The purpose of this study is to name and give voice to the spiritual expression of leadership by women community college presidents. The following questions guided the research: (1) How do women community college presidents describe spirituality? (2) How does spirituality convey itself in the reflections, self-expression, and practice of the leadership of women community college presidents? and (3) How do women community college presidents honor which expressions of their spirituality they share with others and which they hold private? The research design included qualitative/interpretive methodology and phenomenological method with five women community college presidents selected using purposeful sampling.

Individual themes for each participant were used to create five collective themes to describe the experience of being a woman who incorporates spiritual leadership into her practice as a community college president. The overall themes that emerged were: (1) integrating spirituality into work and life (2) being inclusive (3) building and nurturing relationships (4) engaging in self reflection and (5) doing work with meaning.

This study provides insight into the experience of women community college presidents, explains how spiritual leadership is operationalized within the community college context, and offers implications for practice for future and current leaders, those who have the responsibility to select and support leaders, and those who train and prepare leaders.
Spiritual Leadership: Voices of Women Community College Presidents

by
Kristen Jones

A DISSERTATION

submitted to
Oregon State University

in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the
degree of

Doctor of Education

Presented October 7, 2008
Commencement June 2009
Doctor of Education dissertation of Kristen Jones
presented on October 7, 2008.

APPROVED:

Major Professor, representing Education

Dean of the College of Education

Dean of the Graduate School

I understand that my dissertation will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my dissertation to any reader upon request.

Kristen Jones, Author
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to extend heartfelt thanks to:

- The five women who participated in my study for their graciousness, sharing their valuable time, their candor, and being leaders others want to emulate.
- Members of my committee, Dr. Larry Roper, Dr. Tom Scheuermann, Dr. Lani Roberts, Dr. Nan Poppe, and Dr. Sonya Christian, for their support and encouragement through my doctoral studies and for taking the time to provide me with the feedback I needed to produce scholarly work.
- Dr. George Copa, “Professor Extraordinaire”, for his guidance and wisdom during the research sequence of my coursework and for his dedication to getting me to a place where I felt confident to continue the dissertation journey on my own.
- The large number of friends, colleagues, and mentors who encouraged me to begin this voyage and then supported me by frequently asking about my progress, letting me vent, sending notes of encouragement, making sure I took lunch breaks during my intensive writing phase, reading and providing feedback on draft chapters, and helping me celebrate each accomplishment along the way.
- The staff of the Academic Development and Library Services Division at Linn-Benton Community College for their patience with my absences during coursework and my professional development leave and for carrying on with the work of the division with graciousness and good humor.
- The Institute for Community College Development at Cornell University and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), Region V, WISA for financially supporting my dissertation research.
- My parents and siblings for their pride in my accomplishments, for asking about my research, and for modeling what it takes to achieve a goal.
- My husband, Doug, for taking care of all the details of running our household, for the sacrifices he made, and for his steadfast love and support through this three-year journey.
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“Leaders need not only the technical skills to manage the external world but also the spiritual skills to journey inward toward the source of both light and shadow.”

Palmer, 2000, p. 79

CHAPTER 1: FOCUS AND SIGNIFICANCE

In his opening keynote address at the Uncovering the Heart of Higher Education conference held in San Francisco in February 2007, Parker Palmer defined spirituality as “an internal human yearning to be connected with something larger than our egos.” In addition, he shared his opinion that it is a moral obligation of those who work in higher education to be reflective and to teach students to be reflective. At the same conference, in the closing keynote speech, Diana Chapman-Walsh, President of Wellesley College, expressed that in her own search for peace and fulfillment as a leader she has come to realize that “critical thinking comes from mind and from heart and needs a community to be true to itself.”

The reality that a conference with the goal of helping participants explore what actions are necessary to make colleges and universities places that awaken the deepest potential in students, faculty, and staff drew over 600 educational professionals from 293 different institutions is an indication that many people resonate with the thoughts of Palmer and Chapman-Walsh. The attendance of hundreds of people from two and four year institutions across the United States who were interested in sessions titled, “Living Authentically,” “Loving and Forgiving on College Campuses,” “Learning as Leadership: Old Lessons, New Paradigms, and the Ever-Present Need for Wisdom in Higher Education,” and “Mentoring Critically Aware Spirituality and Commitment to the Common Good” is a significant sign people are searching for meaning in their work and for leaders who create environments where purposeful vocation can exist. In addition, the dramatic increase in the number of conferences, popular books, management literature, and research on spirituality in the last 10 years is an indicator that spirituality and its connection to the workplace is a global issue (Cavanaugh, 1999; Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003; Mohamed, Hassan, & Wisnieski, 2001; Neal, Lichtenstein, & Banner, 1999).
The topic of spiritual leadership is especially relevant to community colleges, open-door institutions created for people who would otherwise never consider further education, that look for new approaches to old problems, and that convey acceptance of the idea that individuals and society can always improve (Cohen & Brawer, 1989). This openness and responsiveness lends itself toward hiring people who believe in the potential of others and are inspired by the impact both the institution and their work have on others’ lives. Community college students, faculty, and staff want leaders who model spiritual awareness and growth that creates a spirit within the college from which they can experience a sense of purpose and meaning in their study and work (Myran, Myran, & Galant, 2004). It appears likely that the mission of the community college would attract leaders who are open to exploring and expressing how their spiritual leadership is manifested.

Furthermore, the topic of spiritual leadership has implications for women interested in the community college presidency. Many definitions of spirituality reflect aspects of care and concern for others, the importance of relationships, and operating from a core set of values (Duchon & Plowman, 2005; Fry, 2003; Reave, 2005). As salient aspects of women’s leadership are examined, it becomes clear many of the qualities represented in spiritual leadership are sometimes argued to be present in the manifestation of women’s leadership. In addition, it is increasingly likely that women will be hired in community college presidential roles (DiCroce, 1995) as many of the current community college presidents retire (Fulton-Calkins & Milling, 2005). In 1986, 8% of community college presidents were female; by 1998, 22% were female (Shults, 2001). In 2006, 28% of community college presidents were female (Profile of Community College Presidents).

An awareness of the qualities women can bring to leadership coupled with changing demographics of the community college presidency point to the importance of honoring the messages and gifts women bring to their presidential roles. In her keynote address at the Uncovering the Heart of Higher Education conference, President Chapman-Walsh spoke of the lessons she has learned in her 14 years as the president of Wellesley. She shared the story of her spiritual journey in which she embraced “the shadow” and became open to the world of heart, soul, and spirit where the possibilities of
beauty, hope, and joy became more vivid for her. It is the kind of self-reflection that Chapman-Walsh was willing to model that encourages the relationships necessary to create environments where the connection between vocation and life purpose can be explored and where spiritual awareness and growth are fostered. Women community college presidents who are spiritual leaders have the potential to contribute greatly to the spiritual health of our institutions; it is vital to provide opportunities for them to reflect and share how the unique expression of their leadership helps them meet the current and future demands of leadership in the community college.

Research Focus and Questions

The purpose of this study is to give voice to the spiritual expression of leadership by women community college presidents. The study provides insight into the experience of women community college presidents who are known to exhibit spirituality in their leadership and explores the ways in which the spiritual aspect of leadership is conveyed in their thinking, self-expression, and practice. My intent in conducting research with selected women community college presidents was to provide them with an opportunity to reflect on how they define themselves as spiritual leaders, to take a journey of exploration with them, and to share their stories with others. With this purpose in mind, the questions that are the focus of this study include:

- How do women community college presidents describe spirituality? This question encouraged the participants to reflect on the expression of their leadership and how it reveals spirituality.

- How does spirituality convey itself in the reflections, self-expression, and practice of the leadership of women community college presidents? This question provided an opportunity for conversation about what spiritual leadership looks like in practice and how it is used to guide the participants’ actions and decisions as presidents.

- How do women community college presidents honor which expressions of their spirituality they share with others and which they hold private? This question created space for exploring how the participants discern when to display the spiritual expression of their leadership and when not to, and if the process of making this decision is intentional.
Significance of Study

There are four compelling reasons to study the topic of spiritual leadership for women community college presidents: (a) the yearning for spiritual expression and experience at work, (b) the increase in the number of women community college presidents, (c) aspects of leadership relating to spirituality, and (d) my personal interest in the topic.

Yearning for Spiritual Expression and Experiences at Work

For many, there is little separation between work and the rest of life. “Whether we like it or not, work is becoming the source of values in our society and the site of our most worthwhile contributions” (Fairholm, 1998). Work communities are often the most significant communities for people and the place where many find their sense of full meaning. This may explain the significant increase over the last 10 years in the interest in spirituality as it relates to leadership and the workplace (Benefiel, 2005; Cavanaugh, 1999; Dent, Higgins, & Wharff, 2005; Duchon & Plowman, 2005; Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003). It appears many people today are looking for the sacred in what is done in every day work. Surveys confirm a growing need for workplace cultures and leadership that celebrate the whole individual, including the spiritual self (Fairholm, 1998). For leaders, an increase in the desire for spiritual fulfillment at work necessitates self-reflection and awareness about how to most effectively respond to the desires of their employees with compassion and with heart.

The Increase in Women Community College Presidents

A 2001 research brief by the American Association of Community Colleges indicated that 45% of community college presidents planned to retire by 2007 (Shults, 2001). As large numbers of community college presidents who are male retire, they are increasingly being replaced by women. The percentage of community college presidents who were female increased from nearly 11% in 1991 to 28% in 2001 (Weisman & Vaughn). From 1995 to 1998, 34% of presidents hired were female (Shults, 2001). However, there appears to be very little research on the topic of women’s experience in the role of the presidency (Jablonski, 1996, Tedrow & Rhodes, 1999). The growing numbers of women community college presidents and the lack of research on women’s experience of the presidential role point to the importance of conducting studies like the
one I am proposing. It is through offering opportunities for women community college presidents to reflect on their leadership and giving voice to their experiences of using spirituality in their leadership that the value of sharing these lived experiences will be realized.

Aspects of Leadership Relating to Spirituality

There are differences in women’s leadership styles. However, within this variability, there is support for the idea that many of the qualities represented in spiritual leadership can also be present in the manifestation of women’s leadership. Researchers have found that women can bring qualities such as a tendency towards social compassion, a caring, relational emphasis in their moral reasoning, a desire for collaboration, and an awareness of the interconnectedness of organizations to their leadership roles (Gillett-Karam, 1994; Gilligan, 1982; Helgesen, 1990; & Rosner, 1990). Women in both business and education are found to have an open, people-orientated philosophy of leadership that includes communication, motivation, goal direction, fairness, teamwork, delegation, and participatory decision making (Jablonski, 1996). Qualities of spiritual leadership that can be shared with qualities often expressed by women leaders include compassionate and respectful treatment of others, expressing care and concern, engaging in self-reflection, and operating from a clear set of personal values (Duchon & Plowman, 2005; Fry, 2003; Reave, 2005). The connection between women’s leadership and spiritual leadership provides a compelling rationale for exploring what role spirituality plays in defining the leadership of women community college presidents.

Personal Interest

The last and most personal reason supporting the significance of this study is that spiritual leadership is directly related to my philosophy as a community college leader and my future plans for professional contribution. In my own practice, being self-reflective, operating from a strong value system, and honoring those I work with are aspects of spiritual leadership to which I am strongly committed. Engaging in conversation with the participants of my study about their experience of spiritual leadership as community college presidents provided an opportunity for me to reflect on my own thinking and practice as a leader. In addition, sharing between the participants and me allowed for further exploration around my own definition of spiritual leadership.
and how I want to engage with others as I move into higher-level administrative positions within the community college. Furthermore, I am intrigued by the possibility of contributing knowledge to the compelling topic of spiritual leadership. Knowing that spirituality is an area of interest within the education community, that more women will be hired as presidents in the near future, and that there is a lack of research on women’s experience in the presidency demonstrates the potential for me to provide considerable leadership on this topic in the form of publications and conference addresses.

Summary

The purpose of this research study is to name and give voice to the spiritual expression of leadership by women community college presidents. Given there is interest in the topic of spirituality within the higher education community, with special relevance to community colleges, and that people are expressing an increased desire for spiritual expression and experience at work, support exists for exploring the topic of spiritual leadership within the community college context. As the number of women community college presidents increase, it is important to share the stories of women who are currently in the role of community college president. The insights gained from the participants will be meaningful to women currently in presidential positions as well as others who aspire to the presidency. In addition, this study will contribute knowledge about the relationship between spirituality and leadership, specifically as it relates to women’s leadership at community colleges.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this literature review is to gather and evaluate the most current research relevant to the topic of spirituality and its connection to the leadership of women community college presidents. The central question guiding the literature review is: What does current literature indicate about the connection between spirituality and women’s leadership as it relates to a community college context? More specifically, the intention of the literature review is to determine what support the literature provides for the purpose and questions proposed in my study and what guidance it gives in key decisions around the design of my study.
Approach to Review of Literature

The Oregon State University online library was used in searching literature for studies that discussed spirituality, women’s leadership, and leadership in higher education. The primary data sources were the Oregon State University Research Database and the Summit Catalog. FirstSearch, EBSCOhost, and Dissertation Abstracts were used as search tools. Dissertations, peer reviewed journals, and books on leadership and spirituality, specifically as they relate to higher education, were the main reference sources used. Priority was given to works written within the past ten years because exploration of the spiritual dimension of leadership is a recent phenomenon (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003). A variety of key word searches were utilized using phrases such as: spirituality and leadership, workplace spirituality, higher education, community colleges, women administrators, and women’s leadership, as well as changes and trends.

Qualitative and quantitative studies, as well as non-research focused publications such as opinion papers, essays, and popular press books were used for the literature review. Although it was difficult to find quantitative studies on the topic of spiritual leadership, many of the articles on gender differences in leadership were quantitative. Also considered important to the literature review were studies that covered spirituality in the business world, gender differences in leadership styles, theories of spiritual leadership, and various elements of spirituality. Research that focused on changes and trends in the community college and how that affects leadership were also used. In addition, books that addressed topics related to spirituality in higher education were included. Studies that focused on leadership effectiveness as related to gender were not used, nor were articles related to gender and evaluation of leaders because the focus of the current study is not leadership effectiveness.

Organization of Review of Literature

The review of literature is organized around three areas relevant to the topic of the proposed study. First, the definitions of spirituality, workplace spirituality, and spiritual leadership are explored. The purpose of this section is to provide some familiarity for the term “spirituality” because it is a word open to personal interpretation and has a variety of meanings in the literature. Then, I discuss the literature that supports the idea that many people in American society are yearning for spiritual expression and experience.
The purpose of this section is to convey the importance of looking at the topic of spirituality as it relates to leadership in the workplace. Finally, the role of women community college presidents, including the increase in the number of women presidents and the critical role they play in moving community colleges forward, is examined. This discussion helps explain why the proposed study is focusing on women community college presidents.

Definitions of Spirituality

Mohamed, Hassan, and Wisnieski (2001) claim there are more definitions of spirituality than there are authors/researchers to write about it. Spirituality is difficult to describe because it is highly individual and personal; therefore, some time is taken in this section to explore various definitions that exist in the literature. First, definitions of spirituality in general are examined because that is the central concept addressed in the study. Then, two specific types of spirituality, workplace spirituality and spiritual leadership, are addressed because I talked with women presidents about their experience of spirituality in their workplace as it relates to their leadership. In addition, because my study is not focusing on religion, there is a section that explores how the literature differentiates between spirituality and religion. Throughout the review, gaps in these definitions as they relate to women’s leadership at the community college are explored to provide additional rationale for this study.

Spirituality

Many attempts have been made to clearly define spirituality; Table 1 provides a representative listing of some of these definitions. Some researchers look at spirituality as behavior, others as an objective reality that involves ultimate and personal truths, and still others describe it as a subjective experience (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003). Duchon and Plowman (2005) identify two dimensions of spirituality. One dimension is the existence of an inner life or “the feeling individuals have about the fundamental meaning of who they are, what they are doing, and the contributions they are making” (p. 814). The second dimension they identify is community. From their perspective, as spiritual beings, people live in connection with other human beings and their notion of community includes the ideas of sharing, mutual obligation, and commitment that connect people to each other. For some, spirituality is “an effort to see our deeper connections to one
another and the world beyond ourselves” (Conger, 1994, p. 17). Teasdale (1999) defines spirituality as

a way of life that affects and includes every moment of existence. It is at once a contemplative attitude, a disposition to a life of depth, and the search for ultimate meaning, direction, and belonging. The spiritual person is committed to growth as an essential ongoing life goal. (p. 18)

It is clear from this review that defining spirituality is highly subjective. One person’s spiritual experience may be quite different from another’s. There is also great variation in how spirit is expressed and renewed. This ambiguity presented both a challenge and an opportunity for this study. The absence of a “one-size fits all” definition created the potential for confusion, misunderstanding, and incorrect assumptions as I talked with participants about how they describe spirituality. On the other hand, the lack of a definition encouraged personal reflection and created opportunity for giving voice to how women presidents describe spirituality within the context of a community college, which is the intent behind my first research question. As I talked with the participants, my intention was to stay as open as possible to allow them to share the significance of the word from their own experience. However, the definitions outlined in Table 1 provided a useful foundation to start the conversation, when prompts were needed.
# Table 1
A Representative Sampling of Definitions of Spirituality in the Literature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definition of Spirituality</th>
<th>Source</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The personal expression of ultimate concern.</td>
<td>Emmons (2000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That which involves ultimate and personal truths.</td>
<td>Wong (1998)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How the individual lives meaningfully with ultimacy in her or his response to the deepest truths of the universe.</td>
<td>Bregman and Thierman (1995)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The presence of a relationship with a higher power that affects the way in which one operates in the world.</td>
<td>Armstrong (1995)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our response to a deep and mysterious human yearning for self-transcendence and surrender, a yearning to find our place.</td>
<td>Benner (1989)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A way of being and experiencing that comes about through awareness of a transcendent dimension and that is characterized by certain identifiable values in regard to self, life, and whatever one considers to be the ultimate.</td>
<td>Elkins et al (1988)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A transcendent dimension within human experience . . . discovered in moments in which the individual questions the meaning of personal existence and attempts to place the self within a broader ontological context.</td>
<td>Shafranske and Gorsuch (1984)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A subjective experience of the sacred.</td>
<td>Vaughn (1991)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A personal life principle which animates a transcendent quality of relationship with God.</td>
<td>Emblen (1992)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The human dimension that transcends the biological, psychological, and social aspects of living.</td>
<td>Mauritzen (1988)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That vast realm of human potential dealing with ultimate purpose, with higher entities, with God, with life, with compassion, with purpose.</td>
<td>Tart (1975)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That human striving for the transforming power present in life; it is that attraction and movement of the human person toward the divine.</td>
<td>Dale (1991)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pertaining to the innate capacity to, and tendency to seek to, transcend one’s current locus of centricity, which with transcendence involves increased knowledge and love.</td>
<td>Chandler and Holden (1992)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The animating force that inspires one toward purposes that are beyond one’s self and that give one’s life meaning and direction.</td>
<td>McKight (1984)</td>
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**Workplace Spirituality**

One of the difficulties in addressing the topic of workplace spirituality is articulating an operational definition (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003). Most definitions
of workplace spirituality include the concepts of meaning, purpose, and being connected to others (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000; Conger, 1994; Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003; Mirvis, 1997; Vaill, 1998). Giacalone and Jurkiewicz defined workplace spirituality as, a framework of organizational values evidenced in the culture that promotes employees’ experience of transcendence through the work process, facilitating their sense of being connected in a way that provides feelings of compassion and joy. (p. 13)

Furthermore, Ashmos and Duchon (2000) described workplace spirituality as having three components – recognition that employees have an inner life, an assumption that employees want work that is meaningful, and a commitment by the company to serve as a community for spiritual growth. They attempted to measure support for this definition by administering a survey in four hospital systems in four different cities as part of a longitudinal study of meaning of spirituality in the workplace. Their data supports the idea that spirituality in the workplace involves inner life, community, and meaningful work.

Using the same definition and the same survey instrument as in the Ashmos and Duchon study, Duchon and Plowman (2005) conducted a study with six work units in a large hospital system to examine workplace differences in terms of openness to spirituality, and whether these differences were associated with differences in work unit performance. While the instrument they used shows promise, it is unclear whether it would be relevant to different settings and larger samples. Further research on different kinds of organizations in other industries is needed. The authors provided support for the possibility of enhancing the understanding of workplace spirituality through “qualitative studies of a few spiritually friendly climates” (p. 826); work environments that allow for the expression of the whole person and are “life-giving” (p. 814). The suggestion given by the authors to conduct further research at spirit-friendly work environments provided support for the relevance of exploring community colleges in this study.

While the definitions presented above offer a framework for my study, much of the research in this field lacks a sound theoretical base (Duchon & Plowman, 2005; Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003). In addition, the researchers do not do a good job of operationalizing their definitions, a clear picture of what workplace spirituality looks like
in practice is lacking. Though many of the definitions mention an inner life, it is not apparent whether the assumption should be that a person’s inner life at work is different than their inner life in non-work settings. Furthermore, the studies cited above come from the field of management theory and business and industry settings and thus it is unclear how these definitions would be manifested in the field of education, specifically at community colleges.

In summary, the defining features of workplace spirituality presented here include meaning and purpose, the recognition that employees have an inner life, and connection to others. As I explored the topic of spirituality and its association to leadership with my study participants, these were used as prompts that encouraged the women to reflect more specifically about the meaning they gave to spirituality. In addition, meaning and purpose, the inner life of employees, and connection to others were themes that arose in the analysis of the collected data. What appears to be missing from the research is an exploration of community colleges as a spirit-friendly work environment, a focus on women’s experience of workplace spirituality, and a clearer picture of how a person’s inner life at work is defined. My study attempted to address these gaps by asking participants to reflect on their experience of being a woman community college president who incorporates spirituality into her practice.

**Spiritual Leadership**

The field of spirituality and its relationship to leadership is still in its infancy and as a result is marked by differences in definitions and other basic characteristics (Dent, Higgins, & Wharff, 2005). Combining the terms spiritual and leadership complicates the definition process in that researchers already face “a bewildering array of usages of these two terms independent of one another” (Dent et al., 2005, p. 641).

Spirituality, like leadership, is a very hard word to pin down. These are probably two of the vaguest words you can find in our language, and when you put them together you get something even vaguer. (Palmer, 1990, p. 2)

Dent et al. (2005) analyzed 87 academic articles for how they explored the connection of spirituality and leadership. The results of their study indicated the current state of the field is exploratory and the definitions that are proposed in academic literature are not specific and robust enough to move the field forward. In fact, Dent et al (2005)
posed a question to the research community about the justification for another theory of leadership. They suggested the foundations of values-based leadership, servant leadership, and other concepts of inspired leadership may already provide a comprehensive picture of leadership. This study, with its emphasis on the experience of women presidents within the context of community colleges, helps answer the question about whether existing theories of leadership are adequate.

Fry (2003) described spirituality in the context of leadership as leaders who are in touch with their core values and communicate them to followers through vision and personal actions. He defined spiritual leadership as “comprising the values, attitudes, and behaviors that are necessary to intrinsically motivate one’s self and others” (p. 695). In his article, he put forth a theory of spiritual leadership using the concepts of motivation to change, a sense of calling, and a sense of membership.

In her review of over 150 studies on spirituality and leadership, Reave (2005) indicated in effective leadership, spirituality “expresses itself not so much in words or preaching, but in the embodiment of spiritual values such as integrity, and in the demonstration of spiritual behavior such as expressing caring and concern” (p. 656). She treated spiritual leadership as an observable phenomenon that occurs when a leader embodies spiritual values such as integrity, honesty, and humility, creating the self as an example of someone who can be trusted and admired. In Reave’s interpretation, spiritual leadership is demonstrated through behavior, both in individual reflective practice and in the compassionate and respectful treatment of others.

Myran, et al. (2004) spoke to spiritual leadership as it related to community colleges:

It is the alignment of our leadership decisions and actions with our best and deepest impulses of love, hope, faith, truth, and joy. It is the authentic connection between our personal belief system and our works and activities as a leader. It is the response to common purpose and a higher calling embodied in the open door of the community college and its role as a major democratizing force in our society. (p. 11)

While the description has a warm and noble feeling to it, the authors do not indicate how they arrived at this definition. It appears to come mainly from their thoughts and
feelings. It is likely many community college professionals would resonate with the wording. However, it contributes to the problem as Dent et al. (2005) identified, “much of what has been written on this subject has appeared in general, rather than academic publications and consequently may lack rigor” (p. 625) and points to the need for more scholarly literature on spiritual leadership as it relates to higher education. In addition, when the goal of research is to provide more understanding of a concept, such as spiritual leadership, it is important to consider whether the claims made by the authors are worthy of rational consensus (Brown, 1989). It is unclear if there would be consensus around Myran et al. ‘s definition of spiritual leadership. This study presented an opportunity to spend significant time in the field talking with presidents about their experience of spirituality and analyzing the data for common themes that emerged in order to develop an interpretation of spiritual leadership that resonates with the participants.

One example of the type of scholarly literature called for by Dent et al. (2005) is a dissertation (Jones-Johnson, 2001) that explored the role of spirituality in the leadership practices of exemplary female higher education administrators. The purpose of the study was to determine the level of spirituality of female administrators and analyze its relationship to the leadership practices of those administrators. Using a qualitative approach, the author analyzed 63 inventories completed by female higher education administrators who were participants of the National Institute of Leadership Development “Leaders” program, and determined the relationship between spirituality and five leadership practices identified by Kouzes and Posner (1995) – challenging the process, inspiring a shared vision, enabling others to act, modeling the way, and encouraging the heart. The practices identified by Kouzes and Posner provided Jones-Johnson with a useful framework for talking about and operationalizing the concepts of spiritual leadership. However, for some, the categories may be too defined and restrictive. Others may define spiritual leadership differently than Kouzes and Posner. Furthermore, the survey method used by Jones-Johnson may have limited the opportunity to gather information that did not fit into the discrete categories. Asking open-ended questions in an unstructured interview, as I did in this study, allows for more exploration and reflection for the participants. In addition, it is not clear in the Jones-Johnson study how many of the participants came from community colleges or how many were presidents.
The current study focused solely on women community college presidents and provides more information about how this specific population of women administrators views spiritual leadership.

The key points of this section of the review include the complexity of coming up with a uniform definition of spiritual leadership, various theories of spiritual leadership, and the idea that spiritual leadership is an observable phenomena (Reave, 2005). The gaps that appear in this analysis include questions about what concepts should be included in the definition of spiritual leadership, a more scholarly approach to defining spiritual leadership in the context of community colleges, and a lack of opportunity for research participants to reflect about the meaning they give to spiritual leadership. My study addressed these gaps by spending significant time with the participants asking them to reflect on their experience of being a spiritual leader.

*Religion and Spirituality*

For the purpose of this study, the differences between religion and spirituality and the recognition these terms are not used interchangeably should be noted. This section of the literature review will outline the differences between the two concepts.

While Dent et al. (2005) found that several of the articles they reviewed saw spirituality in a religious context, many did not. Most of the articles that did not see spirituality in a religious context suggest that spirituality can be defined separately from religion. Giacalone and Jurkiewicz (2003) indicated viewing workplace spirituality through the lens of religious tradition is divisive because it excludes those who do not practice a specific tradition and conflicts with the social, legal, and ethical foundations of public administration. Duchon and Plowman (2005) defined religion as “an organized belief system” and spirituality as “an inner longing for meaning and community” (p. 809). For Teasdale (1999), “being religious connotes belonging to and practicing a religious tradition while being spiritual suggests a personal commitment to a process of inner developmental that engages us in our totality” (p. 17). In one meta-analysis on spiritual values and practices, religion was “predominately associated with formal/organized religion while spirituality was more often associated with closeness with God and feelings of interconnectedness with the world and living things” (Reave, 2005, p. 656). Dent et al. (2005) came to the conclusion that spirituality should be
defined in a context that takes religion into consideration as one element but includes other elements as well. In other words, Dent et al. concludes that spirituality is broader than any single formal or organized religion.

The findings from this section on the relationship between spirituality and religion support the idea that religion and spirituality differ in significant ways. These differences provide a rationale for the decision not to use the terms religion and spirituality interchangeably in my study. However, although there are differences between spirituality and religion, for some people, there is a strong connection between the two. As the researcher, it was important that I remained open to the possibility that some of the participants of my study experience spirituality within the framework of a religious tradition.

Summary

This first area of the literature review focused on the definition of spirituality as well as gave an overview of the definitions of workplace spirituality and spiritual leadership and explained how the literature differentiates religion from spirituality. As a result of the review, several common defining features for spirituality became apparent. First, it is clear there is no single definition for spirituality that has gained wide support in the literature and that the process of coming up with one definition is extremely complex given the personal and highly subjective nature of the topic. Second, the literature suggests research on spirituality as it relates to leadership and the workplace lacks rigor and a common theory. In addition, when examining the definitions of spirituality, the concepts of inner life, meaning-making, and connection to others through community were common themes throughout the literature review.

In regards to the current study, the idea that spirituality is demonstrated through behavior and is an observable phenomenon (Reave, 2005), provides support for exploring the ways in which the spiritual aspect of leadership is conveyed in women presidents’ thinking, self expression, and practice. In addition, the highly subjective and personal nature of the topic of spirituality and leadership lends itself toward personal exploration, a major component of the current study. My intent in conducting the study is to learn what makes women community college presidents spiritual leaders, to “name” the experience with them, and then to share their stories with others.
The review of the meanings of spirituality in the literature offered specific implications for the design of the current study. The research pointed to a need for a more concentrated and sustained effort to defining spirituality within a community college context. This was addressed in my study by spending time talking in person with community college presidents about their experience of spiritual leadership. There is a need for more research that gives voice to how women give meaning to spirituality and my study addressed this gap by centering on women’s experience of spirituality as it relates to being a community college president. There also seems to be an absence of understanding about the definition of inner life as it relates to the workplace. This gap was addressed by looking at how women community college presidents honor which expressions of their spirituality they share with others and which they hold private. Finally, although the literature indicates that self reflection is an important component of defining spirituality as it relates to leadership, it appears there was little opportunity for participants of the cited studies to engage in reflection. My study encouraged significant reflection for both the participants and the researcher through the interview process.

The Yearning for Spiritual Expression and Experience at Work

For many, work has become the center of their lives and it can be difficult to separate work from the rest of life. The workplace today is an essential arena of life for people and it needs to be a place for connection, contribution, and community (Conger, 1994). Perhaps that is why many are redefining the purpose of work to include satisfaction of the inner needs for spiritual identity and fulfillment (Fairholm, 1998) and why research indicates there has been a significant increase in the last 10 years in yearning for spiritual expression and experience at work (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000; Bolman & Deal, 2001; Conger, 1994; and Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003). These findings point to the importance of looking at the topic of spirituality as it relates to leadership in the workplace, which is the purpose of this study. This section of the review first explores how the literature defines the components of spiritual expression at work. Then, there is a review of the evidence demonstrating the existence of spiritual yearning and, finally, an exploration of some of the possible reasons for the increase in desire for spiritual expression.
Components of Spiritual Yearning

Before delving into how the literature describes the manifestation of spiritual yearning, it is helpful to understand the components of spirituality at work. The literature presents three dimensions of spirituality at work including the ability to live an integrated life, experiencing a sense of meaning and purpose at work, and a connectedness to one another and to the workplace community (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000; Pfeffer, 2003).

Many people have created rigid demarcations between their public and private lives, reserving spiritual aspects for the private realm and rational aspects for their professional and public lives (Tyler Scott, 1994). However, Ashmos and Duchon (2000) believe that understanding spirituality at work begins with acknowledging that people have both an inner and an outer life and that the nourishment of the inner life can lead to a more meaningful and productive outer life. “We live in and through a complex interaction between spirit and matter, a complex interaction between what is inside of us and what is ‘out there’” (Palmer, 1994, p. 23).

People want to be involved in work that gives meaning to their lives. It has been established that people have the intrinsic drive and motivation to learn and find meaning in their work (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003). “To understand spirituality and work is to recognize that workers are spiritual beings whose souls are either nurtured or damaged by their work” (Duchon & Ashmos, 2000, p. 134).

Spirituality at work is also about the idea that spiritual beings not only express inner life needs by seeking meaningful work but that part of being alive is living in connection with other human beings. At work, people value their affiliations and being able to feel a part of a larger community and being interconnected (Pfeffer, 2003).

Evidence of Spiritual Yearning

It appears many employees are finding their workplaces are not providing what they need from them. Bolman and Deal (2001) indicated they found symptoms of spiritual hunger and restlessness in many employees with whom they talked. They cited examples of people who felt like they were working harder than ever, but were not sure why; others who felt like they could never get off the treadmill even though they did not know where they were going; and still others who felt like there was a vague emptiness that was pushing them madly through life. The literature on workplace spirituality
appears to be filled with examples of people who are experiencing a lack of meaning and higher purpose in their lives and who are looking for the sacred in everyday work (Fairholm, 1998; Kurth, 2003). Many feel their job requires a separation from other people, alienation from their work, and a lack of meaning in their lives (Cavanaugh, 1999). In addition, there is a belief that organizations aren’t working well; they are described as feeling lifeless and “expectations for success have diminished to the point that often the best we hope for is endurance and patience to survive the frequent disruptive forces in our organizations and our lives” (Wheatley, 1994, p. 3). “Evidence suggests that our society has lost its connection with the spiritual foundation necessary to maintain our inherent bond with others and with the divine dimension of life” (Kurth, 2003, p. 448).

The results of the review of the literature suggest that many people in today’s society are feeling an absence of meaning and purpose in their work lives. If this is so, it is incumbent upon leaders of organizations to reflect on their own experience of spirituality in order to be able to create work environments that better meet the needs of their employees. This study provides the opportunity for the type of reflection that is required for leaders to meet the new demands of leadership around the topic of workplace spirituality. The references included in this section of the review were not specific to educational institutions; the focus of this study will help fill that gap by encouraging community college presidents to reflect and provide insight into the spiritual expression of their leadership.

Reasons for Increased Desire for Spiritual Fulfillment

The previous section of the review of the literature demonstrated that people are searching for spiritual fulfillment at work; this section will present some possible explanations for the recent upsurge of this desire. Having some sense of what has changed in the workplace in the last decade will help set the tone for the importance of researching spirituality as it relates to the workplace and provide validation for the significance of this study. In addition, an exploration of the literature will provide information about whether an increase in desire for spiritual expression and experience is occurring in educational workplaces and demonstrate how the yearning is being expressed.
Corporate America’s growing interest in spirituality at work can be understood in relation to several trends in our society. First, many believe the downsizing, constant change, and layoffs that characterize many organizations today have created an environment where workers are demoralized and distrustful (Cavanaugh, 1999; Giacalone & Jurkiewicz 2003; Neal, 1997). “Today people no longer have secure jobs, and that is unsettling and encourages self-examination” (Cavanaugh, 1999, p. 187). In addition, employers’ demand for additional hours in the workplace has also triggered reflection about the lack of meaning gained from work (Neal, 1997). The trend towards being more thoughtful about the benefits and costs of work speaks to the connection between self-reflection and spirituality and to the importance of providing opportunities for people to engage in reflection. Opportunities for reflection occurred in this study when participants were asked to think about how their spirituality is expressed in the reflections and practices of their leadership.

A second trend relates to the workplace being seen more often as a primary source of community for many people. The decline of neighborhoods, churches, civic groups, and extended families as primary places for feeling connected have led people to seek community from their places of employment. “Within a matter of a few decades, the ability of these other communities to provide satisfying links to others and to a greater good has lessened dramatically” (Conger, 1994, p. 2). Bolman and Deal (2001) believe the need people have for finding depth, meaning, and faith in life was met in the past by group activities such as raising a barn, celebrating a marriage, or rescuing earthquake victims. Today, opportunities for these kinds of activities are less frequent as people work more, are farther from their families, and are less connected to their communities. For many, the workplace provides the only consistent link to other people and to the human needs for connection and contribution (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000). Certainly, community colleges, with the openness and responsiveness that are their trademarks, represent great potential for providing employees with a sense of community and thus are an ideal setting for the study.

Another theme impacting the rising interest in workplace spirituality is what some consider a profound change in values (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003). This shift has to do with a growing disappointment with the imagined rewards of materialism (Conger,
1994) and diminishing economic gains that cannot create additional, materialistic satisfactions (Inglehart, 1977). The desire for something more has resulted in a search for other kinds of assets, of which spirituality may be one manifestation. Research suggests that increasing numbers of individuals are seeking self-actualization as opposed to material security (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003). In addition, recent polls have found that workers want a deeper sense of meaning and fulfillment on the job – even more than they want money and time off (Fry, 2003).

The three themes presented in this section of the literature review, the downsizing that has led to increased distrust, the tendency to view the workplace as a primary source of community, and a shift in values from materialism to self-actualization, provide possible reasons for the widespread yearning for spiritual fulfillment in the workplace that is being expressed. These significant changes in the workplace demonstrate the need for leaders who are in touch with their own spirituality and are comfortable providing a work environment that assists employees in finding outlets for spiritual expression and experience. The literature included in this review did not address how the themes of downsizing, viewing the workplace as primary community, and a shift in values are expressed in the educational arena. This study provides an opportunity for the participants to explore whether the themes exist in the community college and if they do, how they are responding to them.

Summary

This second section of the literature review focused on an exploration of the increased yearning for spiritual experience and expression at work by reviewing the dimensions of spirituality in the workplace, exploring evidence that points to the existence of an increased desire, and possible reasons for the increase. As a result of the review, several themes relevant to leadership and this study arose. First, it is clear that spiritual leadership is a timely and relevant topic for leaders in the current workforce. It is essential that today’s leaders are able to meet the challenge of providing work environments where employees can achieve a sense of meaningful vocation. A second theme that was revealed in the literature review was the value of self-reflection. It is essential for leaders to reflect about their own views of spirituality, their values, the meaning that is gained from their work, and what they do to create a greater sense of
community for themselves and their employees. Furthermore, it became evident from the literature review that there is value in leaders exploring the connection between their public and private lives to determine if greater integration would be beneficial.

The literature presented here offered specific implications for the design of this study. The review demonstrated that spiritual leadership is a current leadership topic and provided support for exploring the ways in which leaders create work environments that meet the spiritual needs of their employees. This study asked participants to reflect on how spirituality is expressed in their reflection and practice, in an attempt to understand how they address the challenges their institutions are facing, including meeting the spiritual needs of employees. Furthermore, the emphasis on the role reflection plays in workplace spirituality sustained the rationale for conducting a study in which personal exploration and reflection are the major objectives. This study provided significant opportunity for reflection through the interview process. Also, through identification of the components of spirituality, the literature provided support for the research questions that were used to guide the study. The questions that will be posed to the participants will ask the women to reflect on how their personal values are experienced and conveyed in their role as president, how their leadership feels to others, and how spirituality is expressed in their work. In addition, the research has pointed to the need for exploration around how yearning for spiritual expression and experience is manifest at the community college, which is the focus of this study.

The Role of Women Community College Presidents

The number of women in the community college presidency is increasing, and, given the challenges faced by today’s community colleges, there is evidence to support the view that women presidents are critical resources in moving these institutions forward (DiCroce, 1995; Tedrow & Rhodes, 1999). This section of the review explores what the literature says about the role of women community college presidents. First, in order to demonstrate the relevance of researching women presidents, there is a discussion about the increase in the number of women community college presidents. Then, there is an exploration of the qualities women can bring to leadership in an attempt to reveal a connection between women’s leadership and spiritual leadership. Finally, there is a section of the review that explores the idea that women community college presidents are
critical resources in helping their institutions address current and future challenges. The intent of this segment of the literature review is to build a case for the significance of conducting research about the experience of women community college presidents and what they can contribute to the future of community colleges.

*Increase in Number of Women Presidents*

The increase in the number of women community college presidents validates the importance of researching women in the presidential role. According to research (Fulton-Calkins & Milling, 2005; Shults, 2001), a mass exodus of community-college leadership is expected to occur in the coming years. Many community college administrators were employed in the early 1960s through 1970s as community colleges were being founded. The early 1960s through the 1970s was one of the largest growth periods in the history of community colleges, with a 68% increase in the number of community colleges across the nation (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). Administrators employed in the 1960’s and 1970’s are now reaching retirement age. The “2006 Community College President: Career and Lifestyle Survey” (Vaughn & Weisman, 2006) found that 56% of presidents plan to retire in the next six years and that 84% plan to do so within 10 years.

While the majority of community college presidents are still white males, the profile of the community college president is shifting. In 1986, eight percent of community college presidents were women; by 1998, 22% were women. From 1995 to 1998, 34% of new presidents hired were women (Shults, 2001). The percentage of community college presidents who were women increased from nearly 11% in 1991 to 28% in 2001 (Weisman & Vaughn, 2001). These increases indicate a move towards gender diversity in community college leadership and supports the relevance of this study.

*Women and Leadership*

There is disagreement in the field of leadership about whether an inherent style of female leadership exists or does not exist (Astin & Leland, 1991; Klenke, 1996; Rhode, 2003). In addition, there is not agreement on the extent to which gender differences are experienced in different ways by diverse women leaders in different contexts.
There is no “generic woman” and too little work has explored the interrelationship between gender and situational forces or other characteristics such as race, class, ethnicity, age and sexual orientation. (Rhode, 2003, p. 5)

Eagly and Johnson’s (1990) research indicates that both the view that women and men lead in the same way and the view that women and men leaders have distinctive, gender-stereotypic styles should be substantially revised. The purpose of this section of the literature review is not to imply that there is one unique way that women lead but to demonstrate support for the idea that many of the qualities present in the ways women lead can also be manifested in spiritual leadership. As noted by Astin and Leland (1991), the important question is not whether innately female leadership traits exist but why the styles of leadership most often exhibited by women are particularly useful at this time in our history.

Gilligan’s (1982) research on gender differences in moral reasoning and judgment is relevant to the study of leadership because of the importance of morality in making leadership decisions (Klenke, 1996). Gillian asserted that women have a distinctly female approach to moral reasoning, one that is characterized by a desire to maintain relationships and a responsibility not to cause hurt; she termed this as a care orientation. Her research showed that women tend to have a context of moral choice which acknowledges both that the needs of individuals cannot always be determined from general principles and that moral choice must be determined inductively from the particular experiences each person brings to the situation. In this way, Gilligan demonstrated that women view the world as a web of relationships. While Gilligan’s research did not focus on women in educational settings, a study of community college presidents by Gillett-Karam (1994) found that women respondents demonstrated more caring and respect for others, which supports Gilligan’s finding. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) took Gilligan’s idea of moral choice for women and coined the term, “women’s ways of knowing.” They claim that women come to know through silence, through listening to the voices of others, through the search for self, and through the voice of reason. This study explores whether Belenky et al’s findings can be applied to a specific population of women, community college presidents. Qualities of spiritual leadership that are linked to Gilligan, Gillet-Karam, and Belenky et al’s work
include compassionate and respectful treatment of others, expressing care and concern, engaging in self reflection, and operating from a clear set of personal values (Duchon & Plowman, 2005; Fry, 2003; Reave, 2005).

Jaffee and Hyde (2000) conducted a meta-analysis to determine if Gilligan’s claims were supported by empirical evidence. The results of their analysis found support for the idea that the type of moral reasoning an individual uses is highly sensitive to the context and content of the dilemma. As a result, Jaffee and Hyde indicated their findings weakened Gilligan’s original claim about the relation between gender and moral reasoning. A limitation of the study by Jaffee and Hyde is that they did not examine whether females predominantly used a care orientation; the meta-analysis only evaluated whether females used the care orientation more than males. Questions remain as to whether women most often use a mix of these orientations or if they favor one over the other. If women predominately use the care orientation, that finding might provide connection to the topic of women and the spiritual dimension of leadership. An additional limitation, and one that provides support for this study, is that the articles used in the meta-analysis were not focused on women leaders in higher education.

Although Jaffe and Hyde’s (2000) findings were inconclusive regarding whether women favor a care orientation, work by Noddings (1984) provides strong support for the idea that caring is central to moral decision making for women. Her work was built on the premise that when women make moral decisions it is important that they be able to talk to the participants, see facial expressions, and understand what they are feeling. Reasons women give for their decisions often point to feelings, needs, impressions, and a sense of personal ideal rather than universal principles. In addition, Noddings’ work indicates that women approach moral problems by “placing themselves as nearly possible in concrete situations and assuming personal responsibility for the choices to be made” (1984, p. 8). Noddings’ work demonstrates there is a link between qualities present in the ways women lead and spiritual leadership, specifically in the compassionate and respectful treatment of others, expressing care and concern, and operating from a clear set of personal values (Duchon & Plowman, 2005; Fry, 2003; Reave, 2005).

Several other studies indicate similarities among women in the way that they lead. Rosner (1990) found women leaders more interested in transforming people’s self-
interest into organizational goals by encouraging participation, sharing power and
information, enhancing other people’s self-worth, and getting others excited about their
work. From her research, Helgesen (1990) concluded that women tend to avoid
traditional hierarchies in favor of “circular management,” metaphorically being part of
“the web” rather than “the pyramid.” In their book on relational leadership, Regan and
Brooks (1995) identified five feminine attributes in leadership: collaboration, caring,
courage, intuition, and vision. Expressing care and concern, including listening
responsively and appreciating the contributions of others, are components of spiritual
leadership (Reave, 2005) and are common themes expressed in the work of Rosner,
Helgesen, and Ragan and Brooks (1995) on women’s leadership.

According to the work of Gillett-Karam (1994), the research on leadership
accurately depicts the leadership characteristics of women who are community college
presidents. Her research involved determining to what extent five cluster dimensions of
transformational leadership – vision, people orientation, motivation orientation,
empowerment, and values orientation – were gender-based. Although she found that the
general clusters as a whole were not gender-based, four separate behaviors within clusters
were significantly higher for women. These separate behaviors included: (a) risk taking,
or taking appropriate risks to bring about change, (b) demonstrating a caring and respect
for individual differences, (c) acting collaboratively, and (d) building openness and trust.
This study presents an opportunity to confirm Gillett-Karam’s findings with a different
population of women community college presidents as well as provides a chance to
explore how the behaviors Gillet-Karam identified make sense for the participant’s
experience within the context of spiritual leadership.

In their meta-analysis on gender and leadership style, Eagly and Johnson (1990)
found that women leaders have a tendency to adopt a democratic or participative style of
management. Skillful interpersonal behavior, such as being able to understand others’
feelings and intentions, would likely include a style that is democratic. Similarly, being
collaborative required soliciting suggestions from others while maintaining positive
relationships. From their research, Eagly and Johnson concluded the view commonly
accepted by leadership experts, that women and men lead in the same way, should be
substantially revised.
As the definitions of spirituality from the first part of the literature review are examined, it is clear that connections can be drawn between women’s ways of leading and spiritual leadership. For example, Reave’s (2005) review of studies on spirituality and leadership indicated that spiritual leadership was demonstrated in behavior such as care, concern, and respectful relationships and in values such as integrity, honesty, and creating the self as someone who can be trusted. In addition, Fry (2003) described spirituality in the context of leadership as leaders who are in touch with their core values and communicate them to followers through vision and personal action. The connection between women’s ways of leading and spiritual leadership that appears to exist in the literature provides rationale for further examination of women’s experience of spiritual leadership; my study provides an opportunity for this exploration.

This part of the review also provided some guidance for the design of the study. Meta-analysis is useful for combining the results of the large number of studies that address gender and leadership. However, in the Eagly and Johnson (1990) study, this approach failed to provide information about individual experiences of women leaders because of the quantitative focus of their study. In addition, meta-analysis does not allow for a personal relationship to develop between the researcher and the participant and it does not provide the opportunity for participants to direct the research process. The benefit to having a personal relationship with the participants and allowing them to take the conversation where it feels right is obtaining information about how the individual experiences and makes sense of what is being studied (Creswell, 1998; Neumann, 2003). This study addresses the limitations in the Eagle and Johnson meta-analysis by insuring significant time is spent in the field observing and talking with the participants. When a study addresses a specific phenomenon, such as exploring the meaning and expression of spiritual leadership for women community college presidents, qualitative analysis using interviews can provide information about common themes or patterns (Eagly & Carli, 2003; Jablongksi, 1996) which can then be used to interpret meaning as will occur in the proposed study.

*Women as Critical Resources*

The climate of community colleges is changing. Institutions are serving a more diverse population of students, have less money to work with, are dealing with increased
public scrutiny, and are experiencing significant staff turnover. Change must occur on every front of the community college. Funding support, recruitment techniques, student financial aid structures, student support services, the delivery of instruction, arrangements of program and class structures, and teaching methods and techniques must all change drastically to maintain effective organizations (Evans, 2001).

The challenges community colleges are facing and will face into the future require new organizational structures and different leadership skills. Important skills identified for future leaders include the ability to bring a college together in the governing process, the ability to mediate, and the ability to build coalitions (Shults, 2001). In addition, changes require flatter organizational structures, collaboration, valuing the contributions of everyone, and respect for the values of all (Giannini, 2001). Fulton-Calkins and Milling (2005) suggest that some of the crucial leadership traits for community college leaders of the future include self reflection, a solid foundation of values, and a clear personal vision. In addition, specific traits such as the ability to develop a vision for the college, integrity, confidence and courage, and a collaborative spirit have been identified as traits important for community college presidents in the future (Hockaday & Puyear, 2000).

College and university presidents and their top administrators cannot bring about essential changes simply through the authority of their positions. Rather we need leaders who will operate out of their personal visions and convictions in ways that influence, engage, and empower others to join with them. (Chickering, Dalton & Stamm, 2006, p. 249)

The research suggests that women can bring the qualities identified as necessary for future leadership in education to their leadership roles (Evans, 2001; Stephenson, 2001; DiCroce, 1995). As a result, the traits often brought by women into their leadership place them in a position to make the changes necessary to address the challenges community colleges are facing. “Women leaders can provide a new model for leading in the American community college” (Gillett-Karam, 1994, p. 95). Women community college leaders in a study by Tedrow and Rhodes (1999) used coalitions to advance the value of difference, shared authority, created more inclusive forms of decision-making, and fostered a concern for the development of the individual and the
community. These qualities are essential to success in today’s complex, organizational environments and will likely continue to be essential in the future (Senge, 1990). Successful women leaders at community colleges are ones who “advance the value of difference, share authority, create inclusive forms of decision making, and foster a concern for the development of the individual and the community” (Tedrow & Rhoads, 1999, p.10). Promoting women to advanced leadership positions at community colleges is critical to providing education and services appropriate to the needs of students and the workplace (Stephenson, 2001).

This section of the literature review presented research that suggests women leaders can have a profound impact on the future of community colleges. The research indicates that community colleges are facing increasing challenges that will require new leadership paradigms. In addition, it is suggested by the research that women presidents bring qualities to their leadership practice that fits with the leadership perspective necessary to move community colleges forward. In doing so, the literature reviewed here provides compelling evidence for conducting research on women’s experience of the community college presidency. In addition, the literature review suggests there is value in talking in depth with women presidents about how their experience of spiritual leadership translates into the skills necessary for leading community colleges through current and future challenges.

Summary

In this third and final section of the literature review, the role of women community college presidents, including trends of women in the presidency, a brief discussion about women and leadership, and the idea that women are critical resources in the future of community colleges, was examined. As a result of the review, several themes were revealed. First, is it clear that the number of women in the role of community college president has increased and will continue to increase in the coming years. Second, it became clear that connections can be drawn between spiritual leadership and the qualities women often bring to leadership roles. Third, the research suggests changes in the community colleges necessitate a different kind of leadership and that women have the potential to bring qualities to their leadership roles to provide the leadership difference. These themes provide strong rationale for the purpose of my study.
and the specific focus of my research questions; that is, conducting research that will provide insight into the experiences of women community college presidents and exploring the ways in which the spiritual aspect of their leadership is expressed in their thinking and practice.

The literature review of the role of women community college presidents presented in this section offers specific implications for the design of the proposed study. The research suggests that qualitative research using interviews can be useful when exploring a specific phenomenon (Eagly & Carli, 2003; Jablongksi, 1996). As the topic of my study, meaning and expression of spiritual leadership for women community college presidents, can be described as a phenomenon, this finding provides support for using a phenomenological research method and interviews to collect my data. In addition, researchers suggest that qualitative analysis of interviews can provide information about common themes or patterns which can then be used to interpret meaning (Eagly & Carli, 2003; Jablongksi, 1996). The intent of this study is to explore themes that reveal how women community college presidents describe and express spirituality. The review of the literature suggests there is a lack of research about the individual experience of women leaders; this study attempts to fill this gap. Finally, the findings presented in this section indicate that women presidents can be critical resources helping community colleges address the challenges they are facing. This study provides evidence to support this claim as it explored with the participants how spiritual leadership is expressed in their practice.

Summary

In the literature review I have examined literature pertaining to definitions of spirituality, yearning for spiritual expression and experience, and the role of women community college presidents. The information gathered from the review of the literature serves to provide context and a backdrop for the study and reveals opportunities for my study to contribute to the field of community college leadership.

Through the review of the literature several themes emerged. First, it became clear that defining spirituality is extremely complex given the personal and subjective nature of the topic, that spirituality is demonstrated through behavior and is an observable phenomena, and that there is need for a more concentrated and sustained effort to define
spirituality within the community college context. Second, there is evidence to support that spiritual leadership is a timely and relevant topic for leaders in the current workforce given the increased interest employees are expressing for spiritual fulfillment. Finally, the literature indicates that the number of women community college presidents is increasing, that there is a connection between the qualities women can bring to leadership and spiritual leadership, and that women community college presidents are critical resources in moving community colleges forward. These three emergent themes provide strong rationale for conducting the proposed study which will explore the ways in which the spiritual aspect of leadership is conveyed in the thinking, self-expression, and practice of women community college presidents.

In addition to providing strong support for the study, the review of literature presented in this section offers specific implications for the design of my study. First, the highly subjective and personal nature of the topic of spirituality and leadership lends itself toward personal exploration. Although the literature indicates that self reflection is an important component of defining spirituality as it relates to leadership, it appears there was little opportunity for participants of the cited studies to engage in reflection. The focus of this study and the interview process encouraged significant reflection for the participants. Second, the research has pointed to a need for a more concentrated and sustained effort to define spirituality within a community college context and a need for more research that gives voice to how women give meaning to spirituality. My study addressed this need by spending significant time talking with women community college presidents about their experience of spiritual leadership. Third, the literature review indicates that spiritual leadership is a current leadership topic and provides support for exploring the ways in which leaders create work environments that meet the spiritual needs of their employees. During the interviews I asked participants to reflect on how their spirituality is expressed in their reflection and practice in an attempt to understand how they address the challenges their institutions are facing, including creating the type of environment that allows the spiritual needs of employees to be met.

In addition, the research suggests that interpretive research using interviews can be useful when exploring a specific phenomenon. Meaning and expression of spiritual leadership for women community college presidents can be described as a phenomenon,
therefore providing support for using an interpretive research method, specifically phenomenology, for the study. The research findings also support the use of interviews as a data collection technique. Furthermore, it is suggested by the research that interpretive analysis of interview results can provide information about common themes or patterns which can then be used to interpret meaning.

The studies reviewed here provide a solid rationale for a phenomenological study that will provide insight into the experience of women community college presidents who are known to exhibit spirituality in their leadership and will explore the ways in which the spiritual aspect of leadership is conveyed in their thinking, self-expression, and practice.

CHAPTER 3: DESIGN OF STUDY

This section of the research proposal describes the philosophical approach that was used for my study, personal reflections that led to my decision to choose this approach, the research method that will be used, the data needed for the study, information regarding the selection of study participants, data collection and analysis procedures, strategies to ensure the soundness of the data, and plans for the protection of human subjects.

The purpose of this research study is to give voice to the spiritual expression of leadership by women community college presidents. The study provides insight into the experience of women community college presidents who are known to exhibit spirituality in their leadership and explores the ways in which the spiritual aspect of leadership is conveyed in their thinking, self-expression, and practice. My intent in conducting research with selected women community college presidents was to provide them with an opportunity to reflect on how they define themselves as spiritual leaders, to take a journey of exploration with them, and to share their stories with others.

Philosophical Approach

The philosophical approach used in this study was interpretive social science. The roots of interpretive social science can be traced back to sociology and philosophy and the approach is related to hermeneutics, a method of discovering meaning within a text. Hermeneutic science involves reading a text so that the intention and meaning behind appearances are fully understood (Moustakas, 1994). The hermeneutic process
involves a circle through which scientific understanding occurs, through which we correct our prejudices or set them aside and hear “what the text says to us (Gadamer, 1976, p. xviii). Giorgi (1985) describes two levels of interpretive research. In the first level, the original data are made up of naïve descriptions obtained through open-ended questions and dialogue. In the second level, the researcher describes the structures of the experience based on reflection and interpretation of the participant’s story.

In this study, the texts are transcripts of conversations with women community college presidents about how they describe and express spirituality and how they honor which expressions of their spirituality they share with others. When using hermeneutics, the researcher tries to get inside the viewpoint as presented as a whole and then develop a deep understanding of how its parts relate to the whole (Neumann, 2003). Through this research, I have attempted to understand how the various parts of women presidents’ experience of spiritual leadership relate to the whole phenomena of spiritual leadership.

The purpose of an interpretive approach to research is to discover how people experience the world and understand how they create and share meaning of their experiences (Neumann, 2003). Coomer and Hultgren (1989) describe this as “shared understanding through conversation.” An interpretive approach focuses on exploring and understanding how people live their daily lives and make meaning of the social world through relationships. The aim in reflective interpretation is to achieve a fuller, more meaningful understanding, “to bring before me something that otherwise happens ‘behind my back’” (Gadamer, 1976, p. xviii). As the researcher, I engaged with the women in my study by interpreting meaning and giving voice to their daily experiences of using spirituality in their presidential leadership.

Assumptions and Criteria for Truth

One of the key concepts of interpretive research is the relationship between the researcher and participant and the relationship of the participant to the phenomenon being studied, in this case, spirituality in leadership. The researcher has direct and personal involvement with the participants in a naturalistic setting (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Neumann (2003) indicates the goal of the researcher is to be both a “passionate participant” and to achieve an “empathetic understanding” of the experiences being shared by the participants (p. 80). The interpretive researcher attempts to create authentic
conversation with the participants, acquire insights into human experience, facilitate communication, and enable meaningful interactions (Coomer & Hultgren, 1989). In this way, change is not the intended outcome of interpretive research; understanding is the outcome. My intent was to create meaningful interactions and facilitate communication by nurturing the relationships I developed with my participants. Demonstrating interest in their experiences, empathy for their struggles, and care for the insights they share encouraged authentic connections. Furthermore, it is understood in interpretive research that the researcher brings her or his own reality to the study and is encouraged to be selfreflective as part of the process of studying others (Neuman, 2003). Therefore, the results of interpretive research are not value-free.

Other assumptions of interpretive research involve the type of data being collected. The goal of the interpretive researcher is to develop an understanding of how people create meaning out of social action in natural settings (Neuman, 2003). Rather than just making note of what is observed, interpretive research “requires an interpretation by the observer of the meaning which the actor gives to his (sic) behaviour” (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 88). The data I gathered assisted me in developing an understanding of how women community college presidents understand and express spiritual leadership by talking with and observing them in their social world – the community college campus. Descriptive data is collected in interpretive research and there is the assumption that everything has the potential to help explain what is being studied (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). In addition, the researcher puts what is shared by participants into the context of their daily lives by using participant perspectives. Capturing the meaning and significance the participants give to their experience as accurately as possible is of great concern (Bogdan & Biklen). Because of this, it is understood in interpretive research that multiple truths are likely.

In contrast to the positivist approach where a theory is determined to be true if it can be replicated, in interpretive research truth is defined as that which seems right to those being studied. A theory is true if it allows others to understand deeply the reality of those being studied (Neuman, 2003). Therefore, truth is dependent on the perception of the person being studied and how s/he experiences the world. In other words, the interpretive researcher “looks to confirmability rather than objectivity in establishing the
value of the data” (Creswell, 1998, p. 198). In order for truth to be established, there needs to be conversation between the researcher and participants about how the observations made of the participants are being interpreted by the researcher (Brown, 1989). In addition, self reflection on the part of the researcher is essential for defining truth. Only knowledge that emerges from internal perceptions and internally justified judging satisfies the demands for truth (Husserl, 1965). The goal of interpretive research is to end up with a description that accurately conveys an understanding of the ways others reason, feel, and see things.

**Strengths and limitations**

The purpose of interpretive research is to establish shared understanding where it has not existed before (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Brown, 1989). As such, one of the strengths of interpretive research is that it provides an opportunity to give voice to the participants by presenting their experiences in their own words from their own perspectives. In addition, interpretive research often leads to greater awareness for both the participants and the researcher and lead to illumination about the significance of actions (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). From the perspective of an interpretive researcher, the value of doing interpretive research is the ability to collect rich, thick description about individuals in their daily lives, to be able to develop an in-depth understanding of a small group of individuals, and to be able to interact with participants in a collaborative and intimate manner. In addition, interpretive research is particularly useful for exploratory research that attempts to discover themes and relationships (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). The strengths outlined here indicate an interpretive approach is a good match for exploring the ways in which the spiritual practice of leadership is conveyed in the thinking, self-expression, and practice of women community college presidents.

Carr and Kemmis (1986) divide the criticisms of the interpretive approach into two categories. The first category, which they attribute to positivist thinking, includes the idea that interpretive research is not generalizable, is subjective and is not value-free. Interpretive research emphasizes subjective interpretations of individual realities and therefore challenges the causal explanations and universal laws that are the foundation of the positivistic approach. From the perspective of interpretive researchers, when social behavior, such as spiritual leadership, is being studied, the social conventions defining
the behavior and making the behavior what it is in the society being studied must be taken into account (Bredo & Feinberg, 1986). In other words, the behavior must be interpreted in a way that makes sense to those being studied. As such, the value of interpretive research comes from self-reflection which leads to deep understanding of the particular experience being studied. Ultimately, this understanding can then be used to provide a foundation for thoughtful and empathic interactions in other situations.

The second type of criticism outlined by Carr and Kemmis (1989) involves the implications of interpretive researchers’ belief that meanings behind individual actions are derived from within a social context. The core conviction of interpretive researchers is that the text or the subject makes sense. Bredo and Feinberg (1986) compare this to approaching a set of archaeological artifacts and assuming they all came from the same era and same culture. Given this assumption, the researcher then attempts to find a pattern that makes sense of the individual pieces. However, this approach is problematic if, in fact, the artifacts come from different eras. To prevent this from happening, Bredo and Feinberg suggest that before adopting an interpretive research approach, the researcher must determine, rather than assume, that the subject makes sense.

In addition, critics argue that interpretive researchers do not consider the origins and causes of participants’ actions and neglect the problems of social conflict and social change like a critical research approach would. Critics also express concern about unintended consequences of social actions such as when actions have ramifications that were not intended and of which the individuals concerned were not conscious. For example, as Bredo and Feinberg (1986) point out, sometimes people act in a motivated way but are systematically unaware of their motives and in fact, are acting from other motives.

In summary, this section of the paper outlined the assumptions and criteria for truth as well as the strengths and limitations of an interpretive philosophical approach. As I used an interpretive in this study, it was essential that I engaged in authentic conversation with the participants in order to create meaningful interactions that led to self-reflection for the participants. In addition, in order for truth to be established, it was important that I created opportunity to engage the participants in discussion about how I interpreted the data. Although criticisms of the interpretive approach exist, this section of
the paper points to the value of an interpretive approach being shared understanding, greater empathy, and increased self-knowledge.

Personal Disclosure

My perceptions, experiences, and values influenced the choice of the philosophical approach for my study. My desire in conducting this research was to talk with women presidents in order to understand their leadership experience, provide the women an opportunity to direct the research process, and use the participants’ personal reflections, as well as my own, to interpret meaning for how women leaders use spirituality in their leadership. My curiosity about the experience of women community college presidents’ leadership as it relates to spirituality and my interest in developing authentic relationships with participants of my study provide a strong rationale for using an interpretive philosophical approach to my research.

Moustakas (1994) speaks to “recognizing the crucial value of returning to the self to discover the nature and meaning of things as they appear and in their essence” (p. 26). The compelling message in this quote is relevant to my beliefs about self-reflection, listening to others, and spiritual leadership, and their connection to interpretive research.

It seems I have always been drawn to self-reflection. As the oldest of seven children, I likely needed to retreat inward to find quiet and calm. As an introverted child, I became skilled at observing others and then thinking about how those observations fit with my own experiences. It would seem natural, then, that self-reflection has become an important component in my practice as a leader and ultimately, a research interest. In interpretive research, the goal is to “always question the way we experience the world, to want to know the world in which we live as human beings” (van Manen, 1990, p. 5). For interpretive researchers, social reality is based on people’s definition of it (Neuman, 2003) and therefore, it becomes necessary to reflect on both our own and others’ interpretations of experiences.

In my life, I have also been drawn to hearing others tell their stories and creating an environment that allows those I am talking with to feel listened to and cared for. It was likely this interest that drew me to a master’s degree in Counseling and it was in this program that I honed my listening skills and enhanced my desire to more fully understand the experiences of others. Interpretive research is all about listening to the stories of
others in order to develop a deep understanding of the meaning people give to their experiences and how people interact (Neuman, 2003).

Spirituality has been a lifelong value that was instilled in me growing up as family caretakers of a Catholic shrine and lodge 23 miles outside of Juneau, Alaska. Surrounded by incredible beauty, intense silence, and a reverence for nature and the sacred created a desire to carry with me a sense of peace and intention in all that I do. As a leader, for me spirituality translates into operating from a strong value system, being self-reflective, honoring the contributions of others, and working collaboratively to achieve a common goal. The literature review presented in Chapter 2 indicates others view spiritual leadership in the same way. In addition, research indicates that spiritual leadership is a relatively new concept that has gained momentum in the last 10 years. A qualitative approach is most appropriate when studying a new or emerging phenomenon or concept (Creswell, 2002)

In Parker Palmer’s essay (1994), “Leading from Within: Reflections on Spirituality and Leadership,” he talks about the importance of self reflection and coming to understanding if we are leaders who are motivated by a “spirit of light” or a “spirit of shadow” (p. 6). It was this essay that inspired me to do research on spiritual leadership. It feels as though researching the topic of spiritual leadership within an interpretive framework brings together my passions, experiences, values, and desire to make a meaningful contribution to the field of leadership to a compelling place of action.

Research Method

The method I selected for conducting my interpretive research is phenomenology, an approach in which the researcher enters the world of the participants and learns how they experience, live, and display the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 1998). A phenomenological study describes individual lived experiences of a phenomenon and then reduces the experiences to a central meaning. “It attempts to describe and interpret these meanings to a certain degree of richness and depth.” (van Manen, 1990, p. 10). The goal of phenomenological research is to understand the nature of the phenomena so others can better understand how the phenomenon is experienced by the participant (van Manen). Phenomenological researchers attempt to understand the meaning of events and interactions to ordinary people in particular situations (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). van
Manen describes it as “a heedful, mindful wondering about the project of life, of living, of what it means to live a life” (p. 12).

In this study, the phenomenon being studied is the interface of leadership, spirituality, and women in the role of being a community college president. The intention in using a phenomenological approach for this study was to deepen understanding of how women community college presidents describe and express spirituality.

A key concept in phenomenology is Epoche, also called bracketing, in which the researcher temporarily puts aside personal beliefs or attitudes about the phenomena in order understand the experiences of participants in the study (Creswell, 1998). This concept was coined by Edmund Husserl, a German philosopher. The Greek definition is to refrain from judgment, to abstain from or stay away from the everyday, ordinary way of seeing things. “A warning to be alert, to look with care, to see what is really there, and to stay away from everyday habits of knowing things, people, and events” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 85). In the Epoche, no position is taken; every quality has equal value. Everything that appears is “marked with a horizon of undetermined determinability” by the possibility of being seen and known in its essential nature (Husserl, 1977, p. 30). An essential component of using Epoche is self reflection and self knowledge. The objective of the phenomenological researcher is to “describe things in themselves, to permit what is before one to enter consciousness and be understood in its meanings and essences in the light of intuition and self-reflection” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 27). Husserl asserted that, “ultimately, all genuine, and in particular, all scientific knowledge rests on inner evidence: as far as such evidence extends, the concept of knowledge extends also” (1970, p. 61).

Other concepts key to phenomenological research include a structural description, which is how the phenomenon was experienced by individuals in the study, and a textual description, which is what was experienced by the participants. Finally, there is the concept of the “essential, invariant structure of the experience” (Creswell, 1998, p. 55). In other words, the reader should feel as though there is a better understanding of the how a participant experiences the phenomena after reading the final discussion of the study. The experience of the phenomena has been adequately described if the description
“awakens or shows us the lived quality and significance of the experience in a fuller or
deeper manner” (van Manen, 1990, p. 10).

In interpretive research, truth is defined as that which seems right to those being
studied. Phenomenological researchers determine this by engaging in the practice of
checking for intersubjective understanding. Establishing truth begins with the
researcher’s perception (Moustakas, 1994). First, the researcher reflects on the meaning
of the phenomenon for herself, then turns outward towards the participant and establishes
intersubjective validity by testing out this understanding with the participant through a
conversational exchange (Creswell, 1998). van Manen (1990) indicates that it is
intersubjective because the researcher “needs the other in order to develop a dialogic
relation with the phenomenon and thus validate the phenomenon as described” (p. 11).

Procedures

The highly subjective and personal nature of the topic of spirituality and
leadership lent itself toward personal exploration; as such a phenomenological research
method was good match for the study. Data collection and analysis in a
phenomenological study is a circular process. First, reflections and personal experiences
of the participants are conveyed to the researcher. Then the data are reflected on and
interpreted by the researcher. Then, interpretations of the researcher are shared with the
participants and further conversation occurs. In this study, the data was collected through
in person interviews with the participants at a location selected by the participant in order
to encourage a safe and non-threatening environment. Research cited in the literature
review pointed to a need for more concentrated and sustained effort to define spirituality
within a community college context and a need for more research that gives voice to how
women describe and express spirituality. In this study I have addressed these needs by
spending concentrated time talking with the participants about their experience of
spiritual leadership.

Participant and Site Selection

The study participants were five women who are currently serving as community
college presidents. The small sample size is supported by Dukes (1984) who recommends
including three to 10 participants in a phenomenological study. In addition, as is
required by phenomenological research, it is essential that all of the participants
experience the phenomena being studied. I used criterion and snowball sampling to solicit women who use spirituality in their leadership to be participants in the study. Some of the participants were recruited because of my personal knowledge of their leadership practices, some of them were recruited from contacts I made at the Uncovering the Heart of Higher Education conference and others were recruited because of recommendations of other community college practitioners. The five participants were from four different states representing three regions of the United States.

Data Needs and Data Collection Techniques

For this study, as is typically done in phenomenological research, the long interview was the method through which the data was collected. Table 2 presents the initial and follow-up questions that were developed for the interviews and the goal I had in mind when asking the questions. I did not define spiritual leadership for the participants nor did I ask about spirituality directly in the initial questions in an attempt to avoid influencing the participants. My goal was to remain as open as possible to the descriptions and experience of the participants in order to better understand their stories.

Table 2
Interview Questions and Intent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial questions</th>
<th>Follow-up questions</th>
<th>Intent of questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Talk about your journey to the presidency. How long have you been in the presidency?</td>
<td>What process did you go through to make the decision to apply for the presidency? How does being a president match up with your personal and professional desires? How are your personal values conveyed in your role as president?</td>
<td>Develop a rapport with participant Gain insight into how and why the participant is in the presidency. Address first research question: How do women community college presidents describe spirituality?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you identify ethnically? Do you think that makes a difference in your leadership?</td>
<td>Is there a connection between your ethnicity and your practice as a president? How do you think the sense of being “other” affects your work as a president?</td>
<td>Identify ethnic background of participant Explore with participant if her ethnicity is connected to her practice as a spiritual leader.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Question</strong></td>
<td><strong>Question</strong></td>
<td><strong>Question</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So, what's it like for you to be a president?</td>
<td>How do you stay positive when you’re dealing with such difficult stuff?</td>
<td>Provide an opportunity for the participants to reflect on what it means to be a president. Address first research question: How do women community college presidents describe spirituality?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you think your leadership feels to others? How do others at the college see your leadership expressed?</td>
<td>How would others describe your leadership? How do they think it feels?</td>
<td>Address second research question: How does spirituality convey itself in the reflection, self-expression, and practice of the leadership of women community college presidents?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How does who you are as a person show up in your work as a president?</td>
<td>In what ways do you think your spirituality is present in your work? How do you make decisions based on your value system?</td>
<td>Address second research question: How does spirituality convey itself in the reflection, self-expression, and practice of the leadership of women community college presidents? Address third research question – How do women community college presidents honor which expressions of the spirituality they share with others and which they hold private?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What parts of you do not show in your work as a president?</td>
<td>Are there more private parts of you that don’t show up? What do you see as differences between spirituality and religion?</td>
<td>Address third research question: How do women community college presidents honor which expressions of the spirituality they share with others and which they hold private?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Moustakas (1994) indicates the interview usually follows an informal, interactive process and utilizes open-ended comments and questions. He also suggests the interview begin with a social conversation aimed at creating a relaxed atmosphere and that the researcher is responsible for creating a climate in which the participant will respond honestly and comprehensively. Before starting the interview, I gave the participants an overview of my research, provided an opportunity for them to ask questions, and explained that while I had specific questions, I very much wanted them to direct the course of our conversation. I also talked with them about the process I would use to obtain intersubjective validity by explaining they would have the opportunity to review and make changes to their transcripts from our interviews as well as the individual profiles I wrote based on my interpretation of the interviews. I assured them their interviews were confidential and asked them to select a pseudonym for the study. In addition, in order to create a climate during the interviews that would illicit open and honest sharing, I expressed the following:

- I would like the interview to be a personal conversation that provides an opportunity for both of us to reflect on leadership and spirit.
- My goal is to develop a better understanding of your experience of spirit, leadership, and being a woman community college president.
- I acknowledge the commitment you are making in embarking on this journey with me and I appreciate the time you are giving me.

Four out of the five interviews took place in the president’s office with the fifth one being conducted at a hotel near the airport. Meeting the participants in person on their campuses allowed me a glimpse of the environments they are practicing in, the population of students served by their campuses, and how their personalities are conveyed through their office décor. In addition, as the presidents came out to greet me, or as we walked across campus it was a brief indication of how they interact with others and others interact with them. Although not as powerful as physically visiting the campus, I requested an oral description for the participant’s campus and office I did not visit. The interviews were approximately two hours long and they were digitally recorded, with the permission of the participants.
Data Analysis

The goal of phenomenological research is to provide the reader with a better understanding of the “essential, invariant structure of the experience” in order to reveal shared understanding (Creswell, 1998, p. 55). When analyzing my data, I followed the steps outlined by Moustakas (1994) for phenomenological data analysis. First, the data from each of the interview transcripts was divided into statements by a process called horizonalization. Each statement or horizon was regarded as having equal value. Then, the meanings or meaning units were listed and clustered into themes and overlapping and repetitive statements were removed. Next, a textural description of what was experienced by the participants was written and a structural description of how the phenomenon was experienced was developed. Verbatim examples are included in both the textural and structural descriptions in order to provide a “vivid account of the underlying dynamics of the experience” (p. 135). An individual profile for each of the participants was created with the three components described by Moustakas (1994) – a textual description, a list of themes, and a structural description.

The next step in the data analysis was to construct an overall description of the meaning of the experience. As such, an overall textural description, or common themes expressed by the participants about their path to the presidency, was created. In addition, an overall structural description, which highlighted the common themes regarding beliefs about what it means to be a president, was developed. Developing a composite structural description involves using Imaginative Variation which Moustakas describes as, “the researcher understands that there is not a single inroad to truth, but that countless possibilities emerge that are intimately connected with the essences and meanings of an experience” (p. 99). The process of Imaginative Variation includes exploring a variety of possible structural meanings, recognizing the underlying context that account for the emerging themes, considering how the context may affect thoughts and feelings of the participants, and by using examples that vividly illustrate the experience of the phenomenon. Finally, a textural-structural synthesis was created by integrating the individual textual and structural descriptions into a universal description of the experience of being a woman community college president who integrates spirituality.
into her leadership. In addition, the synthesis provides insight into how the three research questions of the study were addressed by the data collected.

**Strategies to Insure Soundness of Data Collection, Data Analysis, and Interpretation**

There are several guidelines for phenomenological research in order to insure soundness of data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Creswell, 2005; van Manen, 1990). In regards to data collection, it is essential to develop questions that ask the participants to explore their everyday lived experiences of the phenomena; this was goal in the development of the interview questions used in this study. Table 2 above outlines questions that were used and my intent in asking these particular questions. Furthermore, information must be collected from participants who have experienced the phenomena. In this study, this was achieved by using sampling methods that insured the women I included in my study are considered spiritual leaders by others. I asked community college women to identify women presidents they considered to be spiritual leaders, I made contacts with presidents I met at the Uncovering the Heart of Higher Education conference, and I asked the presidents I interviewed for names of colleagues they would consider spiritual leaders. It is also important that there is prolonged engagement and persistent observation in the field in order to build trust with the participants. I achieved this by developing a relationship with the participants through initial phone calls and email communication and by making the decision to travel to the cities where the participants lived. This face-to-face interaction on the campuses of the presidents provided the opportunity for greater rapport development and gave me concentrated time during which I was engaged with the participants.

In regards to data analysis and interpretation, the researcher should make every effort not to distort the participant’s meaning in the interpretation and confirm this by member checking, or asking participants to review transcriptions and themes. This is called intersubjective understanding (Creswell, 1998; van Manen, 1990). For this study, participants were emailed their interview transcript, at an email address they choose, and asked to review the transcript for errors and for content they were uncomfortable with. In addition, each participants’ profile, containing their individual textural and structural descriptions and list of themes, was sent to them for their review and edit.
Strategies to Protect Human Subjects

I have completed the Course in the Protection of Human Research Subjects (CITI) online tutorial and I am familiar with Oregon State University’s Human Research Handbook. The Oregon State Human Subjects policy was followed and approval was granted from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) before undertaking the study. In addition, the process for receiving approval from the IRB at each institution connected to participants was followed. All subjects remained anonymous through the use of pseudonyms for participants and names of associated institutions were not mentioned. Individual informed consent forms were signed and collected.

Because of the sensitivity of the topic of this study, special care was taken to engage with the participants in ways that build their trust in me. I did this by acknowledging the discomfort participants could feel discussing spiritual leadership early on in my interactions with them. I shared my own reflections on spiritual leadership and explained the source of my interest in the topic. In addition, I was very aware the participants of my study were high-profile leaders and that there was the potential for having a negative impact on their professional and personal lives if the data collection and analysis and publication of this study were not handled with the utmost care, empathy, and sensitivity.

CHAPTER 4: DATA DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

This chapter provides a synopsis of the data collection and analysis of the lived experience of five women community college presidents who are known to exhibit spirituality in their leadership. The data consists of transcripts from two-hour interviews with each of the five participants. Underlying the analysis of the data are the three research question that are the focus of the study: a) How do women community college presidents describe spirituality? b) How does spirituality convey itself in the reflections, self-expression, and practice of the leadership of women community college presidents? and c) How do women community college presidents honor which expressions of their spirituality they share with others and which they hold private?

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section presents individual profiles for each participant including an individual textural description, a table listing the broad themes that came out in each interview and will be used to address the research
questions, and an individual structural description. Section two provides a composite
textural description and a composite structural description that presents the common
themes that arose when participants reflected on their path to the presidency and what it
means to be a president. In the third section, a textural-structural synthesis is presented
that provides a common description for how the practice of being a president is
experienced by the five participants as a whole. In addition, the synthesis section
provides insight into how the three research questions identified for the study are
addressed in each of the themes. Section four summarizes the overall findings of the
study and leads into the next chapter which discusses specific ties to the literature on
spiritual leadership and implications for practice and future research.

Profiles of Participants

The women who participated in the study were insured a level of confidentiality.
In keeping with that obligation, the participant’s names and the names of the institutions
at which they work were intentionally not cited. Each participant is identified by a
pseudonym that was selected by the individual participant or in two cases, by me as the
researcher. What follows is an individual profile for each participant that includes an
individual textural description, a table listing the broad themes that came out in our
interview, and an individual structural description. The descriptions of the participants
are presented in the order of the interviews.

Participant #1: Kate

Individual textural description. Currently in her first community college
presidency, Kate is a 56-year Caucasian woman who has served as president for seven
years at a college in the Pacific Northwest. We met for our first interview in her second-
floor office in the Administration building. The large windows in Kate’s office offer her
a view of much of the activity occurring on campus. When I arrived at Kate’s office, she
invited me to walk across campus to the cafeteria to pick up some tea which we brought
back to her office. We ran out of time to complete the questions at the first interview so I
returned to her campus seven weeks later for a second interview. Kate’s pseudonym is
her daughter’s name.

Kate was born and raised outside the United States. Her father left school at age
14 to apprentice as a baker. He started his own bakery at age 21 and worked in it until he
died at age 92. Although Kate’s family was working class, they had a strong belief in education and she knew from a very young age that she would go to university. As a first generation college student, Kate graduated with a Business and Social Systems degree and then went on to obtain a Law degree. She worked for a few years for an international company doing international legal work, then met and married her American husband, lived for a few years in Central America, and then moved to the Pacific Northwest.

Kate’s first experience with community colleges came as a result of working at K-Mart as a checker. As a recent immigrant struggling to find work, she accepted a cashier position where she learned many of her co-workers were attending community college in an effort to improve their earning power. Fortuitously, three years later Kate was hired to teach in a displaced homemaker program at the local community college where she held several administrative positions over the next several years, ultimately applying for a vice-president position (VP). After not being selected for the position, Kate applied for and received a VP position at another community college, eventually moving into the Presidency, the position she currently holds.

For Kate, not getting the VP position at the college where she started her career, in spite of having support from people across campus, was devastating and a turning point in her professional path. Although at one time believing she would never have to leave the institution she grew up in, Kate came to realize she could not stay if she wanted to continue being challenged in her work. Galvanized into action, Kate took a week to complete her dissertation for the PhD she had been working on for 12 years and applied for and received the VP position at another community college within a month. When reflecting on how she felt about the process, she noted, “When I walked on the campus for the interview I knew I was going to get the job. I mean I don’t know what that weird thing was, but I just knew it was the right place for me and obviously they did, too”.

When it became apparent the presidency was going to become vacant, there were assumptions from others on campus that she would apply for the position because of her popularity as a VP. Kate indicates she bought into these expectations initially although she had never set a goal for herself to be a president. As the deadline approached, however, she began to reflect on whether she really wanted the position. During this reflection process, she did a lot of reading, writing, and thinking about her values:
“I was thinking about what I want to do and if I got the job what could I do that could be different. Am I the right person for the job right now? What does the college need? What do I have to offer? Is there a match?”

As a result of her reflection, Kate came to the decision that applying for the position “felt right”. In part, her decision was based on her belief that the college needed healing and action and her understanding that she had positive relationships with people that would allow her to make tough decisions. The job felt like a good match to her because, “I felt I knew enough about the college to know our weaknesses and strengths and create a path that capitalized on our strengths and minimized our weaknesses”.

Table 3: Kate’s Interview Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Building and nurturing relationships</th>
<th>Being inclusive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engaging in self-reflection</td>
<td>Being optimistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committing to social justice</td>
<td>Committing to the institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing work with meaning</td>
<td>Being grounded in a spiritual foundation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Individual structural description.* Kate’s practice as a president is grounded in her commitment to social justice and engaging in meaningful work. She explained, “I think I’m doing this work because it reflects what I care about and it reflects who I am.” Kate describes herself as always having had “an inherent sense of justice and fairness” and believes community colleges are democracy’s colleges and as such are focused on equity and social justice. She indicates being sensitive about social justice issues is essential as a leader because “you need to model what you want your organization to be”. Being a community college president provides her with a vehicle to unleash the creativity that exists within the institution and find ways to help people live out their dreams and make a difference in their own way. “I mean it is really a privilege to do this work because you have an opportunity to make a real difference.”

Kate spoke about the importance of building and nurturing relationships and gave two examples of when her ability to connect with people served her well in her time as president. Describing herself as a new president who had to come in and make some difficult decisions, she said, “and so I had good relationships, I had a lot of money in the bank with people so I knew I would have leeway to make some tough decisions”. The
importance of relationships came up again in our interview when Kate described a donor who gave the college a million dollars because he trusted her to do the right thing with the money and indicated $200,000 of it was for public art because he knew that is something she really cared about. “It’s that kind of deep connection with people that is so important. It’s important whether they are giving a million dollars or not.” From her perspective, “there are all kinds of opportunities in community colleges to care and connect with students and with faculty and staff and colleagues. And it’s okay to let people know that you care.” Kate shows she cares by being visible, knowing and using people’s names, and by learning people’s stories. She attends college events, sends frequent email communication with staff, walks around campus to talk to people, and makes herself accessible to students. Kate explained what benefit she receives from being connected to those she works with:

“You get to meet all these interesting people and you get to know peoples stories and there are just amazing stories, you know, what they’ve done and what their kids are doing and you get to see their pride and what’s going on or their sorrow, you know, something that’s not been so good and how they’re handling that. How they’re walking their path or how they’re handling that, whenever, so that, that human connection is, you know, I don’t think we can survive without that.”

The relationships Kate develops are based on being inclusive and believing in the potential, acknowledging the work of, and being accessible to others. Kate believes leaders don’t have all the answers and that there is great wisdom in a group. She talks with the staff and faculty at her college about what a healthy community looks like, “it’s widening the circle, it’s getting the people in the room that care” and about her belief in collaboration, “I believe if you alienate people or push people away you’ll never get solutions”. From her perspective, powerful things can happen when people bring to the table what they are really good at. Kate works to create conditions where people can be involved in what they care about, “you’re going to get the best out of people if they are following their passions.” And, when people have done good work, Kate does her best to make the work visible to others, “every month at the Board meeting I have a long list of kudos I give to people who have either personally or professionally done good things.”

Kate’s optimism and her commitment to the institution are guiding forces in her presidency. In spite of facing great financial challenges for several years, Kate indicates
there are fabulous things going on at her institution, “we’re doing more, in many respects, than people who do have money”. Kate shared that she tries to emphasize the positive, surround herself with positive people, and celebrate the great things that are being accomplished at the college. For example, she described her beginning of the academic year speech as an opportunity to focus on what they have accomplished, celebrate the great things they have been doing, and describe what they need to do and how they are going to work together to get it done. “Part of leadership is creating hope.” Kate indicated her commitment to her work at the college comes from the sense of responsibility for finishing something and not leaving work undone, the long-held value “that you leave things in a better state than you find them.”

Being grounded and operating from a spiritual foundation are also important elements in Kate’s presidential practice. “I think you have to have a sense of, you know, your own groundedness and your own wholeness and your own competence.” A strong sense of self, in which there is a separation between who she is as a person and who she is as a president, allows Kate to not take things personally or “get caught up in stuff I can’t do anything about”. For Kate, spirituality is about “believing in something greater than yourself and having your work be connected to something greater” and doing work that matters, work that makes a difference for people and for the community. Elaborating on her beliefs she said:

“I think it is also to do with believing in wholeness, believing in whole beings and that, you know, people don’t just come to work with just their brain, they come to work with their inner life with their soul, with whatever you want to call it, with their heart. And that you need all of that in the workplace for it to be a healthy workplace.”

Giving an example of how she honors the wholeness of people at the college, Kate spoke of the decision to focus their Inservice on the Zulu concept of Ubuntu, a word that means “I am human because you are human”, and the creation of a theme for the day of “taking care of self, taking care of this place and taking care of each other”. Kate also talked about using poetry and music to touch the spiritual part of people.

Participant #2: Meg

Individual textural description. Meg is a 62-year old Caucasian woman who has been a community college president for eight years. She is currently in her second
presidency at a community college in the Pacific Northwest. We met in her office for our interview, a comfortable room in the Administration building that houses student services and some instructional programs. Meg greeted me warmly, put her hand on my arm and said, “I’ve just put the kettle on for tea”. She chose her grandmother’s name for her pseudonym.

Meg grew up as the oldest of five children in a family where there was no college experience. Although her parents were supportive of her attending college, she “had no guide” for how to go about it. She married right out of high school and followed her husband in his 20-year military career. She did not start college until she was 36 as her husband was getting ready to retire from military service. She started her educational path at a community college where she worked in the Admissions office and used a tuition waiver to pay for school. Over the next 10 years, as she completed her associate’s degree, then her bachelor’s, and finally her master’s and doctorate, Meg progressed through various positions at the college ending up as the Director of Admissions, Registration, and Financial Aid. After realizing she needed to broaden her experience in order to reach her goal of becoming a Vice President of Student Services, Meg took a position at a nearby college as Director of Admissions and Registration where she became Vice President of Student Services and eventually President. After spending a few years at a state university as Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, Meg started her second presidency at the institution where she is currently.

Meg describes her path to the presidency as “one of exploration and a certain amount of serendipity”. She indicates she first started developing her goal of becoming Vice President (VP) of Student Services after she had worked at the community college for about 5 years. In part, her shift in thinking came about as a result of mentoring she received from a colleague who suggested Meg had the credentials and the experience for the position and that she should really think about setting a goal for herself of becoming a VP.

Meg indicates she “had no intention of ever becoming a president”. However, when the president she worked for as VP of Student Services announced his retirement and Meg realized she was equally as qualified as some of the other candidates for the position, she decided to apply. In our interview, Meg talked about the reflective process
she went through in making the decision to apply for this first presidency. She thought about the kind of working environment she needed and asked herself if the other candidates could provide her with that environment. When she realized they likely couldn’t, she “felt she had an obligation to either look for alternative positions or explore whether I could provide that kind of environment for others”. In addition, she received encouragement from the retiring president who affirmed what he felt her strengths were and “did some very proactive work with me with respect to some of the pieces I didn’t have”.

Her first presidency Meg calls her “trial presidency” because she thinks, in retrospect, some of the best attributes she brought to the position were ones that were least congruent with what needed to be done at the institution. She describes her current presidency as “a great fit for me”. The campus is the right size for her to be able to “touch it” and she knows people by name. In addition, she appreciates that one of the principle attributes of the institution is that people “invest a lot in relationships here. They genuinely care for each other, support each other. Even when there are disagreements, those are managed in a way that is respectful”.

Table 4: Meg’s Interview Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Engaging in self-reflection</th>
<th>Being humble</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Continually learning</td>
<td>Using a systems approach to her work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using intuition</td>
<td>Building and nurturing relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizing and acknowledging fear</td>
<td>Being inclusive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Individual structural description.* Meg approached the interview with candor and forthrightness and she reflected about how she views the world, both as a president and as a person. She talked about the challenges she has had in her career, what she has learned from those challenging experiences, her beliefs about people and what they need, and how her own quest for learning and her intuition guide her.

It was apparent from the interview that self-reflection is an important component in Meg’s experience of being a president. When talking about a particularly difficult time in her career she indicated that what allowed her to heal from the experience was “taking a bit of a breather before I started professional work again.” She viewed the experience as
a grieving process and surrounded herself with caring colleagues who helped her think through things in a very meaningful way. In addition, she talked about the importance of working through her grief and anger so she didn’t get stuck there - “that is not where I’m going to use my energy. It’s absolutely not. I want to use my energy where I can make a difference”. Meg also talked about her experience of self-reflection in her doctoral program:

“the biggest challenge was looking at my own leadership performance. The values that I said I wanted reflected through that performance and then assessing whether those values were really being exhibited or not and where they weren’t, why? And that was hard work. If I said I was, that inclusion was an important value for me but I was consistently only including a circle of very comfortable people in conversations or only people who I thought might agree with whatever the concepts were that I wanted to advance, what did that say about me as a leader? And why was that behavior taking place?”

Meg spoke about the importance of being open to learning from her experiences and that “one of the absolute pervading characteristics for me is constantly learning. I never assume that I know it all. I’m hungry for learning.” She holds herself accountable for learning from difficult times, to being open to learning from students she interacts with and learning within her relationships with colleagues and those who work for her. In reflecting on what she has learned she said:

“I’ve learned to be more patient with process. I’ve learned to, I think, be a better judge when genuine consensus has arrived and if in fact there’s not time for genuine consensus, how the conversation needs to be held in order to still move things forward. I’ve learned a lot about how to manage conflicts and disagreements.”

As a president, Meg uses intuition, fear, humility, and trust in her practice of leadership. From her perspective, it is important to be able to sense when things are out of alignment at the institution, either with individuals, or with groups and be able to address them before the issues get to a point where they cause a lot of discord. Fear is also present in Meg’s leadership. She feels fear about whether she is going to be able to facilitate learning in ways that she would like to and:

“I carry a certain amount of fear with me about am I setting the right kind of model, am I exhibiting the right kind of practice for people. Because one way or another they are going to emulate parts of it. And if it isn’t right, if it’s not well
thought out, practiced, respectful, boy I could be creating a whole lot of chaos somewhere else.”

Meg indicates she has become more comfortable with humility and that if there is enough of a trusting relationship on the campus that she is able to be public with her humility, then she knows she has helped to create the right environment. She shared a recent experience of working with a group of faculty and feeling uncomfortable about the process she used. At the end of the meeting she said,

“The way that we went about this, I think we can all agree that the outcome was satisfactory but the process didn’t work. I am going to assume full responsibility and I want to apologize for that. What I would like is for those of you who are willing, think about how the process may have been strengthened and then either come in and talk with me or send me some information about that. But in the meantime, please accept my apology.”

As a president, Meg believes strongly in viewing the institution as a system so that she is able to identify patterns and relationships in order to build on the strengths of the people working with her. She indicates,

“a lot of my role here is to continue to identify the questions to be answered and to be able to gage when people are comfortable that there are enough answers there and a clear pattern formed by those answers that they can all kind of get behind where we are going.”

What allows her to recognize patterns and relationships is the careful listening she engages in and her ability to bring people together around common causes. She acknowledges the work of others and puts great effort into making sure people “feel as if they are influencing the future of this college for the better”. She believes strongly that taking care of the college is a shared responsibility and a shared celebration. Meg spoke of a recent conversation she had with a faculty member in which the faculty described Meg’s leadership in the following way:

While there’s a strong sense of broad vision about where the college is going, staff and faculty are absolutely empowered to fill in the blanks for that vision and she said what she likes is its like having a road map, you know basically what your destination is but we get to decide what we are going to see along the way, how we get there, do we travel quickly, do we take more time, do we take the freeway or back roads, where do we take rest stops along the way to figure out what we are doing. It was a wonderful analogy from her that said, “you know I am secure in the vision that is established but I also see myself in being able to participate in that”.”
Meg uses a strong personal value system to make decisions about the kind of president she is. When she spoke about her transition from a position at the university to a position at the community college, she indicated her primary motivation in leaving the university was feeling a lack of congruence between working for the university with its competitive admission policies and being a person who believes in the open door mission of the community college. In reflecting on a difficult position she was in at her former college, she said she took a stand because her primary responsibility was to protect the long term best interest of the college and to not take that stand would have been “abdicing that role.” Furthermore, Meg indicates she doesn’t “permit anyone else to determine my own personal worth. I am worthy of respect and acknowledgement but I also have a responsibility to be respectful and acknowledge the work of others too.”

Participant #3: DeeDee

Individual textual description. DeeDee, who is a 54 year-old Caucasian woman, is in her first presidency at a community college in the Southwest. She is serving as the first president of her campus, formerly an outreach center, and has been in the position for two and a half years. She chose her pseudonym because it was a childhood nickname.

For our interview, DeeDee offered to meet me at my hotel because the campus is several miles from the airport. At the start of our conversation, I asked DeeDee to describe her office so I could create a mental picture that would help set the stage for our interview. Administrative space is limited on her emerging, young campus and DeeDee described her office as being in a “rich” building where there is an elevator that doesn’t always work, an ancient heating and cooling system, and an occasional problem with ants. There is a certain charm about the building in that her office has a little balcony with sliding doors that affords her a view of the campus she oversees. “My office is not an elegant, lovely thing but it gets the job done.”

DeeDee describes her journey to the presidency as a “non-traditional and convoluted path” during which she was trained as a biologist, worked in the medical field for several years, and explored several different career tracks. She attended community college after completing high school a year early, went on to get her bachelor’s degree in biology, and was the first person in her family to finish college. After working as a
medical technologist for many years, DeeDee decided she wanted a career change and was working on her master’s degree, looking for part-time work, when she stumbled across the Learning Resource Center at a local community college. She was hired as a math tutor, then as an adjunct developmental math instructor and, finally as a full-time math faculty member. It was at that point that DeeDee, “fell in love with community colleges”. Her administrative career began when she was asked to manage a Carl Perkins program. After realizing she wanted to continue moving forward in her career, DeeDee decided to go back for a doctorate, initially in Educational Psychology. However, even though she was in a quality program with a prestigious fellowship, she indicated she “kept finding myself at the end of the day unfulfilled”. After some exploration, she changed to community college leadership and upon entering the program “knew I had come home.” After completing her Ph.D., DeeDee worked for an international company focused on furthering the work of community colleges for five years before going to work as a Vice President at a community college in another state, and was then recruited to her current position.

Although DeeDee believed she would eventually move into a presidential position, when others requested that she apply for her current position she was not looking for a job. In fact, she stated she felt like she wasn’t quite ready for a presidency. However, she was recruited heavily because of connections she had made earlier in her career and, after some thinking, decided to apply and was hired. In reflecting on how she got to where she is, DeeDee said, “Everything has connected to everything in what I am doing, it has truly been a web of connections, a global network for me.”

Table 5: DeeDee’s Interview Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Awe for the work being done</th>
<th>Being authentic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Building and nurturing relationships</td>
<td>Having and creating fun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being inclusive</td>
<td>Engaging in self-reflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building trust</td>
<td>Living an integrated life</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Individual Structural Description.* As the first president of a newly created campus, DeeDee has great awe for the work being done. She explained:
The joy and satisfaction I get out of building and being part of such a creative endeavor is compelling. I get to build something; I get to work with others to launch this amazing thing, to be a part of something new.

DeeDee’s college has a very high number of Spanish-speaking students; the campus is surrounded by a community that is 94% Hispanic. As a white woman, she finds herself living the experience of being ethnically different in a “profound” way. Although she recognizes that her positional power causes her to be treated differently than other white women might be, she says it has been a very empathy building experience. “I am conscious of being respectful, being careful with language, of trying to listen and observe cultural norms before I come in and judge a situation or try to change it.”

DeeDee’s practice as a president is greatly influenced by relationships and the encouragement she received from others. From her perspective, she is in the presidential position in large part because of connections she made during her doctoral internship and in previous positions. In addition, she talked during the interview about how encouragement from others has had tremendous impact on her professional journey:

And certainly along the way there have been people telling me I could and, you know, they’re very iconic and those voices run true and their faces are clear. And they’re like little sign posts along the way. Every single step. And I wouldn’t be here today if those people hadn’t been there.

These influences have instilled a commitment in DeeDee to provide the same support and encouragement to the students the community college serves. “Other people believed in me and that’s what we do at the community college, we believe in our students. We show them they can do what they don’t even know they can do”.

She described interacting with staff in the same way, holding care for others at the forefront of how she operates:

Even when you love the work and you’re committed, there’s a day when you just hit the wall and we have to take care of each other. We are always talking about, watch out for your neighbor, hold hands while you cross the street, make sure we didn’t leave anybody behind.

DeeDee also believes in the power of inclusiveness and empowering others to make decisions. She does her best to share as much information as she can and include others in decisions. During our interview she talked about “opening up the information
pipeline” and “not moving forward until everyone is moving together”. She spoke about “giving away” power and related a story a staff member told about working with DeeDee during which she said, “no, no I don’t work for her, I work with her” and the great pride she felt in knowing her staff view their working relationship with her in the same way she does.

DeeDee acknowledges that trust is an essential component to building relationships centered on inclusiveness and empowerment. She realizes that trust-building in a community takes a long time and as the first president on her newly-formed campus, comes face-to-face with the reality of that in her daily interactions. For example, “There was a decision on the table this week and they all looked at me. And I said, why are you looking at me, this is your decision, how should we do it?” DeeDee talked about how staff she is working with are not used to doing business in the way she believes in leading. “And it takes a while to learn it and to trust it, to trust that this is really what we do here”. Trust also comes into play for DeeDee in regards to taking care of herself. In a stressful position like the presidency it is important to have a network of individuals who are “dealing with the same kinds of things that you are, that you can trust and truly let you hair down, take off your shoes, eat, be real.”

DeeDee describes herself as transparent and indicates authenticity is a core value for her. “I try really hard to be honest and true but accessible.” She strives to tell the truth and indicates, “people are going to know how I feel about something”. In addition she indicates one of her goals as a leader is to create high performing and humane organizations. Although these two values traditionally run counter to one another, DeeDee believes “as the world changes, high performance is going to come from the more humane organizations”.

Another quality essential to DeeDee’s practice as a president is a sense of fun. She describes herself as “quirky, I have a twisted sense of humor”. Her appreciation for playfulness comes out in such things as leading the campus in laughing yoga lessons, “dress like a pirate” day and lots of laughter-filled activities during all-campus meetings. DeeDee described one Inservice day where, “We all put on our masks and played “When the Saints go Marching In” and had everyone marching around the room. We do insane things like that.” The belief in empowering others and the goal of creating a campus
culture where there is an appreciation for fun is evident in DeeDee’s description of a recent all-campus meeting:

This year the team took over, the planning team and they had all these marvelous ice breakers where we were doing animal noises to connect ourselves at the beginning. Then, we played Jeopardy, mad cap Jeopardy game. It was so much fun.

DeeDee spends a significant amount of time engaged in self-reflection and prides herself on knowing what is important to her and what she values. She spoke about the importance of knowing oneself and that in positions of power it can become more difficult to clearly understand what is personally motivating. However, she believes it is when a person has a great deal of authority that it is most important to know oneself. In her role as president, DeeDee engages others in her quest for personal knowledge by selecting “truth-tellers”, people she expects to ask her hard questions and point out inconsistencies in her thoughts or behaviors. Although she describes herself as an extrovert, she indicates she has developed an introspective side that needs nurturing and that she has a greater need for grounding than she previously did in her life.

As DeeDee has developed in her self-awareness, she has become more conscious of her desire for an “integrated life” where she is part of a community that shares her interests and values and her goal of bringing the inner and outer life together. As she describes it, an integrated life has less of a dividing line between work and home or “work and self”. In our interview, DeeDee expressed in her current position she is struggling to find the integration she is seeking. In her words, “the spiritual side of me doesn’t have a home here”. She spoke about how early in her career she “didn’t even have awareness that a divided life existed, I just lived it, I didn’t even know it” and now that the “dormant but, you know, hungry part of me” has been awakened, she is determined to “either change this or change my circumstances so I don’t have to live this divided life”.

Participant #4: Debra

*Individual textural description.* Debra, 59 years old, is in the second year of her first presidency at a community college on the West Coast. For our interview, we met in her office in the Administration building. A room with wood paneling and no windows, Debra’s office is filled with framed quotes and mementos including a bowl of small rocks
with inspirational words inscribed on them. Debra asked me to choose her pseudonym and I settled on a variation of the name of the woman who recommended Debra as a participant in the study.

It was clear for Debra from when she was quite young that her career would be in education and she indicates, “I absolutely knew from the age of 16 I wanted to be a teacher”. She attended a small liberal arts college for her undergraduate degree in comparative literature. By the time she was working on her master’s degree, Debra knew she wanted to teach at the community college. However, tenure-track faculty positions were scarce so she decided to obtain a credential for teaching high school and taught high school for about six years, earning an ESL teaching certificate during this time. Debra was eventually hired as English and ESL faculty at a community college where she taught for a number of years, enjoying it immensely.

Debra’s journey into administration began when the president of her college asked her to chair a committee that was charged with spearheading a new campus initiative. The chair responsibilities eventually turned into a faculty coordinator position, then an assistant dean and finally a dean. During this time, she obtained a doctorate in Educational Leadership and Change. She moved into an interim Vice-President (VP) of Instruction position and then with encouragement from the President, applied for and received the VP of Instruction position at another college in the same district. Debra served as a VP of Instruction for three years at which time her President left the college and she was hired as the interim President for a year before being hired as the President.

Debra describes her career as a series of decisions about opportunities that came her way, “some of them I deliberately took and others were just opportunities I was willing to accept”. As a person with a strong work ethic who seldom says “no”, Debra viewed these opportunities as chances to learn something new and create new challenges for herself. During our interview, Debra pointed out one of the various framed sayings in her office, a Chinese character that has danger on top and opportunity on the bottom. She explained:

“For me, every crisis or challenge I can turn into an opportunity. And I actually, I call it embracing the tiger. There’s a notion that if you dance with the tiger the deal is if you get close enough to the tiger you make it hard for the tiger to get
enough space to get a real good bite on you. So just get real close to the tiger, dance, dance up close and personal and I kind of like that.”

Looking back on her career, Debra indicates that each position she held presented her with a series of interlocking systems in which her challenge was to find the nexus at which they overlap. “In fact if I even go back to my interdisciplinary undergraduate education what that was really forcing me to do is to look for patterns and connections in different areas.” Although she didn’t realize it at the time, her liberal arts education introduced her to a way of thinking that would impact her leadership approach. “As I look back at all the work I’ve done since then, the metaphor and theme of systems is where it all comes together for me”.

Table 6: Debra’s Interview Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Embracing opportunity</th>
<th>Being inclusive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Using a systems approach to her work</td>
<td>Supporting diversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing work with meaning</td>
<td>Trusting the process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using intuition</td>
<td>Being humble</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Individual structural description.* Debra’s focus in her work as President is to “do work with meaning” which she defines as doing what is best for students and helping people live the mission of the college which is printed on a small card she carries with her, “Our first priorities are student learning and success”. Part of doing meaningful work in Debra’s eyes is being able to understand systems and design them in ways that support people doing work within the system. “People come in and they want to do a good job. Hardly anyone wants to come in and fail but if your systems are not adequate and not well-designed, you put good people in bad situations.” In addition, Debra’s belief is that educational access and student success is absolutely dependent upon having smoothly working systems in place, “with a poor system you may have obstacles that you have placed in their way that you don’t even see”.

Another quote Debra pointed out from her collection was, “Whether it’s better to do the right thing for the wrong reason or the wrong thing for the right reason” which she indicates symbolizes her work because there are so few decisions she makes as a
president that are clear, “it’s all grey, there are very, very few things that are black and white”. She indicates even when decisions appear to be clear, once she “scratches below the surface” she finds they are “messy”. Debra indicates she uses her internal compass and intuition to help her make decisions. “There’s a sense that I’ve learned to pay more attention to as time goes on, if the hairs go up on the back of my neck, I need to start paying attention.” In addition, she collects as much information as she can from people who are doing the work which she describes as “making sure you’re asking the right people the right questions”. It is a strong value of hers to make sure people have the opportunity to participate in decision-making and that there are systems in place to collect input from others. Debra indicates most of the time she takes recommendations from those who have given input and when she doesn’t she makes sure she has given them a reason. “Most people are okay with the fact that you made a different decision if they understand your reasoning.”

Cultural sensitivity plays a key role in Debra’s practice as a president. “I think presidents have to understand that is a very critical part of their job.” Continually evaluating whether the college community reflects the local community and showing her support and sensitivity for diverse groups is a major focus of her job. She makes an effort to attend campus celebrations and club events in addition to supporting them financially. “I try to participate to whatever degree they want me to.” Debra indicated supporting diversity might also entail “having the courage to extend a hiring search or reject an applicant pool because it is not diverse enough”. In addition, she spoke of sometimes making unusual hiring choices because “you see some extra added value in a diversity piece that someone brings”.

Debra’s work as a president is influenced by her work ethic, a focus on improvement, a sense of humility and her belief in the importance taking care of herself. She describes herself as having a strong work ethic and being driven to do a really good job. Her focus in on improvement, whether it is taking the college to the next step in terms of achieving the goals they have set for themselves or “teaching, training, nurturing, and critiquing” the people she works with. In our interview, Debra talked about how she is continually surprised at the significance of her role as president:
“What I haven’t quite realized is that this is actually a big deal to be a president of a college. And when I go out in the community I am treated with a level of respect that to this day surprises me.”

She also spoke about the importance of taking care of herself as president because “you’ve got to go the distance, it’s an endurance race with a lot of sprints here and there”. For Debra, self care includes having a place she can go where things are simple and restful so she can “come down” and knowing her limitations, which she explained this way: “I just decided I do the best I can. I’m not going to get to everything, I’m not going to remember every name, I’m going to have some missteps here and there.”

Debra appears to embrace the concept of trusting the process in her presidential practice. She indicated during our conversation the idea of a pattern or a solution emerging from a random “loop of activities or movement” after waiting long enough is the piece of evidence that convinces her there is “something greater out there”. Her practice includes taking one day at a time, realizing she can’t control all the factors in a situation, and accepting that waiting and letting things happen is sometimes the best course of action. “And what I’m surprised at is that how frequently even if it’s a very big problem it gets manageable, certain parts of it resolve themselves.”

Participant #5: Teresa

Individual textural description. Teresa is an African-American woman who has been a president for 12 years. She is currently in her second presidency at a community college in the Pacific Northwest. When asked her age, Teresa said, “I won’t tell” with candor and a twinkle in her eye. She asked me to choose her pseudonym and after our interviews, I named her Teresa after Mother Teresa because of her passion for making a difference in the lives of others.

Teresa’s campus is in the middle of a city and the college buildings are interspersed among other offices for numerous blocks. She has a corner office several floors up and windows give her a view of the skyline. Unfortunately, when I arrived at the Administration building, the fire alarm went off. The time we stood outside waiting for the fire department to clear the building cut into our interview. In addition, Teresa had an unexpected meeting come up so had to cut our interview short. We had a phone
conversation a four weeks after the face-to-face meeting so Teresa could finish addressing the interview questions.

The concept of service to others was instilled in Teresa at a young age. Her grandmother had a habit of asking her grandchildren what they were going to be and do when they grew up. There was an expectation their answer would include plans for a college education and information about what they were going to do for others. Raised in a family that valued service to others and social justice work, the importance of doing meaningful work became part of her self-concept as a child. In addition, education was emphasized and her family made sacrifices for Teresa and her sister to be able to attend school. Growing up in the South, Teresa attended a private Catholic school and then a historically Black private college so had very little exposure to public education until she began teaching high school.

Given the understanding that she had received an exceptional education and the expectation that she “pass that on”, it is no surprise that Teresa became a teacher. After teaching high school for a short time, Teresa was hired as a community college faculty member at which point she decided to return to school for a master’s degree in psychology and counseling. She eventually was hired as a counselor, then as director of a grant, then assistant dean, dean, and finally as a vice president. It was the president she worked for as a vice president who encouraged Teresa to attend a workshop on preparing for the presidency. Shortly after attending the workshop, Teresa decided to pursue a doctorate in community college leadership. In describing her time in community colleges, Teresa says, “I have been driven by what I consider to be the needs of students, the voice of those who don’t often have a voice or can’t articulate things in the confines of how we express things in higher education”.

Table 7: Teresa’s Interview Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Utilizing spiritual strength</th>
<th>Building and nurturing relationships</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engaging in spiritual practice</td>
<td>Being inclusive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing work with meaning</td>
<td>Being courageous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operating from consistent values</td>
<td>Being optimistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging in “power checks”</td>
<td>Using humor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Individual structural description. Teresa used the word “spirit” often during our time together. It appears she is sustained in her work as president through a strong inner belief system and the knowledge she is doing work that makes a difference in the lives of many. “I wouldn’t try to be in this institution or try to run this organization without some strong belief, spiritual belief. I believe it is my spiritualism that keeps me going, to do the tough work.” Teresa’s spirituality provides her with a source of strength that allows her to “dig deep” to her spiritual roots when things feel overwhelming and provides support that allows her to rise above difficult situations rather than “wallowing” in them. In practice, Teresa regularly sets aside time in the morning for prayer, for finding balance before her day becomes hectic. She elaborated on the purpose of this practice:

I think it gives me that space and it sets me on that path of knowing what I am to do that day. It doesn’t mean that frustrations don’t come up and you don’t have insane crazy things happen. But it just means that I have set the course of that intent. And I think its serves me through the day so I don’t have to root so deeply for my center when I need it.

Her spirituality shows up in her compassion for others and in the work she does. As a president, Teresa describes herself as a steward for future generations and says it is a privilege to be a president because she can make a difference in the lives of others. She explained:

You see, I think we are the stewards for future generations. I’m putting things in place that’s going to make it possible for the generations of students that we have to enjoy educations. And to gain the benefits of education and so, that’s joyful for me.

Teresa indicates her spirituality is also evident in the consistency of her value system. She uses prayer and contemplation to make sure she is grounded in her ethical beliefs. She talked about the values discussion she often had with her family growing up, “though we may not be the wealthiest family we have values and we believe in treating people well and we do things this way”. As president, it is important to Teresa that she be clear about whether she is making decisions based on a moral choice or a popular choice and that she never act in an immoral or unethical way when addressing issues. One of the ways Teresa determines if she is making an ethical decision is to ask herself,
Could I explain it to my two sons? Could I explain it to them why I do this? And would they be proud of me as a mother and as a person? And you know if I had to second guess that, I’d say I’d probably better leave it alone.

Consistency in action and belief is of utmost importance to Teresa – “it’s important for me personally, I think it’s important for the college and it’s just important in the world.” She wants people to trust that she is telling the truth, that she can be depended on, and that she is consistently acting out of her values and not from a place of power. “People don’t really care about your ethics and values when they want something, they just want it so you really have to know where you stand on those issues.” She frequently engages in “power checks” during which she asks herself about the motivation of her action to determine if she is acting in a certain way because she has the power to do it or because she is doing the work she should be doing. She asks herself:

First of all, is it good for the students? Second of all, is it good for the college? And is it good for the people in the college and community? And if you can’t answer any of those questions, then to me, you should leave it alone. It’s probably not the right thing to do.

Relationships are central to Teresa’s practice as a president and she believes that being a black woman leader has brought richness to her leadership in that “it has called me to have some consciousness about relating to and with people, being more sensitive about people’s feelings and a heightened sense of responsibility for making the world a better place”. She makes herself available for others and spends time mentoring those she works with. She is visible on her campus and spends time walking around checking in with people. She stated that consistency and genuineness are key components to her relationships:

What I try to do is to act consistently and genuinely so that the person that is present to them everyday is consistent and that they understand that I am genuine. And that I care, that I am fair.

Central to her relationship building philosophy is the belief that people want to be part of the good things that are happening and “if they find out you’re genuine about it they will add to it and will strive to do their very best”. Teresa brings people together to create a shared vision and in that shared vision harnesses people’s enthusiasm for working together. When working with a group, she strives for consensus, although she
indicates this doesn’t necessarily mean everyone agrees. She looks for overall commitment and for why people have agreed. “And I think a leader ought to stir up a little controversy. Check out with people. Why are you agreeing; why do you want to do this; why do you think we ought to do it?”

Teresa uses courage, optimism, and humor to guide her practice as a president. From her perspective, being a courageous leader means being the one to deliver bad news to the college instead of delegating it to someone else, letting people know when she needs time to make a decision rather than providing an answer immediately, and doing the right thing even if there are personal consequences. She spoke about courage in the following way:

And realizing your actions have consequences and so do you have the courage to do the right thing. It’s not always the easiest, the most expedient, not the things that people will love you for but, do you do it for the right reasons? Maybe even if you’re standing there alone, you hope you won’t be but . . .

When she does have to deliver difficult news, Teresa does so with optimism and commitment to working through the issue. “We can do this. We got ourselves in it and we can get ourselves out and we can move forward with strength.” From her perspective, if people at the college are grounded in the core mission of serving students, there is a solution to every problem. And, her optimism is evident when she says, “even on the worst day there are some good things happening here”. Knowing changes are occurring in people’s lives because of work being done at her college is “heady stuff” and keeps her going at difficult times. Teresa also uses humor in her leadership; she likes to laugh with people and believes humor makes her more real to others. “If I made a mistake I like to use humor because that’s what gets me through. I will say, ‘well I’m sorry I’ve made a mistake, I’m working on perfection but it has eluded me’”.

Composite Textural and Structural Descriptions

In phenomenological analysis, after an individual profile for each participant is written, the next step is to develop a composite textural description from the individual textual descriptions. Table 8 provides a summary of the themes that came out for the composite textural and structural descriptions. To write a composite textual description the individual meanings and themes for each participant are analyzed in order to create a description of the experiences of the group as a whole (Moustakas, 1994). In this study,
the composite textual description focuses on the commonalities that arose in regards to the path the participants took to the presidency.

Following the composite textural description, the next step is to develop a composite structural description, a way of understanding how the participants as a group experience what they experience (Moustakas, 1994). Developing a composite structural description involves using Imaginative Variation (Moustakas, 1994) which includes exploring a variety of possible structural meanings, recognizing the underlying context that account for the emerging themes, considering how the context may affect thoughts and feelings of the participants, and by using examples that vividly illustrate the experience of the phenomenon. In this study, the composite structural description focuses on the common beliefs shared by the participants about what it means to be a president.

Table 8
Composite Textural and Structural Description Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composite Textural Description Themes</th>
<th>Composite Structural Description Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Influence of family and own educational experience</td>
<td>Entered the presidency with a clear sense of why they wanted it and what they would bring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not start career with goal of becoming a president</td>
<td>Clear sense of the responsibility and commitment that comes with the position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obtained doctorate after working in the community college system</td>
<td>Personal growth that occurred for them while serving as president</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others influenced their decision to apply for a presidency</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Composite Textural Description*

At the beginning of our interviews, I asked each participant to talk about her journey to the presidency. It was by way of this reflection that four commonalities were revealed about the paths they took and the influences that impacted them along the road to becoming president. First, family and their own educational experiences were important influences for the women in choosing their career paths. Second, all the participants obtained their doctorates after working in the community college system and
third, none of them started their careers with the goal of becoming a president. Finally, all of the participants talked about the significant role others played in their decision to apply for a presidency.

The participants began addressing my initial question by talking about their family life and the influence family values about education had on their careers. For example, both Kate and Teresa mentioned their families have a very strong belief in education and the expectation was set very early that they would attend college. Teresa indicated her parents made sacrifices to make sure she received the best education possible and it was this exceptional education she received that inspired her to make sure education is an option for everyone. Although Kate’s parents were working class, they had an “incredible belief” in education and she knew at a young age that she would attend university. Kate, Meg, and DeeDee spoke of being the first in their families to complete college. Meg shared that although her parents were supportive of education, they assumed college was not financially viable and did not know how to navigate the financial aid system. She said, “I literally had no guide”. DeeDee related that her parents started college but work and family got in the way of them finishing. She is proud of being the first in her family to obtain a college degree and equally thrilled that her mother ended up going back to college when she was 50 to complete a bachelor’s degree. Meg and DeeDee both started their college educations as community college students and indicated their time at community college was helpful for understanding the experience of the students they work with.

During our interviews, the participants indicated they did not start their careers with the intention of becoming community college presidents. Their various paths to the presidency were described as “non-traditional and convoluted” and “one of exploration and a certain amount of serendipity”. All five women spent several years working in community colleges on their way to the presidency; DeeDee, Teresa, and Debora started out as faculty, and Meg and Kate started in student services positions. In addition, all of the participants served as vice-presidents before obtaining a presidency.

Encouragement from colleagues and mentoring from supervisors played a significant role and every woman reflected on a pivotal point when they decided to apply for a presidential position. For Kate, this point came when the president position became
vacant and others on campus encouraged her and assumed she would apply for the
position because of her success as a vice-present. However, it was not a “given” for her;
she spent considerable time reflecting on whether the position was a good fit for her and
whether she was a good fit for the institution. During our interview she spoke of
processing her decision with her husband and when he pointed out she had replaced “if I
become president” with “when I become president”, she knew she had made her decision.

For Meg, the process of deciding to apply for the position included a realization
that in order to have the kind of work environment she desired she either needed to leave
the institution or go through the process of applying for the presidency so she could
create the work environment she wanted. Furthermore, she believed strongly the kind of
leadership she could provide was what the institution needed. She also spoke of the
mentoring she received from the former president who affirmed the strengths she could
bring to the position.

DeeDee was heavily recruited to the presidential position she currently occupies.
Although it was not her intention to seek a presidency, it was the encouragement and
praise she received from the provost of the institution that motivated her to consider and
apply for the position. From DeeDee’s perspective, arriving at a presidential position has
everything to do with relationships she has developed throughout her career. This “web
of connections” has been a central influence on the direction she has taken in her life.

Debora, like Meg, decided to apply for the presidential position because she knew
she’d rather work for herself than someone else. She served as the vice-president at the
institution where she became president and for her, this was helpful because it “took a lot
of the mystery out” of the position and allowed her to go into the position with her “eyes
open” and know very clearly what she was getting into. From Debra’s perspective, in
addition to encouragement and support from others, she is in the presidency because she
has intentionally turned challenges into opportunities.

Although early in her career Teresa never saw herself as a president, she did see
herself doing something important. For her, a job was important as long as she could
make significant changes for students. Eventually she began to see that she could do as
well or better at accomplishing the mission of serving students than some of the
presidents she observed. And, with others telling her, “you can be a president, you should
be a president” and mentoring from the president she worked for as a vice-president, she decided to go through the application process.

*Composite Structural Description*

The composite structural description provides an interpretation for the common beliefs held by the participants about what it means to be a president. Three potential themes appeared during the analysis of the data.

First, all five of the participants were very intentional about entering into the presidency. The applied for their presidencies having a clear sense of why they wanted the position and what they would bring to it. For Kate this process included reflection about whether she wanted the position for the power it brought with it, asking herself what she could do that would be different than what the institution currently had, and what the institution needed at the time she was applying for the presidency. Meg went through a similar process where she asked herself what she could bring to the institution and came to the conclusion that she had unique skills and experience that could benefit the college. In DeeDee’s case, she talked about needing to do the “trust walk” in accepting the position not knowing which campus she was going to lead but knowing she would be placed where her gifts were most needed. Debra, like Meg, knew she could be the kind of leader she wanted to work for. Teresa knew she would bring needed change to the college and the community and also brought clear motivation of providing a voice for students and community members who didn’t know how to articulate their own voices within the confines of higher education.

Second, among all five participants there was a consistent theme of having a clear sense of the accountability and commitment that comes with being a president. Kate spoke about the work as a president being a privilege because she has the opportunity to make a real difference and of doing work that really matters. She also reflected on her belief that she is responsible for not leaving work undone and for leaving things in a better state than she found them. Meg described the presidency as a “scary celebration” in that she carries a certain amount of fear about being the kind of role model who exhibits the right kind of practice for others and needing to be aware of the scope of her influence so that she never uses power inappropriately. Like Kate, Meg believes in using her position as president to make a difference in the lives of others, continuing the legacy
the previous president started, and thinking about the quality of the footprint she leaves. DeeDee spoke about feeling awe for the work being done and indicated she loves having enough positional power to bring resources and people together to do marvelous things. Debra indicated she is continually surprised at what a significant role being a president is and that she has an obligation to do her best to ensure the college mission is carried out for the students. She said, “I’m so focused on the work that goes on behind the scenes, and there’s not much glamorous about that, when I’m introduced as the president it is always for me a sort of revelation”. Like Kate, Teresa describes being a president as a privilege and believes she is a steward for future generations, “I came here not to just maintain the culture but to improve it”.

Third, all of the participants spoke about what they learned through the difficult experiences they have had during their presidency and the importance of knowing themselves. Kate indicated she has become much better at not taking things personally, and understands the importance of thinking about what is really going on and being clear about what she is able to do about the situation. Meg understands in her first presidency she made the mistake of allowing an ethical disagreement to become personal and believes she is a better leader today because of what she learned through this difficult experience. She also spoke about the ongoing process of looking at her leadership performance to determine if her values are being exhibited through her leadership and if not, what she needs to do to change that. DeeDee is struggling with finding a community in her current work setting where she can feel like her work life and her spiritual life are integrated. She spoke about her awareness of the ineffectiveness of using her position to make changes that would benefit her but not be good for the institution. Debra learned early on in her presidency that she had to develop a thick skin so she could “be sensitive but have a tough hide when it comes back to you”. She also addressed the necessity of ultimately being the one who has to make the decision in spite of having the knowledge some people are going to be unhappy. Teresa’s challenges come with needing to work with the “naysayers”, people who are negative and don’t want to participate in the work of the college. She has learned to overcome this challenge by focusing on doing good work with those who are on board with her. She also spoke about the challenge of being a woman president who has had to prove herself by not making the mistake of relying on
other’s knowledge about the working of the institution and the power of having a support network of other women she can be frank and direct with.

Textural-Structural Synthesis

This final step in phenomenological data analysis is a process of integrating the composite textural and composite structural descriptions in order to create a synthesis of meanings of the collective lived experience. The process of developing the synthesis is undertaken in order to “uncover and describe the structures, the internal meaning structures of lived experience” (van Manen, 1990, p. 10). This section of the dissertation provides a description of the five collective themes that emerged from the participants’ experience of being a woman who incorporates spiritual leadership into her practice as a community college president. Table 9 provides a synopsis of the five themes and identifies the individual themes that make up the common themes. The notation next to each theme is the initial of the participant who expressed that particular sentiment. Not every participant had an individual theme fall into each category but if there were three or more participants who contributed to a category, then it became one of the five common themes.
Table 9
Overall Themes and their Corresponding Individual Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall Themes and their Corresponding Individual Themes</th>
<th>Overall Themes and their Corresponding Individual Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Integrating spirituality into work and life</td>
<td>Being inclusive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Believing in something greater than yourself (K)</td>
<td>Make sure people know they are influencing the future of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizing the whole person (K)</td>
<td>the college (M)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seek integration between work and self (DD)</td>
<td>Consider the work a shared responsibility and a shared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is something greater out there (D)</td>
<td>celebration (M)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source of strength (T)</td>
<td>Recognizing and acknowledging the work of others (K)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operating from consistent values (T)</td>
<td>Great wisdom in the group (K)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Groundedness, wholeness, sense of competency (K)</td>
<td>Get people involved in what they care about (K)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helps her stay grounded in ethical beliefs (T)</td>
<td>Empowering others to make decisions (DD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prayer (T)</td>
<td>Share information (DD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Careful listening (K)</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Being visible and accessible (K, T)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Let people know you care (K)</td>
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<td>Personal involvement (K)</td>
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<td>Using names and learning stories (K)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Holds care for others at forefront (DD)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Checks in with people (T)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Consistency and genuineness (T)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Mentoring others (K, T)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Being authentic (DD)</td>
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<td>Using humor, having and creating fun (DD, T)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Engaging in power checks (T)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Deciding to apply for presidency (K, M)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Looking at leadership and performance (M)</td>
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<td>Difficult time between presidencies (M)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Knows what is important to her, what she values (DD)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Seeks truth tellers (DD)</td>
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<td>Be clear about why/how she is making a decision (T)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Holds self accountable for learning from difficult times</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Celebrates being able to really make a difference (M)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Helping people live the mission of the college (D)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Work reflects what I care about, who I am (K)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Helping people live their dreams (K)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Making a difference in the lives of others (T)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Doing what is best for students (D)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Service to others (T)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Help others make a difference (K)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Awe for the work being done (DD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Celebrates being able to really make a difference (M)</td>
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</table>
Taking one day at a time, can’t control all factors, letting things happen (D)

Desire to be part of a community that shares her interests and values (DD)

Having work be connected to something greater (K)

Meditating, walking, gardening, something that recenters and refreshes her (M)

Give people the opportunity to participate in decision-making (D)

Ask the right people the right questions (D)

Create a shared vision with others (T)

Bring people together around common causes (M)

Building trust (DD)

Acts out of values, not out of a sense of power (T)

The interview sparked desire for reflection (M, DD, T)

An obligation to give back (K)

In addition, this section will provide insight into how the themes that arose in the data analysis address the three research questions of the study: a) How do women community college presidents describe spirituality? b) How does spirituality convey itself in the reflections, self-expression, and practice of the leadership of women community college presidents? and c) How do women community college presidents honor which expressions of their spirituality they share with others and which they hold private? Table 10 provides a summary of the themes that addressed each research question and a citation for research that identifies the theme as a dimension of spiritual leadership.
Table 10
Research Questions and their Corresponding Themes and Citations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 1: How do women community college presidents describe spirituality?</th>
<th>Question 2: How does spirituality convey itself in the reflections, self-expression, and practice of the leadership of women community college presidents?</th>
<th>Question 3: How do women community college presidents honor which expressions of their spirituality they share with others and which they hold private?</th>
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*Spiritual Integration*

The first theme that arose from the data analysis is that all of the participants expressed a strong awareness of a spiritual force and the need for this spirit in their lives as presidents and as people. The spiritual force was described in a variety of ways including “believing in something greater than yourself”, “trusting the process”, “taking one day at a time” and “knowing there is something greater out there” expressed in this way by Debra:
That notion that you start with what appears to be a random loop of activities or movement but underneath there is a pattern, if you wait long enough its going to emerge. If you want to talk about spirituality, that’s probably for me the piece of evidence that convinces me there is something greater out there. I don’t know what it is but if you can start a random activity and then suddenly create a pattern, I’ve bought in. I’m a believer.

The emergence of this theme provides insight into the first research question of the study: How do women community college presidents describe spirituality?

While there was variability in the way the participants described spirituality, there was consistency in the participants’ reflections about the central role spiritual beliefs and practices play in their lives. For some of the women, spiritual practice includes prayer and for others it includes engaging in activities such as meditation or working in the garden, actions that help them “recenter” or get back in touch with their spiritual foundation. The participants described the impact of having a spiritual force in their lives as providing a “source of strength”, and offering a “groundedness and sense of wholeness”. In addition, a sentiment that was expressed by Meg when describing spirituality was, “I have a very strong belief that our lives have a purpose and we don’t always know what that purpose is or where the path will lead”.

There were similarities in their reflections about how spirituality provides guidance for the way they live their lives. The commonalities came out in such descriptions as wanting to do work that “connects me to something greater” and “doing work that makes a difference for people and for the community”. The importance of recognizing and acknowledging the whole person also plays a part in their spirituality. This belief was expressed by Kate, “I think it also has to do with believing in wholeness, believing that people don’t come to work with just their brain, they also come to work with their inner life, with their soul, with whatever you want to call it, with their heart”. In addition, operating from consistent values, being grounded in ethical beliefs, and realizing “I can’t control all the factors” were used to illustrate how spiritual beliefs provide direction in their lives. The participants also expressed a yearning to find greater integration with their spiritual selves. For example, DeeDee talked wanting to find a work community that shares her interests and values and Teresa indicated she struggles to find time for meditation and prayer: “I’m having to wrestle with myself a little more to
set aside time in the morning where I start off with that consciousness about spirituality and getting myself adjusted to do the good for the day.”

In addition to providing insight into the first research question, the theme of spirituality shed some light on the third research question: How do women community college presidents honor which expressions of their spirituality they share with others and which they hold private? The participants see a difference between spirituality and religion and for those who participate in an organized religion it is important for the religious part of them not show up in their work. From their perspective, talking openly about their religious practice could cause people to expect preferential treatment, feel alienated, or proselytized to. Kate explained, “I don’t think there’s a place for religion because it could be seen that, you know, that we are getting preferential treatment or that some other religion is not accepted”. At the same time, the participants were comfortable with their spirituality being expressed at work through compassion, fairness, engaging in work that makes a difference for individuals and the community and using poetry and music in presentations to the college community.

I think spirituality can come out in who you are. I think that is different from religion and I’m very careful about that. I think there is a place for spirituality in an organization but I don’t think there is a place for religion. I don’t ever quote the Bible or the Koran or any other holy book in speeches. Because I think it is better to keep that separate. (Kate, 2008)

**Being Inclusive**

The second theme that arose in the data analysis, the importance of being inclusive, provides insight into the second research question, How does spirituality convey itself in the reflections, self-expression, and practice of the leadership of women community college presidents?

Being an inclusive president was a common theme across all the interviews. A commitment to including others in decision making, planning, and celebration was evident in the ways the women described their practice. In regards to decision making, comments such as “empowering others to make decisions”, “giving people the opportunity to participate in decision-making”, and “asking the right people the right questions” provided insight into how the value of inclusiveness is put into practice for the women in this study.
In addition, there was a belief for the women that there is wisdom in groups of people thinking together so when planning it makes sense to create a shared vision with others, get people involved in what they care about, and bring people together around common causes. Kate explained, “If you get the people in the room that are passionate about things, the right things will happen.” Meg spoke about genuine consensus – being able to discern when people are really ready to move forward or when the conversation “needs to be held in order to continue to identify the questions that still need to be answered before we move on”.

Even in celebration inclusiveness is a central value for the participants. Meg described the work of the college as a “shared celebration” and explained she lets people know this by making sure they know they are influencing the direction of the college. Kate spoke about her practice of reading a list of contributions and accomplishments made by employees at the college’s monthly board meeting while other participants talked about making personal commitments to know about and recognize special events in the lives of college employees.

**Building and Nurturing Relationships**

During our interviews, all of the participants reflected on the importance of building and nurturing relationships in their work, providing insight into the second research question: How does spirituality convey itself in the reflections, self-expression, and practice of the leadership of women community college presidents?

Many examples were given about how the women build and nurture relationships including using peoples’ names and learning their stories, checking in with people, engaging in careful listening, demonstrating care through personal interaction, serving as a mentor, using humor, and creating and having fun. Meg spoke about how she sensed upon seeing an employee’s body language that something was not Ok with him. She described how she asked him if he wanted to talk or if he wanted some space and his reply that eventually he wanted to talk but at the moment he needed some time to process. “It is about giving people the comfort of knowing they can have the kind of conversations they need and that you sense when there is something that’s difficult that they are really struggling with.” In addition, the participants identified characteristics they believe help create the conditions for strong relationships including being authentic,
consistent, trustworthy and genuine, holding care for others at the forefront of their work, and being accessible and visible.

The participants reflected on how strong, positive relationships provide the necessary foundation of trust for them to be able to be effective in their jobs. During the interviews they discussed how relationships made it easier to make difficult decisions because people who were affected by the decision knew their concerns and interests were considered. They spoke of the central role relationships play in approaching donors because those being asked for money “trust the college is being well run and know I’m here”. And, they talked about how mentoring relationships, described by DeeDee as “the web of connection”, with others, helped them advance in their professional lives. “You have to recognize that we are all interdependent and you are in a place because other people have helped you get there.” (Kate, 2008) In addition, several of the women spoke about the importance of having relationships with others in their lives who support, encourage, and challenge them as well as “keep me grounded and remind me who I really am”. (Meg, 2008) DeeDee explained, “You have to have someone to commiserate with, fuss with, get over it and go on”.

Engaging in Self Reflection

Taking the time to engage in self-reflection rose to the top as another theme in the data analysis process and also helps provide some clarity to the second research question: How does spirituality convey itself in the reflections, self-expression, and practice of the leadership of women community college presidents?

For the participants, self-reflection was an important component to the process of deciding to apply for the presidency. There was a period of thinking, reading, and reflecting on what each of them could bring to the position, whether it matched with their personal interests and values and whether their skills were the ones needed by the institution. Debra explained, “I felt like the jobs I had, all the little stops, not getting jobs, making mistakes and having to face that, and refine and grow, and develop internally, all prepared me for the presidency.” Self-reflection was also tied to periods of growth and learning. Meg spoke about a difficult decision she made in her first presidency that ultimately was the reason she left the position and what she learned through an intense process of reflection. She believes it is the learning that occurred for her during that
process that is one of the reasons she is effective in her current position and thus “holds herself accountable for learning from the difficult times”. Kate spoke about not getting a job she applied for and how reflection around that galvanized her into making significant changes in her life.

In their practice as presidents, self reflection is evident in the standards they hold for themselves around continually learning, engaging in the process of thinking about their leadership and performance, knowing what is important to them, and being clear about how and why they are making decisions. An example of how self reflection has been used as a learning tool was expressed by Kate in this way,

I think through my career I’m doing a much better job of not taking things personally. I mean when things happen it still hurts, it’s not that you can be immune to the hurt and I don’t think you should be. But I think a do a better job of discernment – what are the things I can do to address the situation and what are the issues where it doesn’t matter what I do, it isn’t going to help.

Meg spoke about her comfort with asking trusted colleagues for input and advice when she is struggling with something and how earlier in her career she might have felt like she was “admitting to a weakness” if she sought input. The means by which the participants engage in reflection includes doing “power checks”, a time of reflecting on why a decision is being made to insure she is acting out of values and not out of power and seeking “truth tellers”, those who will be honest and upfront with her and help her know herself better. The women talked about needing to become very aware of the scope of influence the presidential position has and of the importance of being very intentional about how they interact with staff, how they listen to students, how they create a vision for the institution, and what their presence is in the community. In addition, several of the women mentioned during our interview that our conversation sparked a desire for further reflection on what we had talked about. Teresa commented the questions I posed to her caused her engage in thinking about leadership and core values like she was asked to do in graduate school and DeeDee said, “I like how talking with you today wakes up that little dormant but, you know, hungry part of me.”

The theme of engaging in self reflection also provides insight into the third research question, How do women community college presidents honor which expressions of their spirituality they share with others and which they hold private? The
process of self reflection provides a mechanism for determining what is acceptable for them to request of their employees and what is not. For example, it is Ok to structure an inservice around the theme of “taking care of self, taking care of this place and taking care of each other” but it is not Ok to read a quote from the Koran or change the culture of a college community in order to fulfill a personal desire for spiritual and work integration. Kate explained, “I don’t want to alienate people, the danger would be like almost proselytizing to try to make people pretend to be some way they don’t believe in just to fit my model”.

Doing Work with Meaning

The fifth theme that arose from the analysis of the data was a deep desire to do work with meaning, a theme that provides a response to the first research question, How do women community college presidents describe spirituality? in that it appears for the participants, being a president of a community college is a spiritual job. There seemed to be a deep personal connection when the women talked about engaging in work with meaning that included doing work that “reflects what I care about and who I am” and having a “great awe” for the work being done. When explaining what it means to her to lead from a spiritual place Teresa said, “it means I’m the steward for future generations for this college. That I need to transform it with the help of the people in it to ways that allow for a bright future. We need to have hundred year legacies here.” Specifically, working in community colleges seems to be an essential to fulfilling their desire to do work with meaning as expressed by Kate, “I think community colleges are democracy’s colleges and that we should use them as vehicles to further issues we were built on and believe in”. Meg spoke about her decision to come back to the community college after working at a four-year university in part because she wanted to give back as someone who had benefited from community colleges and in part because she experienced a lack of congruence between the competitive admission mission of the university and her desire to serve via the open door mission of the community college. “The fact that I am working at a community college and given that community colleges are focused on equity and social justice, it is very connected with who I am as a person.” (Kate, 2008)
The theme of doing work with meaning also provides insight into the second research question, How does spirituality convey itself in the reflections, self-expression, and practice of the leadership of women community college presidents?

Differences in how the women defined “work with meaning” is evident, however, the importance of having a meaningful component to their work was universal. A consistency in the personal definition of meaningful work was the idea of making a difference. For the women that included making a difference in the lives of students by “helping people live their dreams” as Kate described:

It really is a privilege to do this work because you have an opportunity to make a real difference. An opportunity to unleash the power and creativity that exists within the organization and find ways to help people live out their dreams and passions and make things happen and make a difference in their own way.

The theme of doing work with meaning was also expressed in their desire to help other people make a difference in the world by educating and encouraging them. Teresa explained, “I have a responsibility for making the world a better place. For helping people improve themselves through education”. The desire to do what is best for students and helping employees live the mission of the college also was described as meaningful work. “If people feel supported, they feel as though I really understand the mission and what the priorities are, and if we are really doing our best to make it happen for students, that is meaningful work.” (Debra, 2008)

Service to others also came up as a component of meaningful work. For some participants this idea came from family values and the expectation that there would be a component of service in whatever career decision they made. For others it comes from a sense of obligation for doing for others what was done for them. “And giving back, I think we have an obligation. If you are standing on someone’s shoulders you need to provide another set of shoulders for the next group. I think that is a professional and personal obligation.” (Kate, 2008)

Summary of Data Description and Analysis

This chapter provided an overview of the data that describes the lived experience of five women community college presidents who are known to exhibit spirituality in their leadership. Section one provided a profile of each of the participants, section two
presented a composite textual and structural description that offered a picture for how the individual participants experienced the path to the presidency and their beliefs about being a president as a whole. An overall textural-composite synthesis, providing a common description for how the practice of being a president is experienced by the five participants as a whole, was developed in the third section. The synthesis was developed around the five themes that arose from the analysis of the data and a description of how the three research questions identified for the study were addressed in each of the themes.

The three research questions that guided the study are a) How do women community college presidents describe spirituality? b) How does spirituality convey itself in the reflections, self-expression, and practice of the leadership of women community college presidents? and c) How do women community college presidents honor which expressions of their spirituality they share with others and which they hold private? The five themes that were developed as a result of the analysis of the data include: a) integrating spirituality into work and life, b) being inclusive, c) building and nurturing relationships, d) engaging in self reflection, and e) doing work with meaning. Table 10 on page 74 provides a summary of how the research questions were addressed in each of the themes.

The goal of the first research question, How do women community college presidents describe spirituality? was to encourage the participants to reflect on how spirituality is revealed through their leadership and what role spirituality plays in defining their leadership. A response to this question is embedded in the first theme, integrating spirituality into work and life. The participants expressed their definition of spirituality in a variety of ways; however, there was a consistent belief about the central role spirituality plays in their leadership. Spiritual practice and beliefs provide them with groundedness and a source of strength and inspires them to engage in leadership based on consistent values with the goal of contributing to the common good. In addition, the fifth theme, doing work with meaning, defined by the women as providing service to others, giving back, and being involved in social justice, provides insight into the first question in that the participants are living their spirituality by the work they are doing.

The intent of the second research question, How does spirituality convey itself in the reflections, self-expression, and practice of the leadership of women community
college presidents? was to provide an opportunity for the participants to reflect on what spiritual leadership looks like in practice and how it is used to guide their actions and decisions as presidents. This question was addressed in four of the five themes that were developed from the analysis of the data - being inclusive, building and nurturing relationships, engaging in self reflection, and doing work with meaning. For the participants of this study, including others in decision making, planning, and celebration, and developing relationships based on care, trust, and genuineness is central to their practice as presidents. In addition, engaging in self reflection in order to learn from difficult situations and make sound decisions guides their practice. Doing work with meaning, specifically within the community college system, is at the core of how spirituality is conveyed in the practice of the community college presidents who participated in the study.

The third research question, How do women community college presidents honor which expressions of their spirituality they share with others and which they hold private? was an attempt to create space for the participants to explore how they discern when to display the spiritual expression of their leadership and when not to, and if the process of making this decision is intentional. Insight into this question was revealed in the themes of spiritual integration and engaging in self reflection. For the participants who practice an organized religion, there was a clear delineation in their minds between religion and spirituality. From their perspective, spirituality has a place in the work world, and religion does not. They believe their spirituality is expressed in the work they do, in the way they interact with others, and by integrating poetry and music into presentations to the college.

This chapter of the dissertation revealed the findings from my research on the lived experience of women community college presidents who incorporate spiritual leadership into their practice. The next chapter will present the findings in relation to the existing literature, offer implications of the findings to practice, and suggest recommendations for future research on the topic of spiritual leadership within the community college context.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to give voice to the spiritual expression of leadership by women community college presidents. The study provided insight into the experience of women community college presidents who are known to exhibit spirituality in their leadership and explored the ways in which the spiritual aspect of leadership is conveyed in their thinking, self-expression, and practice. This chapter discusses the findings of my study in relation to the literature review, addresses implications for practice, gives implications for future research, and concludes with a personal reflection.

Discussion

This section discusses the findings of the three research questions of the study in relation to the related literature review in Chapter 2. The three research questions for my study were:

1) How do women community college presidents describe spirituality?
2) How does spirituality convey itself in the reflections, self-expression, and practice of the leadership of women community college presidents?
3) How do women community college presidents honor which expressions of their spirituality they share with others and which they hold private?

In addition to discussing the findings in regards to the research question, this section describes how the gaps identified in the literature review were addressed by the study. The methodology used was an interpretive phenomenological study that looked at the experience of women community college presidents who used spiritual leadership in their practice. In-depth interviews, typically lasting two hours with approximately five research questions, is the primary process of collecting data for a phenomenological study (Creswell, 1998). The data collected and analyzed for this study included two-hour interviews with five participants. The small sample size is supported by Dukes (1984) who recommends including three to 10 participants in a phenomenological study.

Research Question #1: How do women community college presidents describe spirituality?

The purpose of the first research question was to encourage the participants to reflect on the expression of their leadership and how it reveals spirituality. As evident from the literature review of this dissertation, spirituality is a difficult concept to describe
and define because it is highly individual and personal (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003). It was because the topic is such a highly personal one that I chose not to define spirituality or spiritual leadership for the participants and why I tended to avoid using the term in the interview questions. This allowed the participants to explore their own beliefs around spirituality and not be influenced by mine. The results of our conversations confirmed the thorny nature of defining the concept in that spirituality was described by the participants in a variety of ways including “believing in something greater than yourself”, “trusting the process”, “taking one day at a time” and “knowing there is something greater out there”. The unique expressions used by the participants to explain their understanding of spirituality is consistent with the idea that spirituality can be considered behavior, an objective reality that involves ultimate and personal truths, or a subjective experience (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003).

The benefit of not having one prescribed definition of spirituality was that it encouraged personal reflection for the participants as they spoke about their experience of using spiritual leadership within the context of a community college. Through their reflection it became clear that although the women varied in their definition of spirituality, there was consistency in how they described the importance of a spiritual force in their lives and how spirituality provides them guidance for how they live their lives and operate as presidents. Most definitions of workplace spirituality existing in the literature include the concepts of meaning, purpose, and being connected to others (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000; Conger, 1994; Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003; Mirvis, 1997; Vaill, 1998); the definitions used by the women in this study were no exception. Their descriptions included wanting to do work that “connects me to something greater” and “doing work that makes a difference for people and for the community” as well as recognizing and acknowledging the whole person and being grounded in ethical beliefs. These findings are consistent with Duchon and Plowman’s research (2005) that identifies two dimensions of spirituality, the existence of a clear sense of the contributions being made, and community, the sharing, mutual obligation, and commitment that connect people to each other. In addition, the participants described the impact of having a spiritual force in their lives as providing a “source of strength”, and offering a “groundedness and sense of wholeness”, descriptions consistent with several of the
definitions of spirituality that appear in Table 1 on page 9 of the dissertation, particularly those from Armstrong, Tart, and McKnight (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003).

It appears, for the participants, being a president of a community college is a spiritual job in that engaging in work with meaning is a dimension of spiritual leadership (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000; Fry, 2003; Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003; Pfeffer, 2003). There seemed to be a deep personal connection when the women talked about their work including “it reflects what I care about and who I am”, “making a difference in the lives of others”, and having “great awe” for the work being done. Fry’s research (2003) described spirituality in the context of leadership as leaders who are in touch with their core values and communicate them to followers through vision and personal action. The leaders in this study appeared to embrace the concepts Fry describes by being dedicated to transforming their institutions for future generations of students, committing to social justice and equality in their work as presidents, and living the mission of the community college by contributing to their communities and focusing on giving people opportunities for education. The reflections provided by the participants about how their spiritual leadership is operationalized within the context of community colleges helps provide a clearer picture of what workplace spirituality looks like in practice, a gap identified in the literature review of the dissertation (Duchon & Plowman, 2005; Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003).

Research Question #2: How does spirituality convey itself in the reflections, self-expression, and practice of the leadership of women community college presidents?

The intent of this question was to provide an opportunity for conversation about what spiritual leadership looks like in practice and how it is used to guide the participants’ actions and decisions as presidents. Out of the five themes that arose from the analysis of the data, four of them provide insight into the second research question. Being inclusive, building and nurturing relationships, doing work with meaning, and engaging in self reflection all address how spirituality is conveyed in the reflections, self-expression, and practice of the women who participated in the study. Much of the literature cited earlier in the dissertation provides support for the themes that arose from the data analysis as being elements of the practice of spiritual leadership. Table 10 on
page 73 of the dissertation provides a summary of which citations support each theme. Gaps identified in the literature review earlier in the dissertation included questions about what concepts should be included in the definition of spiritual leadership, the need for a more scholarly approach to defining spiritual leadership in the context of community colleges, and a lack of opportunity for research participants to reflect about the meaning they give to spiritual leadership. This study addressed these limitations by conducting scholarly research with community college presidents who were given the opportunity to reflect on their experience of spiritual leadership. In addition, the five themes that arose from the analysis of the data provide one option for an operationalized definition of spiritual leadership.

Furthermore, the findings of this study are supported by the literature that cites a connection between spiritual leadership and the way women commonly lead (Duchon & Plowman, 2005; Fry, 2003; Gillett-Karam, 1994; Gilligan, 1982; Helgesen, 1990; Reave, 2005; &Rosner, 1990). The themes that arose in the data analysis, particularly being inclusive and building and nurturing relationships, are consistent with Gillett-Karam’s (1994) research on community college presidents. She found the use of particular behaviors, such as demonstrating caring and respect for individual differences, acting collaboratively, and building openness and trust, significantly higher for women. The similarities in the findings between the two studies suggest that Gillett-Karam’s research can be applied to the context of spiritual leadership.

**Being inclusive.** A commitment to including others in decision making, planning, and celebration was evident in the ways the women described their practice as presidents. These findings are consistent with Rosner’s research (1990) on women’s leadership where she found women leaders more interested in transforming people’s self-interest into organizational goals by encouraging participation, sharing power and information, enhancing other people’s self-worth, and getting others excited about their work. In regards to decision making, comments such as “empowering others to make decisions”, “giving people the opportunity to participate in decision-making”, and “asking the right people the right questions” provided insight into how the value of inclusiveness is put into practice for the women in this study. The women expressed their belief that there is wisdom in groups of people thinking together so when planning it makes sense to create a
shared vision with others, get people involved in what they care about, and bring people together around common causes. These elements of being inclusive are also found in the work of Gillett-Karam (1994), Noddings (1984), and Ragan and Brooks (1995).

As a component of spiritual leadership, the theme of inclusiveness is supported by Fry (2003) who described spirituality in the context of leadership as leaders who are in touch with their core values and communicate them to followers through vision and personal actions. His definition of spiritual leadership, “comprising the values, attitudes, and behaviors that are necessary to intrinsically motivate one’s self and others” (p. 695), is assumed to include the element of being inclusive. Support for the emergence of the theme of inclusiveness as a component of spiritual leadership is also found in the work on the dimension of connectedness to others by Ashmos & Duchon (2000); Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, (2003); and Reave (2005).

**Building and nurturing relationships.** During the interviews, many examples were given about how the women build and nurture relationships including using peoples’ names and learning their stories, checking in with people, engaging in careful listening, demonstrating care through personal interaction, serving as a mentor, using humor, and creating and having fun. In addition, the participants identified characteristics they believe help create the conditions for strong relationships including being authentic, consistent, trustworthy and genuine, holding care for others at the forefront of their work, and being accessible and visible. In support of the practices the women in this study revealed, Reave (2005) indicated in effective leadership, spirituality “expresses itself not so much in words or preaching, but in the embodiment of spiritual values such as integrity, and in the demonstration of spiritual behavior such as expressing caring and concern” (p. 656). The participants reflected on how strong, positive relationships provide the necessary foundation of trust for them to be able to be effective in their jobs. During the interviews, they discussed how relationships made it easier to make difficult decisions because people who were affected by the decision knew their concerns and interests were considered. This finding is consistent with Reave’s research (2005) that describes spiritual leadership as an observable phenomenon occurring when a leader embodies spiritual values such as integrity, honesty, and humility, creating the self as an example of someone who can be trusted and admired.
Furthermore, the study participants talked about how mentoring relationships, described by one participant as “the web of connection”, (Gilligan, 1982; Helgesen, 1990) with others, helped them advance in their professional lives. Kate expressed it this way: “You have to recognize that we are all interdependent and you are in a place because other people have helped you get there.” Noddings’ (1984) work on caring demonstrates the links between qualities present in the ways women tend to lead and spiritual leadership, specifically in the relationship-building elements of compassionate and respectful treatment of others and expressing care and concern (Duchon & Plowman, 2005; Fry, 2003; Reave, 2005).

**Doing work with meaning.** Differences in how the women defined “work with meaning” is evident, however, the importance of having a meaningful component to their work was universal (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000). For the participants, a consistent element in their definitions of meaningful work was the idea of making a difference, as in Conger’s definition of spirituality as, “an effort to see our deeper connections to one another and the world beyond ourselves” (1994, p. 17). For the women in this study, meaningful work included making a difference in the lives of students by “helping people live their dreams”. Pfeffer (2003) suggests doing meaningful work is one way the inner life needs of people can be expressed. The theme of doing work with meaning was also expressed in the participants’ desire to help other people make a difference in the world by educating and encouraging them, and by serving others. Kate said, “And giving back, I think we have an obligation. If you are standing on someone’s shoulders you need to provide another set of shoulders for the next group. I think that is a professional and personal obligation.”

**Engaging in self reflection.** In their practice as presidents, self reflection is evident in the standards the participants hold themselves to. They spoke about the importance of continually learning, engaging in the process of thinking about their leadership and performance, and knowing what is important to them (Palmer, 2000). In addition, they talked about being clear about how and why they are making decisions by reflecting on whether a decision is being made from a value system or a place of power. DeeDee spoke about seeking “truth tellers”, those who will be honest and upfront with her and help her know herself better. The women talked about needing to become very aware of
the scope of influence the presidential position has and of the importance of being very intentional about how they interact with staff, how they listen to students, how they create a vision for the institution, and what their presence is in the community (Duchon & Plowman, 2005; Fry, 2003). Support for the idea of self reflection being a component of spiritual leadership is found in Reave’s (2005) interpretation which says spiritual leadership is demonstrated through behavior, in individual reflective practice.

Research Question #3: How do women community college presidents honor which expressions of their spirituality they share with others and which they hold private?

The goal of this research question was to create space for the participants to explore how they discern when to display the spiritual expression of their leadership and when not to and if the process of making the decision is intentional. The interview questions used did not present the opportunity for reflection that I intended, particularly in regards to thinking about whether the decision to express spirituality is intentional. However, some connections can be made with two of the overall themes, spiritual integration and engaging in self reflection.

Spiritual integration is one of the themes that arose out of the data analysis to provide insight into the third research question. The participants in this study indicated they were comfortable with their spirituality being expressed at work through compassion, fairness, engaging in work that makes a difference for individuals and the community, and using poetry and music in presentations to the college community. From this finding I would conclude spirituality for the participants is more about behavior than it is about words; at work the women are more focused on behaving in ways that express spiritual leadership than they are on talking about spirituality. Reave’s (2005) research supports this philosophy as she found in effective leadership, spirituality “expresses itself not so much in words or preaching, but in the embodiment of spiritual values such as integrity, and in the demonstration of spiritual behavior such as expressing caring and concern” (p. 656).

The ability to live an integrated life, where spiritual aspects can be expressed and needs are fulfilled, is one dimension of spirituality at work (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000; Pfeffer, 2003). One interpretation of this finding is that community colleges can be considered “spirit-friendly” climates; work environments that allow for the expression of
the whole person and are “life-giving” (Duchon & Plowman, 2005, p. 814). This was expressed by Kate when she talked about the concept of wholeness and acknowledging that people bring their spirits and hearts to work as well as their mental and physical selves. She gave an example of how she honors the wholeness of people at the college, when she described the focus of their Inservice as being on the Zulu concept of Ubuntu, a word that means “I am human because you are human”, and the creation of a theme for the day of “taking care of self, taking care of this place and taking care of each other”.

Engaging in self reflection was the second theme that helps to address the third research question. The participants used self reflection as a method of determining what expressions of their spirituality they hold private (Reave, 2005). Like the literature revealed (Dent et al., 2005; Giacalone and Jurkiewicz, 2003; Duchon and Plowman, 2005), for participants who practice an organized religion, there was a clear delineation in their minds between religion and spirituality. From their perspective, spirituality has a place in the work world, and religion does not. The participants’ desire to separate religion and spirituality is supported by the idea that viewing workplace spirituality through the lens of religious tradition is divisive because it excludes those who do not practice a specific tradition and conflicts with the social, legal, and ethical foundations of public administration. (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz 2003). One participant, DeeDee spoke of her yearning for an integrated life (Bolman & Deal, 2001), but indicated she used the process of self reflection to determine it was not acceptable for her to attempt to change the culture of a college community in order to fulfill a personal desire for spiritual and work integration.

Summary

This section described the findings of my study in relation to the present literature. I discussed the relationships to past research by summarizing the findings of each research question. In addition, I described how the findings of this study addressed gaps identified in the review of the literature. Existing research provided support for the findings across the research questions. The results of this study were closely aligned with past research in regards to the personal nature of describing spirituality, what spirituality means to the participants’ practice as presidents and how it is used to guide their actions, and the connection between spiritual leadership and the qualities often present in women
leaders. In addition, this study filled a need for scholarly literature on spiritual leadership in the community college by using an interpretive research methodology of phenomenology and following the steps outlined by Moustakas (1994) for phenomenological data analysis. The study also provided insight into the experience of women community college presidents, a perspective lacking in past research.

One gap identified in the literature review that was not addressed by this study was the question posed by Dent et al (2005) about whether there is a need for another theory of leadership. They suggested the foundations of values-based leadership, servant leadership, and other concepts of inspired leadership may already provide a comprehensive picture of leadership. While this study focused on the experience of women presidents within the context of community colleges it did not compare the findings of this study on spiritual leadership to other leadership theories and therefore did not answer the question about whether the existing theories of leadership are adequate.

Implications for Practice

The stories that are part of this study provide an opportunity to learn from the wisdom and experience of the participants. Hopefully the reader will be inspired and encouraged by their candor and self expression. This section provides several implications for practice, although as is the nature of qualitative research, it is likely additional and different implications will arise for the reader. The suggestions that are addressed in this section present implications for practice for three distinct groups. The first group is those who are considering leadership roles and those already in leadership roles. The second group is those who have the responsibility to select and support leaders, and the third group is those who train and prepare leaders. This section is organized by the implications of practice for each of these three groups. At the end of the section, I will provide a summary which includes an overview of the strengths and challenges of spiritual leadership.

Leaders

Content from the interviews that made up the data for this study provides concrete, real-life examples from women currently serving as leaders of their institutions. It is evident that women are critical resources in helping address the challenges community colleges are currently facing and will face into the future. Women community
college presidents who are spiritual leaders, like the women interviewed for this study, have the potential to contribute greatly to the spiritual health of institutions. This study provided the participants with the opportunity to reflect and share how the unique expression of their leadership helps them meet the current and future demands of leadership in the community college. For those considering leadership roles and those already in leadership roles, this study presents vital information that can inspire, encourage, and teach us. Specifically, the lessons available for learning center on the importance of self-reflection, building and nurturing relationships, and engaging in meaningful work.

**Self reflection.** Reflection is essential for creating environments where the connection between vocation and life purpose can be explored and where spiritual awareness and growth are fostered. It is critical that leaders take the time to reflect on why they are making decisions, what motivates them, and what is important to them in their practice. The women in this study spoke about the power of self reflection for helping them learn from difficult experiences, contemplating if their values are evident in their practice, and determining if they are making decisions based on values rather than power. DeeDee spoke about the importance of knowing oneself and indicated in positions of power it can become more difficult to clearly understand what is personally motivating but noted it is when a person has a great deal of authority that it is most important to know oneself. Examples given by the participants for putting reflection into practice include setting aside time each day for reflection and prayer, engaging in “power checks,” getting physical distance from the situation by leaving town in order to have concentrated time to think about a decision, and having trusted colleagues with whom to process difficult situations.

**Relationships.** The women we heard from in this study put a great deal of emphasis on relationships and their message to the reader is it is important to recognize the impact of relationships and the emphasis that should go into building and nurturing them. As Kate said, “that human connection is, you know, I don’t think we can survive without that.” The participants put energy into relationships by being visible and accessible to others, engaging in careful listening, being authentic and holding care of others at the forefront of their work. They attend events at the college, learn and use
people’s names, recognize accomplishments, know what is going on in employees’ lives, and communicate regularly with the campus.

Another aspect of relationships emphasized by the participants is encouraging other women to move into leadership positions and providing support and mentoring for other leaders. All of the women reflected on the impact mentoring relationships had on their decision to apply for the presidency. They gave a strong message about the power of being mentored and mentoring others. For example, Kate talked about the importance of recognizing the support she received from others by mentoring and encouraging future leaders, “If you are standing on someone’s shoulders you need to provide another set of shoulders for the next group. I think that is a professional and a personal obligation”.

DeeDee spoke about the importance of having a support network of people who trust and encourage each other. As more current leaders retire and as the changes in community college require a different style of leadership, encouraging and supporting others, particularly those with a spiritual aspect to their leadership, will be come even more important.

**Engaging in meaningful work.** In a world where people are searching for meaning in their work and for leaders who create environments where purposeful vocation can exist, it is vital that community college leaders believe in the work they are doing. It was clear the women who were part of the study were committed to their work because it reflects what they value. Making education available to everyone, addressing social justice issues, and having a strong connection to the community are concepts they are deeply dedicated to. By doing work they believe in, the presidents in this study provide models for the students, faculty, and staff of their colleges who want leaders who can help them experience a sense of purpose and meaning in their study and work. The women who participated in the study felt strongly that working in community colleges was about finding ways to help people live their dreams and make a difference in their own way. As Kate said, “I mean it really is a privilege to do this work because you have an opportunity to make a real difference.” Teresa spoke about her dedication to being a steward for future generations. “I’m putting things in place that’s going to make it possible for the generations of students that we have to enjoy education; that is joyful for me.”
Selectors and Supporters of Leaders

The findings of this study provide helpful insight for those in a position to select and support leaders. The implications that may be of special interest include those concerning the importance of encouraging promising leaders to obtain further education and move into higher level positions and the significance of hiring people who can help address the spiritual needs of employees.

Supporting and mentoring. All five of the participants in the study spoke about the influence others had in their decision to apply for the presidency. Several of them indicated they did not see themselves as vice presidents or presidents until someone else planted the seed for them. From influential people they heard comments such as, “I think you’ve got both the credentials and the experience that you need for this kind of work and you would be a good colleague so you need to consider this” and “You can be a president. And you should be a president.” In addition, receiving mentoring from current and former presidents was important in the professional paths of the women. Some were mentored by the presidents they were potentially replacing, others by presidents they had worked with at other colleges. In regards to this, Meg said, “I received mentoring from the former president who affirmed what he felt the strengths were that I could bring to that kind of position. And then did some very proactive work with me with respect to some of the pieces I didn’t have.” It is clear from hearing their experience, if we want strong women leaders running our colleges in the future it is essential that we take note of qualified, talented women and be intentional about encouraging them to take the next step while supporting them along the way.

Meeting spiritual needs. As the literature review of this study indicates, people in many workplaces are expressing an increase in their desire for spiritual fulfillment at work. Kate expressed the trend in this way: “people don’t come to work with just their brain, they come to work with their inner life, with their soul. . .and you need all of that in the workplace for it to be a healthy workplace.” The growing need for workplace cultures and leadership that celebrate the whole individual, including the spiritual self, points to the importance of hiring leaders who can create the type of environment that allows the spiritual needs of employees to be met. Those who hire administrators of colleges need to look for candidates who demonstrate self-awareness, acknowledge the
whole person, and are able to lead with compassion and with heart, in addition to intellect. In addition, it is suggested that supporters of leaders encourage leaders to find ways to express their own spirituality in their leadership, such as through being inclusive, building and nurturing relationships, and talking about why their work has meaning for them. Through modeling spiritual practices, like incorporating music and poetry into presentations to the college, using inspirational quotes in college-wide emails, and being open to an Inservice theme based on “taking care of self, taking care of this place, and taking care of each other” like Kate was, leaders open the door for employees to express their own spirituality. Finding a spiritual home at work increases the potential for people to live an integrated life, experience a sense of meaning and purpose at work, and feel connected to one another and to the workplace community.

Trainers of Leaders

There are implications from the findings of this study for those who train current and future leaders. The women who participated in the study spoke about the importance of reflection, specifically in regards to knowing what is important to them and why they are making decisions. As Meg explained,

> It’s never underestimating the influential power, never using it inappropriately. So, I carry a certain amount of fear with me about am I setting the right kind of model, am I exhibiting the right kind of practice for people. And if it isn’t right, if it’s not well thought out, practiced, respectful, boy I could be creating a whole lot of chaos somewhere else.

They also reflected on the value of incorporating a spiritual component into their life and work. For example, Teresa said, “when it seems too overwhelming I go to my spiritual roots and my spiritual self and being. I call it well-spring, you know prayer, contemplation, making sure that I’m grounded in the ethics and the real values.” The literature review indicated people want their spiritual side fulfilled through engaging in meaningful work. The experience of the participants combined with what the literature is saying provides a strong rationale for incorporating a spiritual aspect into training programs for current and future leaders, specifically in regards to the development of spiritually-related characteristics and competencies and expanding the type of leadership training available.
Characteristics and competencies. As suggested in the literature review, some of
the crucial leadership traits for community college leaders of the future include self
reflection, a solid foundation of values, and a clear personal vision (Fulton-Calkins and
Milling 2005). All of these traits can be described as components of spiritual leadership
and were addressed as important aspects in the leadership practices for the women in this
study. Debra’s personal vision was described in this way, “I really think if people would
say they feel supported, they feel as though I understand what the mission is and what the
priorities are and that I’m really doing my best to make it happen for students, then I
think that’s meaningful work.” Teresa indicated she feels a responsibility for:

Making the world a better place, making a difference in my own life and for
others by helping people improve themselves through education. I honestly
believe that change is possible and that you can solve problems. You try for the
very best solution that you can make at the time that will have the greatest impact
for good in the future.

Taking the lead from the spiritual leaders who were part of this study and from other
current research, my suggestion is that leadership training programs include the
development of the following characteristics and competencies:

• Solidifying core values
• Operating consistently from core values
• Building and nurturing relationships
• Being reflective

Type of leadership training. The relevancy of my dissertation topic on spiritual
leadership was supported by the “Uncovering the Heart in Higher Education” conference
I attended in February 2007. The large number of attendees at the conference was one
form of proof that people who work in education are curious about and committed to
incorporating an aspect of heart into the work they do. My suggestion is that
conferences with titles like “Uncovering the Heart in Higher Education” be considered
legitimate forms of leadership training and that community college leaders are
encouraged to attend conferences like the one I did. In addition, it is important for
educational leadership programs, such as Oregon State University’s Community College
Leadership Program, to incorporate opportunities for students to explore spirit, and
reflect on how it manifests in personal beliefs and leadership philosophy. Institutions that
offer leadership training that incorporates spiritual exploration will form leaders who are
good prepared to model life integration and will have the skills necessary to help
members of their college communities find work that is spiritually fulfilling and work
environments they feel connected to.

Summary

The implications for practice outlined in this section provide valuable information
for leaders, specifically in regards to self-reflection, building and nurturing relationships,
and engaging in meaningful work. The power of being a reflective practitioner, the
importance of investing in relationships, and the value of engaging in meaningful work
were highlighted in the results of the study. The study also has implications for those
who support and select leaders regarding mentoring others and hiring leaders who can
help meet the spiritual needs of employees. In addition, the implications outlined for
trainers of leaders include the characteristics and competencies we should be looking for
in leaders and the idea of expanding leadership training to include opportunities for
spiritual exploration. These implications for practice highlight both strengths and
challenges for a spiritual leadership model.

My premise going into this research was there is a place for leaders who
incorporate spirituality into their practice, particularly within the context of the
community college. After completing this study, my conviction remains strong about the
power and the utility of spiritual leadership. The women community college presidents I
spoke with confirmed my belief that spiritual leadership opens the door to creating the
kind of community that engages in dialogue in spite of differences, embraces people
building their whole selves to work, encourages deep empathy for others, and teaches
employees to become active, engaged citizens who care for their communities. Spiritual
leadership encourages us to be reflective practitioners, reminds us about the importance
of being inclusive and investing in relationships, and creates openings for us to express
spirituality in right behavior and in activities that support others in their wholeness.

However, this model of leadership is not without its challenges. For leaders
comfortable with a more traditional leadership model, spiritual leadership may feel too
open and without structure. It may also appear to have too much emphasis on non-
tangible elements, such as defining spirituality and what it means to do work with
meaning. In addition, it may raise concerns about where religion fits in and how one goes about encouraging spiritual expression without moving into demonstrations that may have religious connotations and be uncomfortable for others. Furthermore, this model is based on the belief that people have a spiritual side that needs to be acknowledged within the workplace. Leaders who do not believe spirituality has a role in the workplace will likely discourage exploration and expression. In addition, leaders who do not recognize or are not in touch with their own spiritual beliefs may have difficulty honoring and encouraging spiritual expression in others.

When considering how to address these challenges, it is helpful to reflect again on Palmer’s (1999) reminder that leaders, by virtue of their positions, have an unusual degree of power to create worlds for others that are filled with opportunities or obstacles and with hope or despair. Palmer’s words convey a leadership obligation to create reflective, inclusive, nurturing work environments for others. We have a responsibility to model personal awareness and exploration, engage in uncomfortable discussions, try new ways of doing things, and embrace practices that are not our own. In other words, despite reluctance and discomfort, leaders have a responsibility to engage in reflection about their own spirituality, encourage discussion about how the whole person can be honored in the work place, and find ways to express and encourage spiritual leadership. By modeling personal growth and vulnerability, by doing work that reflects what we care about, and by building and nurturing relationships we can help create the kind of communities where people are engaged and find fulfillment, hope, and connection. As expressed earlier in this dissertation, community colleges are facing increasing challenges that will require new leadership paradigms; spiritual leaders can create the kind of environment needed to move community colleges successfully into the future.

Implications for Future Research

The purpose of this study was to give voice to the spiritual expression of leadership by women community college presidents. My intent in conducting research with these women was to provide them with an opportunity to reflect on how they define themselves as spiritual leaders, to take a journey of exploration with them, and to share their stories with others. While the results of the study provide an intimate look at the experience of being a woman community college president who incorporates spirituality
into her practice, they also point to implications for future research. In this section, I will focus on five possible future research topics.

1. The experience of men community college presidents who are known to incorporate spirituality into their leadership. The focus of this study was the experience of women community college presidents, however, this decision was not meant to imply that men can not be spiritual leaders. I chose to focus on women because I am a woman and I was interested in engaging in research that had personal meaning for me. A similar study could be done with men and the results could be compared to the results of this study.

2. The experience of people who work for and with leaders who are known to incorporate spirituality into their leadership. Originally, in addition to individual interviews, I had planned to observe the women in my study as well as interview their administrative assistants and vice-presidents in hopes of getting a more complete picture of their practice. However, upon reflection, I realized expanding my data sources would be taking away from the focus of my study - the individual’s perceptions of the experience of being a woman president. A future research study with a focus on what it is like to work for or with a spiritual leader and how that leadership is experienced by others could include additional interviews and observations with those who work closely with the leader.

3. Leader effectiveness as it relates to spiritual leadership. Some research has been done on the connection between spiritual values and practices and leaders who are able to motivate others, inspire trust, promote positive work relationships, and achieve organizational goals (Duchon & Plowman, 2005; Reave, 2005). However, existing studies have not focused on how leadership effectiveness is connected to spiritual leadership within the community college context. Given that community colleges can be described as “spirit-friendly” environments, future research on this topic is compelling.

4. How leaders create the type of environment that allows the spiritual needs of employees to be met. The case was made by the literature reviewed for this study that there in an increasing desire for employees to be spiritually fulfilled in their work. While the results of this study indicate the women who participated receive
spiritual fulfillment through doing work with meaning, the results do not provide a great deal of insight into how they help their employees experience the same life integration. A future study could examine what spiritual leaders do that encourages the spiritual expression of others to be unleashed.

5. The influence of other leadership theories on spiritual leaders. One gap identified in the literature review was the question posed by Dent et al (2005) about whether there is a need for another theory of leadership. They suggested the foundations of values-based leadership, servant leadership, and other concepts of inspired leadership may already provide a comprehensive picture of leadership. Future research could address whether spiritual leadership is contained within an existing theory. In addition, other studies could explore whether spiritual leaders make conscious choices to follow other leadership theories (i.e. servant leadership) as a expression of their spirituality.

The purpose of Chapter 5 was to present a discussion of the results of this study in relation to existing literature, offer implications for practice based on the data collected, and suggest possible future research topics. In addition, because of the emphasis on reflection in phenomenological research, I would like to conclude Chapter 5 with some personal reflection on what I learned and how what I am taking from the process of conducting this study will impact my own leadership as a community college professional.

Personal Reflection

Given that I started this dissertation with a quote by Parker Palmer, it seems fitting to end with one as well.

A leader is someone with the power to project either shadow or light onto some part of the world and onto the lives of people who dwell there. A leader shapes the ethos in which others must live, an ethos as light-filled as heaven or as shadowy as hell. A good leader is intensely aware of the interplay of inner shadow and light, lest the act of leadership do more harm than good. (Palmer, 2000, p. 78)

I believe in the quote above, Palmer is describing a spiritual leader – someone who operates from a strong value system, believes in and engages in self-reflection, honors those she works with, and creates an environment of caring and optimism. In addition, I
believe each of the women who participated in my study emulate the qualities of what Palmer describes as a “good” leader in that they are intensely aware of their shadow side and work diligently to ensure their actions are centered in light. I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to the women who shared their stories with me. As a way of honoring them, in this section I will describe one piece of wisdom I received from each of them. I will also reflect on why the knowledge is useful for me in my own practice as a community college leader.

From Kate, I’ve received insight about staying optimistic in the face of great challenge. In spite of dealing with significant budget cuts and layoffs several years in a row, she is able to focus on “looking ahead to get us out of this. That’s what gives me energy.” In addition, even though she has been offered other positions, Kate has tremendous commitment to staying at the institution because she has a “sense of responsibility for finishing something and not leaving work undone.” I have great admiration for Kate’s optimistic spirit as in my own leadership I tend to get stuck focusing on what I can’t do because of external constraints rather than using creativity to look for possibility. In addition, I sometimes have the urge to run away from difficult situations rather than making the commitment to see them through.

From Meg, I’ve received understanding about the dedication to learning from difficult times. In our interview, Meg talked candidly about her separation from a college where she was previously president and her determination not to stay stuck in a place of negativity as a result of that experience. She said, “I hold myself open to learning from difficult times and I also don’t permit anyone else to determine my self worth.” This is a particularly powerful learning for me because it is easy for me to fall into a pattern of using my successes and failures to determine my self-esteem. Meg provides a strong model for taking time to go through a grieving process, finding closure, and moving on to the next opportunity with optimism and new self-knowledge.

From DeeDee, I’ve been reminded about the value of a sense of humor and the importance of having fun. As I think back on her description and demonstration of laughing yoga during our interview, it makes me giggle. She said, “so I will stand out dressed in my proper business suit in front of my campus during convocation and lead them in laughing yoga and they will do it, that’s the crazy thing, they will do it!” DeeDee
talked about using a “mad cap Jeopardy game” to learn the data points for the campus and how much people remembered when data was connected to fun. DeeDee’s stories are an important reminder for me about the value of taking risks for the sake of fun.

From Debra, I’ve been given permission to not be the perfect president. She was very matter-of-fact when she talked about realizing she should be more visible on campus, “I’m not a manager by walking around. I know that it’s the thing to do but it’s not who I am.” She talked about knowing her limitations and her commitment to “coming in and doing the best day’s work you can.” I appreciated Debra’s frank appraisal of herself during our conversation because she gave me a different model for how I can be in my professional roles. There is something very freeing about the idea of trusting I’ve done the best I can in a day and letting go of unreasonable expectations for myself.

Teresa inspires me with her strong ethic of service to others. It appears much of what she does is guided by her dedication to making the world a better place. She serves others by leading with consistency and honesty, by making decisions based on what will have the greatest impact for good in the future, and having the courage to do the right thing. Teresa’s service ethic comes out in her belief that she is “the steward for future generations of this college” and her dedication to not just maintaining the culture but improving it for “a bright future.” I have admiration for Teresa’s apparent ability to rise above politics and inertia in order to keep the best interests of students at the forefront of what she does.

I appreciate being given the chance to engage in conversation with the women who participated in my study about their practice as spiritual leaders. The insight and wisdom they shared provided opportunity to reflect on my own practice as a leader and think about how I want to engage with others. I seek to embrace difficult conversations, to find ways to encourage people to bring their spiritual selves as well as their physical and mental selves to work, and teach those I work with to become active, engaged citizens who care for their communities. I want to be the kind of leader who expresses my spirituality by showing care and concern, challenging myself and others, making a difference, empowering people to make decisions, being consistent, genuine, and optimistic, and encouraging celebration. It is my commitment to the women whose stories have inspired me and to myself to be a good leader so I can project light onto my
part of the world. I extend an invitation to other leaders to consider doing the same; leaders who embrace opportunities and create hope are what our community colleges and our world needs at this time in our history.
References


APPENDIX A
Recruitment Letter

Dear Dr. X,

I am writing to solicit your interest in participating in a study I am conducting for my doctoral research as a student in the Oregon State University Community College Leadership Program. The proposed topic of my dissertation is Spiritual Leadership: Voices of Women Community College Presidents. The study will provide insight into the experience of women community college presidents who are known to exhibit spirituality in their leadership and will explore the ways in which the spiritual aspect of leadership is conveyed in their thinking, self-expression, and practice. I am seeking access to stories of up to eight women community college presidents through a series of individual interviews. You are being invited to participate in this research study because your name emerged as a community college president who engages in spiritual leadership.

There is a lack of original research on the experience of women community college presidents and on the phenomenon of spiritual leadership as it relates to the field of higher education and, specifically community colleges. If you agree to be a participant in this study, you will be working with me to contribute to the research on women’s experience of using spiritual leadership within the role of community college president.

Your participation in this study would involve approximately a total of 3-5 hours. Our first contact would be an in person interview lasting approximately 60-90 minutes in length. The second contact via telephone, in which you will be given the opportunity to clarify, verify, or expand transcribed information from the first interview, will last approximately 60-90 minutes in length. A follow up telephone interview may be required and if so, would last approximately 60-90 minutes.

If you are interested in voluntarily participating in this research study, please contact me at Kristen.Jones@linnbenton.edu or 541-917-4572. After confirming your interest, I will ask you to sign and return an Informed Consent Document that describes your role and protection as a participant, and will schedule the first interview with you.

Women community college presidents who are spiritual leaders have the potential to contribute greatly to the health of community colleges. I hope you will consider participating in this research an opportunity to reflect and share how the unique expression of your leadership helps you meet the current and future demands of leadership in the community college.

Thank you,

Kristen Jones
Doctoral Candidate
Oregon State University College of Education