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Changing ourselves: narrative experiences of women taking the lead in family and consumer sciences

Denise Gail Fisher
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Changing ourselves: Narrative experiences of women taking the lead in family and consumer sciences

by

Denise Gail Fisher

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Family and Consumer Sciences Education

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Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

2007

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DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to the young women who are stepping forward to take up the mantle of leadership within the family and consumer sciences profession. Your commitment and passion are an inspiration.
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this feminist narrative study was to articulate the meaning and understandings emerging female leaders bring to their experience of assuming responsibility for leading in family and consumer sciences education. Narrative inquiry was used to investigate women’s experiences as a theoretical resource for understanding present conditions and exploring the meaning women make of experiences of socialization and leadership in family and consumer sciences. Interviews conducted with three women identified to be emerging leaders were used as the primary source of data. Through the use of inductive analysis, themes emerged from the stories the women shared of the development of their leadership and socialization into the profession. Themes included: key influences and experiences, values and motivation, developing a philosophy of leadership, challenges and sacrifices, and aspirations. Characterizing these three women’s socialization was internalized attitudes and beliefs that placed commitment and passion at the forefront of their professional development. They expressed the critical role of mentoring relationships in fostering the commitment and passion that led to leadership actualization in their professional lives. Through their experiences they developed a feminist conceptualization of leadership based in a philosophy of leadership as nonhierarchical and representing the leader as someone who collaborates or facilitates collective action toward the empowerment of others or the accomplishment of a common goal. This study reveals the significance of providing and encouraging relationships and experiences that promote a professional culture that cultivates commitment and passion in order to build and sustain leaders.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

If we are to fulfill the promise that some early home economists saw for their profession in the ideals and aspirations we still quote from our older literature, we must have the courage and the will and must gain the insight to change ourselves. I do not say that such change will be easy or that it will be without conflict and resistance. But I believe that there is a core of home economists who are already concerned, who do reason, who welcome filling in the gaps of cognitive development that their socialization into home economics has neglected, and who are willing to risk involvement of themselves with others in efforts at rational discourse. It is these people who must take the lead.

Marjorie M. Brown, Home Economics: Proud Past—Promising Future, 1984 AHEA Commemorative Lecture

Although these words were presented twenty-three years ago, they still communicate a challenge, inspire, and give hope for the future of home economics. Who are the leaders in the home economics profession today? Who is shaping our professional destiny? Who is assuming the challenge that Brown so clearly articulated in her commemorative lecture? The stories our present leaders have to share of their journey to leadership are of a different era—a time when programs, funding, families, and society in general were different. Their stories have shaped the professional situation in which we are managing today. Who are we? What do we, the younger leaders, have to contribute to the profession—to the society in which our profession serves? How will our voices, our decisions, our roles shape the future of home economics? We are the profession’s new generation of leaders. We have been shaped by our predecessors, our professional sisters, our mentors. We stand on the shoulders of those giants—envisioning leading our profession in a new era. We are evaluating the past as we take the baton from those who brought us to
this point. We’re running as fast as we can. *Taking the lead* are young women who are changing themselves, filling in the gaps of our socialization into the profession, risking involvement, and making the changes that our profession needs now to be relevant in a rapidly changing, increasingly complex society.

Perhaps we should embrace the experience of being a young female professional, living, working, experiencing the dynamics of change, of family, of work, of relationships. These women capture the essence of what it means to be a leader in this profession—not yet defined, however, by the profession as leaders within the context of traditional definitions, positions, or honors. The stories of young family and consumer sciences professionals have not yet been written. Those stories have not yet been heard, championed, or embraced by anyone but the voices within. Waiting to arrive may mean it is too late. Waiting to be heard may silence, even further, the voices crying to be heard. Waiting to be leaders may suppress the energy and the spirit that burns within the souls of a new generation of leaders. *This study seeks to illuminate those stories and to shed light on our journey of self-reflection and growth, and our call to lead.*

**Statement of the Problem**

Issues within the home economics profession (from hereon called the family and consumer sciences profession), and trends in society at large, have led to struggles as the field has evolved within a constantly changing and increasingly complex environment. Splintering of inter-related disciplines, program closures, dismantling and mergers, teacher shortages, decreased membership in professional organizations, a seemingly continuous search for identity and lack of agreement and
confusion regarding the philosophical grounding and mission of the profession have forced a call to action among members of the profession (American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences, 2003; Family and Consumer Sciences Coalition, 2004; Simerly, Ralston, Harriman, & Taylor, 2000; Vincenti, 2005). Many scholars within the profession have advocated for a new paradigm for preparing and socializing leaders for the profession.

As Brown (1984) proposed, it’s imperative that family and consumer sciences professionals assume responsibility for changing ourselves. O’Neal and Burdette (1995) concluded ten years later that, “In the 21st century, leadership as usual will lead to the demise of the profession” (p. 80). This statement was a bold attempt to get the profession to recognize the need for a different way of looking at leadership.

Another decade later, McGregor (2006) contended that new paradigms for practice need to be “augmented with new paths to leadership from a transformative perspective” (p. 14). From this perspective, she claimed that “effective leadership is based on personal transformation and reflection” (McGregor, 2006, p. 15).

A prominent theme in recent literature places emphasis on the development of leaders and the importance of leadership in positioning and sustaining the profession for the future. Jax (2000) projected that, “The field of family and consumer sciences requires leadership to thoughtfully carry out its mission as we approach the new millennium” (p. 85). The development of leadership as an initiative for building capacity and managing change was introduced into the profession by Buck (2003) and Ralston (2002). Buck (2003) defined building capacity as “increasing internal and external leadership skills in order to move an
individual, a group, or a project forward” (p. 9). According to Buck (2003), “leadership development opportunities expand an individual’s capacity to be more effective as a professional” and further, professional development is an essential component of building leadership (p.11). Ralston (2002) defined capacity building as a systematic developmental effort that enables individuals and organizations to use understanding to respond to change and create the future. More specifically, she outlined three key elements to foster capacity building in order to sustain the profession as:

- Strengthening the value of relationships where understanding can be shared,
- Developing a “culture of learning” where new knowledge and innovation can thrive, and
- Identifying and nurturing leaders who understand the importance of wisdom. (pp. 3-4)

A contemporary with Ralston and Buck, Clark (2000) identified building leaders as a critical need within the profession. She noted that there were often jobs in leadership positions, but no suitable candidates to fill them (Clark, 2000). Another facet of the leadership dilemma is the lack of a climate that fosters the development and encouragement of leaders. The importance of role models and mentoring in developing leadership was reiterated by Clark (2000) as one strategy for addressing the need for building leaders.

A review of literature on leadership suggests that mentors are essential in providing advice, guidance, opportunities, and support (Beard, 2005; Clark, 2000;
Edson, 1995; Kouzes & Posner, 2002; Pence, 1995). Mentoring as an aspect of leadership development necessary for sustaining the profession was identified by DeMerchant and Johnson (1995) as central to building leaders. Family and consumer sciences visionaries advocate reconsidering and redefining current modes of practice in the development and support of leadership in the profession (Brown, 1984; Clark, 2000; DeMerchant & Johnson, 1995; McGregor, 2006; O’Neal & Burdette, 1995). The literature supports exploration of a conceptualization of leadership that looks beyond the prevailing traditional models of leadership for family and consumer sciences if we are going to sustain our profession and thrive in a new era. The purpose of this study was to explore how emerging leaders are choosing to assume responsibility for the profession of family and consumer sciences. The study gives voice to women currently living and working through the dynamics of becoming leaders. It is critical to respond to the needs addressed by present leaders within the profession, to ask women who are forging new pathways in leading family and consumer sciences how they are navigating socialization into the profession and the challenges they are struggling to overcome to become the next generation of leaders.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to articulate the meaning and understanding emerging leaders bring to their experience of assuming responsibility for leading in family and consumer sciences education. The following questions guided the research:
1. What were the experiences and values that motivated women to actively assume leadership responsibilities in family and consumer sciences education?

2. How do emerging women leaders make sense of their experiences and what meaning does leading hold for them?

3. What characterizes the female experience of socialization into leadership in family and consumer sciences education?

A Personal Perspective

It was the transformation that I experienced during the course of my doctoral studies that gave me the impetus to explore the issues faced by my contemporaries—those who were enrolled in a doctoral program designed to prepare them to be leaders in family and consumer sciences. I was challenged by the work of established and recognized leaders who encouraged me to think beyond my present paradigms. I wanted to discover how my contemporaries were assuming responsibility for the profession of family and consumer sciences by giving voice to women who are living and working through the dynamics of becoming leaders. I began my doctoral work with almost nineteen years of experience in the field and viewed earning a PhD as another step in moving up the career ladder. It never occurred to me that there may have been gaps in my socialization into the profession as Brown alluded to in her commemorative lecture; I was confident in my practice and role within the profession. This confidence was, however, short-lived as I found myself questioning my practices and beliefs concerning my leadership role in the profession. I had been taught to practice from a technical philosophical
perspective and had never given consideration to my responsibility to provide leadership to the profession. What did I believe about our mission, our vision and current professional practices? What was I doing personally to promote our mission and vision? What was my responsibility in sustaining the profession? What legacy would I leave the profession?

A life-defining moment came as I was working on a project during the summer FCS Education Leadership Academy experience. I remembered how frustrated I was by some of the lack of initiative exhibited by my colleagues in my home state of Arkansas. The thought occurred to me that I just needed to get Dr. Beverly Crabtree, a former Dean of the College of Family and Consumer Sciences at Iowa State University and a nationally recognized leader in family and consumer sciences, to serve as a catalyst and light a fire under the family and consumer sciences professionals in my state. As I considered the logistics of asking Dr. Crabtree to come my home state, it dawned on me that providing leadership in Arkansas was not Dr. Crabtree’s responsibility. Rather, it was my responsibility not to be complacent and expect others to provide leadership. I had to provide the leadership that would do the important work of the profession, as well as my own work, for that matter. I had to take responsibility for myself and my commitment to the profession’s mission by assuming a leadership role. I wanted to know how my contemporaries would assume the leadership for the profession of family and consumer sciences. How would we do it?
Significance of the Study

This study represents the first exploration to provide qualitative data on the experiences that encourage leadership characteristics for women in family and consumer sciences. For this study, I chose three women who are living through the experiences of changing themselves and assuming leadership roles within family and consumer sciences education. First, these women epitomize the essence of what it means to reconstruct cognitively and in practice the meaning the profession has for them and their perceived roles in assuming leadership for the profession. Their storied lives and experiences serve as sites for exploring personal transformation and illuminate the sacrifices and challenges they have negotiated on their journeys to become leaders. Second, this study examines a category of women who are under-researched. Previous studies primarily used a quantitative approach to address such issues as professional career commitment, leadership styles and effectiveness, leadership aspirations, and leadership development for women in family and consumer sciences (Arku, 1985; Chapman, 1983; Dittmer, 1988; Goodwin, 1991; McCormick, 1981; Moran, 1994; Robinette, 1992). Although these studies expressed the need for more research on leadership and women in family and consumer sciences, research aimed at utilizing women’s experiences as a theoretical resource for understanding present conditions, exploring the changes women working in the profession are encountering and embracing in taking on leadership, and the context of social conditions that constrain their leadership, are nonexistent. Finally, this study contributes to feminist scholarship as it gives voice to
women leaders and the tensions they confront working in a stereotyped, marginalized field of knowledge (Lather, 1989; Thompson, 1989).

**Introduction of Study Participants**

In order to derive meaning and understanding from women’s experiences of assuming leadership, I interviewed three women who are actively involved in family and consumer sciences education. It was through the telling of their stories that I explored the experiences, constraints, challenges, supports and successes they faced as they pushed for transformation of themselves and their commitment and passion to lead. To protect the confidentiality of the study participants, I have used pseudonyms instead of the participants’ real names throughout the study and reporting of their narratives. All three participants were Caucasian, non-Hispanic women, between the ages of 25 and 35, and had earned their undergraduate degrees in family and consumer sciences education. During the time I was conducting the research, all three women were seeking advanced degrees in family and consumer sciences education through a blended distance education graduate program. I used purposive selection based on interviews with professors in this program and information obtained from the American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences to assist me in identifying emerging leaders who were finally selected for the study. Although leaders were identified in various specializations within the profession, I decided to concentrate my focus on leaders with a background in family and consumer sciences education.

**Stacy:** My first respondent, Stacy, was in her late twenties and held the position of assistant professor of family and consumer sciences at a junior college in
the Southeast when I interviewed her. At the time of the interviews she had just
begun a sabbatical to focus on her doctoral studies. She had earned an associate
of science degree at the junior college she is currently working for, then transferred
to the state’s land-grant university to earn both her bachelor’s and master’s degrees
in family and consumer sciences education. Upon graduation she returned to the
junior college to teach and had been teaching there 2½ years when she began
coursework toward a PhD in family and consumer sciences education. As we began
this study she had completed her coursework and was in the process of writing her
research proposal. During the previous academic year, Stacy served her university
as a member of the Vice-President of Academic Affairs Search Committee, faculty
representative on the Alumni Board, and served on the Homecoming Committee,
Faculty Senate and Student Resident Life Committee. She also served as advisor
to the student affiliate of the American Association of Family and Consumer
Sciences (AAFCS). Additionally, Stacy participates in the AAFCS at the national
and state levels; serves as student liaison for the four student affiliates in her state;
is a member of the National Council on Family Relations and the Association for
Career and Technical Education. Stacy has been recognized on the national level
for her contributions as an advisor to the student affiliates of the AAFCS. In her
community, she participates in church activities and was active in work for Habitat
for Humanity and the local Junior Women’s Club before concentrating her energies
on doctoral studies.

Stacy was born the second of two children and has one brother two years
older than she. She was raised on a farm in a rural community, where she was
encouraged to participate in 4-H, Future Farmers of America, and Future
Homemakers of America by her father who was an agriculture teacher and her
mother who was a home economics teacher. Growing up Stacy was active in the
church youth group, where she met her future husband. She has been married for
five years to her husband who works as an accountant. They hope to start a family
when Stacy completes the PhD program. Meanwhile, two Labrador retrievers are
considered part of her family.

Jennifer: My second respondent, Jennifer, was in her early thirties and held
the position of family and consumer sciences teacher and department content area
facilitator (department chair) in a secondary school at the time of the study. She
earned her bachelor’s degree in family and consumer sciences education at a
midwestern university and during the past five years has been pursuing a PhD in
family and consumer sciences with a concurrent master’s program at another
midwestern university. Jennifer has completed all her graduate coursework and is in
the initial steps of completing her master’s thesis. In conjunction with her work as a
secondary teacher, Jennifer has been hired as a staff development consultant by
other school districts, has served as an adjunct instructor for a technical college, has
presented at various professional organizations’ conferences, serves as an advisor
to a school-based enterprise, and is a co-advisor for a special interest school club.
Jennifer serves on the Assessment Team, Professional Growth Committee,
Standards-Based Teaching for Learning Committee, and conducts staff
development workshops for the district. As a part of her professional development
Jennifer participates at the national and state levels of the American Association of
Family and Consumer Sciences (AAFCS), Association for Career and Technical Education, National Association Teachers of Family and Consumer Sciences, Kappa Omicron Nu, Family and Consumer Sciences Education Association, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, and her state association for Family and Consumer Sciences Educators. She has held several statewide offices and served as chair of professional sections/divisions within these organizations, most recently holding a regional president position. Jennifer has received state and national recognition for her achievements as a new professional in the field of family and consumer sciences and has also received two prestigious national awards for innovative programming she developed and implemented in family and consumer sciences with secondary students.

Jennifer grew up in a rural farming community where both her parents had been born and raised. The oldest of two girls, she was surrounded by extended family, living next door to her maternal grandparents and a few miles from paternal grandparents. Jennifer’s parents instilled a strong work ethic and love for family. Her mother worked in banking and her father worked in a factory, each for over twenty years. Although neither parent went to college, they encouraged and supported Jennifer in her educational goals. Another focus growing up was the importance of family. According to Jennifer her family spent much time together gardening, hunting, fishing, trapping, camping and raising chickens, ducks and turkeys. At the time of the study Jennifer was single, having never been married and without children. She sees herself as working to develop a foundation for a future family.
Carol: My third respondent, Carol, was in her mid-thirties and held the position of assistant professor of family and consumer sciences education at a southeastern university during the course of this study. She had received both her bachelor's and master's degrees in family and consumer sciences education from the same southeastern university that she later returned to teach at after six years of teaching at the secondary level. At the time of our interviews, Carol was in the final stages of completing her own dissertation and preparing for its defense to earn the degree of PhD in family and consumer sciences education from a university in the midwest. Carol is actively involved in the American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences (AAFCS) and has served in various leadership capacities within the state association: president, vice president of Annual Meeting, treasurer, state advisor for the Pre-professional/Graduate Student Section, and chair of numerous committees. Her involvement in AAFCS began as an undergraduate student where she served as chair for the AAFCS (then called the American Home Economics Association) student unit. Her professional affiliations include membership in the Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE) and the National Association Teachers of Family and Consumer Science (NATFACS) at both the state and national levels. She has held the office of president of both the state affiliate of ACTE and NATFACS.

Carol has been recognized at state and national levels with several awards including New Achievers Award (AAFCS), Region Outstanding Career and Technical Educator Award (ACTE), and Young Professionals Award Recipient (NATFACS). In addition, Carol has provided leadership and service to the Family,
Career, and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA) in her state by serving as president of the Advisory Board, state STAR events coordinator, and State Leadership camp director. The state FCCLA chapter recognized her service by bestowing on her honorary membership status and the Distinguished Service Award.

Carol was born the second of five children, growing up in a large family with traditional values. Her mother never worked outside the home, assuming the traditional roles of wife and mother; while her father, a carpenter, farmer, minister and previous electrical contracting business owner, worked to provide for the family. Carol credits her father, who never completed high school, with instilling in her the importance of education and hard work. She was the first in her immediate family to go to college and only the second among her extended family to earn an advanced degree. Carol has been married to her husband for 17 years and has two children, ages 8 and 13. For the last 17 years, Carol's husband has worked for a state government agency which required him to travel across the state four days of the week and be home Friday through Sunday. Thus, Carol takes on somewhat the role of a single parent throughout the week, while maintaining a full-time teaching position at the university, serving in volunteer and teaching capacities at church, and participating in professional association activities.

**Organization of the Study**

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter One provides an introduction to the study outlining what the study is about, who the study is about and the significance of the study. Chapter Two establishes the context for understanding the questions to be addressed in the study through a review of
relevant literature on the historical and social contexts of family and consumer sciences, multiple discourses on leadership, feminist perspectives on leadership, and leadership development in family and consumer sciences. Chapter Three presents the philosophical assumptions and theoretical perspectives used to ground the research and describes the research processes and protocols used for the study. Chapter Four focuses on the narrative professional experiences of the respondents and the meanings they have drawn from those experiences. In Chapter Five, conclusions are developed based on interpretation and analysis of the narratives in consideration of relevant literature.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study was to explore how emerging leaders are choosing to assume responsibility for the profession of family and consumer sciences. An examination of the body of literature that targets leadership and women as leaders is given here to inform the study, and to provide an overview of the historical and social contexts of family and consumer sciences. The major areas of literature review in this chapter include: historical and social contexts of family and consumer sciences, dominant discourses on leadership, feminist perspectives on leadership, and leadership development in family and consumer sciences.

Historical and Social Contexts of Family and Consumer Sciences

In order to provide a framework for understanding, the historical and social contexts in which women in family and consumer sciences must work and lead are outlined. A look at our past exposes how social and historical perspectives have shaped the attitudes, beliefs and norms by which family and consumer sciences professionals understand and interpret their work. Further, this examination allows us to reveal how societal change, stereotypical views regarding women and the field of family and consumer sciences, and issues within the profession have impacted women currently working in the field. This knowledge allows critical self-reflection and a way to search out how emerging leaders are choosing to assume responsibility for the profession.

The Home Economics Movement and Inception as a Profession

The home economics movement began at the turn of the 19th century under the guidance of Ellen Richards. What had as its beginnings a program for female
education, advocated by Catherine Beecher and steeped in the concept of
domicity, evolved into a movement that reflected the social reform of the times.
The rise of industrial capitalism with its various social problems brought about a
social reformist ideology that gave credence to science and efficiency as a cure-all
for the social ills of the day. Ellen Richards and early home economists adopted the
reformist ideology and became a part of an activist movement that not only sought to
promote “the utilization of all the resources of modern science to improve home life,”
(Rader, 1987, p.13) but also to serve as a means to “enlarge women’s opportunities
for scientific careers by redefining the home, enlarging its scope in a manner that
encouraged women to move out of the domestic sphere and into the area of social
and political action” (Stage, 1997, p. 19). As the developer of a new curriculum for
the Boston School of Housekeeping, Richards demonstrated the value of scientific
education for women and domestic science as a means to further careers for
women. She was faced with opposition, however, by those who viewed home
economics in a more traditional light as a way to teach household skills to women
and servants.

It was this resistance that led Richard to initiate the Lake Placid Conferences
as a means to legitimize and upgrade the field of home economics. From the initial
meeting of ten participants, conference participation swelled to over seven hundred
participants in only five years. In 1909, the Lake Placid Conferences gave way to
the formation of a new national professional organization, the American Home
Economics Association with Richards as its first president. From its inception,
leaders of the home economics profession were insistent on the social significance
of home economics and placed emphasis on social and political activism; however, there were competing philosophies. Richards’ held that knowledge and application of scientific principles could be used to gain control over the physical environment. According to Vincenti (1987),

Although Richards recognized that the changing structure of society was influencing the family and individuals, she did not consider this part of the study of home economics. She did not challenge, on a societal level outside the women’s sphere, sex-role stereotypes and the exploitation of the poor. Instead she looked to education of individuals to increase female efficiency and economy in management of the physical aspects of the home as the answer to home and family problems. (p. 45)

While there were voices that challenged these views in favor of social critique and a competing philosophy aimed at raising consciousness and the emancipation from societal conditions of domination and repression, Richards’ view dominated. In Brown’s (1984) estimation, Richards was an authoritarian, charismatic leader who encouraged dependence on her leadership rather than a competent rational leader who sought to “develop the intellectual and social capacities of a group” (p.51). It is this legacy which continues to dominate the ways of thinking and modes of action within the profession today.

Facing the Impact of Societal Change

There is no question that the family and consumer sciences profession is in the midst of transition, an evolution brought about by a rapidly changing society.
Family and consumer sciences is a service profession which, by its very nature, is shaped socially and politically. American society looks much different today than it did just a few decades ago. From 1990 to 2000, the U.S. population experienced its largest numerical increase of any decade in U.S history, with a population growth of 32.7 million people. Over half of the population now lives in suburban areas. There has been a decline in birthrates, while the population in older age groups continues to rise. American society is becoming more racially and ethically diverse. In the last two decades the Hispanic population has doubled and the Asian and Pacific Islander population has tripled, primarily due to a trend in large-scale immigration that is expected to continue (Hobbs and Stoops, 2002).

Scholars within the family and consumer sciences profession have identified an additional number of societal trends that has and will continue to impact the direction of the profession such as: 1) the size of families decreasing and single parent households increasing; 2) increasing divorce rates; 3) increasing cohabitation rates; 4) increasing numbers of women with children entering the workforce; 5) shifting social values; 6) increasing globalization; 7) an explosion of technology that is radically changing our social interactions and the way we work; and 8) competitive materialism, rampant consumerism, and unsustainable consumption (Clausell, 1998; McGregor, 2005; O’Neal & Burdette, 1995; Simerly, Ralston, Harriman, & Taylor, 2000; Vincenti, 2005). Vincenti (2005) stated, “During the past 25 years, these growing trends have become norms that are contributing to the deterioration of the quality of life for individuals, families, communities, and society. They have also contributed to our [the family and consumer sciences profession] internal
inconsistency and fragmentation" (p.3-4). Clausell (1998), McGregor (2005), O'Neal and Burdette (1995), and Simerly, et al. (2000), all reiterate the need for leadership to position our profession to address the impact of societal change.

According to Clausell (1998), family and consumer sciences professionals are uniquely positioned to assess how these societal trends will affect the family unit and help families transition through societal evolution. However, she cautioned, “If Family and Consumer Sciences professionals fail to assume leadership in these areas, professionals from other disciplines will take up the mantle” (p. 7). Although the profession is confident in its ability to serve individuals, families and communities, there is a consensus that we must proactively change as a profession to meet the needs of society and that leadership is an essential component in making the changes necessary. In the future, it will fall on new leaders to pave the way for sustaining and moving the profession forward.

Issues and Challenges for the Profession

Aside from challenges due to societal changes, there are also a number of issues and challenges that have shaped the context for those working in the family and consumer sciences profession today. According to Simerly, et al. (2000) there have been four major issues that have impacted the field: 1) an increase in highly specialized programs resulting in students who do not identify with a holistic perspective that once had been the central focus of the profession; 2) a consensus that the name “home economics” was outdated led to a name change to “family and consumer sciences” that was never unanimously adopted contributing to lack of identity and unity; 3) internal confusion regarding philosophical foundations, mission,
and identity of the profession; and 4) limited resources and increased accountability leading to downsizing that resulted in program closures, mergers, and dismantling of programs. Vincenti (2005) agreed, stating further,

Numerous higher education programs, some of them long-standing colleges of distinction such as those at Virginia Tech, Michigan State, University of Tennessee, and the University of Minnesota have been dismantled. Because of the many careers for women today and because many students want to specialize, only a few family and consumer sciences (FCS) teacher preparation programs remain, resulting in a shortage of certified teachers. We have blamed budget limitations and the federal legislation has drained support from FCS education and other “peripheral” subjects such as art, music, and physical education. Too many programs in junior high, middle schools and high schools have been closed and FCS supervisor positions in many state departments of education are now gone. Federal and state budgets for FCS Cooperative Extension Service are much smaller, compared to a decade ago. (p. 2)

These issues are considered symptomatic of the larger underlying issue of internal inconsistency and confusion. Vincenti (2005) claimed that some of us “seem to be embarrassed to be associated with a [FCS] unit and profession that we do not understand, that others do not clearly understand, and that some of our colleagues perceive as lacking rigor” (p. 4). In Vincenti’s (2005) assessment, “Such inconsistency and confusion weakens our validity among those outside the profession, including students, parents, institutional administrators, journalists, as
well as business, and government policy makers” (p. 5). In light of these issues, it is easy to understand how those currently working in family and consumer sciences education feel a need to advocate for their positions and the work they care deeply about when it is evident that society has devalued its importance and rendered our voices invisible (Clausell, 1998; Vincenti, 2005).

**Dominant Discourses on Leadership**

If we are to explore leadership and articulate the meaning and understanding emerging leaders bring to their experience of assuming responsibility for leading in family and consumer sciences education, a discourse on the current ideology concerning leadership must be considered. In recent years there has been an explosion of research and publications aimed at analyzing and critiquing the development of leadership (Ford, 2005). In spite of this proliferation of scrutiny, the concept of leadership has proven to be elusive (Ford, 2005). According to Ford (2005), “academic analysis has given us more than 350 definitions of leadership...but no clear and unequivocal understanding exists as to what distinguishes leaders from non-leaders and, perhaps more importantly, what distinguishes effective leaders from ineffective leaders” (p. 237).

Much of the research conducted has used a positivist epistemology focusing on the collection of facts aimed at explaining leadership. The earliest of this type of research was the “great man” approach, also referred to as “trait theory”, which made the assumption that there were innate personal traits that a person was born with that differentiated a leader from a follower (Northouse, 2004). Most of this research focused on identifying universal traits in well-known social, political and
military male leaders that would correlate with effective leadership. Some of the
traits associated with great leaders included confidence, dominance, intelligence and
knowledge (Lord, DeVader, & Alliger, 1986). Bass (1990) concluded that having
these universal traits did not guarantee effective leadership. Although there are
traits that contribute to effective leadership, researchers acknowledge that
leadership is contextual in nature as well (Northouse, 2004; Reiter-Palmon, 2003).
Osborn, Hunt, and Jauch (2002) argued that “leadership is embedded in the context”
and is socially constructed within a particular setting influenced by time and history
(p. 798).

The next wave of research which followed trait theory approaches examined
the competencies of leadership or a skills approach. The skills approach sought to
enable the measurement and development of competencies essential to good
leadership. Central to this approach is the identification of skills that can be learned
or developed. Northouse (2004) identified competencies of leadership as: 1) problem solving skills, 2) social judgment skills, and 3) knowledge.

More recent approaches tend to focus on what leaders do and how they act.
This type of investigation examines leadership using behavioral theory and a
process approach. Early studies of this type focused on leadership styles which
have evolved into the many theories of leadership prevalent today and include
transactional, transformational, ethical and value-based leadership. Common
themes among these theories are the concept of the leader as an agent of change,
the leader as a visionary, and the importance of moral judgment. One of the key
conceptions of current leadership ideology is that of inspiring a shared vision.
Kouzes and Posner (2002) maintained that effective leaders must have a clear vision for the future and the ability to articulate that vision to others.

Also gaining importance in normative discourses on leadership is the role of ethical, moral, and value-based constructs of leadership. Apps (1994) stated, “What is important for the emerging age is that leaders have a foundation, an examined core of beliefs and values, that guides them during times of paradox, ambiguity, and chaotic change” (p. 2). According to Hall (2001), leaders and employees in a work setting function at different levels depending on their values orientation. As one develops as a leader, values, awareness and capabilities become more complex. Hall (2001) maintained that leaders and others in a learning organization must explore explicitly what their values are, compare those values with the organizational values and come to a value consensus.

Due to criticism aimed at the failure of research to consider the situation or context within which a leader must function, contingency approaches to the study of leadership developed. Situational or contingency approaches “stress the significance of contextual factors such as the nature of the environment, the nature of the work performed, and the characteristics of followers” (Ford, 2005, p. 239). The basic assumption of contingency theory is that for a given situation, a certain style of leadership is demanded and in order to be effective a leader must determine the style needed for the situation and adapt accordingly (Northouse, 2004).

A review of the dominant discourses on leadership reveals the complexity of attempting to generalize findings concerning leadership. Further it is important to note that characterizing the traditional discourse on leadership is a historical and
binaristic view of gender where the concept of leader is based on a male model (Brady & Hammett, 1999; Chin, 2004; Ford, 2005). Thus, it is critical to explore the intersection of gender and leadership within the social and cultural context of organizations and work settings.

Feminist Perspectives on Leadership

In reviewing contemporary literature on leadership, it is clear that normative ideals of leadership do not reflect a feminist perspective. Feminists maintain that the white, middle class male model of leadership almost exclusively forms the basis for the knowledge base of leadership theory (Brady & Hammett, 1999). The lack of attention to gender and the assumption of gender neutral applications of leadership theory have led feminists to challenge traditional western master narratives. There is a paucity of qualitative research aimed at developing knowledge concerning female leadership. The research that has been done often focused on gender differences between men and women leaders, leadership styles of women leaders, and behaviors of women leaders.

Several researchers have examined gender differences between male and female leaders. Some of this research places emphasis on the strengths that women bring to leadership. Work by Proehl and Taylor (2000) suggested that effective leadership is a function of cognitive complexity and “connected knowing.” Proehl and Taylor (2000) drawing on the work of Kegan’s (1994) theory of development and the model of knowing presented in Women’s Ways of Knowing (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule, 1986), proposed that
a primary basis for effective leadership may be the fourth order of consciousness, the level of cognitive complexity at which one constructs one’s own values system, moves into relationship with (rather than being defined by) one’s relationships, and recognizes one’s capacity to authorize knowledge and ideas. (p. 37)

In order to be an effective leader, both women and men must achieve a level of complexity of the mind so that values are constructed and evaluated. Where men and women tend to differ is in their way of knowing. Belenky and her colleagues identified two kinds of procedural knowing which typically occur during the fourth order of consciousness: separate knowers and connected knowers (1986). Men gravitate toward separate knowing, where they value seeing things objectively, while women gravitate toward connected knowing, which places value on seeing things from multiple perspectives. According to Proehl and Taylor, it is this combination of cognitive development and connected way of knowing, that enables a person to have an “empowering orientation, and to be persuasive, cooperative, and supportive” leading to the creation of “workplace environments that will be critical factors in the success of the workplace and organizations of the future” (Proehl & Taylor, 2000).

Several other studies have pointed out that women in leadership positions tend to think and lead differently than men. In a study that examined the thinking styles of women administrators in community colleges, participants reported a preference for idealist and realist thinking styles (Borlandoe, 2005). Successful women leaders also tended to take negative or critical events and positively process
them or use them as motivators to excel (Chatman, 1991; Rude, 2005). Several researchers and scholars have pointed out that women are more likely than men to have a collaborative leadership style, and rank credibility and trust at higher levels (Baker, 2004; Chin, 2004). Females are also more inclined than males to use relational leadership (Floyd, 2004; Barbie, 2004). Additionally, a theme of the ethic of caring as an essential quality of leadership in women administrators was reported in findings of studies by Barbie (2004) and Hirsch (2005).

Other research has examined the behaviors of women leaders and outcomes for effective leadership. In a study by Porter, Geis, and Jennings (1983), college students were asked to rate the person sitting at the head of the table as to whether they were a strong contributor to the group or not. Men sitting at the head of the table were perceived as strong contributors regardless of the makeup of the group surrounding him at the table; however, women placed in the same position were not viewed as strong contributors unless the surrounding group consisted of all women. This study concluded that context is critical for women in order to effectively lead.

Assertive behavior has also received attention as a barrier to leadership for women. According to Gervasio and Crawford (1989), assertive behavior accepted within the role expectations of male leaders, was perceived as a gender role violation for women. Although many studies report the efforts of women to fit in and lead by adopting traditional male models of tough, aggressive behavior, this type of behavior tends to result in being viewed as threatening and even disliked (Butler & Geis, 1990; Calas & Smircich, 1996; Carli, 1995; Fletcher, 2004). Eagly, Makhijani, and Konsky (1992) maintain that there is a narrower range of acceptable behaviors
for women leaders than there are for male leaders. Chin (2004) stated, “All too often, behaviors associated with femininity are rated as negative to good leadership. Tears have come to signal weakness and nurturing leadership styles have been viewed as lacking in substance” (p. 7).

Yoder (2001) made the point that “because social status and power are confounded with gender, the playing field is tilted for women leaders before they even begin to act as leaders” (p. 818). She outlined strategies aimed at evening the playing field in masculinized settings as: 1) avoidance of dominant speech acts along with the use of humor and respect to others in exchanges, 2) adoption of a group-oriented motivational intent, 3) application of the theory of idiosyncrasy credit where the leader conforms to the group initially while building credit among the group before exerting leadership to influence change, and 4) exhibiting exceptional competence (Yoder, 2001, p. 819). Yoder stressed the importance of balancing these strategies while pressing for the advancement of structural supports for women leaders.

A Qualitative Study of Women Leaders

Perhaps one of the more well-known studies concerning women leaders is a qualitative study conducted by Astin and Leland (1991) in which 77 women were interviewed using a cross-sectional approach that employed separate case-study data sets. The study focused on the analysis of characteristics and behaviors of three generational groups of leaders which they termed “predecessors,” “instigators,” and “inheritors” (p. xvi). The bulk of the analysis was centered on the “instigators” or women leading during the 1960s and 1970s because of their significant role in
shaping societal change for the advancement of women's issues. The findings of the study formed a comprehensive examination of key influences and experiences, values and commitment, leadership skills and strategies, costs of leadership and factors affecting leadership accomplishment. I will briefly outline the findings here.

Revealed in the study were several recurrent key influences and experiences. The majority of the women participating in the study reported a strong identification with their fathers, but also noted the existence of a strong female role model, which was usually the mother. Relationships with grandparents were also deemed critical, as was the role of the family in instilling a work ethic and strong beliefs in social justice. Mentors were not perceived as an influential factor, however, the majority acknowledged that they had assistance in other ways and that often their parents and teachers served as role models. Educational and work experiences were seen as key experiences. The majority of the women held a doctorate degree and all of the participants held a master's degree. They also cited various high school and college opportunities that facilitated their development. As far as work experiences, one of the key experiences pointed to as instrumental to their assuming leadership roles was involvement in professional organizations.

Another theme examined was the interaction between values and commitment, the historical context and personal events. Universally, the women shared a passion and commitment to social change based on a value of social justice. Many reported experiences which raised their consciousness, identification with women's issues and the impact of negative experiences or critical defining events or circumstances. Astin and Leland (1991) concluded that all of these
women shared vital elements that fostered their leadership. These included:
“values that address change, the energy of personal motivation and involvement—
whether from positive or negative experiences—and the capacity to look up from
oneself and out to a society and the future” (Astin & Leland, 1991, p. 83).

Other aspects Astin and Leland (1991) explored were leadership skills,
strategies and styles. They determined special skills exhibited by the women
studied were an orientation to action, organizational expertise, networking capacity,
communication skills and ability to work well with others. In considering leadership
styles and strategies, the women studied reported the idea of being faced with a
challenge as stimulating. When asked to reflect on essential aspects of their
leadership, the women discussed having a caring, value-based commitment, the
need to empower or influence others and the value of being prepared. In their
reflections, the women also discussed the challenges and costs of leading. One of
the most common trade-offs mentioned was the amount of time and energy invested
at the cost of physical health, marriages and friendships.

In concluding their study, Astin and Leland (1991) argued that there were
three significant elements to leadership accomplishment. These included: 1) collec-
tive action or the prevalent conception by women leaders that leadership
happens collectively through relationships, 2) passionate commitment stemming
from values and personal experiences, and 3) consistent performance utilizing a
multitude of effective leadership skills and strategies. They urged two processes to
aid the development of leadership as “the task of identifying and educating new
generations of leaders, and the task of utilizing the reservoir of experienced leaders
to meet the emerging issues confronting society” (Astin & Leland, 1991, p. 160). Their rethinking of leadership serves to illuminate and inspire new possibilities for advancing feminist leadership by examining leadership from a feminist perspective and expanding the conceptualization of leadership beyond traditional conceptions to one that centers on the empowerment of others toward collective action.

Leadership Development in Family and Consumer Sciences

In reviewing family and consumer sciences literature, the most cited leadership model is based upon reflective human action leadership theory. This model provides a foundation for a conceptualization that expands the definition of leadership beyond that of position and management. According to Andrews, Mitstifer, Rehm, and Vaughn (1995), in Leadership: Reflective Human Action, reflective human action forms the theoretical basis of leadership. Leadership is based in the core features of reflective human action: authenticity, ethical sensibility, spirituality, and the features of action. Leadership viewed in this context requires us to “face reality as it is, to embrace the most difficult, to pursue a common exploration of our future, and to search for the common good among the diversity of perspectives” (p. 13). According to this framework all professionals have the responsibility to lead, taking authentic action for the common good. Self-reflection is also viewed as an essential component in which leaders must first reflect on their own empowerment and professional practice and make personal changes. In discussing the element of reflection Mitstifer (1995) wrote that reflection is:

. . . the ability to think about what you are doing while you are doing it. This reflection-in-action implies competence and artistry as well as commitment to
learning through reflection on practice. With thoughtful naming and framing, the dimensions of a situation become apparent. Inventing and testing, a kind of improvisation, then can determine the human action. Reflection ensures a search for meaning, an appreciation of uncertainty, and a responsible inquiry. In other words, reflective engagement matters. (p.2)

Through this critical aspect of leadership development, reflective human action is used to dialogue, share information, accept chaos, and embrace a vision as one’s own in order to make a professional’s practice meaningful (Jax, 2000). Further, the reflective human action leadership model advocates the concept of transformational leaders guided by core values (Andrews, Mitstifer, Rehm, & Vaughn, 1995). From this perspective leaders must clarify their own values and beliefs in order to be able to lead others in what they believe. The values must be internalized so that it is evident in their professional practices.

Other research within the realm of family and consumer sciences has sought to explore leadership development, aspirations, and commitment. Moran (1994) investigated leadership development for college women in family and consumer sciences and found that the majority of the students who participated in the study did not possess sufficient leadership skills, did not participate in pre-professional organizations, perceived differences in comparing the leadership styles of men and women, and felt being a student in a traditional women’s program such as family and consumer sciences placed them at a disadvantage. She recommended the development and implementation of leadership development programs aimed at helping women students acquire leadership skills.
In a study examining the leadership aspirations of female family and consumer sciences professionals, Robinette (1992) reported that aspirations to administrative positions were low, with the position of Dean being the ultimate academic position preferred. She concluded that family and consumer sciences professionals who exhibit leadership qualities must be supported and encouraged to seek out administrative positions in order to sustain the profession and continue to serve society.

Commitment was identified by Gentzler as one of the competencies central to professional development of home economists (1986). According to Gentzler (1995), home economics professionals must develop a commitment that is not merely an acceptance of the goals and mission of the profession, but rather the development of a belief system that promotes action in support of a cause they believe in. Gentzter (1987) stated, “Commitment requires action based on the established goals of the profession” (p. 41). Commitment is evidenced by a dedication and belief in a common philosophy that supports actions implied within the mission of family and consumer sciences.

In exploring factors that affect professional commitment in family and consumer sciences professionals, Arku (1985) found that age, length of experience and type of employment were important variables. When using participation in the American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences (AAFCS) as a criterion for determining commitment, Arku (1985) identified employer expectations of participation in the organization, familial attitudes toward involvement, extent of involvement in other professional organizations, professional orientation and mentor
and colleague relationships as critical factors. Nichols (2001) also examined commitment to the profession. Using a survey of 39 professionals who were identified as AAFCS Leaders or New Achievers, Nichols (2001) reported that motivation for their commitment to the profession “comes from knowing that their work makes a difference to others, from working with colleagues and from their identity and beliefs regarding family and consumer sciences” (p. 44). Participants in the study viewed being a good role model and mentor to future professionals as the most effective way to inspire commitment and transmit the culture of the profession.

While there are many facets and developmental experiences that shape leadership, Goodwin (1991) echoed many of the findings by other researchers. She also identified commitment as an essential characteristic in leadership development and the desire to make a contribution to society as well as the profession as strong motivators (Goodwin, 1991). Experiences that were perceived as having the most impact on leadership growth were participation and the opportunity to lead in professional organizations, and a continuing desire for self-development. As might be expected, one of the primary inhibitors to leadership development was the lack of time due to career and family demands (Goodwin, 1991).

**Summary**

A synthesis of the literature exposes a reality for female leadership practice that is largely dictated by context. In the field of family and consumer sciences the context for leading has been impacted by historical perspectives, societal trends, and internal issues and challenges. While the traditional discourse on leadership tends to be based on a male model of leadership, recognizing the gendered nature
of the context is critical in providing a framework for understanding female leadership and the choices women make as they assume leadership in various settings. Madden (2005) cautioned, “A feminist analysis is useful only if it helps women and men understand and respond to constraints on their behavior from gendered expectations and contexts” (p. 6). Additional research must be aimed at developing knowledge concerning female leadership. Efforts have been made to examine leadership from a feminist perspective expanding the conceptualization of leadership beyond position, roles, and management. Feminine leadership has been characterized by a paradigm centered on process and outcomes where the focus is on communication, empowerment, collective action, and change. These ideologies are gaining prominence within the literature, however in reality, cultural and structural supports for feminist leadership are still lacking.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The central focus of this investigation was to articulate the meaning and understanding emerging leaders bring to their experience of assuming responsibility for leading in family and consumer sciences education. When attempting to discover the meaning of a certain phenomenon, Merriam (1990) recommended qualitative methodology because it helps to unearth “how people make sense of their lives, what they experience, how they interpret these experiences, [and] how they structure their social worlds” (p. 19). A desired outcome of this study was to utilize women’s experiences as a theoretical resource for understanding present conditions and to explore the meaning women make of these experiences of socialization and leadership in family and consumer sciences education. Many scholars recommend the use of narratives for investigating the human experience (Bloom, 1998, 2002; Chase, 2003; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clinchy, 2003; Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995; Polkinghorne, 1995). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) asserted, “Narrative inquiry is the study of experience, and experience is a matter of people in relation contextually and temporally” (p. 189). Chase (2003) echoed this thought when she wrote, “Narration is a major way in which people make sense of experience, construct the self, and create and communicate meaning” (p. 79). Thus, women’s narratives as the primary source of data were used to gain an understanding of their experiences and situations.

Philosophical Grounding and Methodology

Decisions regarding the methodology to be used in conducting research are explicitly intertwined in the philosophical assumptions and theoretical perspectives of
the researcher and the goals of the research. Bloom (1998) stated, “Methodology is deeply rooted in and should be consistent with the epistemological beliefs that a researcher brings to her inquiry” (p. 139). Epistemological beliefs attend to the question of how knowledge is structured and known. The process of searching out my own beliefs concerning how knowledge is constructed, who can construct knowledge, and the process of inquiry that would allow for the understanding of social and cultural phenomena as a human construction led me to qualitative research methodology. Creswell (1998) defined qualitative research as...

   . . . an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting. (p. 15)

The selection of a qualitative research paradigm is the result of an examination of five philosophical questions—ontological, epistemological, axiological, rhetorical and methodological—and how the assumptions to these questions coincide with my own assumptions regarding research and the research goals to be addressed. The assumptions qualitative researchers bring to these questions include the following: 1) reality is constructed by the individual; 2) the researcher and those researched interact, collaborating in constructing meaning; 3) the researcher admits her values and biases acknowledging that the interpretation set forth is a representation of herself as well as the participants; 4) the language used is a personal, literary narrative that places emphasis on credibility, conformity,
dependability and transferability; and 5) the process of research is inductive, focusing on process rather than ends (Creswell, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988). With the acceptance of these assumptions and the acknowledgment of the nature of knowledge that forms the basis of family and consumer sciences as a practical/critical science I find myself agreeing with Brown (1980) that knowledge

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\text{. . . does not come from the details secured in making surveys and performing isolated social experiments. . . . Disclosing . . . false comprehensions is the work of the critical sciences. . . . Since human action has embedded in it the intentions and meanings of the actor, knowledge of human action requires interpretation of those intentions and meanings. (p. 53)}
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**Feminist Research Methodology**

In researching and studying methodological approaches commonly used in family and consumer sciences I found there has been an obvious lack of the use of feminist methodology. Given the fact that family and consumer sciences has been defined as a critical science and identified as a “woman-defined academic discipline” a feminist approach is appropriate (Thompson, 1989, p. 98). According to Lather (1989), “home economics is a marginalized field of knowledge. Marginalized and, hence, unevenly invested in dominant meaning systems, it is well situated to challenge orthodox theoretical and methodological practices. Additionally, home economics is in an excellent location to explore questions about the construction of subjectivities via its
focus on the intersection of family and state” (p. 251-252). Family and consumer sciences is well situated to step outside the patriarchal system of explanation to filter knowledge through a feminist lens. Thompson (1989) stated, “If home economists accept only the exogamic positivist scientific research paradigm, they may flounder because they have defined the research question and a mode of inquiry a priori in a way that not all home economists wish to adopt” (p.96). Although family and consumer sciences has not been renowned for research using feminist methodology, the focus of this research demands a feminist perspective that centers attention on women’s experiences as a theoretical resource to understanding present conditions, the meaning that can be derived from these experiences, and the context of social conditions that constrain young women from leading in educational settings.

Feminist methodology provides “a means through which we may reinterpret the world, others, ourselves, and our lived experiences” (Bloom, 1998, p. 138). Although feminist approaches to research may be “extraordinarily diverse,” the point where they all seem to converge is in concurring that traditional sociological approaches have not fully taken into “account the presence of women in social life and the range of women’s concerns” (Esterberg, 2002, p. 18). Due to a multiplicity of perspectives, defining exactly what feminist research is has proven to be elusive. Reinharz (1992) compiled several definitions in “Feminist Methods in Social Research” but concluded that there is a plurality of feminist research practices and we
can best understand what feminist research is by looking at “what feminist research includes” (p. 4). Reinharz (1992) clarified feminist research as guided by feminist theory which focuses on the interaction of gender and power. This feminist perspective provides a lens for seeing gender as an organizing principle that shapes our lives (Lather, 1988). Lather (1988) stated, “Through the questions that feminism poses and the absences it locates, feminism argues the centrality of gender in the shaping of our consciousness, skills, and institutions as well as in the distribution of power and privilege” (p. 571). In addition, Reinharz (1992) proposed that feminist research is interdisciplinary, seeks to create social change, recognizes diversity, advocates the value of the researcher’s personal experiences, and encourages connection between the researcher and those being researched. This perspective seemed to flow naturally from my way of understanding research and the manner in which I wanted to approach this study. Family and consumer sciences is an interdisciplinary field, which provides a holistic approach to addressing perennial problems of individuals and families; however, it is a female-dominated, marginalized field of knowledge that demands examination of patriarchal structures in order to empower those women who are pursuing leadership within the profession.

**Narrative Research**

Narrative research is a qualitative research approach that seeks to understand the human experience. In conceptualizing what narrative research is, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) wrote,
It is a collaboration between the researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in this same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that make up people’s lives, both individual and social. Simply stated…narrative inquiry is stories lived and told. (p.20)

In this definition, narrative denotes a particular type of discourse, the story. Narratives as story “is the linguistic form that preserves the complexity of human action with its interrelationship of temporal sequence, human motivation, chance happenings, and changing interpersonal and environmental contexts” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 7). The predominate characteristic that sets narrative apart from other qualitative approaches is the focus on the individual and how a person comes to make sense of her life and experiences (Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995). As Polkinghorne (1995) stated, narrative is a means by which people “come to understand and describe the relationship among the events and the choices in their lives” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 7).

Narrative research as a methodology has gained prominence among those committed to a feminist approach to research. Bloom (2002) claimed, “Women’s narratives are understood to serve as a corrective to centuries of androcentric narratives that demean or negate women’s experiences in society. Hence, there are political, moral, and epistemological reasons for feminist scholars to collect and interpret women’s narratives” (p. 311). According to Bloom (2002), there are three theoretical goals of narrative research. First, narratives are the primary source of
data. The narrative is the means by which the narrator constructs herself based on individual needs and societal positions. The researcher’s task then is to make sense of the telling of the story and explicate interpretations concerning the narrator’s construction of self. Second, narratives offer a lens for social critique. We cannot separate the lived experiences of an individual and the societal-cultural contexts in which a person interprets her life. Careful examination of experiences in view of dominant ideologies and social structures can be used to construct social critique and action. Third, narrative research “is concerned with deconstructing the ‘self’ as a humanist conception, allowing for nonunitary conceptions of the self” (Bloom, 2002, p. 310). This lens embraces the ideology that subjectivity, or conceptualizations of self, is in constant change and is influenced by social interactions and experiences. Subjectivity is a continual process within a historical and social context (Bloom, 1998). The use of nonunitary subjectivity in feminist narrative research “encourages women to understand how we can be open to new ways to understand the world, to think about experiences, or to reflect on one’s self” (Bloom, 1998, p. 6). It is with this conceptualization of narrative that I approached this study.

The Research Process

Selecting a Dissertation Topic

Throughout my doctoral studies, my interest was drawn to leadership issues within the family and consumer sciences profession. I wanted to know why some of my contemporaries were driven to take an active role in leading and shaping the profession, while others were content to simply “do their jobs”. What were the
experiences and values that motivated women to actively assume leadership responsibilities, despite the sacrifices, conflict, and risk involved? How do emerging women leaders make sense of these restraints and what meaning does leading hold for them? I felt a passion to be an active participant in leading our profession and I knew there were others that felt it too. How did we develop this motivation, this drive, this passion? Could I influence the development of this passion in my students?

When I had the opportunity to take an advanced research methods course that focused on alternative modes of inquiry, I knew I had found the means for answering my questions. I realized that the philosophical assumptions of qualitative research spoke to my understanding of knowledge. This was not the end of my journey, but rather the beginning. As I studied and read more about qualitative research methods, my dissertation topic evolved. I knew I wanted to give voice to the women who are emerging to take the lead in our profession, and generate knowledge aimed at understanding their experiences. I wanted to understand how they make sense of these experiences as they face challenges in assuming responsibility for leading and directing pathways in their professional contexts.

Identifying Respondents

I defined the respondents for this study to be (1) women, (2) in the age group of 25-35, (3) having earned degrees in family and consumer sciences education, (4) seeking a doctoral degree in family and consumer sciences education, (5) through a blended distance education doctoral program (6) while actively working in the profession, (7) participating in professional organizations, and are (8) viewed within
the family and consumer sciences profession as emerging leaders. In order to gain a better understanding of the multiple perspectives held by women in various areas of professional practice of family and consumer sciences education I further defined the respondents to be women who were currently working in education at the secondary, junior college, and university levels.

I used purposive selection to identify three women as key respondents who could provide information about their experiences of personal transformation and the problems they have confronted as they move forward in assuming leadership. I contacted each of the women I had identified either by phone or email to ask them to participate in the study and to explain the purpose of the study. All three women agreed immediately. Stacy and I met at the AAFCS Annual Conference in Reno, Nevada where we discussed the informed consent document and protocol for the study before obtaining her signature. For the other two respondents, I sent the informed consent document via postal mail, which they then signed and returned to me. Before conducting the interviews, I either gave or sent each respondent a copy of the signed informed consent document and answered any questions about the study.

Collection of Data: Interviews

In keeping with the tenets of feminist research methodology, I conducted informal, unstructured in-depth interviews that employed open-ended questions with each of the respondents (Reinharz, 1992). I first conducted a pilot interview with a doctoral student in the Family and Consumer Sciences Education Leadership Academy at Iowa State University. This helped me to refine my guiding questions,
identify additional questions that might result from the interview conversation, and practice my interviewing technique. In some cases I was able to interview the respondent using face to face interviews, but telephone interviews were also used. I interviewed each respondent two times and although I had planned interviews to last approximately 90 minutes, the initial interviews typically lasted three hours. The second interview was used to clarify and validate data from the first interview and additional questions were raised based on emerging themes and data analysis. These interviews were about one hour in length. I was given permission by each of the respondents to audio tape record all interviews.

**Guiding Questions**

The interview offers the opportunity to access not only another person’s thoughts and memories, but also how each person makes meaning of her life and experiences. Narrative inquiry recognizes that “people are both living their stories in an ongoing experiential text and telling their stories in words as they reflect upon life and explain themselves to others” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 4). The women in this study were asked to tell stories about their professional and educational experiences in their own way through the use of open-ended questions. I used the following guiding questions to direct the conversations:

1. What were the experiences and values that motivated women to actively assume leadership responsibilities in family and consumer sciences education?
2. How do emerging women leaders make sense of their experiences and what meaning does leading hold for them?
3. What characterizes the female experience of socialization into leadership in family and consumer sciences education?

Through this interaction, subsequent questions developed from the respondents' statements, however, I encouraged the respondents to share experiences that they deemed important and meaningful to them (Anderson & Jack, 1991). My focus was not simply to gather data, but rather the exploration of the meaning the narrator made of her experiences. Anderson and Jack (1991) wrote, “It is the interactive nature of the interview that allows us to ask for clarification, to notice what questions the subject formulates about her own life, to go behind conventional, expected answers to the woman’s personal construction of her own experience” (p.23). I viewed the interview as an interactive process aimed at going beyond obvious perceptions to what the respondents felt about her experiences and what meaning she made of experiences. I made an effort to be attentive to how the respondent’s narratives expressed viewpoints that might not be consistent with cultural norms and expected behavior.

Establishing Interview Relationships

Feminist research advocates the fostering of a “sense of connection” between the researcher and the respondent (Reinharz, 1992, p.263). Bloom (1998) stated, “Feminist research assumes that what women tell about their lives, the nature of interactions they have with others in daily life, and the ways in which they interpret their own stories and experiences constitute valid and knowable empirical data: therefore, the research relationship depends on a deep rapport with the respondents” (p. 150). The ability to form this connection is not solely tied to the fact
that the researcher and the respondent are both women, but supported in part by a sharing of cultural patterns that enable the researcher and the respondent to understand each other (Reissman as cited in Reinharz, 1992, p.25). I found this to be true as I began this research. I did not enter into this study with these women as a stranger. We had come to know each other through the shared experience of living together in a learning community over the course of two and sometimes three summers in the case of two of the women, while completing graduate coursework. Although I was ten to twenty years older than these women, we shared the culture of working in the context of family and consumer sciences education. Like two of the women, I had taught family and consumer sciences at the secondary level, and we had all taught at the college level. Additionally, two of the women had been raised and educated in the South as I had, which I later learned grounded many of our understandings. Another similarity was our common social locations in racial and class backgrounds. Our shared experiences gave me a profound understanding as I listened to their stories. Their words spoke to me and validated my own ideological perspectives and experiences. Our bonded lives allowed and created a sense of connection that encouraged the women to speak about their triumphs and failures. Personal relationships facilitated “connected knowing” as described by Clinchy (2003) where as a researcher I was able to “attempt to enter that subjectivity, share that experience” to make sense of responses and construct knowledge through their narratives (p. 35).
Data Analysis and Meaning-making of Narrative Data

The goal of narrative analysis is to “try to interpret the possible meanings of the narrative” (Esterberg, 2002, p. 195). According to Riessman (1993), narrative analyses should be evaluated “in terms of: 1) whether they are persuasive, 2) whether they correspond to research participants’ understandings of events, 3) whether they are coherent, and 4) whether they are useful” (p. 65). I began the process of analysis by transcribing verbatim each of the first interviews. I wanted to preserve the essence of the spoken word so I did not correct grammar or any language structure. After transcribing, I read through each interview and used “open coding” to identify themes (Esterberg, 2002, p. 158). In this initial stage, I was careful to let the themes emerge from the data. Working on the computer, I inserted the coding in a red font to distinguish the codes easily from the original transcriptions. At this point I followed a format for writing “interpretive comments” outlined by Chase (2003) where she suggested at each natural break in thought, stop coding and write about what has been said using these questions:

What is this person doing or communicating (especially if that is different from what he or she is saying)?

How does the interaction between you and the interviewee facilitate or hinder his or her story ideas?

What do you think is important or particularly interesting about the passage?

What social factors (for example, social structures, ideologies, or social processes) help you to understand what is going on here? (p. 92)
This process allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of what was important in the data and make connections between the narratives of each respondent. Esterberg (2002) also recommended this process but referred to it as writing “analytic memos” (p. 165). After coding and interpreting the data in this manner, I sent each respondent a copy of the transcript which included my coding and interpretations as a member check in order to verify the data, analyses and interpretations (Creswell, 1998; Fonow & Cook, 2005). I asked for the respondents to make corrections, to clarify some responses and to determine if my interpretations were consistent with their own meaning making.

In the second stage of data analysis, I employed a paradigmatic type of analysis. Polkinghorne wrote (1995), “The paradigmatic analysis of narrative seeks to locate common themes or conceptual manifestations among the stories collected as data” (p. 12). In this type of analysis the researcher examines the different narratives to discover themes that emerge repeatedly across several respondents’ stories. According to Polkinghorne (1995), there are two types of paradigmatic analysis possible:

(a) one in which the concepts are derived from previous theory or logical possibilities and are applied to the data to determine whether instances of these concepts are to be found; and

(b) one in which concepts are inductively derived from the data. (p. 13)

In keeping with the qualitative tradition, I elected to use inductive analysis developing themes from the data rather than imposing preconceived theoretical concepts. After outlining the emerging themes, I used “focused coding” to group
stories and quotes accordingly (Esterberg, 2002, p. 161). Some of the themes where broken down into categories to aid further analysis and then the data was examined for reoccurring patterns and comparisons were made across cases (Esterberg, 2002). From this process I began to develop the study findings and look for gaps in the data. After identifying areas requiring additional exploration, I interviewed each respondent a second time and repeated the process of analysis where necessary. I used member checks after the final write up to verify study findings.

In handling the data, all audio tape recordings, transcriptions and researcher notes were kept in a locked cabinet in my office at work. For purposes of confidentiality, each respondent was assigned a pseudonym that was used consistently in data analysis and report findings. In addition, an effort was made to protect the identities of the respondents by changing or deleting any identifying information recorded in the transcriptions. This included any identifiers such as names of people, places and institutions.
CHAPTER 4: STUDY FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to discover the meaning that emerging leaders in family and consumer sciences education experience as they assume responsibility for leading in the profession. Each of the three respondents met the criteria identified for involvement in the study. A major portion of this chapter reveals the words that the respondents used as they interpreted the meaning of their experiences. Through their words, this research sought to uncover how these women create meaning in their lives, while developing their professional identities as emerging leaders within dominant social and cultural discourses.

Introduction

There is a deep passion that is clearly discernable when listening to the voices of the young women who shared their experiences for this study. Their passion is expressed in the rapid flow of words that cannot seem to come quickly enough to convey the power of their feelings and the need to have their stories heard. Their passion is communicated in the tone of their voices with a sense of urgency that recognizes that what they have to say holds a place of importance both for themselves and for others who have a desire to lead. Their voices inform their peers and other young women who will follow them as emerging leaders uniquely positioned to facilitate change in the lives of individuals and families through their leadership. It is their ultimate concern for others and commitment to the profession that drives their passions. The women in this study share a commitment and passion to lead in family and consumer sciences education. They hope to be a light to individuals and families whose lives they touch and in the process, a light in the
profession as well. This chapter is dedicated to exploring their journeys to assume leadership by examining key influences and experiences they deemed critical, the values and motivation that sustain them, the philosophy of leadership that has developed from their experiences, the sacrifices and challenges resulting from their leadership and their future aspirations.

**Assuming Leadership: Key Influences and Experiences**

This section addresses key influences and experiences that the women participating in the study deemed essential to their socialization into the profession as leaders. I examine family influences, mentors and role models, education, and significant shaping events. To provide confidentiality, I have used pseudonyms throughout the study findings. Stacy, a young married woman in her late twenties, had just begun a sabbatical from her position as an assistant professor of family and consumer sciences at a junior college at the time of our interviews. She was using the sabbatical to focus on completing her doctoral studies. Jennifer, a single woman in her early thirties was teaching family and consumer sciences at the secondary level while completing her master’s thesis in a concurrent masters/PhD program. Carol, a married working mother of two boys ages 8 and 13, was in her mid-thirties and in the final stages of completing and defending her doctoral dissertation in family and consumer sciences education. She was employed as an assistant professor of family and consumer sciences education at the university level.

**Family Influences**

Not a criterion for involvement in the study, each of the respondents grew up in working class families. Jennifer and Stacy reported that their mothers worked
outside the home, one in banking and the other as a home economics teacher, respectively; Carol's mother was a stay-at-home mom. The respondents’ fathers’ occupations varied. Stacy’s father was an educator, teaching agriculture at the secondary level. Jennifer’s father worked in a factory, and Carol’s father was a carpenter, farmer, Baptist minister and previous owner of an electric contracting company. Only Stacy’s parents were college graduates. Both Jennifer and Carol reported that they were the first in their families to go to college and earn a college degree. In considering birth order, Jennifer was a first-born child, Carol a middle child and Stacy a youngest child.

As diverse as family backgrounds may appear, common threads emerged in listening to the women talk about their families. All three women placed emphasis on the role their families played in their development. Family relationships formed the foundation for the support, encouragement and formation of values these women attribute to shaping their leadership skills. Their reflections reveal the complex dynamics that served to mold their identities in positive ways. The value of education and hard work, along with high expectations were consistently promoted and/or modeled. Carol discussed the importance of having family support and encouragement in scaffolding her development:

They [both parents] were right there behind me [in everything I did]. We didn't have a lot of money or anything like that, so it wasn't necessarily that they were footing the bill for things or whatever, but just knowing that they were always there.
Through the consistent availability of parental support Carol found the freedom and courage to explore and grow. A vital part of this growth was instilling the values of education and hard work. Carol elaborated:

I can remember as a child, I was always expected to make straight “As”. One time I brought home a report card and I had a “B”. I was so upset. I didn’t want to show my dad. His question was, “Did you do your very best?” I can remember through the tears, “Yes, daddy I did, I did.” He said, “Then that’s all I can ever ask for.” I always want to do my very, very best.

Carol’s father worked hard himself and modeled what he preached to his children. Carol said of him, “I saw the value of hard work that he put each day—that things aren’t just handed to you.” Carol painted a picture in which she viewed her parents as having taught by example and provided an environment that supported her growth.

Like Carol, Jennifer also spoke of the support, encouragement, and the value of hard work and education instilled in her by her parents. Jennifer explained it this way:

My dad told me, I remember, when I came back from my first summer at [graduate school], he said, “You just let us know when we have to get a hotel room for graduation.” There was no doubt in his mind that I was, number one, going to graduate, and number two, they were going to be there. So, that is very important to them.

Although Jennifer’s parents did not go the college, their support of her educational endeavors has provided her with a love of learning. Their involvement in youth
activities served to model the importance of education and provided Jennifer with an environment that encouraged her development and fostered her own involvement with youth. Jennifer reflected:

My parents have always been involved in youth activities, 4-H, that we were a part of growing up, and they were 4-H leaders. And my dad always helped with the youth archery program in our city and the shooting sports and things like that. My mom also was involved in 4-H and doing things like that, helping us, and my mom said it got to the point where they couldn’t go anywhere and all of these young kids were coming up to my dad saying, “Hi, [father’s name]!, Hi, [father’s name]!” My mom always said that there are a lot of youth that do look up to my dad. They are good role models. They worked hard for what they have.

While both parents have supported Jennifer’s ambitions and involvement in activities, it is her father who seems to have a leading role in this story. Jennifer discussed the positive influence that her parents have had in her life, as well as in the lives of other youth. They have modeled the values of education and hard work through their actions. Jennifer mirrors the example of their commitment through her own professional involvement with youth as a secondary teacher and club adviser.

Although Carol and Jennifer identified closely with their fathers, Stacy looked to her mother as a role model and encourager. Along with Carol and Jennifer, Stacy also credits her family with having a major influence on her development as a leader. She said of her mother, “My mom told me last night, ‘We’re so proud of you.’ I mean, I think they give a lot of encouragement.” Stacy’s mother has been a
powerful influence in her life in modeling what it means to be a family and consumer sciences professional. Stacy’s mother has served as a role model in that she has taught family and consumer sciences for 25 years, has been a department head for many of those years, and recently has taken an administrative position as a Work-Based Learning Coordinator overseeing about 100 student interns. Stacy also looks to her mother as a positive role model who was successful in balancing work and family by including her children in her work life, which is what Stacy plans to do.

I think my mom’s been a good example of making it work. You know, I never felt neglected. She just took me with her. I’ve thought, “I’ll just load the child up and they’ll just go with me.” Maybe that’s what I will do, because I thought “I’ve got a lot to contribute”.

In another example Stacy talks about the difficulty she has had in trying to find balance in her life. Her mother modeled hard work, but also setting priorities as a working mother. Stacy recalled:

I think I am much more driven probably than I’ve ever been in my life. . . . I cannot mentally separate home and work. My mom will call and she’s like, “You need to take a break, you need to go eat lunch, you need to—“. It will be late and I’ll just get going [completing doctoral work or work for my job] and she’s like, “You can go to bed now.” It’s almost like they’re trying to give me permission, because I don’t give it to myself—to turn it off. She’s like gone on and got her educational specialist. She got a job promotion, but she’s got a life. But you know, I don’t ever really remember her bringing work home. I
I remember her working really hard, but I remember her being able to make that cut off. I’m not there yet.

This example illustrates how as a role model, Stacy’s mother demonstrated the values of education, hard work, yet the importance of family while providing support and encouragement of Stacy’s own career and education goals.

Each of these women reported the instrumental role of family in instilling the values of hard work and education, the importance of family providing for encouragement and support, and in serving as role models that have been critical to their growth as a leader.

Mentors, Role Models, and Educational Experiences

The respondents in this study share a common experience of having mentors that have guided their paths, and role models that have inspired their leadership. Because the mentors were usually teachers, many of the key experiences related to mentoring were within the educational setting. Each of the women in this study reported having taken family and consumer sciences courses throughout their high school years. This fact, combined with having key experiences in competitions and leadership positions in Future Homemakers of America (FHA), now called Family, Career, and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA), and having positive role models or mentors as family and consumer sciences teachers were viewed by each of the women as crucial to their socialization. For Stacy, that teacher was her mother. For Carol, her home economics teacher and experiences in FHA were the starting points of her socialization in the profession and to her desire to lead. In this story, she explains that critical juncture:
When I was in ninth grade, that’s when I found out that I wanted to be a home economics teacher. I knew without a shadow of a doubt because I had a wonderful home economics teacher who believed in me and people. [People] don’t believe it, but, years and years ago, when I was in eighth or ninth grade, I was the shyest, quietest student. I was the wallflower. I blended in. I did not want to look different; I did not want to be different. I did not take risks and step out. Through my classes in high school and then through, it was FHA then, I began to have opportunities that changed that. We had this contest that was on FHA facts, I studied all year long the history of FHA, the history of the profession, so that I could take this test and I ended up getting third at the state level. But I remember my freshman year, I went to the state conference and I saw those students, up on stage as state officers and I remember telling my teacher then, I said, “I’m going to be up there. I’m going to be a state officer.” And through [her] confidence and belief in me and because of the experiences that I had in FHA, I transformed. I was able to the next year, my sophomore year to run for state office. I mean, this is somebody who didn’t even want to get up in front of two people. I remember someone telling me there were like eight hundred and something [people] in the audience and I had to get up in front of them and do my speech. And I thought, “I cannot do this, I cannot do this.” I remember her telling me, “You have got to leave the old, shy, quiet Carol sitting right here and go out on that stage and do your thing. When you come back you can be that shy person again, but you’ve got to believe in yourself, you’ve got to believe in yourself enough to go out
there”. And I did. I forgot my speech halfway through and I remember thinking, “Oh my goodness, I have just forgotten everything I was supposed to say,” and it seemed like forever and then all of a sudden, I looked up and I repeated the last paragraph I had and then I just went on. I got elected that year but the key was having somebody who believes in you.

Carol stressed the vital role her experiences in family and consumer sciences classes and FHA had in shaping her talents and supporting her growth as a leader. She suggested that the example her teacher set influenced her perception of the role of a teacher as someone who inspires students to reach their potential. The meaning Carol attributes to these experiences is the valuable role of having a mentor and in being a mentor herself to her own students now that she is a teacher.

Jennifer also began the story of her journey of socialization into the profession by drawing upon key experiences in high school family and consumer sciences and FHA. She like Carol aspired to be a state FHA officer, thus giving her the opportunity at a young age to begin developing leadership skills. It was those experiences that then lead her to the family and consumer sciences profession and a commitment to lead as a professional. She recalled the beginning of her socialization:

I was in elementary school when both my aunt and my cousin at the same time, actually one on my dad’s side and one on my mom’s side, were both state officers in FHA here. They ran against each other for the state president position. So, at that point in time, I saw them in their red blazers, black skirts, and I thought, “Those are professionals—they make a difference.
They really look nice.” So, I had that coming into high school. So, when I went into high school, I knew I wanted to be in family and consumer sciences, take those courses and be a state officer. So, that’s what I did.

Even at an early age, Jennifer recognized that leading makes a difference. Her family and consumer sciences teachers also provided her with role models that she has chosen to emulate in her own practice. Jennifer said, “I had very progressive teachers that taught it the way in which it should be done—according to what we know today.” She alluded to teachers who were progressive in being early adopters of a critical science approach to teaching rather than a technical approach focusing primarily on skill development which had been the norm. Having this background has aided Jennifer in developing her professional practice in the foundation these teachers provided as role models in innovative teaching.

The respondents identified people who were instrumental in their lives when they left high school to attend college. It was through the support and influence of mentors, who were usually college professors, that career paths changed and opportunities for leadership development were encouraged and modeled. Jennifer tells this story of how a college professor influenced her to major in family and consumer sciences education.

When I went to college I decided to major in hospitality and tourism. . . . About three fourths of the way through my freshman year I got a call from, at that time, one of the assistant professors. She called me to her office and basically talked to me about what my high school experiences were. She knew I had been a state officer and asked me if I thought I would be
interested in teaching family and consumer sciences. I don’t think she listened to my answer—she pretty much just said, “You would be a great family and consumer sciences teacher. Here’s your program change card, you can go up and change your major today.” So, that’s what I did and I think since that point, I always say, that it was the career and profession that I was destined for.

Through this one interaction, Jennifer set upon a different life path which has been a critical turning point in defining herself as a professional and as a leader. She looked to her college professors as models of how to lead, how to be a professional and the role of a mentor.

[Three of my assistant professors] were all different in their leadership and in their teaching but they were all professionals just they same. So, they served as role models there too. [Being involved in] professional organizations, watching and learning from other professionals—and with other professionals providing me with opportunities and seeing that potential in me, were all important I think.

These people affirmed Jennifer’s potential and provided her with opportunities that served to foster and encourage her leadership skills. Stacy also discussed the roles of mentors during her undergraduate and graduate studies. She counted as critical the role college professors played in providing her with opportunities that enabled her growth toward professional activities.

I got a graduate assistantship with [a professor] in family and consumer sciences education. I worked with her and another professor from the
Department of Occupational Studies. They were editors of two journals that year. I had never been exposed to anything like that so I did a lot of the correspondence and I got to read reviewers comments. That was really helpful, and I had no idea at that point how that would pay off, but through that I got to publish twice with them, being their assistant.

Stacy emphasized the value of having mentors and learning experiences with family and consumer sciences leaders that provided exposure to experiences outside the traditional classroom, thereby, broadening the scope of what was possible for her to accomplish. Stacy points out the value of current leaders within the profession providing opportunities for new professionals.

Mentoring was also identified as a prevalent theme as Carol reflected on her college experiences. Her undergraduate college advisor provided Carol the encouragement she needed to take on a leadership role and become involved in a pre-professional student organization. Carol viewed this encouragement as a constant guiding force that served to continue to propel her forward in her career to the point where she is now following the steps of that very mentor by taking on the position her mentor later vacated. She elaborated on the importance of those mentoring relationships in this story:

I remember my freshman year, [a college professor] who was my undergraduate advisor at [the university]. We were sitting there and she knew how involved I had been in FHA in high school, and they were having their first meeting for the [pre-professional AAFCS] chapter there at [the university] and we had all been invited as new freshmen and they had all of
their officers but a reporter. So [my undergraduate advisor] leans over to me and says, “You can do this. This is like the college FHA.” So, I became reporter of our local chapter and was real involved there. And, again, [this college professor] did the same thing that [my home economics teacher] did in high school. She just encouraged me. When I look back now, they both saw things in me that I guess I never saw. Because, [my undergraduate advisor] would say, “You know, one day you’re going to come back and take my job.” And I’m like, “Oh no, I’m not.” And now fifteen years later I am in her position.

It was this same college professor that encouraged Carol to run for national chair for the student member section of AAFCS, which she won. Carol credits the opportunity of serving at the national level with providing her the extensive professional network she has today. Carol recognized the role her college professor had in encouraging her to take this opportunity. In another example of mentoring, Carol tells of a time as a young, new high school teacher, expecting her first child, she could not afford to participate in AAFCS. A professor who had taught her as an undergraduate and in her master’s program stepped in and offered to pay half her dues. Carol found this experience significant in that this person believed in her and was willing to provide her this opportunity because of the potential she exhibited. Mentors recognize something in us and often serve as a catalyst to help us realize our potential by providing us with the opportunities we need to develop. She explained:
I actually had a third mentor, and mentoring is a key to all of this because had I not had those people, they played the significant role in my journey. She came to me and she said, “I know that you’re struggling, but if I pay for half of your dues, could you come up with the other half?” I had had her as a teacher at the undergraduate level and when I was doing my master’s work—that was the point I was actually in graduate school—she was the Dean at the time and she said, “I know how involved you were and we really need some new people here, we need some young blood, and this is my gift to you.” I thought, “Surely if she can come up with half of it, then surely I can come up with the other half.” Since that time when she paid those dues, I have paid my dues every year. I get wonderful things out of the organization but more than that, is a commitment that I make to her.

It is the example of this mentor that had given impetus to the commitment Carol now acts upon in remaining active in this professional organization.

Throughout their narratives, Jennifer, Stacy, and Carol consistently talked of being provided opportunity due to recognition by others of their potential or leadership abilities. These opportunities ranged from being selected to serve on prestigious committees, to being chosen to receive additional training or participate in educational experiences which often included financial assistance. How do the women in this study make meaning out of this? Each of the women identified the experiences of involvement in high school family and consumer sciences courses and FHA/FCCLA, involvement in the student member section of AAFCS, and the role of high school family and consumer sciences teachers and college professors
as critical to their development. These women acknowledge that they have worked hard for what they have been able to accomplish, but the influence of mentors have provided a deeper meaning that was perhaps best articulated by Carol when she said:

   [It is a] concept called serial reciprocity. It’s not that you can ever repay what’s been done for you or to you in the past, but in a way, in a sense, we pay it forward. So, if I can do that for somebody, if I can be, offer, that one word of encouragement, if I can be that student’s cheerleader just like those three people were for me then in a sense, that’s what my role is—to pay it forward.

The mentors described by the women in this study were women who modeled leadership, professionalism, as well as providing support, encouragement, and opportunities to foster development. Mentors served to provide experiences that increased success in the advancement of leadership attributes, pushing the women in this study forward and facilitating their growth. The example mentors provided cultivated a responsibility to mentor others.

**Doctoral Educational Experiences**

   The process of doctoral studies offered different perspectives, acting to broaden the scope of understanding for the women interviewed. They discussed developing knowledge of the philosophical underpinnings of the profession, issues within the profession, and finding camaraderie in colleagues dedicated to fulfilling the same mission. It was the degree and depth of knowledge that was gained through this experience that has provided a strong foundation for addressing current
issues and a network of like-minded people who are willing to work together for change. In speaking of her doctoral graduate coursework Carol disclosed the shock of learning that her education had been lacking and there was much more to be learned concerning the philosophies on which the profession is based:

   It always amazed me, and I didn’t even realize, you know, sometimes you go through life and you don’t even realize what you don’t know. But I had been brought up, and all of my training in my bachelor’s and master’s had been in kind of a technical approach of goals and objectives and competencies and I was never, ever exposed to some of the philosophical framework of the profession. I got so angry because I had two degrees and I had never heard some of these frameworks. It wasn’t until [a specific course on philosophical foundations of the profession] that I started becoming aware of other philosophical approaches that really made me question my thinking and opened my eyes to other things.

Stacy echoed the same sentiment that she had been unaware of the philosophies guiding our professional practice until undertaking doctoral studies. She realized that the advanced coursework added a dimension that had been neglected in her previous educational experiences that was crucial to laying the groundwork necessary to become a leader and to contribute fully as a professional. She acknowledged:

   It has opened my mind. I didn’t know about Brown and Paolucci or—I didn’t know some things that Virginia Vincenti has written or I didn’t know any of that. I got the Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences starting as an
undergrad, because I joined the association. I didn’t read them. It makes more sense now. I think sometimes, I need to redo some of the classes I teach—to put in some of that literature early on. I think it’s just another progression in that step of making me become one of these professionals like Sharon Nichols, or like Penny Ralston, or Virginia Vincenti.

In this narrative Stacy referred to the in-depth reading requirements for courses in her doctoral graduate work, the exposure to philosophical issues within the profession, and her continuing growth as a professional as a result. This has impacted her practice in that she sees the need to incorporate this knowledge into her own teaching.

For Jennifer, not only were the educational experiences of doctoral studies enlightening, but finding those of kindred mind and spirit was described as a critical aspect of evolving as a professional.

Another then transforming or evolving [experience], probably more evolving, was going to graduate school at [a university] and realizing that there are more people out there like me. [That] have this passion and this desire and drive to want to learn and that [share the] belief that family and consumer sciences is much more than walking into a food lab.

An important aspect of the doctoral experience that Jennifer alluded to is the value of networking and development of friendships with people who share the same passion and commitment to fulfill the mission of family and consumer sciences. Not only is this valuable in the sense of realizing that you are not alone, but it provides a
cohort of colleagues who can be drawn upon as a valuable resource in several aspects of leading the utmost of these being collective action.

These women perceived doctoral experiences as having informed their development of perspectives and practice within the field of family and consumer sciences. When I asked about transformative experiences in becoming a professional and a leader, they invariably brought up changes within themselves that occurred as a result of these advanced studies. The doctoral experience is one that each respondent identified as instrumental in personal transformation. These experiences laid a solid foundation for understanding the philosophies that guide their work, increased their knowledge and critical evaluation of issues within the field, and provided a network for accomplishing leadership goals.

**Defining Moments**

Often there are circumstances or events that spark a change in how people come to view themselves and an opportunity to grow. When I asked each woman to share a defining moment that was critical to her in laying the foundation for leadership, each expressed how living and working through a negative experience had provided the most significant growth. In each of the following stories, there is a sense of having come through adversity and been made better because of it. For Jennifer, that adversity was dealing with a situation where she was not supported by a cooperating teacher during her student teaching internship. She had been assigned to a cooperating teacher who had never had a student teacher before. Although Jennifer believed she did her job effectively, she was met with resistance when the cooperating teacher would not let Jennifer observe her classroom and
challenged Jennifer’s perception of her teaching ability. This episode caused Jennifer to question if she really wanted to be a teacher or not. Jennifer explained:

I’m sure she’s a good teacher. I wouldn’t honestly know—I was not allowed to be in her classroom. I think she felt threatened. As I look back at it now, I think she felt threatened by me. She told me, she stuck her finger in front of my face and waved it and told me, “You will never teach in this state. You will never become a teacher. I don’t know who you think you are, but you do not know everything.” I knew I was there to learn. I didn’t claim to know everything. I’m there to get the experience, but what I did learn is that I would not ever be like her. If someone tells me I can’t, I will prove to you I can—I will show you how well I can do it. So, I’m not a vindictive person but, you know, this little voice deep down inside of me says, “I hope she reads this.” I wonder what she thinks now. She told me, “I will never have a student teacher. You have ruined my perception of what is supposed to be a positive experience.”

Jennifer tried to make sense of this experience by rationalizing that the teacher was not confident in her own abilities as a teacher. This would explain to Jennifer why the cooperating teacher felt the need to attack Jennifer rather than mentor her at a time when she desperately needed it. The influence of mentoring became significant as Jennifer continued her story.

I had a great supervisor, great role model. I remember calling her [the supervisor] at home and she basically said, “You will go back there and you will be successful regardless of what this woman has told you. You will do all
of the things you set out to do and that I know you can do.” So, that’s what I did. That was a transforming time for me. I either needed to “buck up, buttercup” and keep going or it was going to be the end, so I kept going.

In this narrative, Jennifer shares a critical time when she had to make the decision to quit or move forward as a response to the negative feedback she was receiving from a cooperating teacher. Jennifer found support and mentoring through her internship supervisor and realized that she had the inner fortitude to continue and would succeed in spite of the cooperating teacher. The cooperating teacher’s attitude only served to motivate Jennifer rather than cause her to quit. Jennifer has since received public recognition for innovative teaching. Jennifer knows the teacher must be aware of this and there is a degree of satisfaction for Jennifer in that fact. This experience provided a sense of empowerment.

For Stacy a critical defining moment was in finding herself without a mentor upon taking her first teaching position at a junior college. She felt overwhelmed by the magnitude of the job. She described the growing pains of having to make it on her own:

I didn’t have a mentor. I have had a mentor every phase of life and I didn’t have one when I started my [first] job. It really has impacted me. [I was] totally—alone! I had nobody. That has been a big defining moment for me. I didn’t know what I was getting into. I had been mentored through my undergraduate program. I count my advisor at [the junior college I attended], and then I had [my advisor at the university where I attended]. Then when I got a master’s I had [a university professor], who took me on my first plane
ride to ACTE, where I did my first research poster session. Then I go to this job, and [the same university professor] is teaching me saying, “Oh, you’re going to do great.” I kind of always had that coaching. I got there [at my new job]—I had no idea what I was doing. Nobody’s there, and so as I think through that, that was big. I really had to just make it on my own. I felt like I had been through boot camp. If I can do what I did in really two years, I can do anything. There is nothing they can tell me now that would scare me.

After I have gone through and taught seventeen classes, some of the stuff I didn’t even know what I was going to do. I’d be up there at 10 o’clock at night trying to figure out what I was going to do the next day. I’m like, “If I can do this, there is no job that I can’t learn how to do.”

Stacy reflects on the struggle and triumph of entering her first job and finding herself without the aid and support of mentors. Before this point in her life Stacy had had strong support and mentoring; but upon entering her first real job she found she was totally alone and overwhelmed with the magnitude of what was expected of her. This was a defining moment in that Stacy had to look deep within and find the fortitude to succeed without the scaffolding to which she had become accustomed. What she was able to accomplish bolstered her sense of achievement and gave her confidence in her skills as a professional.

Carol saw the process of writing and defending her dissertation as a defining moment that she is still experiencing. She had been researching and writing for over two years after experiencing various challenges and obstacles associated with family, work, and/or graduate school. Through her reflections on the toll this process
continues to take, she has found meaning in the sacrifices she has made by using her experience to mentor others. Carol conveyed a religious belief that God is in control and through overcoming obstacles, she has grown as an individual and will be better able to serve others. These beliefs have helped her to make sense of this experience and find a way to reconcile the struggles she has been through. She explained it this way:

In the last year, my life evolved around my research and dissertation. Every waking moment I had, I spent reading or writing. It’s just a real learning process I guess. Have I learned exactly this key to time management or stress management? No, but I think the key is awareness—knowing when to stop and sleep, for example, or knowing that my child’s acting out at school is a result of his cry for attention from mom. I am beginning to understand that it’s all part of the process—a process that will continue to shape my life. I may not complete the degree in the time frame that I want, but I have to still believe it will be God’s time frame. I believe that we go through things in life, so that one day we will be able to help someone else. Again, it’s going to be part of my leadership journey. The ups and downs associated with graduate school will be, whether I like it or not, one of the defining moments of my life. I hope that the sacrifices I’ve gone through and the challenges that I’ve experienced while completing a doctoral degree have made me a better person and that I may be a source of support for someone else who might be juggling the same roles.
The stories these three women have to tell of defining moments in their professional socialization, demonstrate how the challenge of a negative situation served to illuminate new understandings as they faced and overcame adversity. There is a degree of resiliency evident in how they interpreted the experiences and reconciled them into a context that made sense to them.

This section addressed key influences and experiences that the women participating in the study deemed essential to their socialization into the profession as leaders. These themes emerged from their narratives: 1) the positive influence of family in instilling the values of hard work and education, the importance of family in providing support and in serving as role models; 2) positive mentoring and modeling by educators in the field of family and consumer sciences; 3) the challenge and enrichment of doctoral studies in the field; and 4) the role of challenges, sacrifices and negative situations in serving to illuminate new understandings and the realization of inner fortitude and growth.

**The Passion to Lead: Values and Motivation**

Each respondent was asked to describe the core values and beliefs she viewed as essential to her development. A common theme that emerged from the study participants was the value of education in improving their practice and their development as leaders. Not only was education perceived as important, but additionally they expressed the belief that the more they invested themselves in their education, the more benefits they expected to reap. Each has continued her education, often while working full time. Jennifer clarified the importance of education in her response:
Within a month of starting my [first] full-time job, I was already enrolled in a graduate class. I always joke about how I haven’t stopped being enrolled formally in classes since I was in kindergarten. Then, when I became specialized in the childcare area I did some updating in some specific areas that I didn’t think I was strong enough in like child guidance, child health safety, and [child] nutrition. . . . Then I enrolled in a graduate program here through a local private college and was going to pursue my master’s in curriculum development and I took one class through them and to me, it was not challenging. I did not want to earn a degree by simply sliding by. I hate to say that because a lot of administrators and people in this area, that want the quick master’s degree, do this program. It is very inexpensive and very conducive to your schedule, but things just don’t change and the professors, I believe, do not get to know you and personalize the program for what you want it to be. So you end up with a stamped degree just like everyone that comes out of there, regardless of your interests or future intentions. So that’s when I started actively looking for a degree program that fit me better.

Jennifer discussed the value she places on life-long learning. She actively sought opportunities to strengthen areas that she felt she was weak in and set a standard of excellence in that she is not willing to settle for a “stamped degree.” She wants her degree to have meaning for her and her life’s work.

Stacy, like Jennifer, had taken courses with the goal being to improve her practice, not because they were required in a specified program of study. She took a class that examined education in community colleges. Of that she said, “I didn’t
have to take that class, it's just one that I took—you know, like human
development—I didn't have to take it, but I feel like it's helping me. It will be a little
more work on me, but maybe it will give me some insight that I don't have.” There
is a profound sense that her educational experiences are shaping who she is and
who she will become. She describes herself almost like a sponge that must soak up
all that it can:

I have tried so hard to build this career, build this program, be as perfect as I
can be [at work] and do the best I can do in this PhD program because I really
want to take it all in. I don't want to just get through it. I want to take it in—
really, 'cause that is what will make me a professional. What I'm doing, is
what is going to help me forever.

Stacy underscores her philosophy that being a professional means doing more than
what is required; that you should do more than the “bare minimum.” She expressed
the value of learning and education to get ahead which is apparent in the fact that
she has taken courses beyond the requirements. She does this because she sees
the value in continuing to learn and being able to apply what she has learned to her
work situation.

Carol shared the same belief that education is critical to her development, but
included participation in professional organizations as an equally valuable element of
her growth. She viewed her work in professional organizations as essential to her
development as a professional and as a leader, not as a requirement of her job.

[Professional organizations have] always been really important to me, that
you belong to professional organizations and that you don't just have your
name on a roll, but that you actively participate. And whether it is going to
meetings or reading their materials, I just think that’s real important for my
own personal growth and professional development.

Another common theme related to core values and beliefs perceived as
essential to leadership development was the value of being committed and caring
enough about a need that you are willing to take action. The women talked about
this value in terms of being dedicated, having a passion, loving what they do and
caring about the profession and others whose lives they touch. It is an intrinsic
motivation that they describe, and although they cannot articulate where that
motivation comes from, it is a driving force as they endeavor to improve their lives
and the lives of others. In response to my question concerning values that had
motivated her to assume leadership responsibilities, Jennifer explained:

It’s a desire, a wanting to better yourself and better others and improve the
situation. I don’t have the answer. My values are things like hard work and
dedication—I’m dedicated to the things I start and I will see them through. I
guess I am a caring person and want to improve the situation be it for myself
or for others. My own personal values—that education is important, everyone
has value and worth and maybe if they don’t believe it, then maybe it is my
job to prove that to them. To make them feel special—to show them they
have worth and they are worthy. I don’t know—it’s intrinsic—it is definitely not
monetary. With some people it may be, but they are the ones that are there
to get that piece of paper and move on.
Jennifer again points out education and hard work as cornerstones of her personal values, but in addition, she mentions dedication or commitment along with the value of caring about others. She reiterates that money is not a motivator, nor is seeking a degree, but rather the impact that she can have on another person. Stacy described a conversation she had with her husband where he pointed out similar values that he could see in her. The State Department of Education in the state where she lives had made a push to change the name of family and consumer sciences in middle and secondary schools to an undetermined name that was to be decided upon later. This anticipated change brought out a passion in her that was clearly visible to others. She described the conversation as follows:

“What keeps me going?” I guess it’s just intrinsic motivation. I just feel so strongly about what I do. My husband said that to me this year, when I got so heated about the name change. I mean I just went off one day in my office. I probably shouldn’t have done that, but I was like, “I am so mad. Why are they going to change our name at the middle school and high school level when our higher ed. is FCS?” I said, “That’s going to impact all of us. We need to be unified.” I just got really so ticked off about it and he’s like, “Nothing gets to you like messing with your profession.” He said, “I’m not that passionate about accounting.” He said, “I just don’t get into it that much.” Of course, I mean, you know, his financial return is going to be a lot bigger than mine—through his whole life. But he’s like, “You don’t do it for that. You don’t do it for the money. You just do it, because it’s just something you care about.”
Stacy’s ethic of care is evident in this passage. She, like Jennifer, recognizes an intrinsic motivation within herself, not driven by money, but by caring. This passion drives her to look beyond herself to the impact of impending changes that may negatively affect the profession.

Carol expressed her commitment and passion in terms of loving what she does. She stated, “I have always had a commitment to the profession.” But more than that, she wants her students to see that passion and strive for it themselves.

I love what I do. Yes, there are days that it is very difficult, the days are long and I think, I don’t know what to do about this situation or that situation, but I love what I do and as long as my students know that and they can see that, then that is important to me. Because I tell my students in the senior seminar that I teach, “Find something you love to do, that you’re passionate about, then find somebody to pay you for it. You can’t be unhappy at what you’re doing.”

Carol demonstrated the belief that it is essential to not only be committed, but also to be passionate about what you do. She seeks to model passion for her students and encourage them to find their passion. To Carol this is an essential aspect of her identity. She has developed a passion and commitment that is the foundation of her identity as a family and consumer sciences professional. These beliefs provide the motivation for assuming leadership.

An additional theme that emerged concerning personal beliefs was a belief in God or destiny. Jennifer briefly referred to the role destiny played in her becoming a family and consumer sciences teacher; however, Stacy and Carol elaborated on
their beliefs and the value of those beliefs in sustaining them and guiding their decisions. When I asked Carol about the values and core beliefs that had guided her, she responded, “Spiritual beliefs, faith and trust have been enormous. Had I not possessed those beliefs, I would not have been able to step out in faith on my leadership journey. Not knowing if I could do this, not knowing if I could do that, but being willing to take the leap.” She explained further:

My faith has always been real important to me and I have used that to help guide decisions that I make. My faith has actually been tested quite a bit in the recent months. It has made me stop and question, whether what I’m doing is what I’m supposed to do. I still firmly believe that it is in God’s overall plan for my life. As hard as it is to experience disappointments or failures, God is using those to shape my future and to strengthen my faith.

As Stacy reflected on her professional journey she questioned her decision not to earn a degree in a specialized field of study; however, she reconciles that decision by relying on her belief that the path she has chosen will turn out to be the best for her because God has a plan for her. Stacy pondered:

I think it’s just been this whole journey [the process of my education]. That’s when sometimes I think, “Well, have I done myself a disservice by not getting a ‘specialty’ area?” Then at the same time I think—I think it goes back to your spirituality—had I not gone to this program I wouldn’t have read all these things by these people. I wouldn’t have these deans on my committee. I wouldn’t even know what I know, so how can I second guess. It’s where I need to be. Maybe I’m just where I need to be, because maybe that’s going
to be part of what I contribute to the profession. What will I do? I know that just kind of goes back to your beliefs too. That God has a plan for it, whatever it is. I don’t know what it is, you know.

What sustains these women? Hand in hand with commitment, caring, and passion comes the additional motivation of seeing that they have made a difference in someone’s life. Each of the women interviewed reported gaining pleasure and satisfaction from having an impact on others. Jennifer reflected:

Any time I know that one of my students is pursuing a career in education that brings me personal satisfaction—or that they’ve gotten a job in an area that they became familiar with through family and consumer sciences. Whether they go to the technical college to be an interior designer or all of a sudden, “Now I’m a special ed teacher and I’m being hired back into this building” or “to work with you Miss [last name].” To see that or anytime they send me a wedding invitation—I get tons of wedding invitations—or I run into a former student in the grocery store with their new baby and that brings me a lot of personal satisfaction to know they’re happy and know they are successful and want to share that with me.

Jennifer followed with a specific account of an encounter with a former student. She had gone to a department store to look at purchasing a barbeque grill. Her former student was working there and made a specific effort to help his ex-teacher.

I was there and not needing assistance, just kind of looking, perusing the variety of grills there and looking and comparing one to the other and he kind of came over and was like, “Miss [last name]! How are you doing?” I looked
over and noticed that there was a customer behind him that really wanted to ask a question, and he said, “Miss [last name], is there anything I can help you with?” I said, “No, I'll be ok, but maybe this gentleman would like your assistance.” So he went and helped the man and came right back. “Can I help you with anything Miss [last name]? Do you have any questions yet?” I said, “Well actually, I do have some questions,” and I thought of some questions I needed to ask and I didn’t even know what I was looking at. So I asked him some questions and he said, “Anything else you need Miss [last name]? You know you could always call me. I know you have our home number too.” Well, the young man that I had in class, he knew me as a teacher in the classroom and to just come back and want to help me with any question I had, I was like, “Wow, there must have been something there.” I had him for one class four years ago and it just stuck out like that.

Jennifer’s story reflects an awe of the power of influence in impacting the lives of others. A relationship that began in one class four years ago compelled that student to want to give back by helping his former teacher. Stacy shared a similar story. A student came to me, very pretty, very affluent family, known her her whole life. She came in as a nursing major, but she just wasn’t happy. She came to me and she said, “Well I think I’ll be an interior designer.” I said, “Okay.” So we start advising for those classes. Then she comes back and she says, “I want to be a FCS teacher.” She went on through. They loved her at [the land grant university]. She stayed up there. She got her master’s. She just finished her first year teaching and absolutely loves it! She got married a few
weeks ago. Her mother-in-law told me she is just in the most perfect career for her. Now she has convinced—I guess this is where you begin to see that chain—her sister and her sister’s best friend are coming to [the junior college Stacy teaches at] in the fall and they are both declared FCS Ed. They said she just loves what she does so much. Now is it the right thing for them? I don’t know, but because she loves what she does so much they want to be like her. That’s what they told me, “We want to be like her.” To me that’s good. Someone has found a career, a path that they love and they enjoy and that’s needed. When I see that happen that’s what makes me happy—that I have created a FCS professional.

Stacy shared this as an example of an experience that gave her meaning in her work. Through the success of one of her students who found happiness in becoming a FCS teacher and, in turn, influenced two others to want to become FSC teachers, Stacy witnessed the circle of influence that she had on impacting others and the profession. Time and again, the women interviewed in this study chronicled events in which they discussed the importance of making a difference, and recalled specific events where they knew they had empowered someone else. Carol told of this occasion where she learned of her impact many years after having contact with a student:

Several years later [after my first teaching job], I had actually attended a meeting and was driving back home when I stopped in a small town. I stopped at a gas station to get gas. So I pumped the gas and went inside. The lady at the counter was staring at me. I’m thinking that this was strange
but I walk through the store and then come back to the counter to pay for my items. She asked, “Are you Carol [last name]? I said, “Yes.” She said, “You don’t remember me do you?” I’m looking at her again. In the meantime, she smiled and she told me her name. It was a student whom I had taught my very first year—a student who had struggled all through my class. It was a parenting class. She told me, “Ms. [last name], I now have two little girls.” She said, “Had it not been for your parenting class, I don’t think I would be the parent I am today.” I mean this was like years [ago]. I thought, “Wow!” I didn’t even remember that she had written down anything I said or took notes. The former student added, “Don’t you remember when we took that field trip to the hospital and we saw those babies in the neonatal unit? We watched this video. I just never thought at the time that I would ever use that information, but I have two beautiful girls.” Having a student affirm one’s teaching or influence is not going to happen everyday. That may not ever happen again in my lifetime. It’s little things like a student who writes you a note after graduating that says they are the teacher they are because of something you did that affirms and acknowledges that something I have said or done has indeed made a difference.

All of the women derived meaning from making a difference in the life of someone else. They value these relationships. They care about these people and that is what drives and sustains their commitment.

This section addressed core values, beliefs, and motivation that the women participating in the study perceived as critical to their development as leaders.
These themes emerged from their narratives regarding values and motivations: 1) the values of education, commitment and caring or passion; 2) a spiritual belief that guides understanding; and 3) the ideology of making a difference serves to provide motivation for the assumption of leadership and affords meaning to leadership and professional experiences.

Developing a Philosophy of Leadership

How do emerging leaders perceive the concept of leadership? How do their personal philosophies of leadership define their work as leaders? In this section, I will explore the conceptual framework used by these women to guide their leadership and components they deemed essential to effective leadership.

Conceptualizations of Leadership

How do these women define leadership? Their responses portrayed a concept of leadership that expands the definition of leadership beyond that of position and management. Leadership, as defined by the women in this study, is recognized through relationship with others, dependent on the situation or contextual in nature, and involves collaboration, sharing a vision, challenging the status quo to facilitate positive change, mentoring and enablement of others. Jennifer stressed the concept that leadership is defined through relationships with others:

. . . leadership to me is not a title. It cannot be claimed by someone—"I am a leader." It needs to be given or earned by those with whom you interact. Other people label you as a leader. That’s not a label you are entitled to give yourself. It comes from those with whom you work and with whom you interact, whether it be your students or colleagues, administrators, people in
professional organizations. I could be president of an organization, but that doesn’t mean I am a leader or that I possess leadership or that I am able to lead. It is not a title. If you’re the president, it has nothing to do with leadership. If you’re the regional something something coordinator, it does not mean leadership. Leadership is a title that you can only earn from those around you.

Stacy reiterated this sentiment and expanded the concept of leadership beyond simply having a title or position. She included within her definition of leadership the idea that leadership can occur outside of having a position when she said, “I don’t think you have a title necessarily. I don’t think you necessarily have to be the ‘professor’ to do it. I think you can do it different ways.” Carol alluded to leadership extending beyond a positional concept in her response, “So many people define it in a positional way—‘You have to hold the position of leadership.’ I believe it’s non-positional. We can lead every day of our life. Maybe if we lead by our action, our thought, and our behaviors. I am more a leader today than I ever was in my life.”

Through their comments, the women defined leadership as relational, impacted by the ability to lead in relation to others, and as nonhierarchical, a framework that places leadership as a responsibility of every professional within their particular social context. Both Jennifer and Carol discussed the role of context when defining leadership. From their perspectives behaviors and skills needed in order to lead are dependent on the situation. Jennifer stated:

There are so many characteristics that describe a leader—I’m not even going to attempt to put characteristics on them because it’s what the people around
you—with whom you interact—what they find valuable. So, the term ‘leader’
could be different in many different organizations.

Carol also expressed this viewpoint when she said:

I don’t think you can read one book and that’s the recipe for leadership. I’m
not saying that you can’t get valuable things from books. I think it’s many
situations in your life, it’s many people, and it’s many books. It’s looking at
all the different aspects of what a leader is and then actually putting them into
practice in different situations.

In defining leadership, emerging leaders included within their framework
collaboration, sharing a vision, challenging the status quo to facilitate positive
change, mentoring, and working toward the empowerment of others. A collaborative
leadership style was most often mentioned or alluded to by each of the women.

Jennifer viewed her interaction with students as collaboration where she is acting to
facilitate their learning.

Without the students I wouldn’t have anything. They’re the ones that allow
me to be creative and are accepting of that and you know, sometimes I say
they’re willing to go along with my plan, but I really I think I have to be willing
to go along with their plan. Maybe that’s the difference. The teacher that
allows them to be creative, within the parameters and guidelines established.

Sometimes I push those a little bit, too. I always say, “I am not the teacher of
the [school-based enterprise] program, I am the facilitator.” I’ve always liked
the term facilitator of learning rather than educator.
In another example, Jennifer discussed a situation in which the school system where she works was in the process of searching and hiring a middle school family and consumer sciences teacher. Jennifer seeks to build a collaborative environment in which the new teacher can excel. She explained:

[The teachers in my department and me] want someone to come in and build the most dynamic middle school program anyone has ever seen. And, we will help them do that. We will promote them and assist them and do whatever we can to help them do that, but we need that person and that is our mindset. Our mindset isn’t, “Okay, let’s have someone come in and do exactly what Jennifer says or what the high school says they should do.” No, that’s not it. Collaboration is viewed as essential to leading her students and her department to fulfill their greatest potential. Carol, in her response, also viewed leadership as collaborative. She stated, “I think its more team work, because it’s that whole integrative, synergistic approach that we’ve talked about within our profession. That’s what it is with leadership. Everybody plays a unique role and you’ve got to have those individual pieces of the puzzle. It’s not complete until you can see the big picture.”

Sharing a vision, challenging the status quo to create positive change, and working toward the empowerment of others were woven throughout the conversations of these women. Carol connected these by saying, “It’s so very true that you’ve got to challenge what is and then you can start to see the vision of what can be. Then you start to get people to work together, you enable them, empower them, and encourage them.” Carol gave a specific example of challenging the
status quo, seeing what could be, and working with others to make the needed
changes:

As we began to look at what our curricula were—maybe it was just being a
new person there or fresh blood or whatever—it just seemed like some of the
things and courses that people took, some of the content in the courses just
probably hadn’t been changed for a while. So it was just a matter of
challenging that to say. “Hey shouldn’t we look at this course? How can we
update the content in this for today’s trends and issues?” So challenging and
helping my colleagues that work in particular program areas to say, “Okay,
let’s look at that. Where is it this program needs to be?” Rather than just
continuing to do the same thing over and over again.

Carol had a vision for curricula change aimed at making content relevant for
changing societal trends. She challenged current thinking, and ultimately created a
shared vision and collective action among colleagues to create the desired change.

In a similar story, Jennifer played a critical role in launching a new student-
interest school club at the high school where she teaches. She, a colleague, and
students envisioned creating a student-interest club. They succeeded in challenging
opinion that opposed the development of a new club, finally created a shared vision
and collaboration with administrators, parents, and students to see the fruition of a
new student-interest school club. Jennifer explained her part as:

I just did what needed to be done—what the students wanted, what the
district was willing to work with and you negotiate back and forth. It’s just
something that if you see a need, you address that need, and in the process you're improving the needs of individuals.

Stacy also put into practice the concept of collaborative leadership through her efforts to bring together stakeholders and institutions to address an issue and collectively formulate a solution. She had been receiving calls from secondary school administrators searching for available family and consumer sciences teachers to fill vacant positions, which served to highlight the issue of teacher shortages in her state. Seeing the need, Stacy is in the process of creating a vision and strategy for addressing the issue and initiated action at collectively creating change.

I sent out an email to the faculty members of three senior institutions. I sent to people who had a vested interested in FCS education and said, “I have been having calls this week and I don’t normally get phone calls looking for FCS teachers. We have a problem, and we as the four schools need to work together to solve it. I don’t know what that means, you know, I’m just throwing this out there. I know that there are some innovative models.” I started thinking, “Maybe we all need to offer on-line classes and get people certified.” I said, “This is something we need to be talking about.” So some of the faculty has said to me this week, “We need to meet in the fall. You’re right. Thanks for getting that going.” I’m thinking I guess we all get so busy, but if we don’t watch it, that’s one major that’s desperately needed that if we don’t produce teachers then they’re going to close the programs. I’m like, I’ve
got a lot on my plate right now, but hey, I’m passionate about this. Let’s do something!

Finally, the women in this study placed importance on mentoring as an essential component of their leadership. Jennifer has taken the role of mentoring other graduate students who are behind her in the same graduate program. She has taken time each summer to share her innovative, award-winning program with one of the graduate classes, which often leads to the development of mentoring relationships. She expressed the need to give back in this explanation:

I actually get a lot of emails from people in the [graduate program] or people interested in it [the program], asking me questions about it or about assignments that I maybe did, or you know, “When you had this professor, what did they expect?” Or, other times I have had people email me components or parts of their work for review and just to offer feedback. I take that as a compliment. They are looking for my feedback. I think that’s something I need to give them. When someone asks you for feedback, it is important that you offer that.

Stacy and Carol see their role as mentors as a means to sustain the profession and vital to their leadership. Stacy indicated that, “[We] need to cultivate some people. Don’t ever be where there’s not somebody who could replace you.” Carol elaborated:

People touch my life and now it’s my turn to touch other lives. That’s what my challenge is, that’s what the pleasure is, in getting people to think creatively, getting people to think outside the box. One of the things that I have really,
really worked hard at, because it was something that [my undergraduate advisor] did to me and [my high school family and consumer sciences teacher]. They instilled in me a passion, a love of the profession, a love for the history, a love of learning—just wanting to know more. That’s what I want to instill in our students today, because I think the generation that we have coming up now, they are very different. If we don’t mentor them and nurture them, then I don’t know if our profession can sustain itself.

A conceptualization of leadership as defined by the women in this study provides a framework for viewing leadership as nonhierarchical, defined by context, and represents the leader as someone who collaborates or facilitates collective action toward empowerment of others or the accomplishment of a common goal. They view as essential components of this conceptualization of leadership, collaboration, sharing a vision, challenging the status quo to facilitate positive change, mentoring and enablement of others.

**Leadership in Action**

What defines the manner in which the women in this study have chosen to lead? The personal philosophies of leadership and the social context of their environments have served to define and guide their work as leaders. They attribute their effectiveness as leaders, in part, to their accessibility, willingness to assume responsibility, and organizational skills; however, how their leadership has played out is also contingent on their personal interests, strengths, and context in which they live and work. In the following passages, the women reflected on the role of accessibility, willingness to lead, and organizational skill in their efforts to lead.
Stacy conveyed the importance in assuming leadership and accepts the work involved in leading as her responsibility as a professional. Stacy explained, “Some people are hesitant to take a leadership role, because it means more work. I usually wound up getting named chair [of a committee].” In another example she said that she planned the agriculture division spring banquet, because “I was accessible and people came to me. They [the students] were like saying, ‘Will you help us? Will you help us get this together?’” Stacy makes herself accessible to students and places herself where she can lead. Others recognize her organizational skills and this contributes to leadership opportunities. Stacy discussed how colleagues seem to know that she will accept the responsibility of leading and has the organization skills to complete a task effectively, “That’s what I’ve learned; now, people know. Someone actually said this to me this year, a faculty member, ‘they know how you are and they know you will get it done’.

Jennifer echoed a willingness to assume responsibility. She discussed her belief in the importance of volunteering in professional organizations saying, “Within those organizations I always volunteer and I organize things like fundraisers or take care of the details.” Her organizational skills have helped her to be effective and recognized by her peers. Jennifer stated, “A lot of people come to me and ask, ‘How did you start this club? How did you get this organized—how did you do this? What steps did you take?’ Like Stacy, Jennifer makes herself accessible and colleagues are aware of her special skills that set her apart in effective leading.

Carol also clarified how she first began to assume responsibility in her work setting and the role effective organizational skills played in facilitating her leadership.
Carol has been given the task of coordinating a field trip for fashion merchandising students. She explained:

So, I have done that for three years and it’s really interesting because I don’t really have any background in design and merchandising, but the reason I was asked to do that was just because of organizational skills and being able to plan events and just organize schedules, so that kind of fell in my lap. I wear lots of different hats at work and take on various responsibilities, like the annual student awards program, the field study tour, and much more. I think having the specific skill set that I possess has led to my leadership skills being strengthened through these various roles and responsibilities.

Although accessibility, willingness to assume leadership, and organizational skill are not viewed as leadership, the women perceived these behaviors as providing opportunity and success as effective leaders.

How the women in this study have chosen to lead has been contingent on their personal interests, strengths, and social context in which they live and work. They all have exhibited leadership, but how the leadership was actualized in each of the three women’s lives has been diverse and unique to them. Jennifer’s leadership has been primarily within the context of secondary education through the creation and implementation of innovative teaching and programming. Although her leadership is evident in many venues including the professional organizations, school clubs, staff development, mentoring of new and student teachers, and work in the community, her interests and strength lies in the writing and development of inventive secondary school curriculum. She has written secondary education
textbook supplements for major textbook companies and continues to create teacher materials for a major educational supply company. Jennifer expressed her enjoyment in writing in family and consumer sciences content area saying, “I just have all of these ideas in my mind and I want to get them out. You know, great activity ideas that maybe I have done or wanted to do or I’ve seen someone else do something and I think ‘Oh, if they just would have just done this, it would have been so much more effective’.”

Jennifer’s creative thinking led to the development and implementation of an innovative program at the high school where she teaches which teams regular education students with cognitively disabled students to foster positive peer relationships and increased knowledge and skill through activities focused on family and consumer sciences content. It is this type of programming that has earned Jennifer recognition through two national awards. Jennifer’s manner of leading contributes to family and consumer sciences education at the secondary level and is instrumental in the task of transforming family and consumer sciences content to make it relevant to the needs of today’s society.

Carol has chosen to take an approach to leadership that focuses curriculum change at the university level and the assumption of positional leadership in professional organizations with aspirations of leading through administrative positions at the university level. Carol initiated changes in curriculum development and strategic planning at the university she works at. Utilizing her knowledge of computers and technology, Carol developed a grant proposal that was recently funded allowing her to implement curriculum changes to apparel design and
incorporate cutting edge computer aided design technology. She has also used positional leadership within professional organizations to reinvigorate the organizations' initiatives. Carol stated, “When you start to see those organizations struggle and you know that they are going to be key to the future of the profession, I just thought that maybe I needed to get involved a little bit more.” For Carol “a little bit more” was assuming the presidency of both AAFCS and ACTE affiliates in her state. Through her leadership the organizations developed into cohesive units, this is accomplishment of which she said, “More than anything else, we all came together as a state again.” This is important to Carol because her perception of the significant role of professional organizations in sustaining the profession.

Also critical to sustaining the profession, according to Carol is assuming leadership through administrative positions in higher education. Carol adamantly declared, “The point is we need people in leadership positions. There is a national need for that, so we've go to be able to get people with PhDs in [family and consumer sciences] who can lead programs in higher education.” This is what Carol has been preparing herself for and is taking steps to advance her leadership in this area through applying for an administrative position that is currently open at her institution. Carol's leadership has contributed to innovative curriculum change within the context of FCS programs at the university she works at. Her leadership has also been instrumental in the rebuilding of professional organizations in her state through the utilization of positional leadership to instigate change. She sees herself continuing to provide leadership through her everyday activities, but more
importantly influencing change through the assumption of leadership positions in institutions and organizations.

Stacy’s leadership has been exhibited within the context of advising and teaching at a junior college and she has earned national recognition for her work as an advisor to the student section of AAFCS. During the time of this study, Stacy began a new phase of leading by stepping into the political arena in her state to fight for teachers whom she felt were being marginalized in a state department of education mandate aimed at changing the name of middle and secondary school family and consumer sciences programs to a name omitting the word “family”. Stacy spoke of her leadership role in this instance saying, “The teachers needed an informed voice. I really took it on as my cause. I have talked with more legislators in the past three weeks than I have in my entire life.” Besides conducting research and contacting legislators, Stacy has attended focus group meetings between teachers and the state department and succeeded in mobilizing teachers in her state to form a collective voice in opposing state department actions. As she reflected on this experience she said:

I had 50 emails the day after one of the focus group meetings. The emails I received were from many of the teachers that had attended. Some teachers just thanking me for getting them the information they needed to be informed and for standing up for them. I didn’t have to do it, I just felt extremely passionate about it. These teachers needed a rallying force letting them know that changing the name at the secondary level was not a national trend. The state department needed an education on the basis of the current name.
I happened to have all of that information. This experience made me fight for my profession and realize the value in what we do on a daily basis. My realization of the importance of what I do and my commitment to family and consumer sciences and its true mission has become increasingly more prevalent in my life and a huge part of my identity.

Stacy’s leadership has been actualized in assuming an activist role aimed at using collective action to facilitating positive change. She is stepping out and taking risks by using her leadership to empower others in opposing an oppressive system.

This section addressed the conceptualization of leadership used by the women in this study to guide their leadership, components of leadership deemed essential to effective leadership, and an exploration of the manner in which they have chosen to lead. These themes emerged from their narratives: 1) a conceptualization of leadership as nonhierarchical, defined by context, representing the leader as someone who collaborates or facilitates collective action toward empowerment of others or the accomplishment of a common goal; 2) a perception of essential components of leadership as being collaboration, sharing a vision, challenging the status quo to facilitate positive change, mentoring and enablement of others; 3) accessibility, willingness to assume responsibility, and organizational skills serve to facilitate effectiveness; and 4) context determines the manner in which leadership is exhibited.

**Challenges and Sacrifices**

During our discussions, the women in this study reflected on those experiences that contributed to their development as leaders and to the formation of
their identities. They often discussed these experiences as challenges, difficult choices or trade-offs. In some cases they were articulated as sacrifices the women made to further their careers. None of the respondents expressed regret for these experiences; instead they have negotiated and resolved them in ways that have meaning for them. The women in this study were at different stages in their lives and working in different settings. Because of the diversity in circumstances, there was also a diverse range of challenges; however, challenges related to relationships and family were the two most often articulated. This section gives voice to the challenges each of the women expressed and how each made sense of these experiences.

Jennifer

Jennifer shared, as a personal challenge, her choice to devote time to building a career rather than committing to a relationship, getting married and having children.

Personal challenges I’ve faced? I’d say personal relationships. Some of the reason that I’ve not committed to starting a family is because of my profession. Also, I look back at that and I say, “Wow, if I hadn’t been so happy in my profession and had that to guide the rest of my life, knowing what it felt to be successful, knowing what if felt to be self-fulfilled, I maybe would have settled for something less in my life. Maybe by this time I would have been married and maybe had children, but would I have known true happiness?” I don’t think so.
Jennifer was in her early thirties and acknowledged that she had taken a path outside of the traditional cultural norm by not choosing marriage and children by this stage in her life in order to pursue a career. She reconciled this decision by pointing to the satisfaction and fulfillment she has had from her career and questioned if she would be the person she is today had she not had these professional experiences. To her, these experiences have made her happy and perhaps not having them would have meant settling for something less. Another challenge she expressed was in having to make the choice between a relationship and a job opportunity. She had been mentored, groomed and prepared to apply for a state level position that was opening up. The impending job opportunity coincided with a serious relationship, resulting in a choice that had to be made between the two. Jennifer explained:

[I knew] an impending retirement would be coming within the state—at the state level—and [had] been told by several leaders in the profession that this would be the position for me. They said, “We are looking for your leadership”, “This person is considering retirement.” I knew this and I had been preparing myself for this for several years. However, about almost two years ago now, I met a man and we started dating and from the very early onset, we’ve talked about this—knowing that this would come up because this would be a geographic move for me. . . . We’ve joked about it but until the point came at which it was either, we’re in this relationship, this relationship is good, it brings both of us to be our best people and together we’re even better than our personal best, we’d like to advance this relationship, or either we need to end
it and go our separate ways and it would be for professional reasons. And I
myself couldn’t justify that, because I’ve always wanted to be married and to
have a family of my own, so it was a point at which it took a lot of work. I
mean, it was really hard for both of us to go through that and the point at
which it really changed was we started looking for houses and it meant one of
us deciding to purchase a house and the other person committing—I mean us
committing together with the intention of becoming married. That was a
decision we made and I’m not kidding you, I signed and closed on my house
on a Monday and that person retired on Thursday of the same week. [My
fiancé] said, “What are you going to do?” And I said, “This is the first time in
my life when I felt like I couldn’t do something.” And it wasn’t because I didn’t
want to or, I shouldn’t say that, I didn’t know anymore if I wanted that. I didn’t
know anymore if something I had thought about and people had prepped me
for for years was something I really wanted any more. And I started
wondering if it was their expectation of me or my own expectation of me.

This circumstance led Jennifer to the realization that the relationship and starting her
own family were more important to her now than a career move. The decision was
difficult because it caused a shift in focus that required a reevaluation of her values,
goals and expectations for her personal life and her career. Like so many women in
American society, doing both was not an option. Women often make difficult
choices between career goals and relationships. This was the dilemma for Jennifer.
Jennifer values family and she could not justify placing career goals over personal
goals in this situation.
For Stacy the challenge has been trying to deal with the demands of balancing work and family. One of the choices she and her husband have made has been to postpone having children. Stacy has felt pressure to conform to traditional societal expectations in the comments she receives from others, in seeing her friends following those expectations, and in her family relationships. She questioned the truth in the societal script that says “you can have it all.”

Everybody my age is having babies. Every week, I mean it’s all the time [people ask me], “When are you going to have a baby?” “When are you going to have a baby?” So since 2004 I’ve been saying, “I’m in school. I’m working on my dissertation, and I’m doing this and when I finish that then—“. My friends are going to be on their second or third and I’m going to be on my first. They’re going to be through. There’s a lot of pressure, but I don’t let it get to me. I don’t really worry about it, but it’s very interesting. My husband and I talk about it a lot. He just keeps telling me, don’t let that bother me. Just keep doing what you got to do. You can do it all. You can finish that then have a baby. [Are we] going to be able to do it all? I think I feel a lot of pressure in that too. What do you do? Society says you can have it all, but what can you do? What can you have and still do well? You know, can you still be a good parent and do all this and the other?

Stacy realizes the ideology that a woman can have it all and the reality of trying to succeed in all areas presents a conflict where something must give. Although she says she doesn’t worry about the decision to postpone having children this passage
conveys an inconsistency that belies her words. It is difficult to be making choices contrary to those in her peer group, however, her husband plays an important role in encouraging her to stay the course and continue with her education despite what she is hearing from society. Because of the focus she must have on her work and graduate studies, these are trade-offs she has made in order to be successful in the profession and to earn an advanced degree. One of the tradeoffs has been growing apart from previous friendships. She makes sense of this by looking at her path as a growth process. She may have outgrown friends, but now she has more to contribute to the profession and a new network of colleagues and friends, which has become an important part of how she sees herself.

So, when I think about what I’ve sacrificed—had I not done this [doctoral] program I’m sure life would be different. I probably would have already had a baby. I mean my direction would be different. I would probably have a hobby. I would probably would be more involved with the ladies my age and my community. I probably would be content being there forever and I’m not content now, probably because I would not have known. I didn’t know. I didn’t know what I could do. I just didn’t know. I think socialization outside of what I do, I have given up in order to build this career. And sometimes that’s a lonely place. I’ve lost touch with the stage of life that my friends are in. They’re all in the baby-having stage. So when we do things, I don’t really have anything going on. I mean, they’re supportive you know, but I’m not going to the one-year old birthday parties and I just don’t have that same life stage commonality of what they’re doing. In a way, I feel like I’ve outgrown
them. So, I feel so a part of what I’m so immersed in right now. When I get out it’s like I feel like an alien. You know like, what do I talk about? I don’t need to talk about my dissertation. I don’t need to keep doing that. So what do I contribute to this friend’s circle? That has been a real—apart from my job—who am I? I almost think having a baby will be good, because it will bring a balance of some type. It may make it crazy, but I almost think it’ll make me normal.

In this passage Stacy looks to the idea of having a baby as a means for helping her to fit back in to traditional female roles to some extent and recovering a sense of being in sync with cultural norms thus making her feel more normal; however, she emphasizes that now she is empowered due to her advanced education and she is happy with that choice.

The challenge of trying to balance family obligations with work and studies also extended to relationships with parents and in-laws for Stacy. She discussed her role in her family and the conflict felt in trying to meet family expectations and in trying to fulfill goals she has for work and graduate studies. She explained her biggest challenge to leading as balancing work, studies, and family:

I think balancing the family, because my husband and I are the babies in each family. We’re also going to be the caregivers and I already know that, as young as we are. It is a challenge, because my dad will be like, “Come lay by the pool with us—come go swimming with us—you’ve got to read?” Personally, I think meeting family expectations and obligations. I mean they’re supportive, but at the same time they don’t quite get it all. They try.
Stacy described the difficulty of having to balance work, family expectations, and graduate studies. She often drops what she is doing to help out her parents and in-laws because family is a priority to her.

Carol

Carol’s challenges also revolved around finding a balance between work, studies and family. Carol has two children and a husband that is away from home due to work responsibilities four out of seven days a week at the time. Carol discussed the delicate balance in trying to find time for her children and family while completing her doctoral work and many professional responsibilities. She reflected on the stress on her marriage, the time away from her children and even the loss of health that she sacrificed and the guilt that consumed her in trying to cope with the situation. She explained:

Women bear the burden of home and family and that has been one of the hardest things. I don’t know about juggling balls, but I feel I have become in the last few years a world class juggler. I feel like that’s what I’m doing. I’m constantly juggling and I just pray that I don’t drop a ball that’s not going to bounce back. What I have been struggling with is—why do I do that? I want to be a great teacher; I want to be a great wife, a great mother, a great this [graduate student]. The problem is when you get home from work you have to get the children fed or whatever. My “real” day doesn’t begin until after my kids are in bed. That was one of the things, when you start to realize the time factor and the challenge of managing your time and managing the stress that is associated with it. I wanted to spend time with my children. So I made a
conscious choice. After they were put to bed that was when I would do my work. So if it meant staying up until midnight, or one or an all-nighter sometimes I did, because that’s what I thought I had to do. It has impacted my health. I hope and pray there are not long-term things from that. I don’t have the answer of knowing what to do, because how do I have all that? How do I still have the quality time with my children and be able to do that? I don’t know; I just know that I feel it is something I must do.

Carol questioned her need to excel in every area of her life and the pressure that placed on her each day. She made the choice to make her children a top priority, but she put her own health in jeopardy trying to meet the high expectations she set for herself. She also questioned how the pace she has chosen to work at, especially during the time she was completing her doctoral degree, will affect her children. She reflected:

Sometimes I wonder how that will affect my children. My youngest child actually had several issues at school during that time. I can remember calling the teacher. I was returning her call about some of his behavior issues. Normally, my child had not had behavior problems. I remember her telling me that he just seemed really different, very needy, wanting attention, seemed to be doing things strictly for—kind of playing out or acting out. I immediately started crying on the phone with her. I told her it’s because I’m trying to finish getting my degree and working full time and I just spend all my waking moments on school and work. I don’t know for sure if that had any impact on it. Of course, I think I shocked her because she wasn’t expecting to hear all
that. She quickly assured me that she thought things were going to get
better. They did later on. Like at that point it was worth it and that I would
either be able to make it up to my family later or the benefits of that sacrifice
would outweigh in the future.

Like Stacy, Carol made reference to the social script, “you can have it all” and the
challenge that ideology presents. She maintained that she has begun to develop a
maturity that has helped her confront that particular ideology and make choices that
are best for her and her family.

I think in a way it’s a superwoman mentality. I thought I could do it all. Oh
yeah, I can go back to school and I can do this. “Oh we need someone to
serve in this role; well sure, you’ve got the skills.” “Okay, this can’t be that
difficult.” A lot of it was things that I brought on myself, but I think that’s all
part of the maturing process. What I’ve learned is that you’ve got to be able
to set your own limits. I have to be willing to be okay with myself and say no.
Just because I say no doesn’t mean I’m a bad person. It has taken me a
while to finish the doctoral program, because there was a point that I had to
stop working on school. It was either lose my marriage or finish with a
diploma, but also a divorce in hand. I had to stop and I had to focus on my
family. [There was] a lot of role conflict. I had to make some decisions and
choices about what I was able to do and not able to do. Dealing with the guilt
has been something I have really had to work on and I still work on.
To find understanding in her experiences, Carol looked at the challenges and sacrifices she has endured as essential to her growth. She used this analogy as a way of understanding the sacrifices and challenges she has experienced.

A couple of weeks ago, my husband and I were outside doing some yard work and we had these shrubs on the side of the house. My husband insisted on cutting them back. So he cut them back and he cut them back so much I was like, “Oh they look so bare, so naked, I can’t believe you did that. They look so ugly!” Just the other day, I saw the new growth on those bushes which was a beautiful bright green. It’s more growth than what we had ever seen before. It seemed amazing to see the new life that was infused in those bushes. I thought about that as I reflected on some of the sacrifices that I’ve made. In living my life over the last few years, things in my life had to be cut back. I didn’t really like it when things had to be cut back or things didn’t necessarily go my way or whatever. But I realized that sometimes things in life have to be cut back in order for a new growth, a new life to come forward. That in itself kind of helped me to understand that something better can happen. Sometimes we have to let go of things so that new things can occur. What we have to figure out is—what old things do we hang on to and what do we let go of?

The challenges and sacrifices that these women have articulated largely dealt with choices related to relationships and families and the pressure to live up to expectations of society in keeping with cultural norms. These women have found ways to cope with these challenges. Their families have provided support and they
each approached their choices in a way in which they were able to interpret negative experiences or challenges as opportunities of growth, reconciling their choices and decisions in such a way that they found these experiences contributed to their identities as leaders and professionals.

This section addressed the challenges each of the women faced through their socialization process and in assuming leadership in family and consumer sciences and how each made sense of these experiences. These themes emerged from their narratives: 1) the challenge of balancing work, relationships and family; and 2) a perspective of resilience in dealing with critical experiences resulting in a positive outcome or change.

**Aspirations**

One of the questions I had when I began this study was whether these women viewed themselves as leaders? How did they envision themselves leading in the future? What legacy did they wish to leave? Although they provided conflicted responses concerning their perceptions of themselves as leaders, they did view themselves as leaders in one way or another. Jennifer described herself as a learner, refusing to give herself the title of leader, but she did admit that she was a leader at the local, state and national levels.

I guess I have been forced to see myself as a leader because I’ve been made one by others. I know that sounds funny but I do not see myself as a leader—I see myself as a learner. People say, “How did you become such a leader?” and I say, “But, I’m not.” I’m not. You can call me a leader, others can call me a leader or an emergent leader, but it’s not something I ever
intended to do. I didn’t set out one day and say, “I’m going to be a great leader.” I would say I have been a leader in my department, in my school, and in my district in family and consumer sciences and in family and consumer sciences statewide. I probably, with the most recent recognition of national teacher of the year, [would say that I have been a leader] hopefully nationwide.

Carol’s reflections on how she perceived herself as a leader illustrated that, although she was willing to accept the title of leader, she did not know if she could be recognized as a leader at the national level yet. That is a goal she still aspires to reach.

I would probably say now that I do [see myself as a leader]. I don’t know that I see myself as a leader in the profession. I believe that I’m leader in my school and in my department, just because I’ve had people look to me for questions and things like that. Our department head position is actually open. I had a faculty member come to me last year when it was open and ask me, “Would you consider applying? We think you can lead us.” I think I’m a leader in my school. I think I’m leading within my state, not just the fact that I held a position of leadership. People saw my level of professionalism, my ability to bring people together in a state organization that was struggling. As far as whether I would say in the whole profession itself, am I leader? I don’t know, but I guess that’s all in how you define leadership. At some point in my professional career, I would like to be considered a leader nationally. I would like to be a person that even when they say, “We want to know about
leadership development," or "We want to know about professional
development," that they'll think "Let's call Carol [last name]. Let's see what
she has to say about this."

In response to the question "Do you see yourself as a leader?" Stacy said,
"Yes, I do, but I'm also learning. I feel like I'm a leader and I want to be. I want to
be. I just need to put myself where I need to be in order to get to that point." Stacy
sees herself in the process of becoming a leader, one that is still growing. She said
twice, "I want to be" a leader, placing emphasis on her choice to pursue the path of
leadership and on the fact that she is still in the process of getting to get to that
point. The key to these reflections was that although these women believed
themselves to be leaders to a certain extent they viewed themselves still in the
process of becoming leaders. Carol elaborated:

I can see leadership as a journey; it's a process of becoming. I don't think it's
something where you ever arrive. You'll never be able to say, "Oh, I'm leader
and I'm done. This is it." I think it's having a set of personal qualities, a set of
beliefs and then being able to apply those. It's all a process. It's either
developing those qualities that a leader needs to have or it's taking some of
those qualities and applying them to a certain situation or certain problem. Or
it's just a process of seeing what the possibility is—looking at the vision. It is
a process. It's not something that we can ever mold it, picture it, bottle it. It's
very, very abstract.

The study participants are still in the "process of becoming". They view
themselves as growing, changing and having much more to contribute. So, how did
they envision themselves leading in the future? They articulated both professional goals and goals for leading. They expressed interests in pursuing administration, curriculum development, professional development and serving at the national level in professional organizations; however, they are searching out what they will ultimately do. Jennifer stated:

I have many options to choose from but I’m not even sure that I know what it is. I’m not saying that I don’t know what I want to do, I don’t know if what I will do has even been named yet. I may professionally consult, I may teach online for [a university] from home, I don’t know. I don’t know if I’ll work at the university or secondary level, or at the state level or federal level. I don’t know. I want to do it all. I really do. There’s not a position that doesn’t interest me.

Two of the women specified obtaining a doctoral degree as key to advancing their opportunities to lead. Carol explained, “I believe that once I get this degree, I think the opportunities are going to open up. I think it’s going to be opportunities that I can’t even fathom what they might be. It’s just that I have to trust and believe and have faith that that’s what’s going to happen.” Stacy mirrored this perception in her comment, “I want it [the doctoral degree] to give me credibility. I’m doing this for where I will go. Right now I don’t know where that is, but I know that it will get me to where I want to be.”

Two of the women viewed positional leadership as a necessary step to gaining the power and influence that would be required to facilitate their leadership goals. As Stacy discussed her career aspirations to become a dean, she recognized
the fact that positional leadership often includes the elements of power and influence that then could be used to advance the philosophical framework of integration, which she viewed as critical to sustaining the profession. She said in speaking of her career goals:

I think just to really go as high as I can. Maybe I want to be a dean. You know, now, what’s going to be the career path to get me to that point? There aren’t too many deans by the time they are 35. That’s kind of one of those things that you kind of aspire to your whole life. I want to have that kind of influence. To be where I can—where I can say “Okay, this unit is going to be one of the best in the country. We’re going to be integrative.”

Carol alluded to the importance of positional leadership in sustaining and leading the profession in her response as well. She is seriously considering an administrative position in which she could have more influence. She explained:

The thing is we need people in FCS Ed, because they are the generalists. They’re the ones who see the big picture. If we continue to let specialists, and I’m not degrading them, but if they continue to only see their specialization it’s going to be the demise of our profession because that’s what is happening in higher education programs. They are dividing us up and don’t see us as a whole anymore. Unless we have people who see the big picture in those positions I don’t think we’re going to change anything. . . . Our department head [position] is going to be open in the fall and that’s one of the things I’ve really been praying about. Okay God, is this something I need to apply for? Is this what you’re preparing me for?
Carol discussed the ideology of an integrative, holistic perspective as crucial to advancing the profession. Carol and Stacy believe that by enriching themselves and expanding their base of knowledge through advanced study, they are preparing themselves for positions in which they will have more power to influence and challenge philosophical underpinnings. Carol does not know specifically what her role will be, but continues to search for and prepare herself for positional leadership where she believes she can have the desired impact.

The final question I asked these women was, “What legacy do you want to leave the family and consumer sciences profession?” The overriding theme was simply that they wanted to make a difference. Whether it was in the life of one individual or making a difference within the profession, making a difference was the meaning that these women brought to their leadership and work within the profession. Stacy reflected:

I just want to help be a part of what sustains it as an integrative profession. I just want to help continue to tie it together, you know, where everything still relates around that body of knowledge, but then communicate that to other people. You can’t do it by yourself. You’re one person, but maybe as one person you can make a difference. If I teach a student what it means, then maybe in their workplace they can be that leader there.

In this passage, Stacy expressed the desire to make strides in promoting an integrative philosophy through her work with students. She visualizes making a difference through her relationships with students and impacting those students to become leaders. Jennifer also reflected on the legacy of having a chain of influence
in her role as a teacher. She recalled something that had been said at the presentation of one of her national awards that expressed her thoughts:

My goal would be to create something that would continue beyond my involvement. . . . The governor's wife actually said it, our first lady. She said something about when you’re an educator you don’t just impact the lives of students in your classroom in one year; you impact the lives of their families, their siblings, their friends, their relatives because those students continue to do that [what they have learned from a teacher]. Later in life, you impact the children of your students and their children and their children after them because of something you modeled, that you did, a way in which you worked with them—the way in which you made them feel. So, every day I hope to be leaving a positive legacy or something that will carry on—formally or informally, acknowledged or not, named or not.

In Carol’s words, the meaning derived from leading and working in family and consumer sciences is in knowing that she has made a difference in the lives of others:

I guess it would all boil down to making a difference. I just want to know that I’ve made the difference; a difference in the life of just one person. That I did help empower someone to either improve their situation or improve their knowledge or their skills. The difference I’ve made in one person’s life might inspire them to make a difference in someone else’s life and they in turn will make a difference in another’s life.
To each of these women, the essence of their leadership is rooted in making a difference. Whether it is empowering an individual or a family or sustaining the profession of family and consumer sciences, the leadership exhibited by each of these women shows a commitment to making a difference. It is this legacy they hope to leave for those who follow their path.

This section explored the respondents’ perceptions of themselves as leaders, their aspirations for leading in the future, and the legacy they each hoped to leave. These themes emerged from their narratives: 1) a perception of themselves as leaders within their social context; 2) a searching out of possibilities for leading in the future; and 3) aspirations of making a difference in the lives of individuals, families and the profession.

Summary

The stories these women have to tell of their socialization into the family and consumer sciences profession and their development as leaders illustrate diverse and common influences, experiences, and catalysts that have served to shape their identities as leaders. They are in the midst of their stories, a path of conscious change aimed at making themselves ready to lead. Common themes that emerged pertaining to key influences and experiences were: 1) the positive influence of family in instilling the values of hard work and education, the importance of family in providing support and in serving as role models; 2) positive mentoring and modeling by educators in the field of family and consumer sciences; 3) the challenge and enrichment of doctoral studies in the field; 4) the role of challenges, sacrifices and negative situations in serving to illuminate new understandings and the realization of
inner fortitude and growth. Themes that emerged regarding values and motivations were: 1) the values of education, commitment and caring or passion; 2) a spiritual belief that guides understanding; and 3) the ideology of making a difference serves to provide motivation for the assumption of leadership and affords meaning to leadership and professional experiences. Themes that emerged concerning the development of a leadership philosophy were: 1) a conceptualization of leadership as nonhierarchical, defined by context, representing the leader as someone who collaborates or facilitates collective action toward empowerment of others or the accomplishment of a common goal; 2) a perception of essential components of leadership as being collaboration, sharing a vision, challenging the status quo to facilitate positive change, mentoring and enablement of others; 3) accessibility, willingness to assume responsibility, and organizational skills serve to facilitate effectiveness; and 4) context determines the manner in which leadership is exhibited. Themes that emerged with regard to challenges and sacrifices were: 1) the challenge of balancing work, relationships and family; and 2) a perspective of resilience in dealing with critical experiences resulting in a positive outcome or change. Themes that emerged relating to aspirations were: 1) a perception of themselves as leaders within their social context; 2) a searching out of possibilities for leading in the future; and 3) aspirations of making a difference in the lives of individuals, families and the profession.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this narrative study was to discover the meaning and understanding emerging leaders bring to their experience of assuming responsibility for leading in family and consumer sciences education. I used narrative inquiry to investigate women’s experiences as a theoretical resource for understanding present conditions and exploring the meaning women make of these experiences of socialization and leadership in family and consumer sciences education. I conducted interviews with three women identified to be emerging leaders which were used as the source of data. Through the use of inductive analysis, I developed themes from the stories the women shared of the development of their leadership and socialization into the profession. In this chapter I summarize the findings that emerged from the inquiry based on the following research questions:

1. What were the experiences and values that motivated women to actively assume leadership responsibilities in family and consumer sciences education?

2. How do emerging women leaders make sense of their experiences and what meaning does leading hold for them?

3. What characterizes the female experience of socialization into leadership in family and consumer sciences education?

Research Question One

What were the experiences and values that motivated women to actively assume leadership responsibilities in family and consumer sciences education?

Conclusions drawn from the data are: 1) foundations of leadership development are
conceived through family and consumer sciences science professionals’ opportunities provided by family and consumer courses, FCCLA, and professional student organizations where leadership potential is recognized and fostered; 2) family and consumer sciences emerging leaders develop personal values and professional knowledge that facilitates their leadership through relationships with others; 3) the challenge and enrichment of doctoral study provides a critical experience characterized by a broadened understanding of the family and consumer sciences philosophical framework and practice; and 4) the values of education, commitment and caring or passion serve to motivate assuming leadership responsibilities.

In searching out the beginnings of leadership development, I found evidence that experiences in family and consumer sciences courses at the secondary level, participation in leadership opportunities in student organizations such as FCCLA and the student section of AAFCS, could be the starting point of developing leadership skills for family and consumer sciences professionals. Without exception, each of the respondents began the story of their socialization into the family and consumer sciences profession and the beginning of their leadership journey by discussing these critical influences. Two of the respondents recalled becoming state officers in FCCLA which later influenced their leadership in the student section of AAFCS. One of the respondents remembered being immersed in family and consumer sciences since the age of three through her mother’s role as a family and consumer sciences teacher and learning leadership skills through participation in FCCLA competitive events.
These findings mirror studies that demonstrated a positive relationship between student leadership as a good predictor of later leadership (Draper, 1982) and the positive role of FCCLA in developing leadership skills (Vickers, 1994). These experiences seem to have established a pattern for assuming leadership in professional organizations. Each of the respondents followed a progression from involvement in FCCLA, to involvement in the student section of AAFCS, to involvement and leadership in various professional organizations as an adult. Many studies document the key role of professional organizations in contributing to leadership growth and professional commitment (Arku, 1985; Goodwin, 1991; Watts, 1986; Yovanovich, 1986). According to Arku (1985) early experiences in student organizations provide a base for not only developing leadership skills, but for fostering professional commitment in students.

Through the course of this research I found that family and consumer sciences emerging leaders develop personal values and professional knowledge that facilitates their leadership through relationships with others. The respondents in this study revealed the influence of parents in providing for the formation of values and support, and the impact of teachers and mentors who served to encourage their growth and stimulate the formation of a broadened understanding of the philosophical underpinnings that ground the profession of family and consumer sciences. In the reflections of the respondents, parents where deemed as role models and teachers of the values of hard work and education perceived as to critical to leadership development.
These findings support conclusions found within the literature (Astin & Leland, 1991; Ironside, 1983; Roubanis, 2000) that parents instilled values that were instrumental in the formation of leadership qualities. Through vital parent-child relationships the women in this study were provided experiences, support and encouragement as they pursued educational and leadership goals. Jennifer, Stacy, and Carol discussed parental involvement in 4-H activities, school achievement, and the role of support and encouragement in facilitating their development toward leadership. These reflections are confirmed by Astin and Leland’s (1991) study where family is cited as shaping individual talents which led to success as a leader through the provision of special experiences, strength and inspiration. The influence of family richly impacted each respondent so that qualities were deeply imbedded that served to facilitate leadership development.

Family and consumer sciences emerging leaders develop leadership in relationship with others who touch their lives. Respondents in this study recalled the many encounters with teachers and mentors that affected their becoming a leader and gaining professional knowledge that served to cultivate their leadership. Each respondent concurred that their leadership was a result of interacting with, observing, and emulating family and consumer sciences professionals. Mentors and teachers provided opportunity, encouragement, support, guidance, and role models to follow. It was through mentoring relationships that emerging leaders first conceived and understood the commitment and passion that has become the essence of their leadership. This finding concurs with the contention that mentoring is a critical aspect of leadership development for women (Beard, 2005). Family and
consumer sciences literature has also focused on the value of mentoring relationships in nurturing leadership within the profession (Baugher & Kellett, 1983; Clark, 2000; Crabtree, 2000; Firebaugh, 2000; Meeks, 2000). Each of the respondents found leadership development to be consummated through interactions with mentors and teachers and valued these relationships for inspiring them to become who they are. This finding presents a contrast to Astin and Leland’s (1991) research where mentors were not perceived as an influential factor to leadership development for “instigators” primarily because “women were neither available nor in a position to help mentor” (p. 52). However, this study’s findings does coincide with indications in Astin and Leland’s (1991) research pointing to a shift toward increased mentoring relationships as new generations of leaders look to women of previous generations who have succeeded as leaders. Today’s emerging leaders are embracing the importance of mentoring, and in doing so, are changing leadership development for women.

The challenge and enrichment of doctoral study provides a critical experience characterized by a broadened understanding of the family and consumer sciences philosophical framework and practice. The study respondents reflected a resounding belief that the doctoral studies contributed to their development as leaders. They discussed emphatically the gaps in their socialization that they were previously unaware of before becoming entrenched in the study of philosophical perspectives and issues surrounding the family and consumer sciences profession that were a part of their studies. Not only did these studies open new vistas for understanding and practice, the experience provided a learning community and
network that fostered capacity building as described by Ralston (2002). Ralston (2002) discussed the importance of building relationships that foster a “culture of learning” where knowledge and understanding can be shared, created, and promoted (pp. 3-4). For the women in this study, doctoral studies offered that opportunity, generating new understandings and the nurturance of relationships that aided leadership development and fueled their passion.

As the respondents of this study shared experiences of their leadership journey, it became apparent that the values of education, commitment, and caring/passion served to motivate assuming leadership responsibilities. These values seem to be the core of their leadership. Gentzler (1986, 1987, 1995) found commitment to be a component of professional development that implies action aimed at fulfilling the mission of the profession. The stories the respondents shared reverberated with the theme of commitment and their actions illustrated their commitment. Respondents have born out their commitment through their work with individuals, families, organizations, institutions and communities. They demonstrated a passion and caring that has become essential to their leadership. Each respondent at some point stated, “I love what I do” and expressed the belief that what they do makes a difference. Imbedded in their reflections is a sense of connection and care that defines their sense of identity as family and consumer sciences professionals. Through this ethic of care they have chosen the ethic of responsibility that has become the anchor of their leadership efforts. This finding corroborates Gilligan’s (1982) assertion that “women’s sense of integrity appears to be entwined with an ethic of care” which can evolve into an “ethic of responsibility”
from which strength and integrity can be drawn (p. 171). A theme of the ethic of caring was found to be an essential quality of leadership in studies by Barbie (2004) and Hirsch (2005) as well.

**Research Question Two**

How do emerging women leaders make sense of their experiences and what meaning does leading hold for them? Conclusions drawn from the data are: 1) confidence in professional and leadership abilities grows through perseverance in overcoming obstacles; and 2) the ideology of making a difference serves to drive the assumption of leadership and provide meaning to leadership and professional experiences.

Socialization into the profession of family and consumer sciences and leadership is not without its share of challenges, obstacles and sacrifice. Respondents shared reflections of negative experiences that defined their socialization process. Experiences included a diversity of situations and negative interactions ranging from challenges in dealing with difficult people, to working without the benefit of mentors, to conflicts in balancing family and work roles. In each circumstance, respondents expressed a sense of empowerment and growth as they managed to successfully navigate these obstacles. When discussing how these experiences shaped their leadership, each of the three women in this study drew upon inner strengths and core beliefs to turn negatives into positives. By taking this perspective they perceived these experiences as facilitating reflection and growth that acted to spur their development as professionals. Both Jennifer and Carol stated that they “enjoyed a challenge” and when presented with a challenge it
often served to motivate them. Jennifer and Stacy faced obstacles by looking within themselves to find the fortitude to overcome negative experiences. Also important in dealing with negative experiences for Stacy and Carol, was a core belief in God and placing faith in His guidance. These two women found comfort and strength in their religious faith and a belief that the challenges and sacrifices they experienced helped them to become stronger and better able to help others.

Literature supports the finding that women leaders often adopt a perspective of resilience in dealing with critical experiences resulting in a positive outcome or change. Studies on female leadership consistently found that successful women leaders take negative or critical events and positively process them or use them for motivators (Astin & Leland, 1991; Chatman, 1991; Roubanis, 2000; Rude, 2005). Additionally, a study by Erdwins, Buffardi, Casper, and O’Brien (2001) found that when women are confident in work and family roles it mitigates negative feelings related to conflict and overload. All three of the respondents concurred that the sacrifices made and challenges faced resulted in positive outcomes that facilitated their growth, sense of control and empowerment.

“It is only in relationship to the other that the self can be defined,” asserted Casey (1993, p. 23). This statement is indicative of the way the women in this study have come to make meaning of their experiences and the value leadership holds for them. The social process of face-to-face encounters as leaders and teachers in family and consumer sciences has provided powerful motivation and the establishment of an identity that has rendered a sense of responsibility aimed at making a difference. The narratives of Jennifer, Carol, and Stacy focus on the
significance of relationships where they have impacted others and in doing so have been impacted themselves. The women in this study voiced the need to make a difference through their efforts as professionals and leaders. Having seen that they can and do make a difference stimulates their sense of commitment.

Women leaders studied by Astin and Leland (1991) exhibited this same “sense of mission or caring and desire to make a difference” (p. 81). Astin and Leland (1991) found that common among women leaders were “values that address change” and “the capacity to look up from oneself and out to a society and the future” (p.83). The same could be said for the women represented in this study. Each woman values changing the lives of others, enabling others toward empowerment, and demonstrates the ability to see beyond themselves to the difference they make in the lives of others. For these women therein lies the meaning for leading and working as a family and consumer sciences professional.

**Research Question Three**

What characterizes the female experience of socialization into leadership in family and consumer sciences education? Conclusions drawn from the data are: 1) commitment and passion drive leadership actualization; 2) commitment and passion can be created and strengthened within the context of lived experience; 3) context determines the manner in which leadership is exhibited; and 4) a culture that cultivates commitment and passion must be created in order to build leaders.

In searching out common threads from the narratives of emerging leaders in family and consumer sciences education I found that the socialization process was marked by the development of a commitment and passion that inspired these
women to assume leadership. Characterizing their socialization was internalized attitudes and beliefs that placed commitment and passion at the forefront of their professional development. In their own words, they spoke of how their commitment and passion led them to leadership actions and behaviors. Their leadership is an outward manifestation of the internalization of their commitment and passion for their profession. Both Jennifer and Stacy said, “It’s who I am.” The respondents have developed through their socialization an identity as a family and consumer sciences professional that governs their professional actions. This finding confirms Gentzler’s (1995) contention that

Professionals who are committed to the contemporary mission of home economics have undergone certain experiences which have reinforced and encouraged that commitment. Those experiences have provided opportunities to examine and internalize the intended goals and meaning of the mission of home economics. (p. 96)

Gentzler (1995) goes on to discuss commitment as not merely acceptance, but a dedication to act, “Action based on one’s commitment becomes the key” (p. 97). Brown (1985) suggested that action

...involves the act as a culmination of the thought and intentions of the actor who arrives consciously at determination of the act. An action, therefore, has meaning in terms of the actor’s underlying reasons. (p. 170)

The socialization process for the three women in this study has been filled with experiences that have shaped their beliefs and commitment so that they have
synthesized professional values transcending self-interest and as a result engaged in leadership as essential to their professional practice.

A second conclusion concerning the socialization process was that commitment and passion can be created and strengthened within the context of lived experience. Although none of the respondents could pinpoint specifically how their commitment and passion was created and strengthened, they agreed that a multitude of influences combined to bring about this transformation. In their reflections, Carol spoke of her commitment being born out of mentoring relationships; Jennifer discussed the influence of seeing passion among colleagues and professors upon entering graduate school and how these experiences cemented her commitment and passion; and Stacy talked of challenging events that brought out passion she did not realize she had and the importance of knowledge in giving her the power to act on her passion.

Both Stacy and Carol believed that passion is created through relationships with others. In speaking of her mentors Carol stated, “They instilled in me a passion, a love of the profession, a love for the history, a love of learning…just wanting to know more.” Stacy conveyed the belief that others see passion in you and seek to find that same fulfillment themselves. She said, “[Students] say they want to be like me, so what do I have that they want? You know, I think people want…they want to be that happy.” Nichols’ (2001) study of AAFCS Leaders and New Achievers supported this finding. Study participants perceived mentoring as the most effective way to inspire commitment and transmit the culture of the profession (Nichols, 2001).
The process of assuming leadership in family and consumer sciences was different for each respondent because each was living and working within their own unique setting. According to Casey (1993), “It is precisely because all educational and political actions must be grounded in some particular social environment, that they must also be different from each other” (p. 166). Social context determined the manner in which each of the women in this study was socialized into leadership and exhibited leadership. Each respondent shared a willingness to assume leadership; however the opportunities that molded that leadership varied resulting in individual leadership skills and styles. Although experiences converged to develop a philosophy of leadership based in the conceptualization of leadership as nonhierarchival and the representation of the leader as someone who collaborates or facilitates collective action toward empowerment of others or the accomplishment of a common goal, how this conceptualization was actualized for each respondent was contingent on context. Each respondent displayed leadership within the context of her environment. Jennifer’s leadership has been primarily within the context of secondary education through the creation and implementation of innovative teaching and programming. Carol’s leadership has been within the context of leading curriculum change at the university level and positional leadership in professional organizations. Stacy’s leadership has been within the context of advising and teaching at a junior college and leading teachers in having their voices heard when political systems were silencing them. Osborn, Hunt, and Jauch (2002) proposed that different models of leadership fit different circumstances:
We see leadership as a series of attempts, over time, to alter human actions and organizational systems. Such human actions vary depending on hierarchical levels where the actors find themselves in their organizations and the circumstances facing the organization at the time. Hence, “leadership” is an emerging social construction embedded in a unique organization—it is contextual leadership. (p. 832)

Out of varying social contexts, each of the women has chosen to lead and contribute in a way that is personal to them and their situation.

As I contemplate the future of the family and consumer sciences as a profession and listen to the voices of emerging leaders as they reveal the challenges they encountered in assuming leadership, I am convinced that a culture that cultivates commitment and passion must be created in order to build leaders. What kind of culture are we creating? In thinking about this I was reminded of the dismay I felt when in talking with another secondary teacher about the shortage of family and consumer sciences teachers she questioned, “Why would anyone want my job?” It is a simple act that we are all responsible for as transmitters of the culture of family and consumer sciences, to convey the value and worth of our profession. We must enjoy what we do and have a passion so great that others can see it. The women in this study have experienced a culture that has provided them the commitment and passion to lead. We learn from them the importance of mentoring in providing opportunities, support, and encouragement. We learn from them the importance of creating a culture of learning where knowledge and innovation can thrive. In order to build the leadership that our profession’s scholars have deemed necessary for our
sustenance and growth, we need to listen to the voices of emerging leaders, listen to their stories and hear their words. Only then can we move forward in creating a nurturing culture where commitment and passion flourish and leaders are unleashed.

**Reflections on the Research Process**

My experience as a researcher has been at times frustrating and at other times illuminating and exhilarating, a roller coaster of highs and lows. At the time this research began I was questioning my responsibilities as a leader in family and consumer sciences education and searching out what it truly means for me to assume leadership within the profession. I was inspired by *Women of Influence*, *Women of Vision*, a study by Astin and Leland (1991) that focused on the activism of women primarily during the 1960s and 1970s who instigated social change. I believed that a type of activist leadership aimed at change was necessary for advancing family and consumer sciences education in light of the issues and challenges that seemed to be so prevalent. I perceived leadership to have a foundation in commitment and passion that prompts a vision realized through collective action to initiate positive change. The women, who allowed me into their lives in this effort to co-create meaning, were selected because others saw them as emerging leaders in family and consumer sciences education. I hoped to discover through their narratives how they came to be identified as emerging leaders, how they conceptualized leadership, and how they were acting out their conceptualizations as emerging leaders. How were they leading us?
As I began to analyze these women’s narratives, I was constantly challenged to evaluate what constitutes leadership in light of the overwhelming multitude of various discourses on leadership and the accepted cultural norms surrounding those conceptualizations. I began to question my understandings of leadership. Why were these women recommended as emerging leaders? Are these women actually emerging leaders? How is leadership exhibited in the lives of emerging leaders? During the process of interviewing and analyzing the narratives of the respondents it slowly became evident that although they voiced conceptualizations that were similar to my own in many ways, to some extent they had internalized many of the patriarchal discourses of leadership placing emphasis on traits, behaviors, skills, competition, power and influence which are all prevalent components within traditional male models of leadership. This was evident when I asked them how they exhibited leadership. The emerging leaders spoke of organizational skills, roles of positional leadership in organizations, and leadership as necessitated by job responsibilities. They spoke of aspirations of obtaining positional leadership. Was this anything different from how leadership has been conceptualized and acted out previously in our profession?

I was beginning to think that what I had discovered is that we indeed were leading just as we always had, limited by our own conceptualizations of leadership and dominant cultural norms. At this point in the research process I was beginning to contact each of the respondents to conduct a second interview. In my second conversation with Stacy, she began to share the latest developments concerning a situation that she had referred to during our first interview in which middle school
and secondary school teachers were being asked by the state department of 
education in her state to change the name of their programs from family and 
consumer sciences to an undetermined name. As she began to describe the recent 
events that had transpired and her actions in addressing this issue I could see that 
she was living out leadership as I had envisioned it. I was ecstatic at the revelation. 
She spoke of her passion that drove her to act, not because it was her job 
responsibility, but because of the responsibility she felt to sustain the profession and 
to help teachers who were being treated unjustly by an overpowering system. She 
was acutely aware of the injustice of the situation and the impact that the proposed 
change would make on the profession in her state and perhaps nationally. Stacy 
viewed the situation as a challenge and an opportunity that her commitment and 
passion drove her to take up. She implemented leadership in researching, 
networking and collaboration to form a plan and ended up instigating collective 
action aimed at change and empowerment. Stacy had exhibited the type of 
leadership that I had decided was a new way of leading. This was what our past 
and current leaders where calling for, right? I had found the new paradigm for 
leadership that would sustain the profession and carry us forward amidst social 
change. But had I really?

Andrews et al. (1995), Astin and Leland (1991), and McGregor (2006) had all 
developed conceptualizations of leadership that consisted of a framework based on 
the power of each individual to lead, grounded in a moral dimension, challenging the 
status quo through collective action, and striving for change agendas. I also could 
not resolve the fact that Carol and Jennifer did not fit into this mold exactly. Did this
mean that they were not leaders? I knew that they were. The puzzle pieces just simply did not fit. I went to bed several nights and woke up in the morning thinking through the conflicts and tensions that my research presented. What was the meaning that I made from this study? I needed to look at my research differently perhaps. Finally, I had an epiphany. I had been trying to find a new way of conceptualizing leadership and that is where I was missing the mark. As I scoured the transcripts, my notes and analyses, I began to realize that I had not found a new paradigm for leadership and quite simply new leadership conceptualizations were not emerging from the research. What was emerging from the research was more primal than leadership development; it was the commitment and passion that drove the leadership exhibited by the women in this study. I began to understand that what is needed to move our profession forward and make family and consumer sciences relevant to future generations is fostering a commitment and passion that leads to action and therefore, leadership. Leadership development is secondary to commitment and passion. We can develop a multitude of conceptualizations of leadership, in fact, there already are many. We can conduct leadership development courses based on these models, however, if we do not foster commitment and passion then our efforts are in vain. Each of the women in this study exemplifies different ways of leading, yet they are all leaders. My argument is that this is exactly what we need within our profession. We need women with various leadership styles, characteristics and qualities based on the context they have chosen to work in. We need leaders, such as Jennifer, developing innovative programs that will keep us relevant. We need leaders, such as Carol, who are
willing to step into administration to provide the influence necessary to promote family and consumer sciences by working through the structures of organizations and institutions. And we need leaders, such as Stacy, who are taking risks to fight for our profession and others who need a voice.

The tie that binds all of these leaders together is the commitment and passion with which they have chosen to lead. As I reflected on this revelation, I returned once again to the Astin and Leland (1991) study and found that these researchers had identified “caring, value-oriented commitment as the centerpiece of leadership” (p. 118). One of the overarching themes discovered through their research was the importance of passionate commitment as a cornerstone of leadership (Astin & Leland, 1991). This is what we must work to foster. Within the stories of the three women in this study are complex dynamics that have culminated in the commitment and passion they exhibit. What I believe we must focus on is how to encourage this type of commitment and passion so that leaders may emerge. How can this be done? I argue that we need to aim to provide and encourage the relationships and experiences that promote commitment and passion. By looking to the voices of the women in the study, these actions might include: 1) encouraging involvement in family and consumer sciences courses, FCCLA, and preprofessional student organizations; 2) encouraging doctoral studies; and 3) providing mentoring that offers support (especially during challenging times) and opportunities for growth, as well as mentoring that demonstrates passion. Family and consumer sciences professionals must model and demonstrate passion so that it can evolve in those whose lives we touch. It is through interactions and experiences that passion and
commitment are conceived. Relationships are key to transmitting this essential, most basic, requirement in order for leaders to emerge. Astin and Leland (1991) concluded with similar implications encouraging “conscious attention to the critical dimension of succession” and utilizing “the teaching role for seasoned leaders to transmit their knowledge about leadership and to mentor their successors through active learning experiences” (p. 161).

This study reveals that the hope of our profession is in good hands as emerging leaders step forward to take up the mantle of leadership within family and consumer sciences. Within the socialization process we are building commitment that is breeding a passion leading to action aimed at creating positive change for our profession. Paraphrasing Brown (1984) in her commemorative lecture, we must change ourselves, fill in the gaps of our socialization and embark upon rational discourse if we are to change from how we have always done things to find a better way. Leadership is a critical area that we must reevaluate if we are to move forward and address societal issues and challenges within the profession itself. Perhaps we have been putting the cart before the horse. Rather than solely focusing on leadership, we need to first work at developing the type of commitment and passion out of which leaders are born. The narratives represented in this study provide us a path to follow. The women represented here are changing themselves and filling in the gaps of their socialization, learning each day through their interactions with family, mentors, colleagues, teachers and students. They have overcome obstacles, challenges, made sacrifices, and taken risks that have contributed to their understandings and growth. They are stepping forward to take the lead. As I reflect
on their leadership and individual journeys I believe that as a teacher and mentor, I can foster the commitment and passion in my students. This is the vital link, the beginning of the chain that binds and builds the leadership necessary to guide the profession for future generations.
APPENDIX A:

APPROVAL OF INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
DATE: April 26, 2007

TO: Denise G. Fisher
Harding University, Box 12233, Searcy, AR 72149

CC: Yvonne S. Gentzler
30A MacKay Hall

FROM: Jan Canny, IRB Administrator
Office of Research Assurances

IRB ID: 07-233

Approval Date: 24 April 2007
Date for Continuing Review: 23 April 2008

The Chair of the Institutional Review Board of Iowa State University has reviewed and approved the protocol entitled: “Changing ourselves: Narrative experiences of women taking the lead in family and consumer sciences education.” The protocol has been assigned the following ID Number: 07-233. Please refer to this number in all correspondence regarding the protocol.

Your study has been approved from 24 April 2007 to 23 April 2008. The continuing review date for this study is no later than 23 April 2008. Federal regulations require continuing review of ongoing projects. Please submit the form with sufficient time (i.e. three to four weeks) for the IRB to review and approve continuation of the study, prior to the continuing review date.

Failure to complete and submit the continuing review form will result in expiration of IRB approval on the continuing review date and the file will be administratively closed. All research related activities involving the participants must stop on the continuing review date, until approval can be re-established, except when necessary to eliminate immediate hazard to research participants. As a courtesy to you, we will send a reminder of the approaching review prior to this date.

Please remember that any changes in the protocol or consent form may not be implemented without prior IRB review and approval, using the “Continuing Review and/or Modification” form. Research investigators are expected to comply with the principles of the Belmont Report, and state and federal regulations regarding the involvement of humans in research. These documents are located on the Office of Research Assurances website or available by calling (515) 294-4566, www.compliance.iastate.edu.

You must promptly report any of the following to the IRB: (1) all serious and/or unexpected adverse experiences involving risks to subjects or others; and (2) any other unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others.

Upon completion of the project, please submit a Project Closure Form to the Office of Research Assurances, 1138 Pearson Hall, to officially close the project.
APPENDIX B:

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT
INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Title of Study: Changing ourselves: Narrative experiences of women taking the lead in family and consumer sciences education

Investigators: Denise G. Fisher, M.S.
Yvonne S. Gentzler, PhD

This is a research study. Please take your time in deciding if you would like to participate. Please feel free to ask questions at any time.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to explore how emerging leaders are choosing to assume responsibility for the profession of family and consumer sciences and gives voice to women currently living and working through change in the field. You are being invited to participate in this study because you are an Iowa State University Graduate Student participating in the Family and Consumer Sciences Education Leadership Academy.

DESCRIPTION OF PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate in this study, your participation will last for six months and will involve the initial contact to secure this signed informed consent document, one 90-minute audio-taped interview, a second 90-minute audio-taped interview, and a 60-minute audio-taped focus group meeting. During the study you may expect the following study procedures to be followed. You will be asked open-ended guiding questions about leadership in your work setting. You may skip any question that you do not wish to answer or that makes you feel uncomfortable. Interviews will be audio-taped, transcribed, and analyzed. You will be provided copies of written transcripts and the opportunity to determine if your words were analyzed appropriately. If not, there may be a need for an additional interview to make clarifications. All audio-taped interviews and transcriptions will be erased one year after completion of the research.

RISKS

There are no foreseeable risks at this time from participating in this study.

BENEFITS

If you decide to participate in this study there may be direct benefit to you. A desired outcome or advantage to you will be the opportunity to learn about yourself through self-reflection and your work with the researcher in constructing meaning. It is hoped that the information gained in this study will benefit society by contributing to the advancement of knowledge concerning the experiences of women living through the experience of assuming leadership within the family and consumer sciences profession. This study will also contribute to feminist scholarship as it gives voice to women leaders working within a specific academic discipline.

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COSTS AND COMPENSATION

You will not have any costs from participating in this study. You will not be compensated for participating in this study.

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or leave the study at any time. If you decide to not participate in the study or leave the study early, it will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may inspect and/or copy your records for quality assurance and data analysis. These records may contain private information.

To ensure confidentiality to the extent permitted by law, the following measures will be taken: respondents will be assigned a pseudonym which will be used on all data collection materials instead of their name. Only the principal investigator and the major professor executing the research will have access to the data. The data will be stored in a locked cabinet at the principal investigator’s office at Harding University, Searcy, Arkansas. Computer stored data will be password protected. Audio-taped interviews and transcriptions of interviews will be erased one year after completion of the research. If the results are published, your identity will remain confidential.

QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study.

- For further information about the study contact Denise G. Fisher, (501) 281-5120 and/or Yvonne S. Gentzler, (515) 294-0533, gentzler@iastate.edu.

- If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact the IRB Administrator, (515) 294-4566, jcs1959@iastate.edu, or Diane Ament, Director, Office of Research Assurances (515) 294-3115, dament@iastate.edu.

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PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE

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Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. You will receive a copy of the written informed consent prior to your participation in the study.

Participant’s Name (printed)  

( Participant’s Signature)  

(Date)  

INVESTIGATOR STATEMENT

I certify that the participant has been given adequate time to read and learn about the study and all of their questions have been answered. It is my opinion that the participant understands the purpose, risks, benefits and the procedures that will be followed in this study and has voluntarily agreed to participate.

(Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent)  

(Date)
REFERENCES


