3-16-2022

Understanding Female Millennial Administrators and Their Perceptions and Experiences of Leadership in the Community College

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UNDERSTANDING FEMALE MILLENNIAL ADMINISTRATORS AND THEIR

PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF LEADERSHIP IN THE

COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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129 Pages

The perceptions and experiences of female community college administrators, particularly those that are part of the Millennial generation, have often been neglected in current research. This study examines community college leadership in a new context, by exploring the lived experiences of female identifying Millennials. More specifically, this study was developed to better understand how gender may impact Millennial women's perceptions of leadership overall, as well as their perceived ability to move into senior-level leadership roles within the community college. Utilizing a qualitative methodology, this study included the use of semi-structured interviews to obtain data from twenty female Millennial community college administrators across the United States. This study utilized a phenomenological approach in order to identify key themes from the interviews. Findings from this study support the view that inequities and injustices are still present for women, including Millennial women, working in community college administration. The findings further revealed that institutions of higher education need to continue striving for more equitable policies and procedures. The stories and experiences shared within this study shed light on the current environment and institutional culture as it pertains to female identifying, Millennial administrators.

More broadly, this research provides new insight into identifying and altering existing structures of inequity within the community college.

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A Dissertation Submitted in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Educational Administration and Foundations

ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY

2022

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Throughout this journey, I have been blessed with a myriad of individuals that have supported me, encouraged me and challenged me in pursuit of this endeavor. It does, in fact, take a village.

First, I must thank my dissertation advisor and chair, Phyllis. Thank you for reminding me of my capabilities, even when I wasn't sure I would ever finish. This dissertation would likely have never been completed if it hadn't been for your well-timed nudges to keep moving. To my committee members, I am immensely grateful for your expertise, guidance, and ultimately your kind words and support.

I am also indebted to my family for their unconditional love and support over these past nine years. There have been countless times when I thought I might jump ship, and they were always there to pull me off the edge.

Additionally, I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge my gratitude for Shaun. Although things may have turned out differently than we expected, I am truly grateful for his many years of support and encouragement.

I am continually thankful for my supervisors, both past and present, who have never wavered in pushing me toward my goal. I am especially indebted to Donna for always asking about my progress and listening to the struggles I was currently facing. I am wholeheartedly appreciative of her constant reminders that I would get there, in my own time.

To Doug – thank you for believing in me and showing me your never-ending support to get me to the finish line. You always knew exactly when to ask what you could do to help. For all our walks and conversations that helped me refocus my priorities, I am truly thankful.

Finally, I am forever grateful to the twenty individuals that chose to sacrifice part of their day, and to share their experiences and thoughts with me. Without them, this study would not have been possible.

This study is dedicated to all my fellow female identifying, Millennial colleagues working in community college administration – this is for you. May the inequities and injustices that we have faced, and those that we continue to face daily, just make us stronger.

K. A. L.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

This study explores and examines the perceptions and experiences of female identifying community college student affairs administrators, who were born in the Millennial generation. For the purposes of this study, the Millennial generation refers to individuals born between 1981 – 1996 (Dimock, 2019). Kowalski-Braun (2014) notes in her research on Generation X women (those born between 1965 – 1982) that studying such groups "provides valuable insights into the way in which feminist perspectives and generational frame have influenced higher education" (p. 1). By continuing this line of research and examining the next generation of women, the Millennials, we too can gain valuable insight into how a specific generation has already and will continue to influence higher education. As Millennial women progress into more senior levels of leadership within the community college, it is critical to understand how they conceptualize and experience leadership.

Background to the Study

A glimpse into the amount of existing literature on the topic of leadership indicates that there is no shortage of research in this area. A simple Google search of the word "leadership", for example, yields over 2.5 billion results. Even if we narrow the search terms to "leadership in higher education", there are still over 840 million results to sort through. Upon completing an electronic search of bibliographic databases over the past ten years (2011-2021), there are over 9,000 results. Moreover, if the search filters are narrowed to only look for studies focusing on leadership and gender in higher education specifically, within the last ten years (2011-2021), there are still over 800 results. Based on these numbers alone, it can be concluded that leadership continues to be both an overwhelming, yet seemingly relevant topic within the current higher education conversation. Interestingly, one area where there is minimal research is that

pertaining to the perceptions of leadership as acknowledged by female identifying administrators working within the community college, particularly those who identify as part of the Millennial generation.

In looking at the Millennial generation specifically, the numbers alone are intriguing. According to the Pew Research Center, "more than one-in-three American labor force participants (35%) are Millennials, making them the largest generation in the U.S. labor force" (Fry, 2018, para. 1). Furthermore, results from a recent survey indicate that "Millennials are now the largest workforce generation in the U.S., and almost half of them work in business and professional services while a third are in financial activities" (Lefever, 2018, para. 1). Additionally, "female Millennials comprise 45.3 percent of the generation's full-time workers compared to 54.7 percent for men" (Lefever, 2018, para. 2). In their research on this topic, Taylor and Stein (2014) recognize "there is an existing gap in the generational understanding of female staff members' views on leadership in higher education" (p. 2).

Statement of the Problem

The stories and lived experiences of female identifying individuals who also identify as part of the Millennial generation, working as community college administrators, are neglected. Because of this neglect, research is needed to explore and gain an understanding of how leadership is perceived and experienced by Millennial women in the community college. More specifically, this study was developed to better understand how gender may impact Millennial women's perceptions of leadership overall, as well as their perceived ability to move into senior-level leadership roles within the community college. In her research, Kowalski-Braun (2104) sought to "explore how feminist perspectives and generational differences influence the leadership practice of women administrators in higher education" (p. 10). Following a similar

vein, my research replicates this study with some minor deviations. Rather than looking at women with a Generation X membership, I chose to focus on female identifying individuals employed by the community college that also identified as part of the Millennial generation. Echoing Kowalski-Braun (2014), "It is critical to continue to examine higher education through the experiences of feminism, gender, and generation" (p. 9). As a significant segment of the current workforce, including higher education, I believe it is imperative to give voice to this particular group.

Furthermore, this research is important because if we can better understand the lived experiences and perceptions about leadership of female identifying employees in the community college, we (institutionally) can do a better job of identifying and perhaps dismantling the systemic barriers that create institutional inequities. Mandel (2003) substantiates this thought by writing, "Making room for women within relatively unaltered structures would leave intact the overall system that historically has denied leadership opportunities to women and other powerless groups" (p. 69). The stories and experiences shared within this study shed light on the current environment and institutional culture as it pertains to female identifying, Millennial administrators. More broadly, this research provides new insight into identifying and altering existing structures of inequity within the community college.

Context

In looking at the context for this research, there are three key areas which we must draw our attention: (1) the Millennial generation and gender, (2) community colleges, and (3) student affairs administration within the community college setting. Before we can delve into the research problem at hand, it is imperative that we fully understand the research population and the environment in which the research questions are situated.

The Millennial Generation and Gender

Research on the Millennial generation has steadily emerged within the last two decades, ranging from examining the differences between generations and drawing comparisons to better understanding how Millennials work, including work attitudes and values as well as their unique communication styles (Chou, 2012). For the purposes of this research, I was particularly concerned with Millennials working within the higher education arena and their perceptions and experiences regarding leadership. Chou (2012) notes, "Although a number of studies have devoted to the investigation of Millennials, the leadership and followership styles exhibited by Millennials at work has been largely neglected" (p. 71).

Research regarding the Millennial generation is particularly critical at this time for the very simple reason that this group is next in line to be the future higher education leaders. Bannon, Ford, and Meltzer (2011) write, "businesses [including institutions of higher education] need to understand what this future workforce will look like in order to tap its potential" (p. 61). Moving beyond the existing research on work attitudes and communication styles, it is relevant to examine how Millennials perceive and conceptualize leadership within the higher education system in order to better grasp how their own leadership styles have been shaped and influenced. Without a doubt, this significantly impacts how higher education institutions will operate in the future.

Moreover, this research adds an additional layer by utilizing a gendered lens and focusing specifically on female identifying Millennials. Pasque (2014) writes in regards to women in higher education specifically:

It also helps us to understand the contemporary complexities of experiences of women already in the system of higher education who contribute to – and are the direct recipients

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of – existing gender policies and programs… this research will help increase awareness around issues of access and equity for women in higher education in order to work toward intentional policy and structural change. (p. 318)

The intended intersectionality between generational status and gender is useful because it provides a new perspective for leadership research. Pasque (2014) provides a helpful understanding of intersectionality when she writes, "intersectionality is not the layering of gender, race, class, and sexual orientation, but the multidimensional intersections where identities are threaded through each other, as well as to individual, institutional and societal privilege and oppression" (p. 321). If the intent is to explore and identify how leadership is perceived, conceptualized, and experienced by female identifying Millennials within the higher education system, then there can and should be continued dialogue regarding what this means for higher education, particularly community colleges, as they move forward and embrace equitable leadership policies and practices.

Community Colleges

Community colleges provide a unique setting for this research in that they operate very distinctively from the traditional 4-year university or college. Brown, Martinez, and Daniel (2002) write, "Community colleges are considered homogeneous in that they generally serve diverse populations and share a commitment to open access, comprehensiveness, and responsiveness to local needs. However, significant differences exist among and between [community] colleges…" (p. 46). In short, community colleges are often vastly different from one another (e.g., size, student demographics, geographical location, etc.), despite their overarching values being quite similar. That said, this study utilized this setting because there is valuable data available from the female identifying Millennials working there. While

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community colleges serve a diverse student body, they also attract a diverse group of employees. Having worked within the community college arena for several years, I can personally attest to this accurate portrayal.

In looking at gender within the community college, Townsend and Twombly (2007) point out that while community colleges tend to be more accessible to women, they are still gendered organizations. Garza Mitchell and Eddy (2008) write, "Community colleges are hierarchical bureaucracies and as such are based on traditional structures that favor men" (p. 795). Knowing this provided a unique opportunity to explore the lived experiences of female identifying Millennials working in administration within the community college.

Student Affairs Administration within Community Colleges

From a historical perspective, "student affairs organizations have been developing over the last 50 years as predominantly hierarchical, functional structures" (Kuk, 2012, p. 15). Yet, more recently, these highly specialized professional roles have shifted toward more "open, organic systems" where cross-departmental collaboration is both valued and sought after (Kuk, 2012, p. 18). Within these open systems, student affairs professionals now have the opportunity to learn from their colleagues and work collaboratively with one another toward the general goal of student success. What was formerly a more rigid structure, has loosened considerably under the premise that student success is everyone's role. Understanding this paradigm shift from constrained, hierarchical roles to a more fluid structure is integral, as it likely impacts the lived experiences of female identifying Millennials within student affairs administration in the community college. Particularly for the Millennial generation, this paradigm shift is paramount because many of these individuals may not even be aware of a more hierarchical, specialized structure, as they were not yet in the workforce during that time.

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Kuk (2012) provides an excellent description of student affairs organizations and how they fit within the larger collegiate environment when she writes:

> While student affairs organizations are part of the collegiate organization in which they exist, they are also organizationally and culturally quite different from academic organizational units in their institutions. On the structural continuum of organic to mechanistic organizations, student affairs is likely to be more mechanistic than academic departments. As administrative units, such organizations are likely to be somewhat bureaucratic, less democratic in decision making, and more hierarchical than academic units. (p. 23)

Furthermore, student affairs administration continues to be an interesting area in that it draws individuals (both men and women) from a wide variety of backgrounds. Kuh, Evans, and Duke (1983) write, "no one career area or career path served as a 'stepping stone' to the senior student affairs office [SSAO] position" (p. 46). Interestingly, this statement still rings true today – often those individuals moving up in higher education have varied backgrounds. Thus, it is for this reason that I sought this particular population, as it yielded both robust and influential data, which can be drawn upon to offer suggestions for necessary change within higher education.

Research Purpose

This study contributes to this area of research by exploring how leadership is perceived and experienced by female identifying Millennial administrators within the community college. What differentiates this study from other studies on leadership, specifically within the community college, is its focus on women and the female perspective through which leadership is perceived, while also taking into consideration generation identification. By utilizing a feminist lens to conduct this research, an opportunity to add to the growing expanse of leadership

literature was presented. Referring to the writings of Kezar and Lester (2008), the authors note

"one important issue of diversity remains mostly unaddressed – generational difference,

specifically as they relate to women and efforts to create gender equity" (p. 70). While this study

does not explicitly explore generational comparisons, it does seek to illuminate the experiences

and perceptions of one generation in an effort to foster recognition of the issues Millennial

women currently face within the higher education profession. Furthermore, my research

contributes to a body of literature that can then serve as a basis for future generational

comparison(s).

Embedded in this research is the concept of gendered power relations in leadership.

Reynolds (2016) writes, "Such deconstruction feminist analyses of leadership have revealed how

leadership discourse is contained within an androcentric matrix" (p. 39). She goes on to say that

"deconstruction feminist perspectives allow for a critical reflection of how gendered hierarchies

of power are implicit in supposedly neutral leadership discourse" (Reynolds, 2016, p. 40).

Spigel (2018) provides a useful definition of androcentrism by identifying this as "consciously or

unconsciously [placing] a masculine point of view at the center of culture or history, thereby

viewing women or any 'other' as a deviation from the norm" (p. 2). Reynolds (2016) goes on to

pose the question, "How do we move beyond gendered leadership toward gender-integrative

leadership" (p. 40)? Rather than viewing leadership through a lens of masculinity or femininity,

gender-integrative leadership seeks to avoid this binary approach. My research was designed to

provide meaningful data that ultimately helps answer such a question, particularly as it relates to

higher education and the community college context. By better understanding and reflecting

upon the perceptions and experiences of female identifying Millennials as it relates to leadership,

we now have a clearer picture of how leadership is still viewed through a gendered lens, and can therefore begin thinking about how to move past this problematic mindset.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do female identifying community college student affairs administrators identifying as part of the Millennial generation perceive leadership?

2. What are the lived leadership experiences of female identifying community college student affairs administrators identifying as part of the Millennial generation?

3. When positioned against a feminist framework, what do these leadership perceptions and lived experiences reveal?

Type of Study

Utilizing a qualitative methodology, this study provides a deeper understanding of the intersection of leadership, gender, and generational status within the community college. As noted by Merriam (2009), "Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (p. 5). Merriam (2009) further notes, "Qualitative researchers conducting a basic qualitative study would be interested in (1) how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (p. 23). It was for these reasons that a qualitative methodology was deemed to be the most appropriate type of study from which to obtain data relating to female identifying, Millennial student affairs administrator's perception(s) of their experiences in the community college as it relates to the underlying values of leadership.

Theoretical Framework

Given the feminist lens through which this research was undertaken, it seemed most logical to utilize feminist theory as the theoretical framework. Reynolds (2011) acknowledges that, "Feminist theory offers a lens to question and revise cultural assumptions while revealing the unethical nature of the gendering of power" (p. 160). It is best to begin by stating the three main principles on which feminist theory is founded:

1. Women have something valuable to contribute to every aspect of the world.

2. As an oppressed group, women have been unable to achieve their potential, receive rewards, or gain full participation in society.

3. Feminist research should do more than critique, but should work toward social transformation. (Ropers-Huilman, 2002)

Understanding these principles assists us in identifying the underlying framework for this research and in drawing conclusions from the collected data. Most importantly, this research was conducted in an effort to identify and offer suggestions for creating a culture within higher education that is both accessible and equitable for female identifying Millennials as they enter into positions of leadership.

Campbell and Wasco (2000) offer a very thorough and comprehensive approach to understanding feminist research. They write, "What most centrally, and reliably, defines research as feminist research is its guiding philosophy on the nature of knowledge (epistemology) and the process by which research is created (methodology). Feminist research seeks to respect, understand, and empower women" (Campbell & Wasco, 2000, p. 778). Feminist standpoint theory (Harding, 2004) in particular provides a useful framework for this study in that this type of research "utilizes a variety of methodologies (e.g., both qualitative and

quantitative approaches) to engage research participants (typically members of oppressed groups) in reflection on how their gender, race, social class, and sexual orientation shape their experiences in the social world" (Campbell & Wasco, 2000, p. 782). Based on this understanding, Harding's feminist standpoint theory (2004) was employed as the foundation for this study.

Perhaps the best way to capture the essence of this research is simply stated by Campbell and Wasco (2000) when they write, "The overarching goal of feminist research is to capture women's lived experiences in a respectful manner that legitimates women's voices as sources of knowledge" (p. 783). Through this study, I provide an opportunity for Millennial women within the community college to give voice to their stories as it relates to both their perceptions and experiences of leadership.

Key Terms and Concepts

The following key terms are utilized extensively throughout this research, and therefore, I have included definitions for the sake of clarity and consistency.

Leadership – Rhode (2003) notes that "leadership is generally viewed as the ability to influence and inspire others to act in pursuit of common goals, often beyond what their jobs or roles require" (p. 4-5). Northouse (2007) describes leadership as "a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal" (p. 3).

Gender – A recent conference publication aptly described gender as "a socially constructed system of classification that ascribes qualities of masculinity and femininity to people" (The 18th Annual White Privilege Conference, 2017, p. 8).

Generation – Kezar and Lester (2008) acknowledge that a "generation refers to a group of people who develop a shared or collective culture that reflects specific attitudes, preferences, and dispositions, which in turn alters their activities and practices" (p. 52).

Millennials – For the purposes of this study, Millennials are defined as those individuals who were born between 1981-1996 (Dimock, 2019).

Feminism – Feminism is not easily defined. However, for simplicity's sake, I prefer a definition provided by Khatry (2016) noting that, "To be a feminist means to be a believer in empowerment. Feminism is supporting and advocating women's rights on political, social, and economic equality" (para. 2).

Community college – Two key authors in community college scholarship define the community college as "any institution regionally accredited to award the associate in arts or the associate in science as its highest degree" (Cohen & Brawer, 2003, p. 5). Of course, it should be acknowledged that many states in recent years have authorized community colleges to award bachelor's degrees (Community College Baccalaureate Association, 2020).

Administrator – For the purposes of this study, administrators are defined as employees of the community college serving in non-faculty/noninstructional positions. This includes, but is not limited to, professionals working in Student Affairs related positions (e.g., Academic Advising, Admissions, Financial Aid, Support Services, etc.).

Summary

It is my hope that this research would act as a catalyst in creating a paradigm shift in leadership theory which could move organizations, including higher education, to leadership models that are more holistic, value-driven, follower-oriented, and participative (Reynolds, 2016). The research described over the next several chapters directly contributes to a much-

needed body of literature by exposing and further analyzing the intersection of leadership, gender, and generational influence within the community college through the lens of feminist standpoint theory. Taylor and Stein (2014) sum this up well when they write:

> As leaders in higher education work to meet the challenges of changing demographics in the United States, there is a unique phenomenon that has yet to be explored in great detail: the impact of generational influences on the organizational functioning of colleges and universities in the United States and its specific impact on female identifying staff in higher education. (p. 2)

This chapter has illustrated an existing gap in higher education leadership literature, and has further provided evidence for the continued need for this research.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study was to explore and examine the perceptions and experiences of Millennial women working in community college administration. Continuing the research conducted by Kowalski-Braun (2014) on Generation X women, this study investigates how women of a different generational status perceive and experience leadership within the community college. As members of the Millennial generation are quickly becoming the most prevalent group within the workforce (including higher education), it was deemed worthwhile to pursue research within this area (Fry, 2018). This chapter provides a review of the literature relevant to this study, including a broad discussion of leadership, but more specifically leadership within higher education and the community college in particular. Additionally, a review of key scholarly works regarding the intersection of gender and leadership in higher education, generational status, and student affairs leadership within the community college will be discussed.

Leadership

Despite the limited research on Millennial women working within the community college, there is arguably a vast amount of literature on the topic of leadership in general (Gini & Green, 2013). An article published in the *Chicago Tribune* newspaper notes that, "According to Amazon.com, since 1989 more than 20,000 books have been printed with the word leadership in the title" (Gini & Green, 2013, para. 1). Perhaps even more astonishing is that this does not even begin to scratch the surface of the multitude of articles and published scholarly papers that address some facet of leadership. Despite being over a decade old now, Northouse (2007) still aptly captures the state of leadership literature when he writes:

People are captivated by the idea of leadership, and they seek more information on how to become effective leaders. Many people believe that leadership is a way to improve how they present themselves to others…. Academic institutions throughout the country are creating programs in leadership studies. Generally, leadership is a highly sought-after and highly valued commodity. (p. 1)

Additionally, it should come as no surprise that leadership is often referenced in a variety of settings (e.g., corporations, volunteer organizations, non-profit entities), and in application to a wide range of situations (e.g., employee interactions, customer/client satisfaction, overall company success). With that in mind, we would expect that some literature on the topic of leadership would reference leadership as it applies to higher education. Taylor (1994) writes a review of literature about leadership within education:

The literature concerned with the study of educational administration is replete with definitions of leadership, descriptions of the specific components of leadership, and studies that bridge theoretical models with the practice of leadership in the field…. It is apparent in the literature that no one definition, list of descriptors, or theoretical model provides a complete picture of either the theory or practice of leadership in education. (n.p.)

Taylor (1994) goes on to discuss various leadership theories, including those that focus specifically on traits, behaviors, and situations. In doing so, Taylor (1994) further notes, "the literature regarding educational leadership has concerned itself [primarily] with highlighting theories related to what the leader is, what the leader does and the leader's effectiveness in particular situations" (n.p.). Interestingly enough, what Taylor (1994) seemingly omits from her review is how leadership is perceived and/or experienced, particularly by certain populations

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based on gender or generational status. My research suggests a shift from studying the leader to studying how the leader (and more broadly, the concept of leadership) is perceived and experienced by individuals.

Continuing on, several authors acknowledge that there really is no one way to define leadership, but rather it is a multitude of characteristics unique to individuals placed in a variety of diverse situations (Gini & Green, 2013). For the purposes of my research, I prefer to utilize a definition provided by Northouse (2007), in which he describes leadership as "a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal" (p. 3). He goes on to say:

> Defining leadership as a *process* means that it is not a trait or characteristic that resides in the leader but a transactional event that occurs between the leader and his or her followers. *Process* implies that the leader affects and is affected by followers.
>
> (Northouse, 2007, p. 3)

This particular definition seems most applicable because we are looking at how leadership (as a process) is both experienced and perceived by Millennial women within the community college.

Organizational Theory

In order to fully understand and embark on a discussion about leadership, it seems relevant to review the basic tenets of organizational theory because much of leadership theory is rooted within this conversation. At its simplest, organizational theory provides a way to better understand or visualize how an organization functions. Over the years, authors have referred to these perspectives in a variety of ways including frames, metaphors or models (Manning, 2013). In any case, these "lenses" offer an opportunity for readers to better conceptualize how organizations run and carry about their business. It is important here because as noted by

Manning (2013), "The interdisciplinary perspective…enables readers to better understand colleges and universities as a means to support effective leadership and management" (p. 3). Furthermore, "people perceive organizations in a number of ways…. One theory cannot explain all the nuances and complexity of practice on a college or university campus" (Manning, 2018, p. 6). In sum, if we are going to embrace research that seeks to better understand some facet of higher education (in this case leadership), then by all means we must provide a foundation for understanding the variety of organizational perspectives that shape such reality.

Morgan (2006) writes at length about using metaphors to best understand how varying organizations operate the way they do. Using metaphors of machines, organisms, brains, cultures, political systems, psychic prisons, flux and transformation, and as instruments of domination, Morgan (2006) creates a visual representation for how organizations operate and why those who work within such organizations act in the ways that they do. Succinctly written, the main premise of this work shows:

> (a) how different metaphors give rise to different theories of organization and management, (b) how an understanding of the process can help us master the strengths and limitations, and (c) how we can use this knowledge to become more effective leaders and managers. (Morgan, 2006, p. xi)

Perhaps more importantly, these metaphors help us understand the underlying tenets of leadership within the institution.

In their text on the six cultures of the academy, Bergquist and Pawlak (2008) write about six distinct "cultures" that make up the university: (1) the collegial culture, (2) the managerial culture, (3) the developmental culture, (4) the advocacy culture, (5) the virtual culture and (6) the tangible culture. Of relevance here, these "cultures" provide a unique setting for which

leadership within the institution is manifested. Thus, how leadership is then perceived and experienced is a direct result of the particular culture(s) evident within the institution. The authors concur when they write:

> A culture helps define the nature of reality for those people who are part of that culture. It provides lenses though which its members interpret and assign value to the various events and products of this world. If we are to understand and influence men and women in their daily work inside academic institutions, then we must come to understand and fully appreciate their implicitly held models of reality. (Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008, p. 10)

When we reflect on these anchor-store works regarding organizational theory, we become better equipped to understand that organizations are essentially living entities, shaped by the leaders that are found within their walls. Whether we prefer to view organizations from a metaphorical perspective (Morgan, 2006), or we gravitate toward models (Clark, 1986) and culture identification (Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008), these theories shape our understanding of how organizations run, which ultimately influences (and is influenced by), those individuals that find themselves in leaderships positions. Much like a domino effect, those leaders then impact individuals within the organization, shaping their experiences and perceptions regarding leadership. Manning (2018) concludes, "Higher education faculty, staff, and administrators perform their life's work in extremely ambiguous, multifaceted, and politically charged settings" (p. 197). We must understand and respect this unique perspective in order to fully embrace the emergent findings from this research.

Leadership Theory

Furthermore, if we are to conduct a study focused on the perceptions and experiences of leadership within the community college, it also seems relevant to provide some fundamental

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context and background as it relates to leadership theory. According to Bensimon, Neumann, and Birnbaum (1989), leadership theories can be categorized into six distinct areas: trait theories, power and influence theories, behavioral theories, contingency theories, cultural/symbolic theories, and cognitive theories. While the titles of each are revealing, it is helpful to acknowledge what defines each of these categories. Trait theories, for instance, are those theories that define leadership by the personal traits or characteristics of the leader. Power and influence theories "consider leadership in terms of the source and amount of power available to leaders" (Bensimon et al., 1989, p. 5). Behavioral theories are those that focus on what the leader does and how the leader acts (i.e., the behavior they exhibit). Contingency theories, on the other hand, emphasize external factors or situations that influence ones' leadership style. Cultural and symbolic theories "study the influence of leaders in maintaining or reinterpreting the systems of shared beliefs and values" (Bensimon et al., 1989, p. 6). Finally, cognitive theories are those that identify how a leader makes sense of a complex and changing world (Bensimon et al., 1989).

In his work on leadership, Northouse (2007) expands upon the work of Bensimon et al. (1989) by identifying several approaches to leadership, all of which have their merits and pitfalls. These theories or approaches are trait approach, skills approach, style approach, situational approach, contingency theory, path-goal theory, leader-member exchange theory, transformational leadership, team leadership, and psychodynamic approach (Northouse, 2007). While I will not discuss each theory or approach in detail, I believe it remains critical to have a basic knowledge of these key categories. In the research that follows regarding the perceptions and experiences of leadership within the community college, understanding the various lenses used to describe leadership is beneficial.

Leadership and Higher Education

It has already been acknowledged that leadership in itself is an immensely broad topic (Gini & Green, 2013). As we begin to narrow our focus to leadership within the higher education arena, Bensimon et al. (1989) write, "faith in the power and wisdom of leadership and its potential to make a difference in colleges and universities underlies much of the literature of higher education and is particularly ubiquitous in contemporary and highly popular works on leadership" (p. iii). When we look at leadership within the institution, it is helpful to briefly discuss organizational frames. Bolman and Deal (1984) recognize leadership through four frames or lenses: the structural frame, the human resources frame, the political frame, and the symbolic frame. From the structural perspective, the university is viewed as a bureaucracy while from the human resources perspective, the university is viewed as a community of equals. Conversely, the political frame shifts our perspective so that the university is viewed as a political system and the symbolic frame encourages us to view the university as organized anarchy (Bolman & Deal, 1984).

But what does leadership look like from each of these perspectives? From the structural perspective, the focus is on creating structure and placing an emphasis on developing a sound strategy for moving forward. Conversely, from a human resources perspective, a leader needs to focus on the individuals that make up the institution. Utilizing the political perspective allows leaders to focus on varying groups within an institution, and the possibility that such groups may have conflicting interests. Finally, from a symbolic perspective, leaders opt to place an emphasis on creating value and meaning within the workplace. Each of these perspectives and styles can be quite valuable depending on the situation at hand, and none should be discounted or discredited. Bensimon et al. (1989) reiterate this breakdown when they write, "The structural

frame emphasizes formal roles and relationships, the human resource frame focuses on the needs

of people, the political frame considers the conflict over scarce resources, and the symbolic

frame views organizations as cultures with shared values" (p. 6). Utilizing these "frames", we

can then shift the conversation to look at leadership within the university.

Astin & Astin (2000) in collaboration with the W. K. Kellogg Foundation produced a

monograph which highlights leadership in American higher education. They write:

> In American higher education we typically find two approaches to leadership: a
>
> hierarchical model where authority and power is assumed to be proportional to one's
>
> position in the administrative pecking order, and an individualistic model where 'leaders'
>
> among the faculty tend to be those who have gained the most professional status and
>
> recognition. (p. 5)

As someone who lives within the administrative world within the community college system, I

can attest to the hierarchical model that presently exists. Schuh (2002) begins to shed light on

research within the area of student affairs and leadership. While different from my research, his

study opens the door to exploring leadership within the student affairs arena as he looks

specifically at the experiences of senior student affairs leaders and how they conceptualize

leadership in their own roles (Schuh, 2002).

Additionally, Amey (2006), offers a review of leadership in higher education literature by

focusing on three main types: (1) research that focuses on leadership as learning and doing, (2)

research that focuses on gender, race, and ethnicity in leadership, and (3) research that focuses on

role-based leadership. Of particular interest to my study are those studies that look specifically

at gender in leadership. She writes, "The perspectives of white women and leaders of color have

been included in the literature only slowly and unevenly" (Amey, 2006, p. 56). In discussing the

need for continued research in this area, Amey (2006) acknowledges:

> One challenge to gender, race, and ethnicity studies in leadership is the need to develop
>
> culturally sensitive frameworks that go beyond the dominant model of leadership.
>
> Critical theory, feminist lenses, complexity theory, and other postmodern approaches
>
> help us understand leaders whose experiences are not easily portrayed within traditional
>
> frameworks. (p. 57-58)

In her research, Middlehurst (2008) contends that there is a significant gap between

leadership theory and leadership practice, which she attributes to the complexities associated

with leadership context. Simply put, research on leadership is difficult to generalize because it is

so contextually reliant. Middlehurst (2008) further acknowledges that "leadership remains 'a

contested concept' for several reasons" – one of those reasons being the masculine lens from

which leadership is viewed (p. 327). Feminist theory provides just such a lens for which to

engage in additional research on the topic of leadership, but more specifically, research that

focuses on the unique viewpoint of Millennial women working within the community college.

She concludes:

> In all areas of work on leadership in higher education, it is time for greater maturity.
>
> Practitioners who seek quick fixes and simple solutions to complex and dynamic situation
>
> will not find single answers in the literature… However, more sophisticated and diverse
>
> research designs and wider reference points across sectors will enrich higher education
>
> research. (Middlehurst, 2008, p. 336-7)

In their work on leadership and higher education, Wang and Sedivy-Benton (2016) also

note that there is a gap between leadership theories and leadership in practice. They write:

While leadership theories are beautifully drafted and reasoned, when it comes to applying them, few leaders seek to do so… [higher education] institutions seem to find a disconnect between what they know and what it looks like when called to put it in practice. (p. 22)

As we look toward recent research in the area of leadership and higher education, Khan (2017) discusses the differences between adaptive leadership theory and transactional leadership theory within the context of higher education institutions. Khan (2017) notes that "adaptive leaders do not just make changes, they carefully recognize potential changes in the external environment and consider the best path that will positively affect the organization" (p. 179). Transactional leadership, on the other hand, "focuses [primarily] on the leader-follower relationship" (Khan, 2017, p. 179). More specifically, these two leadership theories are compared based on environmental readiness, leadership complexity, and followers' motivation. Based on this comparative analysis, Khan (2017) argues that while "neither leadership theory can address all required actions in contemporary education institutions," adaptive leadership theory is a better fit overall (p. 182). Khan (2017) further notes, "The flexibility and orientation toward change offered by adaptive leadership theory provides strategy to respond to demands for change" (p. 182). In both of these studies, we see a common thread which explores the intersection of leadership theory and leadership in practice.

Leadership in the Community College

What is interesting about research regarding leadership within the community college is that there is an extensive focus on studies from the perspective of the leader, and his/her experiences within their own leadership capacity. What is much more difficult to find, are those studies which both recognize leaders and seek to explore their perceptions and experiences

surrounding leadership in their daily work. In reviewing the existing pool of literature, we find that the focus is on the transition of leadership from one generation to the next (Royer & Latz, 2016), while other researchers turn to exploring leadership in community colleges as it relates to specific roles/positions (Trent & Pollard, 2019; Finkel, 2016). Again, it becomes evident that existing research lacks studies that seek to examine a specific population of community college employees, and how they respond to and interact with leadership within their daily work.

Student Affairs Administration

In an effort to effectively set the stage for the research that follows, it is both imperative and helpful to provide a clear picture of the role student affairs administration serves within higher education institutions. We begin by asking, who are these folks and what is it they do? Gillett-Karam (2016) provides a useful definition when she writes, "[student affairs professionals] are the daily managers who respond to student needs and behaviors across many programs and services. They monitor and reform student services, including enrollment management, international student affairs, student government, early alert systems, etc." (p. 85). Kuk (2012) continues by saying:

> The complexity of issues that students bring with them to campuses, and the expectation that students and their families exhibit in receiving services, has created new challenges to the knowledge and level of competencies of practitioners…. Student Affairs staff are often the first responders and/or points of contact in addressing these incidents and their aftermath. (p. 4)

Beyond the classroom, students have varying needs in order to be successful within the collegiate environment. Thus, it is student affairs that fills this void by providing an extra level of support. Student affairs folks are the academic advisors, the counselors, the financial aid

workers, and the career and employment staff. While far from an exhaustive list of the titles held by student affairs administrators, these are just a few of the individuals that support students beyond the classroom. In light of organizational structure, we find that "student affairs organizations have been and continue to be organized as hierarchical, functional structures, with units that provide highly differentiated programs and services to students" (Kuk, 2012, p. 7). This is important to note because the research questions posed here seek to determine the perceptions and experiences of female identifying Millennials working within student affairs administration in the community college. Understanding how student affairs administration, as a unit, is structured and functions will provide additional insight into the data collected.

Roper and Whitt (2016) write at length about student affairs leadership and the challenges within such an environment:

…because student affairs professionals are absent from important conversations, evidence of the value of student affairs works is also absent in local, national, and state-level reports on factors related to student and institutional success. Thus, lack of involvement in important conversations – whether through lack of attention to the content and strategic necessity of those conversations or through exclusion from them by other institutional leaders – perpetuates itself to further obscure the voices of student affairs leadership. (Roper & Whitt, 2016, p. 32)

Even more apparent is the lack of research on particular populations of student affairs professionals (e.g., Millennials). Lunceford (2014) writes, "While conversations on succession planning have primarily centered on community college leadership, there has been little emphasis on new student services professionals. New professionals play a critical role in the maintenance, advancement, and success of community colleges" (p. 13). These statements

together provide a strong catalyst for the basis of my research, which investigates and explores

the feelings, perceptions, and experiences that surround leadership within the community college

for female identifying Millennials working within student affairs administration.

The Intersection of Leadership and Gender

While my aim is not to provide an in-depth review of feminism, I believe it is critical to have

a basic understanding of the key tenets and historical background of the feminist perspective.

Ropers-Huilman (2002), discusses the three main principles of feminist theory:

1. Women have something valuable to contribute to every aspect of the world.

2. As an oppressed group, women have been unable to achieve their potential, receive
   awards, or gain full participation in society.

3. Feminist research should do more than critique, but should work toward social
   transformation. (p. 11)

My study employs a feminist theoretical framework, and thus is seems only fitting that

context is provided regarding feminism and its evolution, particularly in the context of higher

education. In their introduction to feminism and feminist perspectives in higher education and

student affairs, Nicholson and Pasque (2011) write:

> It is important to note that many of the definitions of feminism are anything but simple in
>
> the ways in which they inform our work with students, programs, policies and our
>
> perceptions of ourselves and others; the implications of our actions based on our
>
> perspectives have a direct impact on the lives of the people in our communities. (p. 4)

How Millennial women working in student affairs within the community college view

themselves and conceptualize their experiences with leadership, ultimately impacts the role they

serve in helping students succeed in the collegiate environment. Pasque (2014) goes on to say,

"Feminism inherently questions notions of power and, in this context, is useful to explore issues of gender inequity in an educational policy and practice" (p. 319).

When we talk about women in leadership, it is often associated with gender bias. Sulpizio (2014) writes:

> One of these gender biases is the male-as-normative model of leadership, where leadership behaviors are aligned with masculine associated traits such as decisiveness, assertiveness, and completion. The qualities associated with being female identifying individuals– relational, emotional, and passive – are incongruent with social accepted leadership practice. (p. 102)

Most recently, Spigel (2018) notes, "White men dominate leadership positions in all our major institutions – from military and medicine to media, legal and criminal justice, policing, finance, industry, entertainment, science, and education" (p. 2). While this does not call out student affairs in particular, it does shed light on the education arena as a whole. What is further surprising is the vast amount of leadership literature dedicated to being a better leader – the "how to" manual of meeting leadership expectations. Yet, Spigel (2018) identifies this as problematic for women in leadership positions. Spigel (2018) focuses her article on androcentrism, the idea that "we either consciously or unconsciously place a masculine point of view at the center of culture and history, thereby viewing women and any 'other' as a deviation from the norm" (p. 2). She writes:

> When we fail to acknowledge and explore the ways in which androcentrist bias colors how we understand and react to leadership traits in women, we promote the myth that women, individually and collectively, can forge ahead into leadership positions if they

just have the right tools in their tool box. In reality, we don't just need to equip women

in higher ed; we need to equip and change our institutions. (Spigel, 2018, p. 3)

It is through my research that I engage in dialogue that addresses how women (particularly

Millennial women) perceive and experience leadership within the community college.

Women in Higher Education

In exploring the literature that looks at women in higher education, there are five core

areas in which the research is primarily categorized: history of women in higher education,

leadership stories, career progress and strategies, studies that emphasize race and ethnicity, and

perceptions (Yakaboski & Donahoo, 2011). For the purposes of the research that follows, we are

most concerned with perceptions; specifically, the perceptions associated with community

college leadership. Pasque (2014) identifies why this research is truly integral , noting that it:

helps us to understand the contemporary complexities of experiences of women already

in the system of higher education who contribute to – and are the direct recipients of –

existing gender policies and programs…. This research will help increase awareness

around issues of access and equity for women in higher education in order to work

toward intentional policy and structural change. (p. 318)

Fochtman (2011) provides additional encouragement for research in the area of women in

higher education when she writes, "currently research on high-achieving women in

postsecondary education is focused primarily on faculty, with little study about high-achieving

academic or student affairs administrators" (p. 85). Yakaboski and Donahoo (2011) further point

out that:

The role and presence women have on college and university campuses should be an area

of scholarly research that can have policy applications and create a climate for culture

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change… the lack of a research focus on women in student affairs administration is one way that the population continues to be marginalized and pushed to the periphery within the higher education community. (p. 270-271)

Of particular interest, Diehl (2014) recently conducted a study that is similar to my research in that it sought "to find out how women in influential leadership positions in colleges and universities have faced and navigated through adversity, barriers, and obstacles" (p. 139). While my research has a different angle because of its focus on female identifying Millennials working within student affairs in the community college, the underlying premise is relatable. Her findings were aimed at the process of navigating through adversity and also discussing what strategies could be employed to help with this task (Diehl, 2014).

Generational Status

Millennials in the Workplace

Millennials are those individuals typically born between the early 1980's and the mid 1990's, and as of 2011, accounted for "10% to 15% of the U.S. labor force" (Bannon, Ford, & Meltzer, 2011, p. 61). For the purposes of this study, the Millennial generation refers to individuals born between 1981 and 1996 (Dimock, 2019). Current research on Millennials in the workplace tends to highlight key characteristics about this particular population, specifically as it relates to work ethic, attitudes and values, skills, and communication styles (Bannon, Ford & Meltzer, 2011; Chou, 2012). Chou (2012) looked at how Millennials lead and how their followership styles have altered the workplace. Interestingly, Chou (2012) notes that, "Although a number of studies have [been] devoted to the investigation of Millennials, the leadership and followership styles exhibited by Millennials at work has been largely neglected" (p. 71). A subsequent study looks at gender and how it impacts the motivation to lead in Millennials

(Porter, Gerhardt, Fields, & Bugenhagen, 2019). As Millennials continue to move into and upward in the workforce, research must be undertaken that seeks to better understand the intersection of leadership in higher education, gender and generational status.

Generational Status and Gender

More specifically, the existing body of literature that looks at generational status of women in higher education is considerably small (Taylor & Stein, 2014; Kezar & Lester, 2008; Kowalski-Braun, 2014). The studies conducted by Taylor and Stein (2014) and Kezar and Lester (2008) focus on generational differences between female identifying administrators working in higher education. In their review of literature on generational differences, Kezar and Lester (2008) go on to engage in a cross-generational dialogue and make comparisons between groups. Alternatively, my research is a continuation of Kowalski-Braun's (2014) study which looked at how feminist perspectives and generational differences influenced the leadership practices of women administrators in higher education. While her study explored the perspectives of female identifying individuals that identified as part of the Generation X population (born between 1965-1982), my research gives voice to female identifying Millennials within the community college (Kowalski-Braun, 2014). As noted by Taylor and Stein (2014), "there is an existing gap in the generational understanding of female staff members' view on leadership in higher education" (p. 2).

Kowalski-Braun (2014) also sought participants who were already in mid-level positions aspiring to senior-level, or already in senior-level positions. My research differed in that I did not look for participants holding positions at a specific level within the student affairs administrative ranks at community college. As I am focusing on Millennials, many of my participants are in the early stages of their career. However, Kowalski-Braun (2014)

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acknowledges the worthiness of this endeavor when she states, "A generational perspective offers new insights into the future leadership of women in higher education as colleges and universities seek new and varied approaches to leadership and change, searching for alternative methods to solve profound challenges" (p. 8).

Summary

This chapter has highlighted a review of the literature relevant to this study, including a broad discussion of leadership, specifically leadership within higher education and the community college in particular. Additionally, a review of key scholarly works regarding the intersection of gender and leadership in higher education, generational status, and student affairs leadership within the community college has been identified and discussed. As noted previously, the purpose of this research study was to explore and examine the perceptions and experiences of Millennial women working in community college administration. As the number of Millennial women working in the community college continues to grow, research on this particular population is especially timely and relevant.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In order to effectively conduct research regarding the perceptions and experiences of female identifying individuals who are part of the Millennial generation, and work in community college administration, it is important to thoroughly address the methodologies and procedures that were utilized to do so. This chapter reviews the qualitative basis for this study, the overall research context, and the approaches taken to collect and analyze data. Additionally, this chapter further discusses credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability, as well as ethical issues associated with the study.

Research Problem

As previously noted, there is limited research regarding how leadership is both perceived and experienced by Millennial women in administrative roles within the community college. The purpose of this study was to explore and examine this particular population and their perceptions and experiences in relation to leadership in the workplace through qualitative analysis.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do female identifying community college student affairs administrators identifying as part of the Millennial generation perceive leadership?

2. What are the lived leadership experiences of female identifying community college student affairs administrators identifying as part of the Millennial generation?

3. When positioned against a feminist framework, what do these leadership perceptions and lived experiences reveal?

Research Context

The data for this study was obtained from female identifying community college administrators who are part of the Millennial generation currently working within a community college in the United States. As noted in Chapter 1, research on the Millennial generation has been steadily emerging within the last two decades. Chou (2012) acknowledges that while "a number of studies have devoted to the investigation of Millennials, the leadership and followership styles exhibited by Millennials at work has been largely neglected" (p. 71). Furthermore, the intended intersectionality between generational status and gender is useful because it provides a new perspective for leadership research. Pasque (2014) reiterates this stance when she writes, "intersectionality is not the layering of gender, race, class, and sexual orientation, but the multidimensional intersections where identities are threaded through each other, as well as to individual, institutional and societal privilege and oppression" (p. 321). For these reasons, utilizing female identifying community college administrators identifying as part of the Millennial generation was deemed an appropriate population for this study.

Laying the Foundation

In undertaking research of this nature, it is critical to discuss the lens through which this study was guided. A feminist epistemology was utilized for this study because "feminist research seeks to respect, understand, and empower women. Therefore, feminist epistemologies accept women's stories of their lives as legitimate sources of knowledge, and feminist methodologies embody an ethic of caring through the process of sharing those stories" (Campbell & Wasco, 2000, p. 778). Adapted from Campbell and Wasco (2000) with permission from the author, Figure 1 provides a helpful visual representation of how feminism intersects with philosophies of science to inform feminist approaches to social science.

Figure 1

Epistemological and Methodological Tenets of Feminist Scholarship
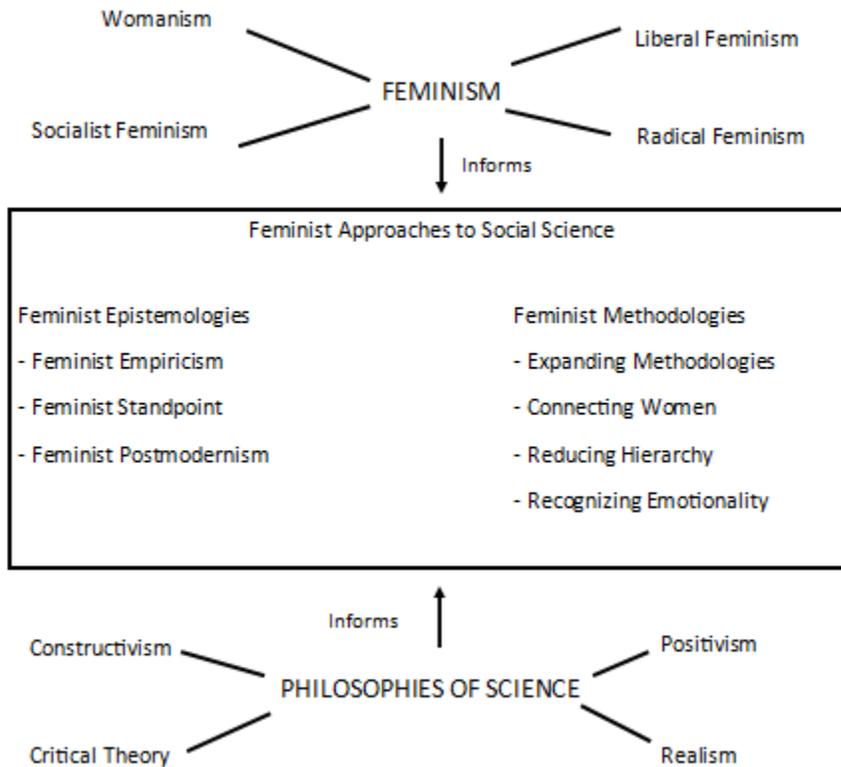
Niskode-Dossett, Pasque, and Nicholson (2011) further support the use of a feminist framework because of "the importance of listening to how women construct their experiences instead of how they fit into (or are excluded from) existing models" (p. 327). Pasque (2014) weighs in on the usefulness of a feminist lens for this type of research when she writes, "Feminism inherently questions notions of power and, in this context, is useful to explore issues of gender inequity in an educational policy and practice" (p. 319). These remarks suggest that research which employs a feminist lens is both warranted and needed.

Additionally, Figure 1 highlights how an understanding of the various forms of feminism as well as the differing philosophies of science interact to create a multifaceted feminist approach to research. As noted by Campbell and Wasco (2000), "Feminist research is rooted in the political activism of the women's movement" (p. 787). Yet the authors further conclude:

> The overarching goal of feminist research is to identify the ways in which multiple forms of oppression impact women's lives and empower women to tell their stories by providing a respectful and egalitarian research environment. This mission necessitates the use of multiple methodologies, and there is broad acceptance of both qualitative and quantitative work in feminist scholarship. (Campbell & Wasco, 2000, p. 787)

While varied methodologies are used in feminist research and inquiry, I further clarify why this study is a qualitative, phenomenological investigation rooted in a social constructivist framework.

Social Constructivism

Within the four primary epistemological theories that clarify the nature of knowledge (Campbell & Wasco, 2000), a constructivist approach makes the most sense given the nature of this particular research. Campbell and Wasco (2000) write in regard to this particular approach, "Social factors, such as gender race, class, culture, and economics are not merely lenses though which we see reality, they are agents shaping how we construct our visions of what constitutes our individual realities" (p. 780). In talking about social constructivism, we can see the connection to a feminist lens, in which the emphasis is placed on the lived experiences of participants (Creswell, 2007). To fully understand the realities of those participants in this study, we must embrace a social constructivist mindset.

Phenomenological Studies

While I have noted that this is a qualitative study, it is also important to discuss why it is, more specifically, a phenomenological inquiry. In his text on qualitative inquiry and research design, Creswell (2007) outlines five distinct approaches: (1) narrative research, (2) grounded theory, (3) case study, (4) ethnography, and (5) phenomenological. A phenomenological study "describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon" (Creswell, 2007, p. 57). Continuing on with this line of thought, he writes, "The basic purpose of phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences to a description of the universal essence" (Creswell, 2007, p. 58). By interviewing participants regarding their perceptions and experiences as it relates to leadership in higher education, I uncover overarching themes about gender and gender inequities that are present within the context of the higher education landscape.

It would be negligent to talk about phenomenology without acknowledging and briefly discussing the two "camps" of phenomenological thought – hermeneutic phenomenology (van Manen, 1990) and transcendental phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994). For the purposes of my research, I fall into the latter "camp" of transcendental phenomenology and the qualitative approach detailed in this chapter follows as such. As noted by Creswell (2007), "transcendental or psychological phenomenology is focused less on the interpretations of the researcher and more on a description of the experiences of participants" (p. 59). A unique component of this particular approach is the use of bracketing, where the researcher takes a moment prior to collecting data to describe their own experiences with a particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). In this case, I began my research by recording my own personal experiences and perceptions

regarding leadership in higher education, so as to enter into data collection with an open mind and a fresh perspective.

Feminist Standpoint Theory

Following a social constructivist paradigm and the basic tenets of a phenomenological study, this particular research inquiry employs feminist standpoint theory (Harding, 2004). Harding (2004) better defines this when she writes:

> Standpoint theory emerged in the 1970s and 1980s as a feminist critical theory about relations between the production of knowledge and practices of power… it was proposed not just as an explanatory theory, but also prescriptively, as a method or theory of method (methodology) to guide future feminist research. (p. 1)

Campbell and Wasco (2000) provide additional clarification by noting that "[feminist standpoint] theory claims that class, race, gender, and sexual orientation structure a person's understanding of reality" (p. 781). In other words, how individuals perceive and interpret their experiences and interactions are dependent upon their unique, individual perspective or standpoint. For example, how I perceive an interaction with a coworker is largely based upon my personal perspective, which has been shaped over the course of my lifetime by my gender, my race, and my socio-economic class, amongst other identifying characteristics. Campbell and Wasco (2000) provide additional clarification when they write:

> Feminist standpoint research utilizes a variety of methodologies (e.g., both qualitative and quantitative approaches) to engage research participants (typically members of oppressed groups) in reflection on how their gender, race, social class, and sexual orientation shape their experiences in the social world. (p. 782)

By utilizing qualitative data collection and analysis techniques, it was my hope to better understand the perceptions and lived experiences as it relates to leadership of Millennial, female identifying individuals working in higher education. Hesse-Biber (2014) continues, "Feminist research positions gender as the categorical center of inquiry and the research process… Research is considered 'feminist' when it is grounded in the set of theoretical traditions that privilege women's issues, voices, and lived experiences" (p. 3). Feminist standpoint theory provides a lens through which to hear the real stories. Quite simply, "The ordinary and extraordinary events of women's lives are worthy of critical reflection as they can inform our understanding of the social world" (Campbell & Wasco, 2000, p. 775). Through the research presented here, I provide a voice for the lived experiences and perceptions of Millennial women working within the community college as it relates to leadership.

Type of Study

This study was designed as a phenomenological qualitative study, in which data was collected in two parts. Data for part one was collected via virtual focus group interviews. Data for part two was collected via one-on-one, semi-structured interviews conducted in a virtual format. Ryan, Coughlan, and Cronin (2007) write, "qualitative methods are concerned with experiences, feeling and attitudes" (p. 738). In this study, a qualitative approach provides an opportunity for readers to hear about how leadership in higher education is both perceived and experienced by female identifying Millennials working in the community college. It is important to note that the essence of this research is to provide a voice for those stories that are not frequently heard, often by groups of individuals that are considered marginalized (Campbell & Wasco, 2000). This is because the society in which we currently reside is inherently patriarchal and androcentric. By definition, androcentrism is:

consciously or unconsciously [placing] a masculine point of view at the center of culture

and history, thereby viewing women or any 'other' as a deviation from the norm. This

androcentrist perspective is deeply embedded in American cultural norms and rarely

acknowledged, even while we grapple with sexism and gender discrimination at the

personal level and in our organizations and communities. (Spigel, 2018, p. 2)

Madden and Russo (1997) further support this argument when they write, "A view that men's

behavior is normative underlies the historical marginalization of research on women in

psychology as well as in other disciplines" (p. 5). The research outlined here uplifts

marginalized voices, and brings their stories to light within a society that too often devalues them

in the everyday.

Campbell and Wasco (2000) go on to say, "As a result of this androcentric bias, women's

lives and experiences have not been adequately captured through the traditional scientific lens"

(p. 778). As evidenced by the writings of scholars in this field, it is obvious that women's voices

about their personal stories and experiences (in all aspects of life) are often silenced or dismissed

in favor of the male perspective. In providing further support for the qualitative basis for my

inquiry into this particular subject matter, Jayaratne and Stewart argue, "Because qualitative data

are organized and evaluated subjectively in terms of themes, categories, and new concepts, not

statistical significance, they have been seen as more useful in capturing women's stories and

legitimating those experiences as sources of knowledge" (Campbell & Wasco, 2000, p. 784).

While quantitative methodologies have their place in feminist research, for the purposes and

goals of this study, a qualitative methodology was deemed superior (Jayaratne & Stewart, 1991).

Part One

In part one of my research, data was collected through two guided, virtual-based focus group interviews with female identifying community college administrators who are part of the Millennial generation. Focus group interviews:

> [are] characterized by a non-directive style of interviewing, where the prime concern is to encourage a variety of viewpoints on the topic in focus for the group…The aim of the focus group is not to reach consensus about, or solutions to, the issues discussed, but to bring forth different viewpoints on an issue. (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 150)

Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) further note that "one strength of focus groups is that this method is socially oriented, studying participants in an atmosphere that is often more natural and relaxed than a one-on-one interview" (p. 195). The focus group centered on participants' experiences with leadership and their perceptions of leadership within their workplaces. As noted by Campbell and Wasco (2000), "Feminist scholars have argued that the task of understanding women's lives may be best achieved in group settings" (p. 784). Furthermore, "Bringing women together to discuss their lives brings attention to the myriad of ways gender oppression affects the day-to-day experience of being female identifying" (Campbell & Wasco, 2000, p. 785). By facilitating focus groups, dialogue occurred in which Millennial female identifying individuals had the opportunity to discuss their day-to-day experiences and perceptions as it relates to leadership in higher education, particularly in the community college.

The data collected from these focus groups drove the development of questions for the second part of the data collection process, the one-on-one, semi-structured interviews. By reviewing the transcriptions of the focus group interviews, I was able to identify reoccurring comments that warranted further discussion and more in-depth dialogue in the one-on-one

interviews. For instance, one emergent theme was the idea that there was some notion of acceptance around women having to lead "differently". I wanted to explore this further, and thus, my one-on-one interview protocol asked participants to talk a bit more about feelings of acceptance. Other areas that I sought to explore further included mentorship, career aspirations, perceptions of male leaders, and continued dialogue about how participants viewed the intersection of gender and generational status. The questions asked during the focus group interviews (Appendix D) were intentionally designed to be broad and open-ended, and focused primarily on how individuals viewed leadership and leaders, including themselves, on their respective campuses.

Part Two

Semi-structured, one-on-one interviews with female identifying community college administrators identifying as part of the Millennial generation were utilized to obtain qualitative information relating to participants' perception(s) and experience(s) regarding leadership. Merriam (2009) notes that semi-structured, one-on-one interviews are those in which "either all of the questions are more flexibly worded or the interview is a mix of more and less structured questions" (p. 90). In addition, she observes that "neither the exact wording nor the order of the questions is determined ahead of time," allowing the researcher "to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic" (Merriam, 2009, p. 90). The semi-structured, one-on-one interviews provided additional insight to the lived experiences of the study subjects as well as their perceptions about leadership in higher education. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) echo this when they write, "Through conversations we get to know other people, learn about their experiences, feelings, attitudes, and the world they live in" (p. xvii).

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Because it is critical to hear the participant's stories as told from their own perspective, both the focus group interviews and the semi-structured, one-on-one interviews were employed as the data-collection methods for this study. Campbell and Wasco (2000) note that, "to assess how we understand our social worlds, researchers must engage participants in interactive dialogue to break down and make visible these socially constructed realities" (p. 780). The use of focus group interviews and semi-structured, one-on-one interviews provided the appropriate environment to facilitate interactive dialogue through the use of two different, yet related, settings.

Data Collection

Sampling

As noted by Ryan, Coughlan, and Cronin (2007), "In qualitative research, participants are usually recruited to a study because of their exposure to or their experience of the phenomenon in question" (p. 741). For this study, participants were recruited through several modalities, including the Michigan American Council on Education (MI-ACE) Women's Network, social media platforms (e.g., Facebook), and general word of mouth. The Michigan American Council on Education Women's Network is "the professional network for Michigan women in higher education. We work in concert with the ACE Women's Network nationally to identify, develop, encourage, advance, link and support (IDEALS) women in higher education" (Hurns, n.d., para. 1). This particular network was selected as a good, initial resource to recruit participants because of its focus on empowering female identifying leaders in higher education. Because this network is comprised of female identifying individuals working in higher education, I maintained confidence that it was a viable means to recruit female identifying Millennials that have "experienced the phenomenon being explored and can articulate their lived experiences"

(Creswell, 2007, p. 119-122). As a past attendee at several MI-ACE Women's Network events, I can personally attest to the type of attendees present. However, due to very limited interest from members of the MI-ACE Women's Network, additional participants were sought out by postings on various higher education and student affairs based Facebook groups. Additionally, participants were actively recruited through word of mouth from colleagues and friends.

To begin data collection for part one of the study, two focus groups were conducted in a 50-minute, virtual format utilizing Zoom technology. Those who responded to recruitment efforts were formally invited to the virtual focus group to discuss their experiences and perceptions of leadership. Participant criteria, Millennial women community college administrators (born between 1981-1996), were identified and explicitly stated in the recruitment message (Appendix A). Capacity for the focus groups was capped at 10 people for facilitation purposes; participants were admitted on a first come, first served basis, dependent upon time of response. Part two of data collection involved one-on-one, semi-structured interviews conducted in a virtual format utilizing Zoom technology. Additional details regarding the data collection process are outlined under collection techniques.

Participants

Participants sought for this study were female identifying community college administrators working within a United States community college, who were part of the Millennial generation. Upon conclusion of the focus group interviews, participants were asked if they were interested in participating in part two of the study, a one-on-one, semi-structured, virtual interview lasting approximately 60 to 90 minutes. All individuals that expressed an interest in the research as a result of recruitment efforts were emailed to confirm their interest. Participants who responded favorably to my follow up were then contacted via email within 48

hours to schedule a one-on-one, semi-structured interview at a later date. Written consent was obtained directly from participants for both the focus groups (Appendix B) and the one-on-one, semi-structured interviews (Appendix C); this included consent for recording of all sessions. The focus group interviews and all one-on-one, semi-structured interviews were recorded for clarity and to ensure that what was shared was not misconstrued or misrepresented in the final manuscript. Participants who participated in the one-on-one, semi-structured interviews had the opportunity to review their transcribed interview and to make any necessary revisions for the sake of clarity and accuracy.

Focus group participants also had the opportunity to provide contact information for other individuals/colleagues that they felt would be interested in participating in this research. Identified as snowball sampling, "the key assumption of snowball sampling is that members of your target population know one another" (Vogt, Gardner, & Haeffele, 2012, p. 351). It was determined that participants in the focus group sessions likely had female identifying, Millennial colleagues who would also be interested in participating in part two of the study. All recruited individuals were contacted via email and asked if they would be interested in participating in a doctoral research project about perceptions and experiences as it relates to leadership in higher education. This snowball sampling technique allowed for additional participants to be recruited for the second part of the study, leading to more robust data collection. The ideal number of participants for part two of this study was between 5 and 25 (Polkinghorne, 1989).

All participants were further screened to confirm that their professional titles were accurate and consistent with what was self-reported. A simple Google search confirmed that each participant did in fact work where they said they did, and it also provided an opportunity to confirm that they did indeed work for a community college.

Collection Techniques

Upon approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), data collection took place in two parts. In part one, 50-minute virtual focus group sessions provided participants with the opportunity to engage in guided dialogue about their perceptions and lived experiences regarding leadership in a non-threatening and comfortable environment (Appendix D). The focus group conversations encouraged group participants to share ideas, which illuminated themes that were further discussed in subsequent one-on-one, semi-structured interviews. Munday (2014) notes that "the task, then, for feminist researchers is not to use focus groups as a means of eliciting some objective truth about the nature of social reality but rather to investigate how the participants understand and actively construct social categories and phenomena" (p. 238). Additionally, this group provided peer support so that participants were able to share things they may have otherwise forgotten or not considered in one-on-one, semi-structured interviews. In discussing the value of focus groups, Munday (2006) writes, "the researcher is able to observe the processes through which individuals construct their own realities and make sense of themselves as a group who share common values and ways of understanding themselves and their world" (p. 95).

Interestingly, Campbell and Wasco (2000) point out that "feminist scholars have argued that the task of understanding women's lives may be best achieved in group settings" (p. 784). This argument further confirms the importance of utilizing a focus group as a means to obtain rich and relevant data regarding female identifying Millennials perceptions and experiences. The data collected from the focus group sessions was utilized to develop guiding questions for the one-on-one, semi-structured interview protocol. Key themes from the focus group session were analyzed and questions for the one-on-one, semi-structured interview protocol were structured so

that participants had the opportunity to expand upon what was touched on during the focus group session. For those that did not participate in part one of the study, the questions were still relevant, and participants had an opportunity to share their perceptions and experiences regarding leadership in the workplace. The virtual focus group sessions lasted approximately 50-minutes and was be facilitated by myself, the primary researcher.

During part two of data collection, one-on-one, semi-structured interviews were conducted via Zoom, utilizing an interview protocol (Appendix E). According to Polkinghorne (1989), the recommended number of participants for interviews is between 5 to 25. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) offer a similar recommendation by noting that "in common interview studies, the number of interviews tends to be around 15 +/- 10" (p. 113). Although all one-on-one interviews were semi-structured, the interview protocol served as a tool by which to guide the conversation regarding leadership perceptions and experiences. As noted by Merriam (2009), "good interview questions are those that are open-ended and yield descriptive data, even stories about the phenomenon" (p. 99). Though the interview protocol provided a helpful outline for the interview, the participants shared their own stories about their perceptions and experiences as it related to leadership. Participants were emailed prior to their scheduled one-on-one interviews and requested to complete a data collection sheet (Appendix F) to obtain relevant demographic data.

Both the focus group sessions and one-on-one, semi-structured interviews were recorded to ensure accuracy using Zoom technology. Additional handwritten notes were taken during the focus groups and during the one-on-one, semi-structured interviews by myself, the researcher. All handwritten documentation was stored securely in a locked drawer in my personal residence. Recorded files were uploaded to my personal, password protected computer and then transferred

to REV, a professional transcription service, via a securely encrypted network server on the Internet.

Interview Protocols

The focus group interview protocol (Appendix D) was developed with the intent to generate and encourage candid dialogue regarding leadership as it is perceived and experienced by Millennial female identifying individuals working in administration within the community college. The one-on-one, semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix E) was developed following the focus group sessions. Questions included as part of the one-on-one, semi-structured interview protocol were developed based on the key themes that emerged from the focus group dialogue. These key themes provided guidance for developing more in-depth and focused questions relating to participants' leadership perceptions and experiences. Furthermore, the questions that were developed as a result of the focus group sessions provided an opportunity to dig deeper into certain aspects of leadership that were only briefly touched on during the focus group sessions. In discussing in-depth interviewing, Hesse-Biber (2014) notes that there is an underlying interest "in uncovering the subjugating knowledge of the diversity of women's realities that often lie hidden and unarticulated" (p. 184).

<div align="center">

Data Analysis

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Data from both the focus group sessions and the one-on-one, semi-structured interviews were analyzed to identify key themes that emerged. Both the focus group sessions and one-on-one, semi-structured interviews were transcribed as soon as possible following the interactions. Merriam (2009) acknowledges the importance of this first step when she writes, "Verbatim transcription of recorded interviews provides the best database for analysis" (p. 110). Descriptive coding is identified as a process of "assigning some sort of shorthand designation to

various aspects of your data" (Merriam, 2009, p. 173). Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) further note, "A descriptive code assigns labels to data to summarize in a word or short phrase the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data" (p. 74). It was critical that as I began to categorize, explore, and interpret my data that the participants' own voices were not lost. REV, a professional transcription service, was utilized to transcribe both the recorded focus group sessions and the one-on-one, semi-structured interviews. The professional transcription service was required to provide a signed client non-disclosure agreement. A professional transcription service was beneficial for the sake of obtaining the transcripts in a timely manner in order to move forward with additional analysis. As noted previously, the recurrent themes that emerged from the focus group session were the basis for the development of the one-on-one, semi-structured interview protocol utilized in part two of the study.

Data obtained from both the focus group interviews and the one-on-one, semi-structured interviews were coded in two ways. Initially, I read through the interview transcripts and made notes acknowledging interesting excerpts and identifying common words and phrases. Following my initial reading, I then reread each transcript in an effort to create a coding system that identified and categorized the findings. Table 1 identifies the codes that were created to categorize the data.

Table 1

Data Codes

Codes	Meaning
PM	perceptions relating to Millennial status
PG	perceptions relating to gender
PB	perceptions relating to both gender and generation
EM	experiences relating to Millennial status
EG	experiences relating to gender
EB	experiences relating to both gender and generation

Subsequent readings focused specifically on certain sections and questions to help identify, solidify, and provide evidence of findings and themes. Once the data were adequately partitioned out and explored, further analysis took place in an effort to effectively describe what patterns/themes emerged, and also to begin explaining such patterns/themes. Following Creswell's (2007) recommendation, the data were analyzed by:

> reducing the information to significant statements or quotes and [combining] the statements into themes. Following that, the researcher develops a ***textural description*** of the experiences of the persons (what the participants experienced), a ***structural description*** of their experiences (how they experienced it in terms of the conditions, situations, or context), and a combination of the textural and structural descriptions to convey an overall **essence** of the experience. (p. 60)

It is this essence that provided insight into the research questions posed within this study, particularly the last question which sought to identify what participants' perceptions and experiences revealed when positioned against a feminist framework.

Researcher Positionality

In a study that focuses its attention on the perceptions and experiences of Millennial female identifying individuals working in administration within the community college, I would be remiss if I failed to discuss my own researcher positionality. As a female identifying individual and a Millennial working as an academic advisor at a community college in southwest Michigan, I identified strongly with the participants in this study. As noted by Madden and Russo (1997), "…all people bring their values and expectation to research questions, designs, and interpretations. Those who maintain their research is value-free are more dangerous and

naïve than those who explicate the values embedded in their research" (p. 3). Perhaps for selfish

reasons, I was drawn to the premise of this research and felt a personal connection to the research

questions. My own interest in leadership and how gender inequity presents itself in the context

of leadership in higher education is something that I think about regularly, and have thought

about long before the start of this study. Viewing my "closeness" to the overall foundation of

this study was actually quite valuable in that it allowed me to find common ground with the

participants (Madden & Russo, 1997). Perhaps then this also alluded to an increased level of

trust between myself as the researcher and the participants, which created an environment in

which participants felt comfortable sharing their perceptions and experiences. As noted by

Campbell and Wasco (2000), "Researchers must establish rapport and trust to facilitate the

disclosure of information from their participants" (p. 785).

It also became clear as I began thinking through this study that I needed not only to

capture the essence of my participants, but also my own feelings, beliefs, and biases that I

brought to the table. Campbell and Wasco (2000) acknowledge this interplay when they write,

"Throughout the process of research, feminist scholars attune to the feelings of their research

participants *as well as* their own feelings" (p. 786). Additionally, Campbell and Wasco (2000)

note, "…feminist researchers use their own emotions as resources for substantive insight into

their work. Feminist scholars encourage scientists to attune to their own feelings during the

research process, and to share those reflections in professional discourse" (p. 787). In the results

and analysis of the data, I have identified how my own thoughts and perceptions show up.

<p align="center">**Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations**</p>

While quantitative research concerns itself with generalizability and reproducibility,

qualitative research operates differently. Understanding the human experience through personal

stories warrants an alternate approach to ensuring academic rigor (Ryan, Coughlan, & Cronin, 2007). Rigor is defined as "the means of demonstrating the plausibility, credibility, and integrity of the qualitative research process" (p. 742). According to Ryan, Coughlan, and Cronin (2007) there are four key criteria for evaluating qualitative research studies: (1) credibility, (2) dependability, (3) transferability, and (4) confirmability.

Credibility

Credibility "addresses the issue of whether there is consistency between the participants' views and the researcher's representation" (Ryan, Coughlan, & Cronin, 2007, p. 743). Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) offer several strategies to maintain credibility within a qualitative research study. Of these strategies, I employed a continual monitoring of my "own subjective perspectives and biases" by maintaining a personal journal of my thoughts as the research took place (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019, p. 203). Additionally, I provided "thick descriptions" of the research process, and did my best to seek "negative instances or discrepant findings" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019, p. 203-4). Acknowledging negative instances and discrepant findings adds credibility to my research because they reinforce that real life often includes contradictory information (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

To further ensure that credibility was achieved in this study, I provided copies of the transcribed one-on-one, semi-structured interviews (from part two) to the respective interviewee/participant in order to allow them to confirm that what they said and expressed was accurate. I also encouraged feedback from the respective interviewee in terms of necessary revisions and/or additions to the interviews for the sake of clarity and accuracy. Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) refer to this process as making use of "member checks" (p. 204).

Dependability

Dependability refers to providing readers with "evidence of the decisions and choices made regarding theoretical and methodological issues through the study and entails discussing explicitly the reasons for such decisions" (Ryan, Coughlan, & Cronin, 2007, p. 743). To ensure that dependability was met, a large part of this chapter has been dedicated to providing a clear rationale explaining why the tools/methods used to collect data aligned with the research questions guiding the study. Additionally, while not all data is presented in the final manuscript, I can ensure that all field notes and transcripts, with identifiable information excluded, have been made available for review by other researchers if requested (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

Transferability

The transferability of a study is ensured "when the findings can 'fit' into other contexts and readers can apply the findings to their own experiences" (Ryan, Coughlan, & Cronin, 2007, p. 743). In order to provide a high level of transferability, I obtained an adequate sample size for one-on-one, semi-structured interviews to ensure that a variety of perspectives were shared, and that a sizable depth of data was obtained. This is referred to as meeting sufficient saturation or redundancy, and no new information is being acquired (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Sufficient saturation was met once no new information was acquired through the one-on-one interview process.

Confirmability

Confirmability involves demonstrating "how conclusions and interpretations have been reached" (Ryan, Coughlan, & Cronin, 2007, p. 743). Researchers typically acknowledge that confirmability has been obtained once credibility, transferability, and dependability have all been met (Ryan, Coughlan, & Cronin, 2007).

Ethical Considerations and Reciprocity

Merriam (2009) writes, "It is ultimately up to the individual researcher to proceed in as ethically a manner as possible" (p. 230). It was not my intention to cause harm or create feelings of discomfort for any participant in this study. It is important to note that there were no physical risks associated with this study. There were, however, minimal psychological risks for participants in that they were asked to share personal stories regarding their perceptions and experiences. At any time during the focus group sessions or during the one-on-one, semi-structured interviews, participants had the option to remove themselves from the study with no questions asked. Pseudonyms were used in all written documentation following the interviews, and all raw data was kept on a password protected computer only accessible to the primary researcher. Participants also had the right to refuse to answer any question that they were not comfortable with, or to withdraw from the study at any time. Prior to the start of all interviews (focus group interviews and one-on-one, semi-structured interviews), participants were asked to read and sign a document indicating informed consent (Appendix B and C, respectively). The informed consent document fully described "the purpose of the study, what sort of information is being sought, how it will be used and the implications for [participants] as contributors to the research" (Ryan, Coughlan, & Cronin, 2007, p. 741).

Although individual participants in this study were not compensated monetarily for their time, it was hoped that they recognized it as an opportunity for them to share their own personal stories. As the researcher, I made sure to emphasize that their personal stories, combined together with the stories of other participants, created a meaningful impact within the field of higher education. Publication of this dissertation adds to the literature regarding the intersection of gender and leadership in higher education, and may even provide insight for future researchers

seeking to expand upon or replicate parts of this research. To alleviate some of the risk

associated with sharing their personal stories, I made sure that all identifying information was

removed from the final manuscript. If any participant needed to or desired to speak with a

licensed counseling professional as a result of emotional distress brought on from participating in

this study, information regarding psychological support would have been made available.

Summary

This chapter discussed the research methods that were employed for this study, the

overall research context, as well as how data collection and analysis was completed.

Additionally, this chapter further discussed credibility, dependability, transferability, and

confirmability, as well as necessary ethical considerations. As noted previously, data was

collected through two primary methods including, focus group interviews and one-on-one, semi-

structured interviews with female identifying individuals working in administration within

community colleges who identify as part of the Millennial generation. Analysis of the data was

then conducted in order to identify how leadership was both perceived and experienced by

female identifying community college administrators who identify as part of the Millennial

generation.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

Introduction

During the fall of 2020 and spring of 2021, twenty individuals took time out of their busy lives to speak with me about their perceptions and experiences regarding leadership within the community college. Their candid storytelling provided me with a rich and descriptive narrative relating to the lives of female identifying, Millennial community college administrators. While it would likely take several hundred pages to provide every detail from each participant, the commonalities that emerged and are shared in this chapter are nevertheless striking.

This chapter provides an overview of the phenomenological study and reviews the findings of the research study as it relates to the following research questions:

1. How do female identifying community college student affairs administrators identifying as part of the Millennial generation perceive leadership?

2. What are the lived leadership experiences of female identifying community college student affairs administrators identifying as part of the Millennial generation?

3. When positioned against a feminist framework, what do these leadership perceptions and lived experiences reveal?

Utilizing a qualitative methodology, this study involved interviewing participants regarding their perceptions and experiences as it relates to leadership within the community college. Rooted in feminist theory, this study sought to give voice to Millennial women working in community college administration.

Demographic Characteristics of Interviewees

Based on the demographic information collected from each participant prior to their scheduled interview, Table 1 was created in an effort to provide a quick snapshot of the entire participant pool. Eighty five percent (n=17) of the participants identified a master's degree as

their highest degree held, while 10 percent (n=2) had a PhD. The remaining 5 percent (n=1) had a bachelor's degree. Also, 30 percent (n=6) of the participants identified their current position as entry level, while a majority, 55 percent (n=11), identified their current position as mid-level and acknowledged that they aspired toward a more senior level role. Fifteen percent (n=3) of the participants recognized their role as mid-level, and currently do not aspire to move into senior level leadership. There were no participants that identified themselves in a senior level position within their institution.

Most of the participants (45 percent; n=9) have been in their current position for 1 to 3 years. Similarly, 40 percent (n=8) of the participants have been working in higher education for 5 to 9 years. Fifty percent (n=10) of the participants work in the Midwest, while the remaining 50 percent were located in other geographic regions across the United States.

Table 2

Demographic Information of Participants

Highest Degree Earned	Level of Current Position	Length of Time in Current Position (years)	Length of Time in Higher Education (years)	Region of Employment within the U.S.
Bachelors, n=1	Entry, n=6	<1, n=4	1-4, n=7	Midwest, n=10
Masters, n=17	Midlevel, Aspiring to Sr. level, n=11	1-3, n=9	5-9, n=8	Northeast, n=2
PhD, n=2	Midlevel, Not Aspiring to Sr. level, n=3	4-6, n=6	10-14, n=4	Southern, n=3
	Senior level, n=0	7+, n=1	15-19, n=1	Western, n=5

States identified in the Midwest region of the U.S. where participants worked include North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, Illinois, Wisconsin, Michigan, Indiana, and Ohio. States identified in the Northeast region of the U.S. include Vermont, Connecticut, Delaware, Pennsylvania, Maine, Massachusetts, Maryland, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, and Rhode Island. States identified in the Southern region of the U.S. include West Virginia, Virginia, Texas, Tennessee, South Carolina, Oklahoma, North Carolina, Mississippi, Louisiana, Kentucky, Georgia, Florida, Arkansas, and Alabama. States identified in the Western region of the U.S. include Hawaii, Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Colorado, Wyoming, Utah, Nevada, Arizona, California, Washington, Oregon, and New Mexico (Simpson, 2020).

Participant Profiles

While the overall participant pool shares certain characteristics, it is important to note that each individual is inherently unique. The following profiles highlight these differences and help provide additional context regarding each participant's personal background. Each profile discloses the participants' birth year, employment title, as well as what region of the United States (U.S.) they work in. Additionally, each participant disclosed how long they have been in their current position, what level they consider their position to be, how long they have held a professional position in higher education, and finally what level of education they hold. Participant names have been changed to ensure confidentiality. Pseudonyms were selected at random by the researcher; any similarity to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

As noted previously, the Millennial generation refers to individuals born between 1981 – 1996 (Dimock, 2019). For this research, I have chosen to split the participant group into two subgroups: older Millennials (born between 1981 – 1988) and younger Millennials (born

between 1989 – 1996). These dates were determined based on an even split of the generation. Eleven participants were categorized as older Millennials and nine participants were categorized as younger Millennials. Based on participants' responses to the interview questions, the need to create additional division within the generational group became evident. Appendix G offers a participant profile table which provides a visual representation of the similarities and differences across participants.

Older Millennials (born between 1981-1988)

Kourtney was born in 1988, and currently serves as a Success Coach at a southern community college. She has been in her position for five years and considers it to be a mid-level role. She aspires to senior level leadership. She has spent 5 to 9 years working within a professional position in higher education. She holds a Master's degree.

Kim was born in 1983, and currently serves as a TRIO Student Support Services Director at a midwestern community college. She has been in her position for six years and considers it to be a mid-level role. She does not aspire to senior level leadership. She has spent 5 to 9 years working within a professional position in higher education. She holds a bachelor's degree.

Leah was born in 1985, and currently serves as the Director of Advising at a midwestern community college. She has been in her position for one and a half years and considers it to be a mid-level role. She aspires to senior level leadership. She has spent 10 to 14 years working within a professional position in higher education. She holds a Master's degree.

Louise was born in 1981, and currently serves as a Director of Academic and Career Advising at a midwestern community college. She has been in her position for five years and considers it to be a mid-level role. She aspires to senior level leadership. She has spent 10 to 14 years working within a professional position in higher education. She holds a Master's degree.

Helen was born in 1982, and currently serves as a Dean for Institutional Research within a western community college. She has been in her position for eleven years and considers her role to be mid-level. She does not aspire to senior level leadership. She has spent 15 to 19 years working within a professional position in higher education. She holds a doctorate.

Felicity was born in 1987, and currently serves as an Assistant Director of Student Life and Leadership Development at a northeastern community college. She has been in her position for almost two years and considers her role to be mid-level. She aspires to a senior level leadership position. She has spent 5 to 9 years working within a professional position in higher education. She holds a Master's degree.

Megan was born in 1985, and currently serves as an Associate Director of Admissions for a northeastern community college. She has been in her position for six years and considers it to be a mid-level position. She aspires to a senior level leadership role. She has spent 10 to 14 years working within a professional position in higher education. She holds a Master's degree.

Erin was born in 1981, and currently serves as the Manager of a Disability Resource Center at a midwestern community college. She has been in her position for five years and considers it to be

a mid-level position. She does not aspire to a senior level leadership role. She has spent 5 to 9 years working in a professional position within higher education. She holds a Master's degree.

Jasmine was born in 1984, and currently serves as the Interim Basic Needs Manager at a western community college. She has been in her position for six months and considers it to be a mid-level position. She aspires toward a senior level leadership role. She has spent 5 to 9 years working within a professional position within higher education. She holds a doctorate.

Angela was born in 1988, and currently serves as the Director of Student Activities at a midwestern community college. She has been in her position for four and a half years and considers it to be a mid-level role. She aspires towards a senior level leadership position. She has spent 5 to 9 years working in a professional position within higher education. She holds a Master's degree.

Iris was born in 1987, and currently serves as the Project Manager for the Pathways Program at a western community college. She has been in her position for two and a half years and considers it to be a mid-level position. She aspires toward a more senior level leadership position. She has spent 10 to 14 years working in a professional position within higher education. She holds a Master's degree.

Younger Millennials (born between 1989-1996)

Rachel was born in 1993, and currently serves as an Academic Advisor at a community college in the south. She's been in her position for two years and considers her current role to be entry

level. She has spent 1 to 4 years working within a professional position in higher education. She holds a Master's degree.

Jackie was born in 1995, and currently serves as Program Coordinator for a midwestern community college. She has been in her position for one year and considers it to be an entry level role. She has spent 1 to 4 years working within a professional position in higher education. She holds a Master's degree.

Brandy was born in 1995, and currently serves as a Residence Life Coordinator at western community college. She has been in her position for one year and considers it to be an entry level role. She has spent 1 to 4 years working within a professional position in higher education. She holds a Master's degree.

Alice was born in 1991, and currently serves as an Academic Advisor at a community college in the Midwest. She has been in her position for less than one year and considers it to be an entry level role. She has spent 1 to 4 years working within a professional position in higher education. She holds a Master's degree.

Anne was born in 1996, and currently serves as a Youth Services Coordinator within a midwestern community college. She has been in her position for less than one year and considers it to be an entry level role. She has spent 1 to 4 years working within a professional position in higher education. She holds a Master's degree.

Molly was born in 1992, and currently serves as an Open Doors Program Coordinator at a western community college. She has been in her position for one year and considers it to be a mid-level role. She aspires toward a senior level position. She has spent 1 to 4 years working within a professional role in higher education. She holds a Master's degree.

June was born in 1992, and currently serves as an Academic Advisor at a midwestern community college. She has been in her position for a year and a half and considers it a mid-level role. She aspires toward a senior level position. She has spent 5 to 9 years working within a professional position in higher education. She holds a Master's degree.

Erica was born in 1992, and currently serves as the Director of Residence Life and Student Conduct at a midwestern community college. She has been in her position for less than one year and considers it to be a mid-level role. She aspires toward a senior level position. She has been working within a professional position in higher education for 5 to 9 years. She holds a Master's degree.

Nancy was born in 1993, and currently serves as an Academic Advisor at a community college in the south. She has been in her position for one year and considers it to be an entry level role. She has spent 1 to 4 years working within a professional position in higher education. She holds a Master's degree.

Findings

Qualitative data is exciting because it so clearly tells an intimate and unique story of the participant. The purpose of this study was to better understand and examine the perceptions and
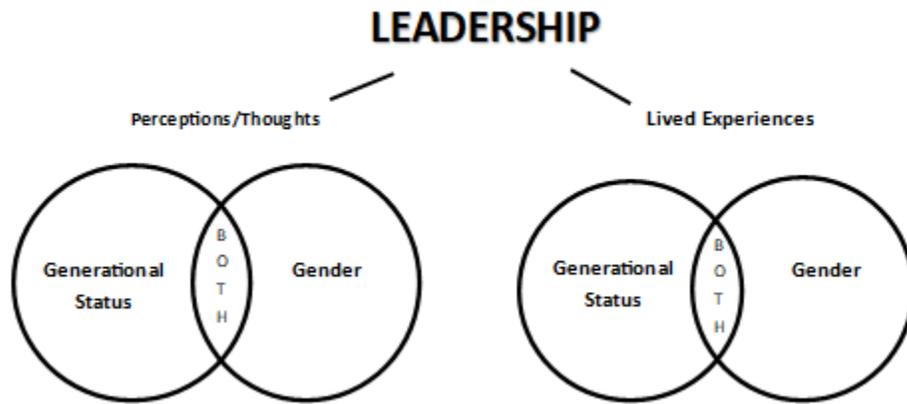
lived experiences of female identifying Millennials working in community college administration as it relates to leadership. Setting out on this research journey, I wanted to know what women were saying about leadership in their workplace. I wanted to hear about their personal experiences. I sought to investigate the differences they experienced (both real and perceived) between themselves and their male colleagues. Adding another layer, I needed to better understand how these gender differences intersected with their generational identity.

The data was analyzed by categorizing the findings first by the participants' perceptions about leadership based on gender and generational status (i.e., Millennial status), and second by the participants' lived experiences as it relates to leadership based on gender and generational status (i.e., Millennial status). Figure 2 provides a visual description for how the interviews were coded and analyzed as it relates specifically to research questions #1 and #2. Under the broad category of leadership, I was particularly interested in participants' perceptions and thoughts, as well as their lived experiences, as it relates to leadership in the workplace. Furthermore, responses were categorized based upon their content as either gender focused or generational status focused. In some cases, participants would discuss their perceptions and/or lived experiences as it related to *both* their gender and generational status (this is referred to as both in the corresponding figure).

Further, to answer research question #3, I analyzed the data to generate three emergent themes that described the participants' lived experiences. The themes include, (1) men really just don't get it, (2) there exists a sense of "acceptance" regarding present day inequities and injustices, both perceived and experienced, and (3) the presence of identity "intersections" complicates things. These themes are described based on the gender and the generational status of the participants, and in relation to the feminist framework.

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Figure 2

Coding of Participants' Responses

LEADERSHIP

Perceptions/Thoughts   Lived Experiences

Generational Status — BOTH — Gender   Generational Status — BOTH — Gender

Categorizing the Data by Gender and Generational Status

Words are Powerful

As I read and reread the one-on-one interviews, similar tones and experiences revealed themselves. Words like "luxury", "privilege", and "coast" (i.e., minimal effort) were dominant throughout the conversations that related to how male colleagues were perceived, whereas words like "proving myself", "backlash", and "fear" were often used when participants told of their own personal experiences and shared their perceptions of what they face daily as leaders within their respective institutions. Louise accurately acknowledged this when she said, "I feel like the ways that people talk and reference gender differences or use different types of language to describe women versus men and how they do their jobs, there are different words used" (Louise, personal communication, November 27, 2020). Helen, Iris and Brandy all mentioned "proving oneself" multiple times in the context of their conversations. Iris expanded on this a bit and brought up an interesting point when she said:

…we have to jump through more hoops… we have to do more work and we have to keep proving ourselves. And even then, we don't know if it's going to be enough that somebody will be convinced, I guess, that we can lead or that they would trust our leadership. (Iris, personal communication, December 9, 2020).

Not only does she express this need to constantly prove herself, but she also acknowledges that females then have to wrestle with possible feelings of inadequacy and/or capability as leaders. It begs the question, are we really enough? It is immensely discouraging that through all the efforts of "proving ourselves" women still have to ask themselves if it is really enough in order for others to believe they are competent and qualified to do the job correctly and to do it well.

Nancy went on to talk about the "fear" that she experiences in the workplace. To further clarify, this is not a fear of bodily harm, but rather a very real fear of unintentionally saying something or acting in a way that would put her in an unflattering light. Regarding both gender and generational status, she reports that there is a:

…fear of overstepping your boundaries at times. You don't want to be looked less upon because of that… there's [also] a fear of trying to express and share new ideas because they're not necessarily as welcome because they just want to do it the way that it's always been done. (Nancy, personal communication, March 3, 2021)

In this comment, Nancy specifically draws upon her experiences as a female, but also her experiences as a Millennial when she talks about bringing in new perspectives. Helen also touched on this aspect of how her gender and generational status overlap. In a stark reflection of her experiences in the workplace, she goes on to say, "I think I feel very alone, and academia is predominantly, people are my parents' age… [they're] usually male, usually white" (Helen, personal communication, November 23, 2020). She then went on to speak in greater length

about her need to "prove herself". In line with both Nancy's and Helen's experiences, Jackie also sheds light on her "fears":

> I'm very careful about the way that I speak at work, which I don't think men ever do… it's made me very self-conscious in the workplace about the way that I'm talking and how I'm speaking, which is actually more frustrating because then I feel like I have my counselor voice on and I have to use my counseling skills rather than, I'm an expert… I want to use my expert voice, my expert experience… I absolutely one hundred percent believe that it's because I'm a woman and because I'm young. (Jackie, personal communication, November 23, 2020)

In talking about her male colleagues, Iris also echoed a similar sentiment when she commented, "I feel like [men] have the almost luxury maybe to say it like it is and not be afraid [of repercussions or retaliation]" (Iris, personal communication, December 9, 2020). It strikes me as truly disheartening that females should ever feel the need to alter how they present themselves in order to be taken seriously, or in order for their voice to convey a sense of authority on a given subject matter. Yet, this is exactly how it is for women across the U.S. working in a profession that gives an outward appearance of being progressive and equity minded.

When asked to describe their male counterparts, very different language was used. Rachel notes:

> So the men in our office, they're not very aggressive… they're very like 'I'm here, I'm passive, I'm getting things done, but I'm not really [overachieving]'… I just feel like the men in our staff just kind of get there and just kind of coast. I don't want to call them lazy because they're not, but they're in like a maintenance state. (Rachel, personal communication, November 23, 2020)

Alice also alluded to this when she said:

> I think men have more leeway as far as being able to do things just because they can.
>
> Whereas women will get a little bit more negative feedback if they don't get that buy in,
>
> if they aren't more receptive to feedback. (Alice, personal communication, November 29,
>
> 2020)

The differences here are nothing short of striking. What is becoming evident is that women believe that men have the ability to do little more than the bare minimum without fear of repercussions or backlash, whereas females (particularly Millennials in this case) are regularly expected to do more, exceed expectations and take on additional tasks and duties to "prove themselves" as competent and trustworthy leaders. The participants in this study have shone a spotlight on the fact that women must live in a state of heightened vigilance regarding how they speak and act in the workplace.

Not Old Enough

To couple these feelings of "fear" and attempts to "prove oneself" from a gender perspective with the generational piece, is further crippling. Several of the participants also spoke of not being taken seriously because of their age. How devasting it must be to spend countless hours doing everything possible to "prove oneself" only to then be largely dismissed because they are not over the age of forty. Regardless of the educational credentials that these women have, their ideas and perspectives are still largely disregarded and dismissed because they are blindly labeled as "too young". Alice spoke directly to this when she said, "I kind of feel like our generation, or me specifically, I wasn't taken seriously even though I have a significant educational background" (Alice, personal communication, November 29, 2020). In my interview with June, she recounted a very specific time when she was interviewing for a

position and the interviewer "straight up just told me, 'You're too young for this'" (June, personal communication, January 15, 2021). She went on to describe how she felt as a result:

> And so that's kind of when I started thinking a little bit about age and being in higher ed and moving up at some point. I'm like, 'Is it really going to take until I'm out of my twenties, or whatever, for people to view me as competent and smart and all the things?'. (June, personal communication, January 15, 2021)

In terms of credentialing, like most of the participants I spoke with, June holds a Master's degree and explained that she was fully qualified for the position that she applied to. This is not to say that she should or should not have gotten the position, but it does sound an alarm that the reason she was not even considered further was because of her age/Millennial status.

Abolishing the "Mothering" Role

Although being taken seriously is a continual struggle, what seems to be firmly cemented in place is the perception that as females we are overwhelmingly seen as the "caretaker" or in a "nurturing" role. Historically, women have been and often still are seen as maternal figures; someone who provides a more nurturing and sensitive perspective. Perhaps not surprisingly, this same stereotype has carried over into the workplace. Rachel spoke of this directly when she said:

> I definitely think that female presence, especially with your antiquated views of females of being in service and support roles and almost like a caretake in some cases; [females] do a lot of support, we do a lot of engagement. I definitely think we get into hand-holding territory. (Rachel, personal communication, November 23, 2020)

While she acknowledges the antiquated mentality from where this dynamic originates, she also fully acknowledges that it is alive and well in higher education today. It is not unusual to see a

stronger female presence in support-type roles (e.g., advising, counseling, student success center positions) within the community college. What is interesting is that this same dynamic is carried over in terms of leadership and how that looks different between males and females on campus. Rachel went on to say, "I've definitely had experiences where especially serving men, they treat me differently than they would treat my male colleagues" (Rachel, personal communication, November 23, 2020). Brandy also referenced this "mothering" mentality when she commented, "I always have this concern that I am not even being seen as [I am] but am being more so [seen as] an effective maternal figure than I am an effective leader" (Brandy, personal communication, November 28, 2020). Perhaps this then begs the question of how to shake such an antiquated mindset and regularly reinforced stereotype.

What About our Female Colleagues?

An intriguing point emerged when discussing the differences between male and female leadership, and how that manifests in individuals' perceptions and experiences. A great deal of the conversations centered on how participants viewed their male counterparts, but a smaller part of the conversation also looked at how participants viewed their female colleagues. Particularly from a Millennial standpoint, several interviewees had things to say about their female counterparts from older generations. Angela spoke a bit about the women she knew in leadership:

> …they were either kind of distant, and cold, and to a point vengeful for some things. A lot of times there was a lot of feeling of there being a target on my back, and you just wanted to fly below the radar. If they didn't know your name, sometimes it was even better. (Angela, personal communication, January 13, 2021).

She went on to say, "I've always actually found more support from some of the men who have been on cabinet. It's a little dissonant that men have been more willing to give me guidance and help give me a boost" (Angela, personal communication, January 13, 2021). While the experiences females face often feel very different from those perceived experiences of men, there is also this added layer of not feeling supported by female colleagues. While Angela did not expound on what she meant by dissonant, one can conclude this may have risen from the idea that as women, we expect to be in one another's corner, so to speak. Because we likely have shared experiences about what it is like to be a female in the workplace, perhaps there is an expectation that we would want to help a female colleague out. Quite the opposite, Jasmine notes, "…my last supervisor that I had was in her late 40's… [she] really did not respect other women in her role, and did not try to groom women. She also pitted them against one another" (Jasmine, personal communication, February 23, 2021). This finding is additionally alarming in light of everything else that has been shared.

Climbing the Career Ladder

In looking specifically at participants' perceptions about leadership, one area that I wanted to focus on was career advancement and how female identifying, Millennials perceived their own career trajectory and how their perceptions impacted their future ambitions. Erica aptly sums up her thoughts by saying, "I think I'll have to fight for [the position] if I want it… I think [I've] got a shot, but I don't think I have as much of a shot as a male counterpart" (Erica, personal communication, February 25, 2021). There was also an interesting perspective that emerged about senior-level roles being somewhat less desirable. One participant mentioned that moving up would take her further away from working with students, which was what she

enjoyed most about working in higher education. However, others noted some darker and more

dismal aspects of higher up roles. Rachel commented:

> I don't really see myself moving up past a director role just because of the part where it
>
> starts to get dark and muddy and twisting arms and things like that. With who I am as a
>
> person, I could not go to sleep at night with some of the ways that they have to move at
>
> that level (Rachel, personal communication, November 23, 2020)

This is indeed an interesting take and clearly is impacting Rachel's future career ambitions. She

is not alone though; Iris also made reference to the "darker" side when she said:

> …it is very discouraging now to even think where I want to end up because of other
>
> factors that I've just mentioned, like leadership and higher-level leadership and politics
>
> that are at play and the games you have to play to get to those positions and to stay in
>
> them (Iris, personal communication, December 9, 2020)

Also intriguing, both of these comments seem to have very little to do with generational status,

and only slightly more to do with gender. When Iris references "the games you have to play",

this does not appear to be exclusive to men or women. Rather these "games", and the "dark and

muddy" culture that is perceived to exist at that senior level, is evident regardless of gender.

Briefly going back to the idea that females often perceive that they need to "prove

themselves" in the workplace, Rachel went on to talk a bit about her own career ambitions, and

noted, "Can I challenge myself and get outside of [advising] a little bit? Probably. But I [like]

being told I'm doing a good job so here I am" (Rachel, personal communication, November 23,

2020). This makes one wonder if females are in fact holding themselves back because there is

this overarching need to simply be valued and appreciated amidst the constant pressure of

needing to prove oneself and continually take on more and do more to be respected. Perhaps

once they find a role in which they are deemed as successful leaders, there is a fear of moving beyond and losing that title. The frightening part is that these are young women making these statements, women in their 20's and 30's that are holding themselves back so early on in their career because of the culture society has created, more specifically the culture that the community college has created and embraced. This is not to say that all females have this attitude or this perception of career advancement, but if one person does, it is quite possible that others do as well.

A Note about Old(er) and Young(er) Millennials

A significant amount of existing research is dedicated to the differences between generations, but a lesser studied (yet perhaps more interesting) phenomenon are those differences that exist within a particular generational group. Based on the results of my study, there are distinguishable differences between what I have termed "younger Millennials" and "older Millennials". For the sake of clarification, I refer to older Millennials as those born between 1981-1988, and younger Millennials as those born between 1989-1996. These dates were determined by a straight split down the middle of the generation.

One of the most remarkable findings between these two groups is how they identify with their "salient identity", or rather their sense of "primary identity". Simply defined, one's salient identity refers to the primary identifier an individual most closely identifies with in a particular situation (Morris, 2013). Within the group of younger Millennials, 7 of the 9 (78%) participants spoke first of their Millennial identity when asked about their personal experience(s) in leading at their institution, and how it looks different because of their identity as a female Millennial. Only one participant acknowledged their identity as a female initially and discussed their perspective and/or experiences using that lens first. Within the group of older Millennials,

however, 6 of the 11 participants (55%) spoke first of their gender, and then later referenced their generational status as it relates to their personal experience(s) in leading at their institution. One participant, however, acutely pointed out that it has been difficult to determine if their experiences are primarily a result of their gender, generational status/age, or rather a combination of both.

While percentages are not usually referenced in qualitative studies, this particular divide within the generational group was quite striking. It seems apparent that younger Millennials more closely recognize their generational status, and are more aware of how those differences show up in the workplace, while older Millennials are more in tune with their gender identity and how that plays out in their workplace interactions. While both groups spoke freely and candidly about their gender and generational status, there was a distinct difference in the focus on the conversation depending on if the interviewee was deemed to be a younger Millennial or an older Millennial.

For example, several younger Millennials spoke specifically about their perspectives as it relates to generational status. Jackie noted:

> Baby boomers and Gen Xer's have these really big, important roles in decision-making roles on campus and they're making decisions for entry level Millennial workers, as well as Gen Z and younger students, and their experiences don't reflect the experiences of their Millennial and Gen Z stakeholders. There's a huge disconnect. (Jackie, personal communication, November 23, 2020).

Erica, also a younger Millennial, reiterated a similar sentiment when she commented:

> …the fact that she still saw me as a kid, it wasn't insulting but it was surprising… I think as a female, we experience that a lot more. If we're not close to retirement our

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experience is not super valid in a lot of folks' eyes. (Erica, personal communication,

February 25, 2021)

Although there are elements of gender woven within these statements, the overarching focus from the younger Millennial group is on generational identity, and gender more or less seemed to follow behind as an afterthought.

Conversely, older Millennials really seemed to focus on their perceptions and experiences as it related to their gender (versus generational status). Megan, for instance, alluded toward feelings of inadequacy, but from a gender perspective, when she said:

[Men] are the ones whose voices are generally heard a little bit louder, and I've learned to insert myself in some of those conversations, but I need to be confident in the area in which I'm speaking to. If I have any hesitation, I sometimes find myself silenced because I'm afraid of looking inept in front of leadership. (Megan, personal communication, February 28, 2021).

Also focusing on gender identity, the concept of boundaries emerges. In utilizing this term, I am referring specifically to the physical, emotional, and mental limits an individual creates around themselves, which further impact how one acts and behaves. Going back to this idea of "fear" and reflecting on the point that many participants work very hard at maintaining a delicate balance so as not to overstep these imaginary (yet, seemingly very real) boundaries in the workplace, Jasmine, an older Millennial, commented:

There's always that fine line to walk when you're trying to be firm and yet you're trying to also not cross into being too dominant or trying to seem overbearing… if they were a man, that wouldn't even be a part of the commentary. (Jasmine, personal communication, February 23, 2021)

In these instances, gender now takes a predominant place in the conversation, while generational status is outwardly not as important.

Of further interest were the number of comments from older Millennials which acknowledged a sense of discomfort with being referred to as a Millennial. Several participants were vocal about the fact that they were on the older end of the spectrum, or that they had a hard time accepting their Millennial status since they did not closely identify with the younger Millennial group. For instance, Louise mentioned that she felt "conflicted about identifying as a Millennial in many ways… because [I'm] right on that borderline" (Louise, personal communication, November 27, 2020). Kim echoed this when she said:

> I mean, I consider myself a Millennial, but I have never really considered myself… I
>
> don't feel like I categorize a lot in the Millennial cohort because I'm on the lower range.
>
> (Kim, personal communication, December 5, 2020)

By "lower range" it can be assumed that she is referring to her status as an older Millennial since Kim was born in 1983. Several other older Millennials also acknowledged this difference, but I think Megan summed it up best when she spoke about a coworker:

> But she's five years younger than me, and there's even a divide between the way I see
>
> life as a Millennial, the way she sees life as a Millennial and those distinctions are
>
> apparent… I think the Millennial generation spanned a little bit too long because I
>
> definitely don't identify with the younger Millennials. (Megan, personal communication,
>
> February 28, 2021)

It is hard not to think that perhaps these apparent differences have emerged because younger Millennials entered into the workforce (2008-2016) at a time when gender equity issues were

either less present, or they simply looked vastly different, as opposed to those seen by their older

Millennial counterparts who likely entered into the workforce in the early 2000's (2001-2007).

Emergent Themes

Research question #3 prompts a deeper dive into the perceptions and experiences of the

participants and asks us to look exclusively at what is revealed in light of a feminist framework.

In hearing about the participants' lived experiences and better understanding their perceptions

regarding leadership, several critical themes became clear: (1) men really just don't get it, (2)

there exists a sense of "acceptance" regarding present day inequities and injustices, both

perceived and experienced, and (3) the presence of identity "intersections" complicates things.

"Men Just Don't Get It"

Despite those differences within the generational group, some comments were consistent

amongst all participants regardless of age. One particular interview question asked interviewees

if they thought "men got it" in regards to gender equity, or if there was still some sense that male

colleagues in the workplace were still a bit naïve and ignorant when it came to issues of gender

equity. While their responses were nuanced a bit, the majority of interviewees agreed with the

statement that "men just don't get it". The real question then becomes "why" – *why* don't men

"get it"? There are two ways to look at this: (1) men are trying to understand, but inherently they

will never fully "get it" because they are not female (from a biological perspective), or (2), they

are not trying to understand, which can then be broken down to a variety of reasons. Several of

the participants in this study recognized the first group, the men that are trying, but will never

fully "get it". Perhaps more alarming though is the second group, those men that are not trying

because they either do not see any problem, they do not care that there is a problem, or perhaps

they simply look at the historical progress that has been made, and then question if more work really needs to be done.

This was further demonstrated in comments dealing with very personal experiences participants have encountered in their day-to-day work life. For example, Jackie shared the following:

> I think working with men has been difficult and frustrating at the worst, and at the best it's been eye opening and an area of growth on my end and their end to the point now where I actively seek those opportunities to talk to men whether they're colleagues or students to actively seek those opportunities to talk to them about my experience as a woman. (Jackie, personal communication, November 23, 2020)

Leah went on to say:

> I think men a lot of times are clueless, unless they also have an identifier that makes them not part of the majority-majority. So, for example, my gay male friends, even if they're white men, a lot more in tune with the struggles that women face. (Leah, personal communication, December 8, 2020)

It should also be stated that quite a few participants acknowledged their agreement, but made sure to include an "it depends" clause. For instance, Felicity noted this when she said:

> I think it depends on who the male is… I think if they're open to the conversation, they might be willing to have it, but I think what I've noticed in higher ed and in my experience is that sometimes you have a lot of what they think are 'woke men'. (Felicity, personal communication, March 1, 2021)

As I mentioned previously, perhaps this is the most alarming group of them all – those that think they get it, but really, they are missing the mark. Yet, they have little ambition to be better/do better because they already think they are.

Similarly, Megan said:

> I think some males get it. I won't say that they all do… I find higher education to be a little more open-minded especially on the student affairs side of the house, I've spoke to a lot of colleagues that seem to get it there. But if you were to ask a faculty member or somebody that did not have that training, they may not see it the same exact way. (Megan, personal communication, February 28, 2021)

Alice continued to echo the idea that higher education in itself may offer a slightly more promising perspective:

> I think there have been some improvements over time and I think when you work in a higher education setting, sometimes you lose sight of reality just because a lot of the men in this space may be more aware, or may be more understanding or fighting to be more equitable as far as making sure that women are advancing and things like that. But I think holistically, no, men don't get it. (Alice, personal communication, November 29, 2020)

This is a slippery slope though. While higher education may generally be perceived as being more "woke" or progressive in terms of equitable practices, this may not always be the case. Furthermore, this blanket approach may also be allowing certain institutions to avoid doing necessary work and making necessary changes because they can claim they are already doing what needs to be done just because they are an institution of higher education.

One interviewee had a rather unusual perspective in regards to males and how she perceived her situation:

I know there are some male professors that are at the campus that I work at that have more conservative views about women and diversity in the workplace. But for the most part that hasn't really affected me or really anybody that I work with too much. I think it's more of like for their personal life, like their personal views. (Anne, personal communication, November 29, 2020)

Anne is the youngest Millennial that participated in this study and was the only interviewee that mentioned that while her colleague(s) may hold inequitable views, she did not feel that it would impact her directly or affect dynamics within the workplace. As the youngest participant of the group, and thus classified as a younger Millennial, it is quite interesting that not only did she not focus on gender disparities during our conversation, but also that she essentially expressed indifference to the fact that her male colleagues held inequitable views of women. Additionally, she maintained that one's personal views of the opposite gender would not impact their day-to-day work relationships. It is seemingly easy to chalk this up as mere naivety, but perhaps there is a shift happening within the younger Millennials, as well as those generations after, where gender equity is seen as less relevant, or dare I say, even obsolete.

Thoughts on Male Privilege.

In talking about gender inequity as it falls under the larger concept of oppression, the topic of privilege is not far away. Erica succinctly noted this when she said:

It's just like any other kind of privilege, right? When you hold privileges and you don't choose to recognize them, you think that you've worked really hard and that you deserve

what you have. Which isn't untrue but it's not the whole truth, right? (Erica, personal

communication, February 25, 2021)

Privilege is an interesting concept, particularly in light of this research. Traditionally,

conversations about privilege generally are embedded in diversity work as it relates to race.

However, the concept of privilege is very much at the forefront of the conversations presented

here. When we talk about the language used for males in the workplace, and words like "coast"

(i.e., minimal effort) and "luxury" are presented, it becomes obvious that one gender has been

afforded the privilege of facing significantly fewer barriers in the workplace. The Privilege

Project asserts the following statement about male privilege:

Due to the patriarchal society we live in, cisgender men are awarded benefits and rights

solely on the basis of their gender. With men dominating positions of power, women

have often been overlooked and oppressed by society. As a result, women have been

perceived consciously, and subconsciously, as the inferior gender and less competent

than their male counterparts. ("The Privilege Project", n.d.)

Given the evidence and statements provided by my research participants, I would argue that even

when women are in positions of authority and power, they still find themselves victims of

oppression to some degree. When we talk about men "not getting it" and male privilege,

inevitably the question arises of what would force a male colleague to "get it". In a world of

male privilege, men don't have to get it – there are no repercussions or adverse impacts of not

putting the energy in to better understand the perceptions and experiences of their female

colleagues. While yes, there are laws in place to prohibit outright discriminatory practices and

sexual harassment in the workplace, I argue that there is very little that is done regarding the

microaggressions that still take place. There is extraordinarily little effort put into changing the

80

workplace mentality so that female identifying, Millennials are not constantly feeling as though they need to "prove themselves" or that they need to censor themselves for "fear" of not being taken seriously or appearing competent.

The "Threshold" Factor

By 2022, it would arguably seem that overt instances of gender discrimination and harassment is something that has been largely eliminated, but evidence of smaller, microaggressions is still quite troublesome. By this I mean that such microaggressions are normalized as "just the way things are." If this is true, then at what point do individuals determine that a certain behavior or action warrants confrontation? I refer to this as the "threshold factor". The "threshold factor" refers to the idea that something must be significant enough in one's mind in order to say something or do something about it. In this case, we are talking about the present inequities as revealed by interviewee's personal experiences. Interestingly, this is also an indication that perhaps there is still a strong undercurrent of antiquated patriarchal standards that exist within one's internalized mindset. I offer that the "threshold factor" is a result of three possible dynamics at play: (1) acceptance, (2) exhaustion/burnout, and (3) a desire to maintain a sense of peace.

Acceptance.

In line with instances of microaggressions is the idea that there is a certain level of general "acceptance" around inequity. Perhaps the mindset follows that because these dynamics have always been around, they are just expected, and thus accepted. For instance, Anne noted, "…we do kind of like brush it off sometimes. I feel like there might be a threshold that we don't think it's a problem until it gets to harassment" (Anne, personal communication, November 29,

2020). Erica echoed a similar sentiment when she said, "I think women, especially internally,

we're like 'okay'" (Erica, personal communication, February 25, 2021). She went on to say:

> We're not empowered to call people out on that kind of sexist comment… Like there've
>
> been times where I've been in meetings or situations with male colleagues and him and I
>
> would be talking to leadership, or a student or an external partner, literally anybody and
>
> they will direct the conversation to my male colleague, as opposed to me, even if I have
>
> said something. And that seems to happen a lot. And it's just accepted. (Erica, personal
>
> communication, February 25, 2021)

An interesting thought that also emerged from the interviews is the idea that perhaps

women are a larger contributor to this sense of acceptance than men. Helen agreed when she

commented, "And sometimes women are part of the problem" (Helen, personal communication,

November 23, 2020). It then begs to be asked if gender equity work is (or has been) focused too

much on men, and that there is still very real work that needs to be done by our female

colleagues. Louise also alluded to this when she said:

> I actually think, 'Darn it, you make us look bad.' All those serotypes about women as
>
> leaders and women as they interact with their other female colleagues, I'm like, 'Geez,
>
> man. You're not helping. You're really not helping.' (Louise, personal communication,
>
> November 27, 2020)

This underlying culture of acceptance, because this is how it has always been and will likely

continue to be, ultimately upholds the "threshold factor".

Exhaustion.

Additionally, participants also alluded to a feeling of burnout and/or exhaustion as it

relates to gender and generational inequities. This is often further exacerbated by additional

marginalized identities such as race, sexual identity, and/or disability status. There seems to be a distinct sense of not having enough energy to combat these inequities, and often times, if the inequity is not "bad enough" than the energy needed to counter it, the effort it would take is just not worth it. Brandy commented, "It's just I'm happy to help, I'm happy to do whatever it is to have to make stuff move forward, but there is a point where it's just like this is exhausting. I don't want to do this anymore" (Brandy, personal communication, November 28, 2020). Jackie offers a similarly disheartening sentiment regarding her career aspirations and the perceived limitations she faces, "I don't think that the challenge of being a woman in a public sphere is ever going to go away in my lifetime" (Jackie, personal communication, November 23, 2020). Although Jackie does not reference burnout specifically, the tone is indicative of fatigue.

Alongside feelings of acceptance of the way things just are, there also appears to be an element of exhaustion contributing to the "threshold factor". I would further offer that these two components are not mutually exclusive, but rather they create a vicious cycle with one another – if an individual is exhausted and burned out, it is far more likely that they will accept things the way they are (unless they get "bad enough"). Additionally, if things are accepted as just how it is, it can seem overwhelming and daunting to create meaningful change, thus leading to a burned-out mentality.

Keeping the Peace.

Finally, there appears to be a very clear social phenomenon at work here called gender socialization. Gender socialization is defined as "a process by which individuals develop, refine and learn to 'do' gender through internalizing gender norms and roles as they interact with key agents of socialization, such as their family, social networks and other social institutions" (John et al., 2017, p. 3). Historically, women are seen as the "relationship keepers". Females are

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taught at a young age to not disrupt the peace or cause a scene. As it relates to socialization, Kourtney specifically touches on this when she says in regards to taking a leadership stance, "[it's] been a learning process and I think that comes from socialization as a female as like just go with the flow, don't cause a stir, don't be too persistent or too pushy" (Kourtney, personal communication, December 5, 2020). Leah also echoed this by saying, "Women are doing exactly what they've been conditioned to do the whole time. Men are doing exactly what they've been conditioned to do the whole time" (Leah, personal communication, December 8, 2020). These comments alone are concerning because they truly indicate the severity and deeply rooted pervasiveness of gender stereotypes in our culture. By shining a light on various injustices and inequities as it relates to gender specifically, we are violating deeply ingrained societal expectations. Regarding the "threshold factor", it only makes sense then that females would avoid doing so unless something became serious enough to warrant such an unusual disruption.

Intersections

Qualitative research is rarely cut and dry; rather it is riddled with nuances and muddled by multiple variables that inevitably impact how participants perceive and experience their world. My research was not exempt from this fact. It would be negligent not to acknowledge the intersections of identity that my participants face, and how that impacts their daily lives in the workplace. Erica aptly stated, "It's hard to tell in some ways if my leadership experience is related to being a woman or if it's related to being a mid-level manager" (Erica, personal communication, February 25, 2021). Additionally, Kourtney noted, "I also have a disability. So that combined with looking younger than I am combined with being a female, just creates a lot of stereotypes of what people will think of me before I talk" (Kourtney, personal communication,

December 5, 2020). While this research focuses specifically on gender and generational status, those are not the only two identities participants acknowledge, nor are they easily separated.

Megan pointed out, "…if you really look at the history of females, you see that those inequities still exist that we're not equals, we're not there. You throw in the race and ethnicity card, it gets even worse" (Megan, personal communication, February 28, 2021). Alice also succinctly acknowledged this fact by stating, "I hear completely different experiences from white women" (Alice, personal communication, November 29, 2020). As a person of color, Alice admitted how her race impacts her perceived career limitations. She notes, "I don't think it's just my gender. I think it's my race as well; [it] will impact my ability to move up" (Alice, personal communication, November 29, 2020). It becomes quite evident that it is impossible to point to one identity and draw conclusions based on that identity alone.

When considering additional identities, race, sexual identity, and ableness are often at the forefront of our minds. However, another identity shared by many females is that of motherhood. Alice commented:

> I think oftentimes women who have children have to sacrifice a little bit more… I think it
> shouldn't be considered when it comes to promotions or when you're going for internal
> roles, and I hope that it won't, but I think that realistically in the back of someone's mind,
> whether it's an unconscious bias, it could be a reality as far as me trying to move up.
> (Alice, personal communication, November 29, 2020)

These comments provide evidence that it is empirically impossible to fully separate out our identities, or to assume that because identities are shared amongst a population, that the population will perceive and interpret their experiences in the same ways. This makes things complicated. Thus, this study is merely a reflection of twenty individual voices, and while there

are commonalities and linkages between their stories, they cannot be generalizable to all female identifying, Millennial community college administrators.

Summary

Reading through these interviews proved to be a rather emotional endeavor (vacillating between humorous accounts, punctuated with moments of stark realism), and I would be remiss if I failed to acknowledge my own feelings of overall sadness and a sense of despair at times. Yet, there does seem to be a beacon of hope for the future:

> We could have better educational decisions made. We could have broader perspectives brought to how we're engaging with the communities. There's a lot that is just coming from that male perspective, coming from the money perspective, coming from a heterosexual white male perspective, really is what it is. Persons who've always been very privileged who don't understand the challenges that maybe a single mother who's working is facing to try and get her education. (Angela, personal communication, January 13, 2021)

This quote was intentionally selected to conclude this chapter because it effectively captures the overarching essence of this study. By better understanding the perceptions and experiences of female identifying, Millennial community college administrators, we now have a fantastic opportunity, and an obligation, to do a better job of making institutional decisions that will positively affect all stakeholders, including employees, students, and those within the community at large.

Amey's (2006) review of leadership in higher education literature acknowledges that "the perspectives of white women and leaders of color have been included in the literature only slowly and unevenly" (Amey, 2006, p. 56). Almost a decade later, Taylor and Stein (2014) also

made an ardent call for additional research on female views of leadership in higher education. The findings presented here aim to help fill that void, and using a feminist lens, provide much needed insight into female identifying, Millennial leaders presently working in community college administration. Middlehurst (2008) further pointed out how problematic it is to view leadership solely from a masculine standpoint. Therefore, the stories shared in this chapter provide a unique perspective for the reader, one that is often overlooked and ignored in a great deal of leadership studies.

As noted previously, utilizing a feminist lens to guide this research was paramount for me. Campbell and Wasco (2000) drive this point home when the emphasize that "feminist research seeks to respect, understand, and empower women" (p. 778). Furthermore, they remark that the "overarching goal of feminist research is to identify the ways in which multiple forms of oppression impact women's lives and empower women to tell their stories" (Campbell & Wasco, 2000, p. 787). I can only hope that the time spent with the women in this study has empowered them beyond the interview questions. In chapter five, I provide additional discussion regarding these findings and include commentary on implications and areas for future research.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

Introduction

In this qualitative study, female identifying Millennials shared their perceptions and experiences about leadership as it relates to their work in community college administration. This following research questions guided this study:

1. How do female identifying community college student affairs administrators identifying as part of the Millennial generation perceive leadership?

2. What are the lived leadership experiences of female identifying community college student affairs administrators identifying as part of the Millennial generation?

3. When positioned against a feminist framework, what do these leadership perceptions and lived experiences reveal?

Rooted in feminist standpoint theory, and utilizing a phenomenological approach, this research sought to give voice to a frequently marginalized population. In discussing feminist methodology, Campbell and Wasco (2000) assert, "feminist social science legitimates women's lived experiences as sources of knowledge. The ordinary and extraordinary events of women's lives are worthy of critical reflection as they can inform our understanding of the social world" (p. 775). On the topic of methodology, Amey (2006) goes on to say, "Critical theory, feminist lenses, complexity theory, and other postmodern approaches help us understand leaders whose experiences are not easily portrayed within traditional frameworks" (p. 57-58). As part of this study, twenty participants engaged in one-on-one interviews asking them to describe their perceptions and experiences relating to leadership within the community college. Reflecting on the findings from this research, a discussion regarding the implications as well as limitations is presented here. Additionally, areas for future research are explored.

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<center>**Implications**</center>

In contemplating on the findings of this study, one may wonder what all this means in the context of everyday life. Blevins (2001) writes about "the time-honored tradition of the story to clarify perceptions, to persuade, to depict, and to shape the cultures in which we work" (p. 505). My study set out to give voice to a marginalized population in an effort to better understand the lived experiences of female identifying Millennials working in community college administration across the United States. We know that "class, race, gender, and sexual orientation structure a person's understanding of reality" (Campbell & Wasco, 2000, p. 781). Furthermore, Campbell and Wasco (2000) assert that "to survive, less powerful groups must be attuned to the culture of the dominant group" (p. 781). We can infer that female Millennials fall into the less powerful group and that men are part of the dominant group. This is supported by Spigel's (2018) research which acknowledges that, "White men dominate leadership positions in all our major institutions – from military and medicine to media, legal and criminal justice, policing, finance, industry, entertainment, science, and education" (p. 2). As such, female employees are indeed a marginalized voice in higher education and in the community college. By better understanding shared experiences and identifying commonalities, as well as noting the various differences within the participant group, certain themes were brought to light.

An Overview

The first key theme is that "men just don't get it". By agreeing with the statement that "men just don't get it," participants referenced the fact that they perceive their male colleagues as not fully understanding the experiences and inequities women face as a result of their gender. This is either because men simply are unable to fully understand such situations since they are not female, or because there exists the possibility that they do not care or see a problem in the

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current situation. The second key theme is that there exists a sense of "acceptance" regarding

present day inequities and injustices, both perceived and experienced. The sense of acceptance

regarding inequities and injustices refers to what I have termed the "threshold factor." By this, I

mean that there is a distinct threshold between a behavior or comment being brushed off because

it is not deemed worthy enough to initiate confrontation, versus a behavior or comment being

viewed as significant enough to do or say something about it. I further offer that this "threshold

factor" is largely related to a general sense of acceptance that inappropriate comments or

behaviors just are the way they are. It was also noted that the "threshold factor" has implications

regarding feelings of burnout and exhaustion. Additionally, gender socialization plays a large

role in understanding this phenomenon. Finally, the last key theme is that the presence of

identity "intersections" complicates the situation. It became obvious that the intersection of

gender and generational identity often overlap when talking about perceptions and experiences.

Participants expressed difficulty in determining whether their experiences in the workplace were

a result of their gender, their generation status, or rather a combination of both. Some

participants even acknowledged that perhaps there were additional intersections such as race or

sexual identity which also contributed to their experiences.

In addition, findings from this study further suggest that inequities are still very much

present both in terms of gender and generational status in higher education. Interestingly,

participants' particular focus on these inequities seemed to be rooted in their identification as

either an "older Millennial" or a "younger Millennial". As noted in Chapter 4, those who were

considered older Millennials (born between 1981-1988) tended to initially focus more on those

inequities that related to their gender, while younger Millennials (born between 1989-1996)

tended to initially focus more on those inequities that were a result of their generational status.

While it is unclear why this presented this way, one may hypothesize that this is because older

Millennials have been in the workforce longer and have had the opportunity to recognize how

gender has impacted their experiences and the way that they are treated by others. Conversely,

younger Millennials may only be in their first professional position, and perhaps have not yet had

enough time in the workforce to see how gender inequities such as feeling the need for women to

"prove oneself" play out.

In looking at this phenomenon where women felt the need to "prove themselves," the

findings offer two different perspectives. For instance, almost all participants spoke of feeling

the need to prove themselves in the workplace. For older Millennials though, it took the

framework of having to do so as a result of their gender (i.e., needing to do more or take on more

in order to appear as competent as their male colleagues). On the other hand, for younger

Millennials, this took the form of having to prove oneself as a result of their generational status

(i.e., needing to do more and take on additional responsibilities to prove that they are as

competent as their older colleagues). Because younger Millennials are often the youngest

individuals in the workplace, it is possible that age remains a salient factor in their mind. In his

research, Arsenault (2004) discusses the differences within generations and refers to those

individuals at either the very beginning or at the tail end of the generation as "tweeners".

Arsenault (2004) further contends that "in asking these 'tweeners' what their response

would be to the most memorable events in their lives, the responses probably would include

examples of the most memorable events of both generations" (p. 125). In this case, younger

Millennials would likely identify more closely with their Generation Z colleagues, while older

Millennials would more closely identify with their Generation X predecessors. I echo Arsenault

(2004) in that "organizations and their leaders need to become more sensitive to [generational]

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differences" (p. 137). Going one step further, I think it is beneficial for higher education institutions to recognize and understand that differences often exist within a given generation which will also impact the leadership landscape.

Actionable Steps

In terms of useful takeaways, these findings indicate that institutions need to do a better job of making sure their employees (particularly female Millennials) feel valued for the work they do. I offer that this should result in tangible actions that recognize the work being done by Millennial women. This trickles down directly to the supervisor/supervisee relationship to ensure that female Millennial employees are not just being thanked for the work that they are doing, but also that there is an institutional culture that does not uphold a "need to do more to be appreciated" mindset. I believe this is more of a culture shift than it is a change in policy or procedure. Even if employees are being verbally recognized for a job well done, the effort to create a culture of true appreciation will fail to the extent that the underlying culture continually insists that they prove themselves, either because of gender or generational status.

Tedrow and Rhoads (1999) write, "Thus, creating change to improve the lives of women who are community college administrators may involve transforming the organizational culture" (p. 3). Furthermore, they acknowledge that "a thorough analysis of women's issues likely requires a culture focus primarily aimed at understanding the experiences of women as 'women' (Tedrow & Rhoads, 1999, p. 3). Institutions of higher education, including community colleges, would benefit from doing a better job of seeking feedback from their female Millennial employees, and learning how their perceptions and experiences shape their day-to-day work. Such feedback should then be used to shape policies (e.g., maternity leave) and open the door to

ongoing conversations about what could be done differently so that women feel heard and validated.

As previously noted, it was also made evident that despite historical advances to create equitable workplace environments, particularly within community colleges which are recognized as being more accessible and democratized, there is still an overarching perception that "men just don't get it" regarding inequity and the struggles faced by females. Beebe (2015) writes, "Community colleges were founded on the principles of social justice. This foundation still permeates the mission and core values of community colleges across our country" (p. 59). Given this information, I argue that this particular finding is even more unsettling. Although the *why* behind the phenomenon of men "not getting it" is still unclear, several hypotheses can be made. As I mentioned previously, it is possible that men are indeed trying to better understand such situations but are unable to fully grasp it because they are simply not female. Simone de Beauvoir acknowledged this very point when she wrote that even "the most sympathetic of men never fully comprehend woman's concrete situation" (as cited in Schneir, 1994, p. 16). This finding is also congruent with the writings of Campbell and Wasco (2000) when they say, "By living out their lives in both the dominant culture and in their own culture, members of stigmatized groups can develop a type of double vision, and hence a more comprehensive understanding of social reality" (p. 781). Since we have previously established that men are part of the dominant culture, they lack the "double vision" afforded to oppressed groups, and therefore, are never able to fully understand women's struggles.

Yet, while men may never entirely grasp the female experience, they can be educated. This study, for example, provides concrete examples of what female Millennials experience daily, which includes being overshadowed, ignored, and not being taken seriously. Results can

be presented and shared widely within the community college sector. It is additionally

imperative that individual institutions do their own work and hear from their own employees

about the perceptions and experiences of Millennial female staff. While this study sheds light on

the experiences of twenty individuals across the U.S., it would be far more impactful for men to

hear from their own colleagues. Furthermore, as Tedrow and Rhoads (1999) point out,

"community college administrators, faculty, and staff need to better understand how traditional

organizations have framed women's working lives through masculine instrumental conceptions"

(p. 15). Not only do our male colleagues need to hear from female Millennials, but they also

need to better understand the existing patriarchal framework in which community colleges

operate.

An alternative explanation for "men just don't get it" is perhaps our male colleagues are

not even trying, or that they do not really care about this problem. This presents a far more

upsetting, and requires a more focused, response. If men are not trying to understand the

situation, or simply do not care, then we face a much more challenging and difficult time

attempting to find solutions to "fix" the existing problems surrounding inequity. Again, I offer

that we, as women, need to do the work of sharing our experiences and making our voices heard

at every opportunity. There is value in perseverance and persistence. We need to continue to

shed light on the microaggressions and inequities that women see and experience in the

workplace. Studies like mine offer one opportunity to add to the dialogue, but smaller

opportunities in the workplace should also be made available. Townsend (2009) writes:

> If the institution has a strong organizational culture of trust and openness of members
>
> toward one another, leaders should consider having study groups and workshops among

faculty and staff to provide an opportunity for reflection about their discourse and

institutional practices. (p. 742)

For some institutions, this may be a difficult task, and it may mean that work needs to first be

done to create a culture of trust and openness. I argue that such a shift must begin in individual

departments or divisions first, such as student affairs, and then spread throughout the institution.

In any case, discourse of this nature is critical if we are to move forward.

Finally, the idea that there is a distinguishable "threshold factor" around these existing

inequities and microaggressions is additionally troubling and cause for concern. As noted

previously, the "threshold factor" refers to the feeling that at some point, having a conversation

or sharing one's experiences as it relates to inequity is just not worth it. Whether this stems from

an overall "acceptance" because this is how it has always been, or as a result of rising levels of

exhaustion and burnout from trying to "combat" inequitable environments, the reality is that

female Millennials acknowledge an imaginary threshold between saying something in response

to a microaggression or brushing it off. There is also the reality that this is a result of gender

socialization – the idea that females are expected to keep the peace and not create waves in the

workplace, even when they are not being treated in the same manner as their male colleagues

(John et al., 2017). The "threshold" phenomenon leads us to more fully recognize the need for

continued work to be done so that our female identifying Millennial colleagues do not have to

continue to ignore hurtful comments, or to just deal with certain behaviors because they do not

seem bad enough to warrant confrontation. Again, when we look to the why behind this

phenomenon, we are often left with more questions than answers, and only a handful of

hypotheses.

In their research, Tedrow and Rhoads (1999) discuss reaction strategies to a male dominated organizational context. As it relates to the strategies of adaptation, reconciliation, and resistance, they write, "these complex strategies place a greater psychological burden on women in comparison to their male counterparts. The negative consequence is that women spend a good deal of time and energy simply trying to survive, when they should be thriving" (Tedrow & Rhoads, 1999, p. 14). As evidenced by the participants in this study, female Millennials are tired. At some point, it does become easier to just accept that inequities exist, and that culture and society have reinforced certain gender norms that are consistently and continually supported. An example of this is when participants spoke of taking on a "mothering" or nurturing type role in the workplace. Despite this perspective, I suggest that we need to continue fighting. We need to find strength in our female colleagues as a collective body of women working in the community college and begin lifting each other up. Organizations such as the American Association for Women in Community Colleges (AAWCC) or the American Association for University Women (AAUW) are excellent resources for finding support and camaraderie amongst female colleagues working in community colleges.

Allen and Baber (1992) echo this by saying, "Feminists embrace the solidarity of women's experience as oppressed and devalued people; feminist work together for political change and personal empowerment" (p. 5). They further contend, "Female solidarity is necessary to the feminist project of making the world better for women" (Allen and Baber, 1992, p. 7). By sharing our stories, we can empower one another and perhaps that negates some of the exhaustion and burnout. Campbell and Wasco (2000) write, "The overarching goal of feminist research is to identify the ways in which multiple forms of oppression impact women's lives and empower women to tell their stories" (p. 787). Groups like campus-based Women's Networks

and participation in regional or statewide associations that focus on women in higher education can be especially impactful for creating such community. The Michigan American Council on Education (MI-ACE) is an excellent example of a professional network that works to support, uplift and promote women in higher education. For student affairs professionals specifically, organizations such as the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) Center for Women or the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) Coalition for Women's Identities are fantastic groups focused on empowering women working in student affairs administration. I wholeheartedly believe that female Millennials would find great value in taking part in these kinds of networks across the U.S.

Changing Our Mindset

I would have liked to use this chapter to wrap up this study neatly by presenting a series of solutions so as to "fix" issues of gender and generational inequity in the community college. That is not the case though – unfortunately, this is not a "how to" manual, nor can I present a concise list of steps based on this research study that will automatically lead to eradicating inequities. What I can offer, however, are suggestions and ways of thinking through the findings so we can begin changing our internal mindset. By changing our own mindset and shifting to a feminist perspective, we have a unique opportunity to see reality in a new light. Simply stated, a feminist lens means that we, institutionally speaking, can see firsthand how current structures such as policies, practices, and procedures all impact women in the workplace. The stories brought forth in this study provide clear evidence of the microaggressions still present daily for Millennial women working in higher education.

I could say one of the implications of this study is the need for more education regarding gender and generational equity in an attempt to create an awareness that such issues

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exist. Community college campuses, and student affairs divisions, could also create more opportunities for training or professional development designed for both our male and female colleagues. While I believe there is a need to create mechanisms for invoking more inclusive and equitable work practices, by means of such programs, I cannot help but agree with Allan (2011) when they write, "focusing only on policies and programs as means to create equity, without looking at underlying culture and structure, is essentially dealing with the symptom and not the real cause of inequity" (p. 50). By looking solely toward education and programming, we are only scratching the surface of what needs to be done. Institutionally speaking, we have to do better than just creating an awareness and providing educational opportunities to better understand the present inequities. While these are important facets, and there are valuable opportunities in continued training and professional development activities (e.g., feedback sessions, workshops), these things will not bring an end to inequity.

Instead, I offer a different perspective: women need to continue to do their own work. We (as women) need to begin changing our own perspective so that we stop feeling (and feeding into) the constant pressure to "prove ourselves" or to "work harder" than our male colleagues in order to be seen as competent leaders. We need to shift our internal mindset and allow ourselves to be good enough as we are, without having to take on additional responsibilities, or censor our speech or our actions in an effort to uphold the societal expectations of gender norms that have been so ingrained within us. Guthrie (2001) offers a similar response by stating:

> Women must learn to heed that inner voice when it cautions, 'I don't need to do that.' Today's unprecedented pressure to 'be all you can be' can be unhealthy when pursued immoderately. Greater courage and strength is required to resist the pressure than to succumb to it. (p. 243)

Culturally speaking, this is far bigger than the community college or higher education as a whole. During our conversation, Alice commented, "I think [inequities] are so ingrained within our society that people don't even notice when it's happening" (Alice, personal communication, November 29, 2020). This needs to be addressed in the formative early years with our young children, when they are still in elementary school.

Additionally, as women, we must change how we view one another. I propose that we stop comparing ourselves to each another, and that we stop holding our female colleagues to standards set in place by a patriarchal society. We cannot possibly begin to change our external environment if we do not first change our internal perspective. Townsend (2009) writes:

> …the organizational climate for women and minorities will not improve until we embody in our own discourse, including its tacit assumptions, the perspective that women and minorities are not deficit because they do not fit the norms of White middle- and upper-class males. When we overtly move to discourse that claims minorities and women are different then White males, we must be careful that these differences are still not views as deficiencies. (p. 742)

We are not deficient; we are not less than. We may, in fact, be different, but different is good. We may lead differently as women, but why should we have to conform to standards that are androcentric? As we begin to alter our own perspective, one of the key changes that needs to take place is a conscious shift away from a deficiency viewpoint. I challenge my fellow female colleagues to change our conversations and how we speak to one another, and thereby, we can begin to change our workplace culture.

We also can continue to change the culture by being physically present in spaces where women's voices need to be heard. Alice aptly noted in her interview, "I want to be in the rooms

where the big decisions are being made that impacts people like me, or women, when they're students, to effectively make change in that way" (Alice, personal communication, November 29, 2020). We absolutely need to continue to not just have a seat at the table, but to make sure our different voices and our stories are heard. We need more women to share their experiences so that decisions regarding institutional policies and procedures are heavily influenced by the lived experiences of Millennial women. As an expert on organizational leadership, Senge (1990) writes, "In a learning organization, leaders are designers, teachers, and stewards" (p. 321). By continually being present in the rooms where the decisions are made, women can operate in a role as (re)designers of the system and promote institutional change. Using the metaphor of a ship, Senge (1990) goes on to say, "No one has a more sweeping influence on the ship than the designer" (p. 321). While small changes and initiatives can be impactful, the more important implication is that women strive to be (re)designers of a system that removes those barriers that lead to inequitable environments. That is the only real way to ensure that change of this magnitude is sustainable.

One of the ways in which the institution itself can further help remedy the current situation is to provide career development programs that will assist in preparing female Millennials to move into leadership, and for those already in leadership roles, to move into more senior-level leadership positions. Selzer and Robles (2019) acknowledge the importance of this when they note:

> Entry-level women's needs should be taken into consideration since many women's leadership development programs focus on women in middle management who aspire to senior leadership roles. All women should be taught early… that professional development opportunities should be used as career assessment and reflection. (p. 121)

This essentially benefits both the individual (by preparing them to advance in their career) and the institution (by providing an opportunity for feedback from the individual regarding how to change the institutional culture so that it best supports and removes barriers to women). Eddy (2008) further notes, "Opportunities for women to test the leadership waters would aid in providing a chance for women to acquire the requisite skills and experiences and provide a safety net for them as they envision themselves in the presidential role" (p. 64). I argue that this does not have to apply only to individuals seeking a presidential position, but for anyone that aspires to be a leader in a more senior-level role.

From a community college perspective, where this research was based, Miller and Creswell (1998) note, "stress may be especially acute for women holding academic leadership roles in 2-year colleges [due to] gender-based bias in certain occupational careers" (p. 229). My study indicates that in addition to the stress caused by gender-based bias resulting from certain occupational programs, the stress from dealing with inequitable work environments and ongoing microaggressions is also alarming. Munoz (2009) further notes, "Since their inception, community colleges have been led primarily by an extremely homogonous group: White males. Academic institutions are proud of their rich histories and traditions, and over time they have maintained a rigid resistance to change" (p. 155). This speaks volumes to the need for community colleges in particular to take seriously these implications, and to move forward in taking the steps necessary to change the inequitable landscape for female Millennial administrators. Without a doubt, these are the future leaders of the community college. Written over forty years ago, this statement still rings true today, "The community college has an obligation to provide and encourage opportunity for women of talent in every area of leadership and policymaking" (Eaton, 1981, p. viii).

Through the suggestions offered here, I believe the community college can make significant strides in dismantling existing gender and generational inequities. This can be done through creating spaces to engage in open dialogue about the perceptions and experiences of female Millennials, and by encouraging our female colleagues to shift their own perspectives so as to free themselves from holding onto antiquated patriarchal expectations and societal norms. Community colleges specifically have the unique opportunity to serve as role models within the larger higher education arena. Stephenson (2001) writes, "as other institutions absorb and move more women and minorities upward, they may look to community colleges as model incubators for the advancement of women leaders" (p. 193). Furthermore, community colleges can also reflect tangible actions to remove gender and generational inequities, which may serve as catalysts for change within other institutions of higher education. Additionally, institutions need to continue to encourage women to be in the rooms where decisions are made, and to further provide opportunities to develop future leaders. Finally, while not a standalone solution, it is still important to provide opportunities for men to hear our stories and engage in professional development activities that highlight the lived experiences of female Millennials in the workplace, as well as address the historical frameworks of higher education that have upheld the masculine narrative.

Limitations

As with any research, there are always limitations present that ultimately impact and affect the outcomes. There are two external factors that I believe played a large role in how my participants came to view their perceptions about leadership and talk about their experiences in the community college. In early 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic shook the country, as well as the world. It would be negligent to assume that the ramifications that resulted from COVID-19,

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and thus changing work environments, did not significantly impact the conversations and narratives that were shared. While these ramifications likely looked different for institutions across the country, I still believe this affected my participants' perspectives during their one-on-one interviews. It became apparent that the changing work environment (e.g., remote work) helped draw attention to existing inequities, and also made mainstream the option of a more flexible work arrangement, leading to a better work/life balance. For example, when asked specifically about the impact of COVID-19, Iris noted, "I think there was more of a status quo happening last year than it is this year because of the pandemic and just like civil unrest and just a lot happening in our country" (Iris, personal communication, December 9, 2020). Alice also mentioned an interesting point in that COVID-19 has provided an opportunity to see employees from a holistic perspective. As such, I believe this holistic perspective allowed my participants to more fully reflect on their perceptions and experiences as female Millennials in the workplace.

Additionally, the political context of 2020 also likely had a substantial impact on how participants chose to respond to my interview questions and prompts. While I will not go into detail about the political environment over the last five years, suffice it to say that there were episodes across the nation of civil unrest, racial justice and protests. This was evidenced by the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement, as well as several notable and women-organized protests. I would further be remiss if I did not acknowledge that 2020 was a U.S. presidential election year. Regardless of what one's political views are, they likely became more pronounced and more in the forefront of everyone's mind during late 2020 and early 2021 when I was conducting my interviews.

One additional limitation of this study is that it utilized a very binary perspective of male and female. Unfortunately, for the sake of this research, I needed to limit my scope in order to

keep the data set manageable. Zamani-Gallaher (2017) writes, "thus, the traditional view of gender does not accommodate gender nonconformity or acknowledge gender fluidity but instead strictly adheres to male/female as the norm" (p. 91). Given this limitation, I strongly encourage future researchers to take gender fluidity and a non-binary view of gender more into account.

<center>**Recommendations for Future Research**</center>

I believe that good research merely opens doors for continued research. Thus, it is imperative to consider ways in which the current study can be expanded upon, or different lenses can be used to better understand the phenomenon at hand. One area that would be especially interesting regarding my research would be to look at the similarities between Generation X (born between 1965 and 1980) participants and what I have termed older Millennials, and the similarities between Generation Z (born between 1997 and 2012) and those that are part of the younger Millennials age group. Based on their birth year, younger Millennials are closer to Generation Z, while older Millennials may share more traits similar to their predecessor, Generation X. Since there were differences between older Millennials and younger Millennials in my research, looking at how those two groups related to their older (Generation X) and younger (Generation Z) counterparts could be quite fascinating.

Keeping with this line of thought, another area of research that may be interesting would involve looking at the Baby Boomer (born between 1946 and 1964) parents of older Millennials and looking at how older Millennials' leadership style(s) have been influenced by their parents, as well as how their understanding and conceptualization of leadership has developed as a result of their upbringing. Similarly, it may be worthwhile to look at the Generation X (born between 1965 and 1980) parents of younger Millennials in a similar framework. It is possible, and perhaps likely, that differences exist as a result of their childhood upbringing. It also may help

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explain the notable differences in Millennials' salient identity as either gender focused or generational focused. For example, perhaps Baby Boomer parents felt a stronger connection to and dealt more with gender inequity in their lifetime, and therefore, this was at the forefront of conversations for older Millennials growing up. Conversely, perhaps Generation X parents felt more strongly about their generational identity, and therefore, this was a focal point in raising their younger Millennial children. Further research in this area would yield interesting results and may provide a bit more insight regarding the noted differences between younger Millennials and older Millennials.

Additionally, there are additional variables that could be adjusted to create studies that would be valuable within this academic area. For example, by choosing to look specifically at Millennial women of one race/ethnicity (e.g., African American, Hispanic/Latina), their stories would likely be different from those of my participants and may provide meaningful insight into certain subgroups of female identifying Millennials. It may also prove interesting and worthwhile to continue this research by looking for additional participants within the older Millennial or younger Millennial category specifically. While I draw attention to and highlight a few differences between these two groups, additional research should be conducted to further understand these two subsections of the Millennial generation.

It would further be interesting to examine the relationship between women who are already in senior-level positions and how they relate to and perceive their younger, female counterparts. While we know how some female Millennials have experienced females of older generations in the workplace (including their perceived lack of support and guidance), I was not able to investigate this relationship dynamic in the opposite direction. It would undoubtably be better to understand this dynamic from both directions. These are just a few suggestions for

future research that would enhance this area of study and continue to contribute to a growing, and much needed body of literature about women in higher education.

Conclusion

When I started this research, I asked myself a single question: what does it mean to be a female identifying Millennial working as an administrator within the community college system? I wanted to know what this experience looked like for others who shared this identity with me. I wanted to know if their perceptions and experiences mirrored my own, and/or what differences existed. First and foremost, it was for selfish reasons that I pursued this research path. More important, though, is the path it has carved out for future research in this area. Yet perhaps most importantly, the stories told here have the ability to change the landscape of higher education. Selzer and Robles (2019) write, "Every woman has a story to tell. All women leaders in higher education must consider themselves active participants in the pipeline to move the needle" (p. 121). These stories bring to light the inequities and injustices that are felt by female identifying Millennials across the U.S., and they have the power to break down those inequities going forward. Perhaps Eddy (2017) says it best:

"So, yes, we've come a long way, but the road to equity remains long." (p. 101)

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APPENDIX A: INITIAL RECRUITMENT MESSAGE TO POTENTIAL FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

Kerri Langdon, a doctoral student in the Higher Education Administration program at Illinois State University in Normal, Illinois, is conducting qualitative dissertation research on how female community college administrators identifying as part of the Millennial generation (born between 1981-1996) perceive and experience leadership within the workplace.

As a participant, you will be asked to partake in one focus group session, lasting approximately 50 minutes. The focus group session will be conducted virtually on a mutually agreed upon date utilizing Zoom technology. In this focus group, participants will be asked to reflect upon and share their thoughts regarding their perceptions and experiences about leadership in the workplace.

Participants will also have an opportunity to provide contact information for other individuals/colleagues that they feel may be interested in participating in this research.

If you are interested in participating in the focus group session, please contact me, Kerri Langdon, at ████████████████ or ██████████.

Thank you for your assistance!

Sincerely,

Kerri Langdon

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT FORM – FOCUS GROUP SESSION

Illinois State University
College of Education
Department of Educational Administration and Foundations

You are invited to participate in a research project entitled "Understanding Female Millennial Administrators and their Perceptions and Experiences of Leadership in the Community College". This study is being conducted by Kerri Langdon, Academic Advisor at Kellogg Community College, and a doctoral student in Higher Education Administration at Illinois State University. My study is conducted under the supervision of Dr. Phyllis McCluskey-Titus (█████████████).

The purpose of this study is to understand the perceptions and experiences of female community college administrators identifying as part of the Millennial generation as it relates to leadership in the workplace. If you choose to participate you will be asked to partake in a focus group session lasting approximately 50 minutes. The focus group session will be conducted virtually on <**DATE TBD**> utilizing Zoom technology. There is no monetary or other compensation available for participation in this study. This session will be audio and video recorded to ensure the accuracy of the collected information, and all content will be transcribed into a written record. You would be able to leave the virtual group at any time during the focus group session. You also have the option to turn off the video if you choose. You are ineligible to participate in this study if you are currently within the European Economic Area.

Please do not hesitate to ask questions about the study before participating or while the research is taking place. I will be happy to share the results with you at the completion of the study. Ensuring the confidentiality of data is the norm in research. Neither your name nor institution will be used in the dissertation dissemination process; rather it will only be known to me. Pseudonyms will be used for participants (i.e., Administrator 1, Administrator 2, and so on) and general terms will be used in reporting results (i.e., "Five of the administrators commented…;" etc.). On a separate master document, I will keep a list with the names of all participants and the corresponding code numbers. Once the data are collected and analyzed, the master list will be destroyed. Additionally, due to the nature of the focus group session, I cannot guarantee confidentiality, however, focus group members are encouraged not to discuss information that occurs during the focus group outside of the focus group.

As in all research, there may be unforeseen risks to you as the participant. It is possible you may find that reflecting upon your perceptions and experiences is upsetting. Additionally, should a breach of confidentiality occur, there is a potential risk to your reputation and/or employability. There are no direct benefits of participating in this study. However, whatever the outcome of this study, research suggests that reflection is beneficial to helping people analyze, understand, and gain meaning from their experiences. You may benefit from this activity by having the chance to talk about your perceptions and lived experiences regarding leadership in the workplace. Other female community college administrators identifying as part of the Millennial generation may benefit from this research, as well as institutions of higher education

across the country. After your data has been deidentified, your data may be used in other research projects.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. The focus group questions are open-ended, meaning that there are no right or wrong answers. I am interested in your honest discussion about your perceptions and experiences regarding leadership in the workplace. You may refuse to take part in the research at any time without penalty. You may skip any questions you do not wish to discuss for any reason. Your participation or non-participation will have no effect on your employment status.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact Kerri Langdon, at (office) ▬▬▬▬▬ or (cell) ▬▬▬▬▬ or via email at ▬▬▬▬▬▬▬. You may also contact the Research Ethics & Compliance Office at Illinois State University at 309.438.5527 or via email at REC@IllinoisState.edu, if any questions or issues arise during the course of the study.

By signing below, I agree to participate in the 50-minute focus group interview.

Signature (participant): _____ Date: _____

Signature (researcher): _____ Date: _____

You may print out a copy of this consent form for your records.

Thank you.

Kerri Langdon, Researcher, ▬▬▬▬▬, ▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬

APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT FORM – ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEW

Illinois State University
College of Education
Department of Educational Administration and Foundations

You are invited to participate in a qualitative research project entitled "Understanding Female Millennial Administrators and their Perceptions and Experiences of Leadership in the Community College". This study is being conducted by Kerri Langdon, Academic Advisor at Kellogg Community College, and a doctoral student in Higher Education Administration at Illinois State University. My study is conducted under the supervision of Dr. Phyllis McCluskey-Titus ( ).

As a participant, you will be asked to partake in one private face-to-face interview, 60-90 minutes in length. The interview will be conducted in-person at a location convenient to both the participant and the researcher. For participants that are unable to schedule an in-person interview, virtual (via Zoom) or telephone interviews will be available as an alternative option. There is no monetary or other compensation available for participation in this study. You are ineligible to participate in this study if you are currently within the European Economic Area.

The purpose of this study is to understand the perceptions and experiences of female community college administrators identifying as part of the Millennial generation as it relates to leadership in the workplace. If you choose to participate you will be asked to partake in an interview lasting approximately 60-90 minutes. This interview will be audio recorded to ensure the accuracy of the collected information and all interviews will be transcribed into a written record. You would be able to ask the interviewer to turn off the audio recording equipment at any time during the interview.

Please do not hesitate to ask questions about the study before participating or while the research is taking place. I will be happy to share the results with you at the completion of the study. Ensuring the confidentiality of data is the norm in research. Neither your name nor institution will be used in the dissertation dissemination process; rather it will only be known to me. Pseudonyms will be used for participants (i.e., Administrator 1, Administrator 2, and so on) and general terms will be used in reporting results (i.e., "Five of the administrators commented…;" etc.). On a separate master document, I will keep a list with the names of all participants and the corresponding code numbers. Once the data are collected and analyzed, the master list will be destroyed. All data from the interviews will be maintained in a password-protected computer. After the interview is transcribed, I will also provide you with a copy of the transcript so you can review and determine if anything needs to be clarified or changed.

As in all research, there may be unforeseen risks to you as the participant. It is possible you may find that reflecting upon your perceptions and experiences is upsetting. Additionally, should a breach of confidentiality occur, there is a potential risk to your reputation and/or employability. There are no direct benefits of participating in this study. However, whatever the outcome of this study, research suggests that reflection is beneficial to helping people analyze,

understand, and gain meaning from their experiences. You may benefit from this activity by having the chance to talk about your perceptions and lived experiences regarding leadership in the workplace. Other female community college administrators identifying as part of the Millennial generation may benefit from this research, as well as institutions of higher education across the country. After your data has been deidentified, your data may be used in other research projects.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. The interview protocol is open-ended, meaning that I have a list of questions that I will ask and there are no right or wrong answers. I am interested in your honest responses to questions about your perceptions and experiences regarding leadership in the workplace. You may refuse to take part in the research at any time without penalty. You may skip any question you do not wish to answer for any reason. Your participation or non-participation will have no effect on your employment status.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact Kerri Langdon, at (office) ███████████ or (cell) ████████████ or via email at █████████████████████. You may also contact the Research Ethics & Compliance Office at Illinois State University at 309.438.5527 or via email at REC@IllinoisState.edu, if any questions or issues arise during the course of the study.

By signing below, I agree to participate in a 60-90 minute private face-to-face or virtual interview.

Signature (participant): _____ Date: _____

Signature (researcher): _____ Date: _____

By signing below, I agree for this interview to be audio recorded.

Signature (participant): _____ Date: _____

Signature (researcher): _____ Date: _____

Thank you.

Kerri Langdon, Researcher, ████████████, █████████████████████

Please save a copy of this page for your records.

APPENDIX D: FOCUS GROUP SESSION PROTOCOL

Introduction/Overview:

Thank you for taking the time to attend this focus group. I am interested in learning more about your perceptions and experiences as it relates to leadership, particularly as it relates to your current role within the community college. I would like to remind you that I am recording this session so the study can be as accurate as possible. As a participant, you will not be personally identified in the research findings. You also have the right to not respond to any question(s) you are not comfortable with.

Icebreaker:

I'd like to begin by brainstorming ways that people can be leaders on college campuses – go ahead and call out different ways that you see leadership on your campus.

Follow up dialogue:

1. What adjectives would you use to describe campus leadership at your institution (e.g., president, vice presidents, deans)? Explain briefly how these apply on your campus.

2. Describe how you lead within your institution.

3. Describe where the practice of leadership at your institution falls on a continuum, where one end is more hierarchical and based on positions and the other end is more individualistic and based on personal/professional expertise and/or recognition.

    a. How is leadership different for administrators and faculty?

4. How does your identified gender play a role in your perceived or real ability to be a leader on your campus?

    a. Do you think leadership within your institution is impacted by gender inequities (either real or perceived)?

5. What is the relationship between leadership and collaboration on your campus?

6. What examples come to mind when I use the word leadership in the context of your workplace?

7. Share how change is initiated on your campus and by whom.

Interview Protocol

Project: A conversation regarding the perspectives and experiences of female community college administrators identifying as part of the Millennial generation regarding leadership in the workplace.

Time of interview: _____

Date of interview: _____

Location: _____

Interviewer: _____

Interviewee: _____

Thank you for consenting to participate in this study. I would like to remind you that I am recording the interview so the study can be as accurate as possible. You may request, however, that the recorder be turned off at any point during the interview. You also have the right to not respond to any question(s) you are uncomfortable with. Additionally, your name nor your institution will be used in the dissertation dissemination process. All data will be maintained on a password-protected computer.

The purpose of this study is to explore how female community college administrators identifying as part of the Millennial generation perceive and experience leadership in the workplace.

The research questions guiding this study are: (a) How do female community college student affairs administrators identifying as part of the Millennial generation perceive leadership? (b) What are the lived leadership experiences of female community college student affairs administrators identifying as part of the Millennial generation? (c) When positioned against a feminist framework, what do these leadership perceptions and lived experiences reveal?

One-on-One Interview Questions

INSTITUTIONAL LEADERSHIP

1. Reflecting on the leadership at your institution, who holds positions of leadership on your campus? Are they male or female?

INDIVIDUAL LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCES/PERSONAL ASPIRATIONS

1. Can you talk about your personal experiences in leading at your institution?
    a. How does this look different because you identify as a female?
    b. How does this look different because you identify as a Millennial?

2. Describe your leadership style. How does this compare to leadership styles you have seen men utilize?
3. What are your career aspirations? Where do you see yourself in higher education in 10-15 years? Thinking of your career trajectory, what's your "final destination"?
4. How do you think that your gender will impact your ability to move into these roles?
   a. What about your ability to be seen as an effective leader in these roles?

MENTORSHIP

5. Can you talk a bit about mentorship and its role in your current position?
   a. Have you had (or do you currently have) a mentor? If so, can you describe some of their characteristics (e.g., gender)?
   b. Do you identify as a mentor to others?
      i. At your institution? Outside your workplace?
   c. In what ways have you found mentorship to be helpful (either as the mentor or the mentee)? Less helpful?

ON THE OPPOSITE GENDER

6. It's been referenced in previous conversations that males "just don't get it" when it comes to gender inequity – what are your thoughts on this? Agree/disagree? Why?
7. Can you tell me about a time when you felt that gender inequity was present for you personally in the workplace?
8. From your perspective, what would allow us to move toward gender equity in the workplace? What actions should be taken?
9. Is there a certain level of acceptance around gender inequity in your workplace? What makes you think or feel that way?

INTERSECTION OF GENDER AND GENERATIONAL STATUS

10. Thinking about leadership in the workplace, how would you describe the influence of generational identity?
    a. What kind of differences do you see?
    b. What does this look like in everyday practice?

11. Can you talk about a time when you felt that your generational identity was especially salient in the workplace?

OTHER

12. Do you believe COVID has impacted your perceptions and experiences as it relates to leadership in your workplace? How so?

13. Do you have any colleagues that would be interested in participating in this study? If so, would you be willing to share my contact information with them so that they can reach out to me directly?

Illinois State University
College of Education
Department of Educational Administration and Foundations

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Female Millennial Administrators and their Perceptions and Experiences of Leadership in the
Community College". As indicated in the email invitation, this study is being conducted by
Kerri Langdon, Academic Advisor at Kellogg Community College and a doctoral student in
Higher Education Administration at Illinois State University. My study is conducted under the
supervision of Dr. Phyllis McCluskey-Titus (█████████████).

This data sheet is being used to help understand and identify the demographic makeup of one-on-
one interview participants.

First Name _____   Last Name _____

Title of Current Position _____

Number of years in Current Position _____

Based on your professional path, how do you describe your current position? *(Please check only
one)*
- o   Entry level
- o   Mid-level, aspiring to senior level
- o   Mid-level, not aspiring to senior level
- o   Senior level
- o   None of the above

Number of years in a professional position in higher education
- o   1-4
- o   5-9
- o   10-14
- o   15-19
- o   20+

For the purpose of this study, I am seeking females that fall in the "Millennial" timeframe –
those individuals born between 1981 – 1996.
- o   Were you born in this time frame?   YES   or   NO

     If yes, specifically, what year were you born? _____

Level of Education *(check all that apply)*
- o   Associate's degree
- o   Bachelor's degree
- o   Master's degree
- o   Doctoral degree (Ph.D. or Ed.D.)
- o   JD
- o   Other (please specify) _____

How do you describe your gender identity? _____

Contact information

NAME: _____

PHONE: _____

EMAIL: _____

Please return this sheet as an email attachment to:
Kerri Langdon, ███████████████████

Questions: Kerri can be reached via telephone at ██████████ (cell)

APPENDIX G: PARTICIPANT PROFILES

Table 3

Participant Profiles

Name	Birth Year	Current Position	U.S. Location/Region	Years in Position	Professional Level	Total Years in Higher Education	Highest Degree Earned
Kourtney	1988	Success Coach TRIO Student	Southern	5	mid-level	5 to 9	Master's
Kim	1983	Support Services Director	Midwest	6	mid-level	5 to 9	Bachelor's
Leah	1985	Director of Advising	Midwest	1.5	mid-level	10 to 14	Master's
Louise	1981	Director of Academic and Career Advising	Midwest	5	mid-level	10 to 14	Master's
Helen	1982	Dean for Institutional Research	Western	11	mid-level	15 to 19	PhD
Felicity	1987	Assistant Director of Student Life	Northeast	2	mid-level	5 to 9	Master's
Megan	1985	Associate Director of Admissions	Northeast	6	mid-level	10 to 14	Master's
Erin	1981	Manager of a Disability Resource Center	Midwest	5	mid-level	5 to 9	Master's
Jasmine	1984	Interim Basic Needs Manager	Western	less than 1	mid-level	5 to 9	PhD
Angela	1988	Director of Student Activities	Midwest	4.5	mid-level	5 to 9	Master's

(Table Continues)

Table 3, Continued

Name	Birth Year	Current Position	U.S. Location/Region	Years in Position	Professional Level	Total Years in Higher Education	Highest Degree Earned
Iris	1987	Project Manager for the Pathways Program	Western	2.5	mid-level	10 to 14	Master's
Rachel	1993	Academic Advisor	Southern	2	entry-level	1 to 4	Master's
Jackie	1995	Program Coordinator	Midwest	1	entry-level	1 to 4	Master's
Brandy	1995	Residence Life Coordinator	Western	1	entry-level	1 to 4	Master's
Alice	1991	Academic Advisor	Midwest	less than 1	entry-level	1 to 4	Master's
Anne	1996	Youth Services Coordinator Open Doors	Midwest	less than 1	entry-level	1 to 4	Master's
Molly	1992	Program Coordinator	Western	1	mid-level	1 to 4	Master's
June	1992	Academic Advisor	Midwest	1.5	mid-level	5 to 9	Master's
Erica	1992	Director of Residence Life and Student Conduct	Midwest	less than 1	mid-level	5 to 9	Master's
Nancy	1993	Academic Advisor	Southern	1	entry-level	1 to 4	Master's

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