Defining moments of women ACUHO-I presidents

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Defining moments of women ACUHO-I presidents

by

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

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Education (Educational Leadership)

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Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

2013
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to

Nandini Bissessar-Grant:

Her grace was my inspiration.
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ABSTRACT

The time has come to tell the stories of women who have served as president of the Association of College and University Housing Officers-International (ACUHO-I). This qualitative study focused on three of the eleven women who were elected to this prestigious position. While there is a plethora of research about women in leadership positions, including those in academics, there is a paucity of information about women who have served as president of this specific association. This research includes stories of these women and provides information about their family backgrounds, career paths, personal and professional mentors, and defining moments they identified as having impacted their professional aspirations and their role as ACUHO-I president.

The ACUHO-I is an international association with more than 900 member institutions of higher education located in 22 countries. The vast majority of these institutions are four-year institutions and a handful of community colleges located in the United States. Thousands of individuals work at these institutions and impact nearly 2 million students. A board of directors, elected from the individual members, help guide this volunteer-driven organization.

Through an examination of the careers of women who served the association and an exploration of the impact defining moments had on their professional aspirations, this study may serve as a resource for rising ACUHO-I leaders, men and women alike. A growing body of literature from a wide variety of fields incorporates the concept of defining moments that significantly shape the direction of an individual’s life. Such moments typically represent a “leadership development ‘jolt’ or turning point that causes individuals to re-think
their self-perceptions” (Avolio & Luthans, 2006, p. 11). Defining moments are an important piece of the puzzle when identifying the professional careers of women who have served ACUHO-I as president.
CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

During the last several decades, the student body at American universities has changed considerably. Female student numbers have increased to the point of surpassing male student numbers and projections are that this trend will continue in enrollment as well as degrees conferred (The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2006; Jacobs, 1996; Jones, 1986). Women (U.S. and non-U.S. citizens attending American universities) currently earn the majority of bachelor’s and master’s degrees, and projections indicate that by 2013 they will also earn the majority of doctorate degrees (U.S. National Center for Education Statistics, 2005).

However, colleges and universities in the United States continue to be dominated by male leadership, creating concerns regarding the exclusion of women in leadership roles. The presence of women in higher education positions tends to decline with the prestige of the institution and, in faculty ranks, declines as the rank is higher (Jacobs, 1996). Jacobs (1996) posits “women have been disadvantaged to some extent in every stage of the academic career process” (p. 172).

Women in leadership positions are no longer the exception they once were. Women in leadership positions in college and university student affairs programs are also much more common than in years past. However, women who have served as president of the international association that provides leadership to college and university residence halls has proven to be more elusive. The Association of College and University Housing Officers (the “I” for international was added much later) was inaugurated in July 1948. It came about
when S. Earl Thompson, then director of residence at the University of Illinois, proposed a meeting of housing professionals to discuss current issues. It was not until 1976 that the first woman was elected to the office of president.

When I first met with my doctoral committee, I was dead set on focusing my research on women who are chief housing officers. The conversation that ensued, however, led to this topic. After conducting some research into the organizational structure, the numbers of presidents and the gender breakdown of those presidents, I became more interested. Knowing also that ACUHO-I has provided me with the variety and quality of professional development and growth opportunities I have enjoyed throughout my career was another pull toward this research. Finally, after one of those 11 female presidents agreed to serve on my committee (although not as one of my research participants) and gave her approval, I was convinced this would be an informative study to pursue.

**ACUHO-I Presidents**

The presidents of ACUHO-I are elected on a yearly basis, beginning their three-year term as vice president, moving into the president-elect role, and concluding their term as president. The successful candidate must have a “…demonstrated extensive record of leadership within the association and/or regional associations or profession in general; understanding of financial reports and audits, understand legal proceedings, understand the foundational aspects of contract management, knowledgeable of human resource issues, and knowledgeable of legislative processes” (ACUHO-I website).
Statement of the Problem

Since 1951, 11 women have been elected president of ACUHO-I. The first was elected in 1976, and the most recent ended her term in July 2012. While there have been 11 women presidents, more than 50 men have served in the same role. The fact that less than one fourth of the presidents have been women warrants close examination of the individuals who comprise this select group of women leaders. This study lends itself to be a potential roadmap for rising leaders in the college and university housing profession through an examination of the lived experiences of women who have served the association as president and an exploration of the impact defining moments have had on their professional aspirations.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this collective case study was to understand the lived stories of the women who have served as president of ACUHO-I. The study was also conducted to determine whether the family and educational backgrounds of these women influenced their aspiration to the presidency as well as explore the defining moments that impacted their term as president. This study further investigated whether there is a relationship between the defining moments identified by the participants and the legacy they have left for women who aspire to leadership roles.

ACUHO-I is the premier association for college and university housing officers. “The focus of ACUHO-I is to support the development of exceptional residential experiences at institutions of higher education” (ACUHO-I website). As a volunteer-driven association, ACUHO-I accomplishes much through dozens of committees and task forces. The ACUHO-
I leadership is provided by an elected executive board whose members are responsible for determining the vision of the association. This board spends a great deal of its time working on the strategic plan and monitoring its progress. This study illuminates the experiences of women who have served as president of ACUHO-I and defining moments that have supported the aspirations and attainment of the presidency of this global association.

Of the 11 women who have served as president, with the first serving in 1976, seven are still in the profession. Three women were identified as participants. The women were selected based on this researcher’s knowledge of them, my bias of their contributions to the profession and the years they served as president. I especially wanted to ensure there was at least five years between their terms. Each participant was interviewed three times. Based on research by Seidman (2006), the focus of the three interviews was as follows: (1) Interview One asked the participants to recount her life histories; (2) Interview Two explored the details of her experiences as a housing professional; and (3) Interview Three focused on her reflection of the meanings associated with her professional career.

**Research Questions**

This qualitative study was guided by two primary research questions:

1. How did the childhood and family backgrounds influence these women to aspire to the presidency of ACUHO-I?

2. How did defining moments in their personal and professional backgrounds impact their role as president?
Significance of the Study

This study adds to the body of knowledge about the leadership of ACUHO-I. It also provides a backdrop to the profession and incorporates stories of women that may inspire future leaders. In addition, it adds to the literature about women in leadership positions in academic and student affairs professions. According to Madsen (2007), “little exploratory research has been conducted exploring the childhood experiences, activities, personalities, and perceptions of successful leaders … explorations focused on the early developmental influences of women leaders are particularly needed” (p. 100).

Audience(s)

This study may be most applicable to women who have held or aspire to hold the presidency of ACUHO-I. The experiences of three women who attained the presidency of ACUHO-I for different reasons and via different pathways, who have been employed in the profession of collegiate residential housing for many years, may also be informative to future women presidents. Gaining insights into what it means to be president during their careers may provide a strong base of knowledge for those aspiring to reach this very high-profile leadership position.

This study might also prove to be significant for women, such as this researcher, who do not aspire to hold the highest position in the association. For us, the experiences shared by the participants may be beneficial in many ways. For example, one of the presidents addressed the issue of asking those who report to her for their input about whether or not she should run for the position. Their insights and their support enabled her to consider the office. This participative style of leadership is applicable to other positions.
Finally, while this study focused on women, it does not, by possible inference, exclude men. In fact, all three of the participants spoke of the men in their lives who had served as support systems, as mentors and as guides throughout their lives. A poem written by Nancy R. Smith, entitled, *For Every Woman* (see Appendix A), reflects this issue. While women’s roles have changed and there are more women in leadership positions, including the presidency of ACUHO-I, one may also infer men’s roles have changed as well.

Lastly, the findings of this research may be helpful to all professionals who hold the title of ACUHO-I president. The commentary by the participants provided insights into the workings of the association, their own leadership styles, and the makeup of the membership of the association.

**Conceptual Framework**

A leading author on the topic of research design, Creswell (2009) discussed conceptual frameworks in qualitative research: “Qualitative inquirers use theory in their studies in several ways, first, much like in quantitative research, it is used as a broad explanation for behavior and attitudes, and it may be complete with variables, constructs and hypotheses” (p. 61). Furthermore, Creswell indicated a second way theory is used in qualitative research is through a theoretical lens, which provides “…an overall orienting lens for the study of questions of gender, class, and race (or other issues of marginalized groups)” (p. 62).

Two theories were used in this research study: feminist perspectives and critical theory perspectives. Feminist perspectives “view as problematic women’s diverse situations and the institutions that frame those situations” (Creswell, 2009, p. 62), while critical theory
perspectives are focused on “…empowering human beings to transcend the constraints placed on them by race, class, and gender” (p. 62).

The conceptual framework of this study is discussed in the literature review and the theoretical framework. The significance of this study is also demonstrated through the detailed summary as well as an analysis of the related literature and applicable theories.

**Overview of Related Literature**

The literature review incorporates information about defining moments and epiphanies; women’s leadership, specifically within the student affairs profession with an emphasis on residence life; the importance of mentorship on women in the university setting; and the role families have on women professionals in higher education. A growing body of literature from a wide variety of fields incorporates the concept of defining moments that significantly shape the direction of an individual’s life. Such moments typically represent a “leadership development ‘jolt’ or turning point that causes individuals to re-think their self-perceptions” (Avolio & Luthans, p. 11). Fredrickson (2001, as cited by Avolio & Luthans, 2010) proposed a theory of positive emotions often termed broaden-and-build. “According to Fredrickson’s research, emotions build on one another like building blocks; the broader the foundation (high frequency of positive emotions), the more likelihood of building upward, thus contributing to further positive emotions such as self-efficacy and hope” (p. 254).

According to Denzin (1989a), the interpretive biographical method “…involves the studied use and collection of personal-life documents, stories, accounts, and narratives which describe turning-points in individuals’ lives” (p. 13). Denzin called these turning points epiphanies, or “interactional moments and experiences which leave marks on people’s lives”
“The notions that lives are turned around by significant events, what I call epiphanies, is deeply entrenched in Western thought. At least since Augustine, the idea of transformation has been a central part of the autobiographical form” (Denzin, 1989a, p. 22).

In them [epiphanies] personal character is manifested. They are often moments of crisis. They alter the fundamental meaning structures in a person’s life. Their effects may be positive or negative … the meanings of these experiences are always given retrospectively, as they are relived and re-experienced in the stories persons tell about what has happened to them. (Denzin, 1989a, pp. 70-71)

Denzin (1989a) defined four forms of an epiphany:

1. The major event, which touches every fabric of a person’s life (the major epiphany);
2. The cumulative or representative event, which signifies eruptions or reactions to experiences which have been going on for a long period of time (the cumulative epiphany);
3. The minor epiphany, which symbolically represents a major, problematic moment in a relationship or a person’s life (the illuminative or minor epiphany); and
4. Those episodes whose meanings are given in the reliving of the experience (the re-lived epiphany). (p. 71)

Living and working in college and university residential housing programs offers staff and students opportunities that may, in hindsight, become defining moments.

“Residential life offers probably the widest range of experiences you can get,” (Biddix, 2010, p. 19). Biddix continued, “At the lower levels it’s very programmatic and offers lots of student contact. At higher levels it provides great administrative experience such as personnel and budget” (p. 19). However, because residence life is so broad and offers a large number of entry-level positions, it is important for individuals who want to move up the career ladder to distinguish themselves from rest of the pack.
Whether one or many, mentors have been identified as key components in the success of women. Ironically, throughout the literature, many women indicated they primarily had male mentors. These mentors were formal and informal, and provided support, contacts, sponsorship, information and coaching. In each case, mentors recognized each woman’s potential. Some of the mentors pushed them in directions they might not have pushed themselves. According to Young (2010), “…when women are mentored by men, they often end up getting more money and higher positions” (Panel recounts history of women leading student affairs” (p. 17).

The purpose of this research was to determine, in theory and in practice, what personal and professional characteristics are critical for women in college and university housing—whether they aspire to serve as ACUHO-I president or choose to leave their mark in other ways. Although several men have served as ACUHO-I presidents, the current study specifically addressed women in the role of president.

**Theoretical Framework**

Socrates once said, “An unexamined life is not worth living.” His philosophy is the foundation of the theory this study is based on. According to Denzin (1989a), epiphanies are “interactional moments and experiences which leave marks on people’s lives” (p. 15). Denzin identified four types of epiphanies:

Major epiphany. This is the one big event that touches every fabric of a person’s life. Cumulative epiphany: This is a representative event that marks a reaction to experiences that have been going on over a long period of time. Minor epiphany: The event may be small but serves as a symbol to illuminate a larger issue in a life or relationship. Retrospective epiphany: Sometimes we don’t recognize something’s significance until long after it occurs. In later reliving the experience, we assign meaning to it. (pp. 70-71)
I have chosen to use the term “defining moments” instead of epiphanies, as I believe the participants will be more likely to be able to identify moments that stand out in their lives. The term epiphany sounds too “grand” and, I feel, may need too much clarification. In addition, the researcher did not ask the participants with whom she spoke to classify the type of epiphany or defining moments.

Gilligan’s (1982) seminal book, *In a Different Voice*, called for a new way of speaking. It changed the conversations that were taking place about women and men and morality. “In the old conversation, our ears were accustomed to hearing, ‘He was an interesting talker; a man who had traveled all over the world and lived in half a dozen countries,’ and ‘Well, Susan, this is a fine mess you are in’” (Gilligan, 2011, p. 15). Early in her career, Gilligan’s complaint about theory was that it is not only unjust to leave women out of psychology, but also not good psychology if it leaves out half of the human race. The culture of the time was such that women were not speaking for themselves. This research study allowed the women participants not only to speak for themselves, but also as women leaders who served as president of an international professional association.

While in graduate school, Baxter Magolda (2004) became interested in students’ “ways of knowing”. Her mode of inquiry was qualitative. She used semi-structured interviews in a five-year longitudinal study of 101 students at Miami University, an academically select Midwestern university. Following the interview, each student completed a written questionnaire, the Measure of Epistemological Review (MER). Both the interview and the questionnaire addressed the domains previously defined by Perry, and interview questions were open-ended to allow the student’s own frame of reference to emerge. The participants were part of a randomly selected group of entering students comprised of 51
women and 50 men. The interviews began in 1986, during the students’ first year, and continued annually for 20 years. In Baxter Magolda’s research, the participants were able to present the interpretations of the world around them in their own words.

Following that longitudinal study, Baxter Magolda refocused her energies on 39 of those original 101 students. Interviews were conducted telephonically with these former students who were in their 20s and 30s. The participants informed Baxter Magolda that it was important for them to be able to speak regarding their entire experiences postcollege, not just their learning. Through these interviews, evidence was revealed “… that her participants’ epistemological development was intertwined with the development of their sense of self and relationships with others” (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010, p. 183). Thus, drawing on the work by Kegan (1994) and Baxter Magolda (2004), they defined self-authorship as “…the internal capacity to define one’s beliefs, identity, and social relations” (as cited by Evans et al., 2010, p. 269).

According to Baxter Magolda, there are four phases on the path toward self-authorship. This path includes moving from a self-definition that is based on external factors to one that is based on internal ones. Cognitive, intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions are included within each phase—“Phase 1: Following Formulas; Phase 2: Crossroads; Phase 3: Becoming the Author of One’s Life; Phase 4: Internal Foundation” (2004, as cited by Evans et al., 2010, p. 186).

Using language of their own, the participants in this study spoke directly to Baxter Magolda’s theory of self-authorship. Each discussed, in one way or another, the elements of self-authorship, including “trusting the internal voice, building an internal foundation, and securing internal commitments” (Evans et al., 2010, p. 186).
Research Approach and Design

Phenomenological methodology was used as the basis for the study. Gall, Gall, and Borg (2003) defined phenomenology as “the study of the world as it appears to individuals when they place themselves in a state of consciousness that reflects an effort to be free of everyday biases and beliefs” (2003, p. 481). In this definition, phenomenological research identifies the “essence” of human experience (Dieser, 2006). Crotty (1998) described “essence” as the core meaning of an experience. This study attempted to identify the essence of defining moments of women who have served as president of ACUHO-I. To accomplish a phenomenological investigation, Gall et al. (2003) recommended using the following procedures: (1) identify a topic of personal and social significance; (2) select appropriate participants; (3) interview each participant; and (4) analyze the interview data.

By collaboratively working with the research participants in a phenomenological study the researcher is able to empathize with the lived experience of each participant and come to know another person in order to check whether her experience of a phenomenon corresponds with another’s experience (Husserl, 1931). The ultimate goal of a phenomenological study, for the researcher, is based on having a strong understanding and personal connection to the phenomena being studied, to better know herself within her experiencing of the phenomena itself (Gall et al., 2003, p. 481).

Qualitative research methodology was used to gather data. Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). In other words, qualitative researchers conduct studies in natural settings attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, pg. 5).
This study combined the collective case study and interpretive biography methods of data collection. Using two different methods is, according to Creswell (1998a), acceptable practice. Creswell explained, “I turn to the biographical approach or the life history approach in studying a single individual. However, the study of multiple individuals, each defined as a case and considered a collective case study, seems acceptable practice” (p. 114). Merriam (2002) also supported combining the case study with other traditions. “Defining a case study in terms of the unit of analysis, the bounded system, allows for any number of qualitative strategies to be combined with the case … people’s stories could be presented as narrative case studies” (p. 179). Stake (1995) noted “The case is sometimes a person and, in many other case studies as well, persons are described in depth. The researcher therefore is something of a biographer” (p. 96).

Case study methodology

Case study provides “an intensive description and analysis of a phenomenon or social unit such as an individual, group, institution, or community” (Merriam, 2002, p. 8). “The process of conducting a case study begins with the selection of the “case.” The selection is done purposefully, not randomly; that is, a particular person, site, program, process, community, or other bounded system is selected because it exhibits characteristics of interest to the researcher” (p. 179).

A collective case study gives researchers the opportunity to “study a number of cases jointly in order to inquire into the phenomenon, population or general condition” (Stake, 1994, p. 227). In the current study, each president was purposefully selected. “Important
coordinations” (Stake, 1995, p. 4) will be made between the three individual cases “through within-case and cross-case analysis” (Creswell, 1998, p. 63).

**Interpretive biography**

According to Denzin (1989a), the interpretive biographical method, “involves the studied use and collection of personal-life documents, stories, accounts, and narratives which describe turning-points in individuals’ lives” (p. 13). Denzin referred to such turning points as epiphanies or “interactional moments and experiences which leave marks on people’s lives” (Denzin, 1989b, p. 15). “The transformation of individual or empirical experience into essential insights occurs through a special process that Husserl calls ‘ideation’” (Moustakos, 1994, p. 27). Similarly, Denzin (1989a) continued:

In them [epiphanies] personal character is manifested. They are often moments of crisis. They alter the fundamental meaning structures in a person’s life. Their effects may be positive or negative … The meanings of these experiences are always given retrospectively, as they are relived and re-experienced in the stories persons tell about what has happened to them. (pp. 70-71)

The biographical oral history methods used in this study may “offer the opportunity to uncover layers of meaning embedded in the stories and insights into how people understand and interpret the past and their place in it” (Sommer & Quinlan, 2002, p. 1). This research provides a collection of “memories and personal commentaries of historical significance through recorded interviews” (Ritchie, 2003, p. 19). Through the utilization of narrative inquiry, opportunities were provided for individuals to retell their experiences and stories, as well as the meanings behind them. “Like retellings in any aspect of the narratives of our lives, [the purpose of retelling] is to offer possibilities for reliving, for new directions and new ways of doing things” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 189). The vantage point for
narrative inquiry is experience as expressed in lived and told stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. xxvi). These stories are complete with a beginning, middle, and end.

**Researcher Positionality**

Since the early 1980s, with the exception of one year, I have been a staff member in a housing program at a state university. The positions I have held include: resident assistant, graduate assistant, residence hall director, coordinator of residence life, area coordinator of residence life, associate director of residence, and director of residence life. In addition, I have worked in the Dean of Students office as a graduate student as well as an interim role as Dean of Students at my current institution.

I have a vested interest in the Association of College and University Housing Officers-International. While I have never been president of ACUHO-I and do not aspire to hold that office, I am committed to the espoused goals of the association. This organization has provided me with unparalleled experiences, including serving on committees and task forces, serving as a faculty member for training institutes, and travelling to South Africa to support the association’s initiatives in that country.

**Delimitations**

The research methodology employed was a collective case study, confined to three female presidents of ACUHO-I. These women were asked to share their perceptions of their childhood years and the defining moments that characterize their leadership styles. A factor that narrowed the scope of this study was there were only three participants (a total of 11 women have served as president, with 3 of the 11 retired at the time of this research). Another delimitation was the requirement that the president be employed by an ACUHO-I
member institution and, to receive the type of support (financial/time/administrative) necessary to serve satisfactorily, the association president has, traditionally, held a position of Associate Director of Residence or higher at their employing college or university. A third factor delimiting this study was the focus of the research questions, along with the combination of case study and interpretive biography methodologies.

**Limitations**

Because this study used purposive sampling, the results may not be generalizable as the sample was comprised of only a small proportion of the women (3/11) who have served as president of ACUHO-I. While the women were asked to share their perceptions and their memories of their childhoods, those memories may be potentially biased and/or inaccurate. In addition, I am confident there were unasked questions of each participant. Finally, while the information may have been provided to answer the questions that were asked, no questions were asked to provide information about mistakes or regrets that may have influenced the participants’ professional aspirations and leadership styles.

**Definition of Terms**

The following terms were defined for use in this research:

*Aspiration*: “The single occupation named as one’s best alternative at any given time” (Gottfredson, 1981, p. 548).

*Association of College and University Housing Officers-International (ACUHO-I)*: is the pre-eminent organization that supports the development of residential experiences at institutions of higher education around the globe. As stated in the website:
ACUHO-I achieves its vision by providing innovative, value-driven programs, services, research, and development as well as networking opportunities that help support and evolve the collegiate housing industry. We do this with the constant purpose of making a positive difference in the lives of members and those they serve. (ACUHO-I website)

**Baccalaureate college or university:** A U.S. college or university that offers “the degree of bachelor, conferred on [its] graduates” (Soukhanov & Ellis, 1984, p. 144); “Baccalaureate colleges enroll just over 1.3 million students with an average head count enrollment of about 1,800 students” (ACE, 2007, p. 31).

**Case study:** “An exploration of a ‘bounded system’ or a case (or multiple cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context” (Creswell, 1998, p. 61).

**Collective case study:** A study of more than one case “in order to inquire into the phenomenon, population, or general condition” (Stake, 1994, p. 237).

**Defining Moments:** A growing body of literature from a wide variety of fields that incorporate the concept of defining moments significantly shaping the direction of an individual’s life. Such moments typically represent a “leadership development ‘jolt’ or turning point that causes individuals to re-think their self-perceptions” (Avolio & Luthans, 2010, p. 11).

**Describe:** “To give a verbal account of; to transmit a mental image or impression of with words; to present a lifelike image of” (Soukhanov & Ellis, 1984, p. 366).

**Epiphanies:** “Interactional moments and experiences which leave marks on people’s lives” (Denzin, 1989a, p. 15); the term *epiphany* is used synonymously with *defining moment* in this study.
Interpretive biography: Qualitative methodology that “involves the studied use and collection
of personal life documents, stories, accounts, and narratives which describe turning points in
individuals’ lives” (Denzin, 1989, p. 13).

Life experiences: Personal or professional events that are memorable and/or significant to the
individual who experiences them.

Mentors: This word has many definitions and interpretations. One definition by Reesor et
al. (2009) was adapted from Moore and Salimbene (1981):

A mentor is a more experienced professional who guides, advises, and assists
in numerous ways the career of a less experienced, often younger, upwardly
mobile protégé in the context of a close professionally centered relationship,
usually lasting a year or more. Many research studies (Bell, 1996; Caruso,
1992; Kelly, 1984; Kogler Hill et al., 1989; Tull, 2003) show that a mentor
can have a positive effect on a person’s career. In fact, some studies show
that those who experience supportive relationships such as mentoring have
more opportunities for success, advancement, and achievement in their
careers. (Kogler Hill et al., 1989, as cited by Wunsch, 1994, p. 114)

Summary

While there is a plethora of information about women in leadership positions,
including those in academics, there is very little information about women who have served
as president of this particular association. This study was an attempt by this researcher to
rectify that dearth of information by ascertaining the defining moments of women holding a
leadership position within in a professional association.

Following this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 includes a comprehensive review and
analysis of the literature. The analysis begins with research encompassing the history of
women in higher education. A history of college and university housing will also be
reviewed. A summary of women in leadership positions in academe will be followed by an
overview of the research on the retention of women leaders in student affairs, including the impact families and children potentially have on working women. The importance of mentoring relationships on women in student affairs will be summarized. The literature review will conclude with a review about how defining moments impact career choices.

Chapter 3 focuses on the research that was conducted in the current study. The specific methodologies utilized will be thoroughly reviewed. The results of this research will be presented in Chapter 4 and the emerging themes as communicated by the participants will be analyzed. Finally, Chapter 5 will present a summary of the findings, and recommendations for further research and practice, as well as the researcher’s final thoughts and reflections.
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

There is a dearth of literature related to women in positions of leadership at the upper ranks within college and university residential life programs. This scarcity continues in the literature regarding women as leaders in professional associations in the same profession. As such, this analysis will begin with research related to the history of women in higher education. The exploration unfolds chronologically, followed by a history of college and university housing. A summary of women in leadership positions in academe (student affairs and academic affairs) will be followed by an overview of studies on the retention of women leaders in student affairs, including the impact families and children can have on working women. The importance mentoring relationships have on women in student affairs, including women of color, will be summarized. The literature review concludes by providing information on defining moments and how they impact women’s career choices.

Historical Background of Emerging Roles of Women in Education

Higher education

The year was 1783 and Lucinda Foote, age 12, applied for admission to Yale University. She was found to be “fully qualified, except in regard to sex, to be received as a pupil of the Freshman class of Yale University” (Rudolph, 1990, p. 307). The general perception of women in the Colonial era was simply that women were intellectually inferior to men—their rightful place was in the home. Interestingly, Timothy Dwight, President of Yale University from 1785-1817, wrote that it was “… high time that women should be considered less as pretty and more as rational and immortal beings” (as cited in Solomon, 1995, p. 15).
According to Benjamin Rush (as cited in Rudolph, 1990), a Philadelphia physician, American women were different from European women. Rush argued that one of the consequences of America being seen as the land of opportunity, was the extended absence of the husband and father from the home: “… in his absence, the mother herself had to be prepared to educate their children” (Rudolph, p. 309). On the whole, reactions to educating daughters were mixed. Some parents recognized that education would provide a livelihood for a daughter who remained single. Other parents, however, were less concerned about educational advancement than with the marriageability of their daughters. “Above all, fear lingered that education might unfit a girl for her subservient role as a wife” (Solomon, 1995, p. 6).

“As men turned to moneymaking or politics, women carried more responsibilities in the church” (Solomon, 1995, p. 4). In the 1800s, seminaries were an acceptable means of educating women. The women’s college movement grew exponentially following the growth of seminaries, including those founded by Emma Willerd, Catherine Beecher, and Mary Lyon. The seminaries, however, did not offer collegiate level work for their female students.

“To its militant Christian founders, Oberlin College in Ohio was ‘God’s College’. Here men and women, white and black, were to be educated together to carry out God’s cause on earth” (Solomon, 1995, p. 21). In 1837, Oberlin College accepted four women as college freshmen. In so doing, the college experience became co-educational.

Before the Civil War, however, fewer than a half dozen other American colleges adopted coeducation. Separate but theoretically equal institutions were somewhat more popular, although even the movement for separate women’s colleges was an unimpressive affair. The first experiment in
women’s collegiate education was the Georgia Female College at Macon, chartered in 1836 and opened in 1839. (Rudolph, 1990, p. 311)

In 1852, with the leadership of Catherine Beecher, the “… American Women’s Education Association was formed for the purpose of putting some direction and some standards into the women’s college movement” (Rudolph, 1990, p. 312). As such, numerous women’s colleges made their appearances in the years following. There were still many issues that would need to be resolved before educating women would become commonplace, primarily the role of the woman in the American family. The ideal of the Christian wife, mother and teacher gave credence to women’s education. “In fact, educating women to be teachers became a respected element in the good works and goals of all religious groups” (Solomon, 1995, p. 16).

In the mid-19th century, two factors increased women’s education—the land-grant institutions and the advent of women’s colleges—which raised the standards and the reputation of women’s education. “First the University of Iowa in 1855 and then the University of Wisconsin in 1863 opened their doors to women, followed by Indiana, Missouri, Michigan, and California” (Rudolph, 1990, p. 314). “In 1860, Matthew Vassar announced he intended to found a woman’s college” (Rudolph, 1990, p. 317). In essence, Vassar (and future women’s colleges, including Wellesley and Smith) provided courses that were serious in nature, not focused on domesticity including homemaking, needlework or beautifying the home.

The growth of women’s education in the Southern and Eastern portion of the country was slower as the roles held by women were dictated more by the economy. In the West, women were equal to men as they were both integral in the taming of the prairie. However,
the future of women’s role in education became brighter when Cornell began accepting women as students (the first major institution in the East to do so) following the commitment of Ezra Cornell to “… allow anyone to study anything…” (Rudolph, 1990, p. 316).

Continuing to pave the way for coeducation, Cornell built dormitories to house women.

Education for women in the South moved as slowly as it did in the East. The devastation of the Civil War necessitated years of rebuilding the regions’ infrastructure including both homes and schools. Because of the absence of a public school system, “… at first only elite southerners had access to education” (Solomon, 1995, p. 21).

In 1874, Harvard was not accepting women as students. It did agree, however, to give its examinations to women and award them certificates for study done elsewhere.

In 1879, with the guidance and leadership of Elizabeth Cary Agassiz, a group of Harvard professors began to give courses for women outside the university. Offered under the auspices of ‘The Society for the Collegiate Instruction of Women,’ these courses constituted what was popularly known as the Harvard Annex. In 1893, the Annex achieved the full dignity of Radcliffe College. (Rudolph, 1990, p. 320)

By 1898, coeducation was a foregone conclusion. That year, the University of Michigan awarded 53% of college degrees to women. “For all coeducational colleges, the increase in men students from 1875 to 1900 was threefold and of women students sixfold” (Rudolph, 1990, p. 323).

**College/University housing**

Taken from the word “dormant”, meaning to sleep, dormitories provided some of the earliest college and university housing options for students. Because dormitories now offer more than a place to rest, the language has changed from dormitory to residence hall. As colleges and universities have grown over the years in both scope and size, residence halls
have generally been at the heart of a college campus. They “were designed to bring the faculty and students together in a common life which was both intellectual and moral” (Schroeder and Mable, 1994, p. 5). These residential colleges were the focus of learning as faculty often lived in the residence hall with the students and provided tutoring.

The 1800s brought about difficult times for residence halls. The historian, Frederick Rudolph, detailed some problems associated with residence living:

In the commons room of the dormitory at South Carolina College in 1833, two students at the same moment grabbed for a plate of trout. Only one of them survived the duel that ensued. Among the victims of the collegiate way were the boy that died in the duel at Dickinson, the students who were shot at Miami of Ohio, the professor who was killed at the University of Virginia, the president of Oakland College in Mississippi who was stabbed to death by a student, the student who was stabbed at Illinois College, the students who were stabbed and killed at the University of Missouri, the president and professor who were stoned at the University of Georgia, and the University of North Carolina. For this misfortune these victims of the college life could thank the dormitory, the time house of incarceration and infamy that sustained the collegiate way. (Blimling, 1995, p. 23)

Initially, universities chose not to concern themselves with the behaviors of students in their homes or in their social lives. The institutions’ priorities rested on faculty responsibilities as well as the actions within the classroom.

A major piece of legislation, the Land Grant College Act, was passed in 1862, providing a means for higher education for the general public. The creation of 69 colleges brought about the beginning of the secularization of colleges. Following on its heels was the loosening of rules and regulations, including those associated with residential living. Because there was less interest in college housing, less attention was paid to the physical infrastructure. In turn, the options available for students were “ill-kept, disheveled, rat-infested, and dilapidated” (Blimling, 1995, p. 25).
Interest in college housing started anew at Yale University, where “there had remained an adherence to the English philosophy that the communal life of students has high educational value” (Blimling, 1995, p. 26). As the 20th century dawned, residence halls became integral in providing various extracurricular campus activities for participating students.

Perhaps the most important factor in the history of college and university residence halls was the strict policy of requiring students to live in provided college housing at women’s colleges. Most women’s institutions believed it was important to provide housing that allowed women to realize the …

…opportunity to acquire that power of expression, that facility in social intercourse, that ability to meet situations of an unusual and unexpected character, that dignity and poise, which ensure that the intellectual and scholarly results of the academic experience will be made available in full measure (Blimling, 1995, p. 29).

New residential structures were in demand as enrollment at colleges and universities increased significantly as soldiers returned home from World War I. In the 1920s, Harvard and Yale Universities created residential house systems. “The aim of the Harvard house plan was to bring into contact a body of students with diverse interests who will by attrition provoke one another to think on many subjects, and will have a corporate spirit” (Blimling, 1995, p. 32). In 1926, after being denied state funds, President Coffman, of the University of Minnesota, sold bonds to finance the building of additional residence halls. Other presidents quickly followed his lead.

“Sixty percent of those veterans who were eligible to enroll in institutions of higher education after World War II enrolled within approximately two years of the end of the war” (Blimling, 1995, p. 36). Because these students were different from those who had attended
in the past, some of the old ways of doing things, including in loco parentis, needed to change. Housing needs also changed as these students often needed shelter for their families. Universities created temporary housing quarters for these students and their families in the form of converted barracks and trailer-parks. “Universities were reluctant to undertake the construction of permanent structures after the war under the belief that the influx of older students (veterans) was temporary and in time the campus would return to the pastoral academic communities of the prewar years” (Blimling, 1995, p. 37).

A major increase in college and university enrollment began in the 1950s and continued into the next decade. As such, new residence halls were constructed. Since these new structures were built to house the masses and, at the same time, keep down costs, the facilities were often aesthetically displeasing, multi-storied buildings. In addition to the new construction, the federal government became increasingly involved in the administration of colleges and universities via the Higher Education Facilities Act and the Higher Education Amendments Act of 1962. More so than the government’s involvement in facilities, the change in the voting age from 21 to 18 necessitated a change in the relationship between institutions of higher education and students, as students began to claim their new freedoms of choice and expression.

In the mid-20th century, as interests and values changed, positions in student affairs were created to address these changes. Faculty were removed from overseeing student life outside of the classroom which enabled them to focus on the students’ intellectual development. In the 1960s, universities found it necessary to respond to student activism and protests. This resulted in “students’ demand for freedom from control and supervision resulted in the establishment of coeducational halls, the implementation of visitation or
parietal hours, the elimination of curfews and dress codes, and the provision of drinking for
students of legal age” (Schroeder & Mable, 1994, p. 8).

As the 20th century gave way to the 21st, trends in residence halls have focused on
student learning. This perspective would “aid educators in accomplishing the educational
missions of their institutions” (Schroeder & Mable, 1994, p. 12).

**Academe**

Whereas very little research has been conducted in the area of women’s leadership in
residence life; nevertheless, there is much research on women’s leadership in the following
areas: the position of Senior Student Affairs Officer (SSAO), academic affairs, and women in
the presidency. As such, research findings on areas that are well studied, such as information
about leadership, can be extrapolated to residence life.

**Leadership in student affairs**

Peggy Barr explained how she discovered her chosen profession:

No one grows up saying they want to be a dean of students or vice president
for student affairs. It was not until I was in college and got involved in
student activities that I realized that people actually got paid for doing this
type of work! What a wonderful revelation! And what wonderful people they
were to encourage me and help me see possibilities beyond being a fifth-grade
teacher. (Blimling, 1995, p. 27)

Because there are no undergraduate majors in student affairs nor is it mentioned as a possible
career track by high school guidance counselors, stories like Peggy Barr’s experiences are
more similar than not.

“Residential life offers probably the widest range of experiences you can get,”
(Biddix, 2010, p. 19). Biddix continued, “At the lower levels it’s very programmatic and
offers lots of student contact. At higher levels it provides great administrative experience such as personnel and budget.” However, because residence life is so broad and offers a large number of entry-level positions, it is important for individuals who want to move up the career ladder to distinguish themselves from rest of the pack.

Reason, Walker, and Robinson (2002) found that changing positions, within the same institution as well as moving between them…

…have become the principal means for advancing women into leadership positions as well as for increasing their numbers in administrative positions. However, women appointed to senior-level administrative positions were more likely to come from within their institution, while men were more likely to be selected from both outside of and within their institution, which often created more opportunities. (p. 1)

In the mid-1990s, research findings by Reason et al. revealed that the majority of senior-level student affairs positions were Caucasian males while …

…women were over-represented at lower-level, ‘more nurturing, feminine’ positions such as residence life and counseling … Women hold the majority of positions in student affairs. However, they are concentrated at lower positions, with lower pay and less prestigious titles which have a direct impact on attrition rates. (p. 2)

In 2005, a study was conducted of Senior Student Affairs Officers (SSAO) in community colleges. Findings of this study, which was conducted by Keim, revealed that 48% of the positions were held by women, an increase of 41% from the early 1980s. In four-year institutions, women held from 7-20% of the SSAO positions in the 1970s, and 33% of the senior administrative positions in the profession. “More recent figures indicate that women currently hold 23% of all vice president positions and 35% of all Dean of Students positions” (Reason et al., 2002, p. 2). While not all women aspire to become senior student affairs officers, it is important to be aware of potential barriers to the attainment of these positions.
The literature has suggested a “feminization of student affairs” as many skills utilized are “softer” and often associated with feminine gender traits. This term has also been used when identifying the lower salaries afforded to women in the profession. Street and Kimmel (1996, p. 223) posited that women student affairs professionals have had to develop and emphasize masculine gender traits in order to be successful. This has included women adopting male values or masculine gender role behaviors (or both) in order to succeed in a traditionally male-dominated profession.

**Academic leadership positions**

A great deal of literature exists in the areas of women in the position of Senior Student Affairs Officer (SSAO), in faculty positions in academic affairs, and the presidency of institutions of higher learning. For the purpose of this review, all three areas are discussed concurrently.

While women have made some strides in attaining leadership positions at four-year institutions, the community colleges have proven to be more welcoming. This may be because community colleges have been considered less prestigious than universities. This perception has enabled community colleges to be flexible with their creativity and innovativeness. “It allows them to take risks, such as hiring a critical mass of women and people of color in faculty and administrative positions. Data show that community colleges hire more women and people of color in leadership positions than universities” (Hall, 2010, p. 1).

“Literature has identified numerous barriers to, and reasons why, women struggle to attain upper levels of academic standings. One of the primary reasons seems to be that
tenure decisions often coincide with childbearing years” (Redington, 2010, p. 13).

According to Dominici, Fried, and Zeger (2009), this could be why tenured women in academic science are twice as likely as tenured men to be single. “Women in science are less likely to move up the academic job ladder after their early post doctorate years if they have children. For men, by contrast, both marriage and children increase the likelihood of advancing in an academic science career” (p. 2).

Literature pertaining to the careers of women college and university presidents has revealed that these leaders tend to have paths that are more indirect than linear. According to Madsen (2008), “true leadership is all about relationships based on trust” (p. 153). “The college presidents interviewed indicated they flourished primarily through informal relationships with individuals who were naturally connected to them through situations, positions or opportunities” (p. 156). Finding peers and professional colleagues who will provide feedback, support and encouragement is critical for success.

**Leadership in academic affairs**

Women have attained leadership positions in academic affairs in colleges and universities. In fact, community colleges have been a welcome haven for women in academe. Despite the notion that community colleges are often considered to be “number two” in rank and prestige, they have been able to be innovative and creative. “It allows them to take risks, such as hiring a critical mass of women and people of color in faculty and senior administrative positions. Data show that community colleges hire more women and people of color in leadership positions than universities” (Hall, 2010, p. 1).
While assisting with women’s attainment of leadership positions in academic affairs, faculty unions have been instrumental in supporting and nurturing gender equity. “Unions improve faculty life for professors of either gender, but women benefit from them more” (June, 2010, p. 1). Data were examined from 1993-94 through 2004-05, which revealed that female professors at unionized campuses made up a larger share of the overall faculty than they did at colleges without unions. In addition, “unionized colleges also had higher percentages of female professors at all ranks, particularly the associate and full professor levels” (p. 1).

The number of female faculty continues to grow, especially with regards to lower level faculty ranks and at less prestigious institutions. “In 2005-06 women made up 51% of the faculty at associate degree-granting colleges, 42% of faculty at baccalaureate and master’s degree institutions, and 34% of faculty at doctoral level institutions” (Easterly, 2008, p. 1).

With more women holding faculty appointments at colleges and universities, the old ways of working changed. Working collaboratively has been identified, in general, as a preferred style by women. In a 1977 study, Dickens and Sagaria found that “collaboration is a common practice among feminist scholars” (as cited in Easterly, 2008, p. 1). Female faculty members sought out close relationships in their professional lives and believed these relationships were a support of them and their work. For many academic women, “alliance building occurs when we invent (or discover) a reading and writing group on campus, an organization for women of color, or a set of colleagues upon whom we depend for advice and feedback” (Henking, 2008, p. 1).
In addition to working collaboratively, looking at values associated with women can provide more information on the ways women prefer to lead. Throughout the literature, it was revealed that female leaders have a tendency to include everyone when conducting group work and in decision-making:

Asking “how does this affect others” as opposed to “what’s in it for me?” demonstrates a concern for the greater good and for the community at large. Being aware of women’s ways of working, as well as conducting further research on this issue, will help foster a satisfying work environment in which women faculty, as well male faculty, can and will perform well and prosper. (Easterly, 2008, p. 2)

The literature has identified numerous barriers to, and reasons why, women struggle to attain upper levels of academic standings. One of the primary reasons seems to be that tenure decisions often coincide with childbearing years. This has forced women to determine how to sync their biological and career clocks. According to Dominici, Fried, and Zeger (2009), this could be why…

…tenured women in academic science are twice as likely as tenured men to be single. Women in science are less likely to move up the academic job ladder after their early postdoctorate years if they have children. For men, by contrast, both marriage and children increase the likelihood of advancing in an academic science career. (p. 2)

One’s perception of leadership abilities is influenced by gender. According to Harvard University’s former president, Lawrence Summers, “… women aren’t represented at the higher ends of science and engineering possibly because women are not as intellectually capable in those areas as opposed to issues of socialization or discrimination.” In essence, as Easterly (2008) commented, “American colleges were designed by men for men,” (p. 1). The structure of many of these institutions are hierarchical, with a patriarchal structure and culture:
While not exclusively feminine, leadership skills associated with women are illustrated in topics such as collaborative decision-making, authentic participation, consensus building, and nurturing. Since higher education institutions tend to be a male-dominated, patriarchal culture, leadership style is normed on male standards. (Caton, 2007, p. 3)

These stereotypical behaviors associated with effective leadership may affect women administrators’ job performance. For example, women administrators may be negatively stereotyped as “caring and nurturing” which may be interpreted as less capable to lead.

As leadership is often equated with power, gender studies have demonstrated that men and women use power differently. According to Caton (2007), “women tend to use their power for the benefit of others whereas men use their power to influence others. Male use of power tends to be associated with domination and oppression of marginalized groups” (p. 2). In addition to the formal processes of positional leadership, there are also informal processes. Because some of these “informal peer networks could shut women presidents out of the institutional culture and that isolation could negatively impact on their work experiences” (Caton, p. 3).

**College/University presidency**

Literature on the subject of careers for women college and university presidents has revealed these leaders to have paths that are informal and indirect as opposed to a traditional linear career path. Some women indicated they took on additional responsibilities but did not aspire to official leadership positions. In her book, *On Becoming a Woman Leader*, Madsen (2008) interviewed 10 women college presidents and found that “Most stated that they began thinking about becoming presidents when they were vice presidents” (p. 141). In most
situations, these women had several trusted individuals, primarily men, who encouraged them to apply for advanced positions.

According to Madsen (2008), “true leadership is all about relationships based on trust.” (p. 153). “The college presidents interviewed indicated they flourished primarily through informal relationships with individuals who were naturally connected to them through situations, positions or opportunities” (p. 156). To be successful, it is critical to find those trusted professional colleagues and peers who will provide feedback, encouragement, and support.

Although having the competency and the confidence to lead is one facet for the development of female college presidents; nevertheless, learning from the experiences of the position is powerful. These women looked for opportunities and experiences they did not have to provide them with the ability to…

…learn what they didn’t know rather than looking for ways to show what they could do. It seems the presidents entered into leadership positions not to impose their will on others but to learn. They took pleasure in learning and found excitement in ‘figuring out how to incorporate new ideas, concepts and skills’ to improve themselves. (Madsen, 2008, p. 184)

Self-reflection has been a common theme in the literature. By learning to become participant, observers can be a powerful tool in understanding one’s own behavior in relation to other individuals and situations. The natural result of lifelong learning to observe and reflect results in growth.

Retention of women in student affairs

“Approximately two thirds of the students in master’s programs in student affairs are women” (Taub, 2006, p. 2). However, a study conducted by Bender (2009) which surveyed
a random sample from the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) Region II membership, revealed that “… 43% of the men indicated that they would remain, while only 28% of the women indicated that they would stay in student affairs” (p. 560). In addition, “Concern about new professionals derives substantially from their high rate of attrition from the field. Estimated at 50% to 60% within the first 5 years” (Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008, p. 320). Thus, retention problems may not be addressed adequately as a significant number of women intend to leave student affairs.

“To combat this attrition, practitioners suggest improving supervision and providing applicable opportunities for professional development in order to better prepare new professionals” (Redington, 2010, p. 10). A study conducted in the early 1980s revealed many reasons for the decrease in job satisfaction among midlevel student affairs administrators. “The reason most frequently cited for leaving the student affairs profession was the lack of opportunity for advancement” (Rosser & Javinar, 2003, p. 2). This research was furthered by Lorden (1998) who posited the following reasons for job dissatisfaction leading to attrition: “(a) burnout, (b) unclear job expectations, (c) conflicts between reasons for entering the field and the realities of practice, and (d) low pay” (p. 3).

The vast majority of positions in student affairs are held by women. “However, they are concentrated at lower positions, with lower pay and less prestigious titles which have a direct impact on attrition rates” (Reason et al., 2002, p. 2). In the mid-1990s, research findings revealed that the majority of senior-level student affairs positions were Caucasian males while “… women were over-represented at lower-level, ‘more nurturing, feminine’ positions such as residence life and counseling” (Reason et al., p. 2).
Importance of mentoring relationships on women in higher education

Mentors, whether one or many, were identified as key components in the success of women. Ironically, throughout the literature, many women indicated they primarily had male mentors who were both formal and informal, and provided support, contacts, sponsorship, information, and coaching. In each case, mentors recognized their potential. Some of the mentors pushed them in directions they might not have pushed themselves. Among a panel recounting the history of women leading student affairs, Young (2010) revealed that “when women are mentored by men, they often end up getting more money and higher positions” (p. 2).

In Beginning your journey: A guide for new professionals in student affairs, Reesor, Baguna, and Hazley (2009) postulated that “the key to personal and professional success is having a strong support base of people who believe in you, challenge you, and help you grow” (p. 109). Campbell and LaCost (2010) indicated that “Development of a mentoring relationship with either a female or male mentor was identified as a successful strategy for women wanting to obtain educational leadership positions” (p. 2). Schmidt and Wolfe (2009) stated, “The mentoring relationship provides mutual benefit and enrichment” (p. 371).

The word “mentor” has many definitions and interpretations. One definition Reesor et al. (2009) used was adapted from Moore and Salimbene (2005):

A mentor is a more experienced professional who guides, advises, and assists in numerous ways the career of a less experienced, often younger, upwardly mobile protégé in the context of a close professionally centered relationship, usually lasting a year or more. Many research studies (Bell, 1996; Caruso, 1992; Kelly, 1984; Kogler Hill et al., 1989; Tull, 2003) show that a mentor can have a positive effect on a person’s career. In fact, some studies show that those who experience supportive relationships such as mentoring have more opportunities for success, advancement, and achievement in their careers. (Kogler Hill et al., 1989; Wunsch, 1994, p. 114)
According to Copper and Miller (1998), mentor/mentoring…

…typically calls for a somewhat spontaneous, usually informal relationship to exist between a more mature and experienced individual and one who is undergoing transition into a field of endeavor or to a more advanced level of responsibility within a chosen profession. It is during a period of transition when the need for mentoring is especially manifest and therefore most useful. (p. 57)

There is much discussion about how mentors and protégés should be chosen, whether it happens by chance, through networking, by a deliberative process on the part of the protégé, or through a formal process determined by a human resource office. According to Reesor et al. (2009), the beginning point should be through an assessment of the needs of the protégé. “What do you want from a mentor, what kind of help do you need, and who can provide it?” (p. 115) Reesor et al. also listed characteristics protégés should look for in a potential mentor:

- a similar or shared value system,
- time availability,
- professional competence in the area in which you desire expertise,
- active contributions to the field,
- a genuine interest in your professional development (a nurturing personality).

The mentor should be someone you like and trust, and an open communicator (p. 115)

Regardless how the mentor protégé relationship is formed, it will take time, effort, and commitment to ensure its success.

When referencing the importance of mentoring women of color, Davis (2009) noted:

The attainments of black women outpace black men in every category and discipline in higher education. However, women still lag far behind black men in faculty appointments and tenure. To this end, mentoring has been identified as a factor in leading to upward mobility, success in education, and personal development. (p. 1)

Hurd Anyaso (2008) posited, “Mentorship is a big piece that people talk about. Needing, wanting and having lack of” (p. 3). Oftentimes, African American women scholars are left to
navigate the professional politics of academe on their own. When considering a mentor, it is critical to select one who wants her protégé to succeed and will provide guidance to avoid pitfalls.

Echoing Anyaso, Davis (2009) found “that not securing a mentor appears to be a barrier to the success of African American women” (p. 2). Davis continued: “…mentoring has been widely used in many organizations as a valuable tool for retaining and promoting employees … It is believed African American women who have a mentor are more likely to be promoted” (p. 2).

Some literature addressed the fact that, because of the low numbers of African American leaders on campuses, there are very few African Americans who are in positions to be mentors. Anyaso (2008) noted, “We talk about how sometimes our mentors don’t look like us and how to go about finding mentors that may look like you or may not. And how that’s OK, as long as this is going to help you tease out the things that you need to focus on for the advancement of your career” (p. 3).

Numerous benefits of the mentor protégé relationship have been cited in the literature. For example, Copper and Miller (1998) stated:

… organizational perpetuation and renewal will result from the mentoring process in at least three beneficial ways. They contend that mentoring
- Builds a positive organizational climate (because of staff members learning about the organizational milieu, expectations and work ethic)
- Provides a mechanism for rewarding staff members (as a result of participating in a sanctioned supervision strategy for those choosing to become so engaged)
- Builds a pool of ready talent (as a result of having a group of staff members whose talents have been both recognized and tested prior to consideration for promotion). (pp. 58-59)
Although a mentoring relationship may last only a few weeks or months, the benefits to the program, the protégé, and the staff are significant. According to Copper and Miller (1998), “There is reason to believe that leaders who establish systematic mentoring programs will be rewarded with higher staff morale, greater staff loyalty, and more productive staff members …” (p. 59). From a professional standpoint, “…having a protégé or two underscores the mentor’s own status and power” (Schmidt & Wolfe, 2009, p. 379). In addition, “…the mentor takes responsibility by caring for other adults and attempting to foster their own growth and development” (p. 379). Six additional benefits for the mentor have been identified by Copper and Miller (1998):

- Makes the mentor feel good (satisfaction gleaned from helping others)
- Makes the mentor look good (as being able to facilitate and encourage the professional development of others)
- Supports the mentor’s image as a visionary (as a result of thinking of and systematically preparing for the future)
- Demonstrates what the mentor values (models behavior that signals quality performance)
- Pays dividends (builds networks that provide support and access to information that was previously unavailable and promoting loyalty of protégés)
- Opens channels of communication (establishes open and honest relationships with others, who will ultimately provide an upward flow of communication. (p. 58)

While Reesor et al. (2009) recommended that “… mentor relationships cross gender and ethnic lines to enhance learning opportunities and improve overall organizational climate” (pp. 118-119), Schmidt and Wolfe (2009) indicated that the complexities of “… male/female dynamics may be minimized or avoided if the newcomer chooses a mentor of the same sex” (p. 378). A great deal of data is available that identifies the potential problems of cross-gender mentoring relationships, including a focus on individuals assuming stereotypical roles and the perception of romantic involvements.
As more women enter positions of leadership and power, rules for women’s leadership are changing. The old rules used to include keeping mouths shut and deferring to men. According to Pat Alea, the new rules include: “be true to yourself, do the right thing, and there is no ‘I’ in the word team. The old rules were about learning to cope. The new rules are about learning how to be authentic” (Alea, 2010, p. 1).

Susan Iverson, assistant professor of higher education administration and student personnel at Kent State University, presented findings of her research at the American Educational Research Association:

Women have mental conditioning that goes on throughout our lives. It’s deeper than a description and more subtle than a stereotype. Words and pictures mirror, legitimize and create a social reality. Women leaders in The Chronicle are shown as caretakers, victims, good girls, bad girls, experts, collaborators and change agents. (Images from the Chronicle, 2007, p. 1)

What most of these roles have in common is demonstrating women in relationship with others. In the same presentation, Suzanne Gordon noted, “Women appear to build power with, while men exercise power over. In women’s collaborative leadership, power is shared and decision-making is consensual. The process empowers everyone involved” (Images from the Chronicle, 2007, p. 1).

Victoria Robinson (2010) stated, “On campus as elsewhere, men are assumed to have more power, connections and ability to open doors, so people of both genders seek out men for their networks” (p. 19). Robinson advised women to “…delete internal barriers, collect mentors, emulate role models, connect style to reality, and live with intention” (p. 19). Charlene Dukes, President of Prince George’s Community College in Maryland, stated that she wanted to use her power to define what leadership meant to her:
I now characterize leadership as the ability to bring people together at all levels to accomplish an institution’s goals in a professional and collegial manner. … It includes shaping and defining a vision, inspiring people to buy into that vision, and helping them secure the tools they need to turn the vision into reality. (p. 2)

“Never give your power away – share it.” This statement was made by Norma Burgess when she began her new position as founding Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Lipscomb University in Nashville, Tennessee. “It does not matter what occupations we have, or roles we choose or are given to play; the internal consistency within us is the most critical piece of us that we have – it is ours” (Pepple, 2010, p. 23).

Women with families

Despite frequent discussions of working women in popular literature, there is scant information on this topic in student affairs professional literature. In a study conducted in 1990, Marshall and Jones examined the sequence of childbearing and career development in women administrators in higher education, and found:

…that salary, rank, and title were unrelated to whether children came before, during or after careers were initiated; when asked whether having children had a positive or negative effect on their careers, however, most respondents believed that childbearing had hurt their careers. (as cited by Nobbe & Manning, 1997, p. 102)

In 1992, Matzat conducted a study of women administrators in higher education which focused on career success and the responsibilities of childcare. “Nearly 90% of the respondents who still worked in student affairs reported that a career in the field is compatible with marriage and family, yet 60% of these respondents did not have children” (as cited by Nobbe & Manning, 1997, p. 102).
As Nobbe and Manning (1997) discussed in their article, being a student affairs professional as well as a mother takes a great deal of forethought and detailed planning in order to balance work and family issues. The women in the study reported they were surprised that they received more support from their supervisors than their subordinates. What assisted the women most was flexibility in the workplace. This allowed them to “work smarter” (p. 106) and more efficiently. “The women who participated in these interviews had already achieved positions of leadership and may have enjoyed greater flexibility and power because of their roles” (p. 108). As supervisors become aware of the issues facing women with children, flexibility may be the key to retaining all levels of employees. As Nobbe and Manning exclaimed, “Although maternity leaves and small children do not last forever, a decision to leave student affairs may be permanent” (p. 109).

**Defining moments**

A growing body of literature from a wide variety of fields incorporates the concept of defining moments that significantly shape the direction of an individual’s life. Such moments typically represent a “leadership development ‘jolt’ or turning point that causes individuals to re-think their self-perceptions” (Avolio & Luthans, 2006, p. 11). Fredrickson (2001) proposed a theory of positive emotions often termed broaden-and-build. “According to Fredrickson’s research, emotions build on one another like building blocks; the broader the foundation (high frequency of positive emotions), the more likelihood of building upward, thus contributing to further positive emotions such as self-efficacy and hope” (as cited by Avolio & Luthans, 2010, p. 254). Defining moments provide the building blocks for a strong foundation that allow individuals to define personal and professional success. As building
blocks, they are also connected to one another – just as this researcher utilized connections as she searched for jobs, as she works with colleagues, or as she relates her family to her career.

**Conclusion**

It is no surprise that women’s roles in colleges and universities have changed over the years. The changes have ranged from not being able to attend college to taking on the top leadership positions across the country. Nevertheless, as in the past, women in top leadership positions are the exception rather than the norm.

Threaded throughout the literature are common themes about women in leadership positions in colleges and universities. These threads include: working within current patriarchal hierarchies; the differences of gender on leadership traits; the challenge of balancing biological and career clocks; and the criticality of identifying mentor(s) to provide support and guidance.

Literature focusing on women in the leadership positions within college and university housing organizations and associations has been nearly non-existent, which lends credence to the importance of furthering this area of research. However, what can be inferred from the literature review is that women leaders in academe, regardless of position, have several characteristics in common: (a) they collaborate instead of compete; (b) they share their power instead of wielding it; and (c) they focus on the inclusion of others, whether in matters of communication, decision-making or simply seeking input.

Regarding the past as well as the present, Schmidt and Wolfe (2009) noted that suitable female mentors in most professions simply have not been available (p. 378). In addition, while having a mentor will not guarantee career success, “they are invaluable in
ensuring that the protégé will be socialized into the formal and informal norms and rules of the culture of the organization” (Davis, 2009, p. 53). The most important factor to consider when choosing a mentor is a willingness of that person to give personal time and attention—the mentor honors “the relationship by devoting personal energy” (Schmidt, 2009, p 378). That energy may be vital to the success of women in student affairs positions.

The purpose of further research should be to determine, in practice, what personal and professional characteristics are critical for women in the top leadership position of professional associations and housing organizations. These characteristics should include a review of family backgrounds and messages received along the way, as well as how defining moments influenced their attainment of those positions.
CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

Qualitative Paradigm

This study applied qualitative research methodology in the data collection process. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2003), qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. In other words, this implies that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 5). Qualitative approaches must ensure the elements of research design are closely aligned as they inform the study from start to finish. According to Crotty (1998), “Epistemology is the theory of knowledge embedded in the theoretical perspective” (p. 3) “...theoretical perspective lies behind the methodology” (p. 2).

When determining the women to invite to participate in this study, the researcher utilized the ACUHO-I’s membership directory to ascertain the positions the participants held on their home campuses. One of the past presidents held a position in dining services on her campus. Because the role of dining is often seen as a service offered to students as opposed to the more educational and holistic experiences students have in residential housing, I chose not to contact that particular president. In addition, I was intentional about seeking participants who have served as president with approximately five years separating each term of office.

Epistemology: Constructivism

“In the constructionist view, as the word suggests, meaning is not discovered but constructed” (Crotty, 1998, p. 42). We make meaning of events and experiences based on
what we bring to them. This needs to be acknowledged when conducting research based on listening to the stories of research participants. Creswell stated that social constructivists “hold assumptions that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work” (2009, p. 8).

The goal of the research is to rely as much as possible on the participants’ views of the situation being studied. The questions become broad and general so that the participants can construct the meaning of a situation, typically forged in discussions or interactions with other persons. (p. 8)

Without question, the participants had developed meaning from their experiences. It is the researcher’s responsibility, then, to make meaning based on the context being studied. My position within the field afforded me this unique ability to conduct this research.

**Theoretical perspective: Interpretivism**

Interpretivism occurs when patterns of meaning are developed inductively as the research is being conducted. In other words, the researcher does not begin with a theory—the theory or theories are discovered. According to Creswell (2009), there are several assumptions associated with interpretivism:

(1) Meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting. Qualitative researchers tend to use open-ended questions so that the participants can share their views. (2) Humans engage with their world and make sense of it based on their historical and social perspectives—we are all born into a world of meaning bestowed upon us by our culture. (3) The basic generation of meaning is always social, arising in and out of interaction with a human community. (pp. 8-9)

This study was based on the interpretations of the experiences the participants had. It was their interpretation of the impact their families had on their professional aspirations, the impact mentors had on their professional careers, and the defining moments of their lives.
Methodology: Phenomenology

Phenomenological methodology was used as the basis for the study. Gall, Gall, Gall, and Borg (2003) defined phenomenology as “the study of the world as it appears to individuals when they place themselves in a state of consciousness that reflects an effort to be free of everyday biases and beliefs” (p. 481). In this definition, phenomenological research identifies the “essence” of human experience (Dieser, 2006). Crotty (1998) described “essence” as the core meaning of an experience. This study attempted to identify the essence of how defining moments influence the professional aspirations of women in their professional lives, including their involvement in one professional association. Gall et al. (2003) recommended using the following procedures in phenomenological investigation:

1. Identify a topic of personal and social significance.
2. Select appropriate participants.
3. Interview each participant.
4. Analyze the interview data.

By collaboratively working with the research participants in a phenomenological study the researcher was able to empathize with the lived experience of each participant and come to know another person in order to ascertain whether his or her experience of a phenomenon corresponds with another’s experience (Husserl, 1931). Based on having a strong understanding and personal connection to the phenomena being studied, the ultimate goal of a phenomenological study is for the researcher to better know him/herself within his/her experiencing of the phenomena itself (Gall et al., 2003).
Data Sources

Recruitment of participants

To accomplish this study, three participants were selected based upon the use of a purposive sample with two criteria: (a) the participants are women; and (b) these women have served as president of the Association of College and University Housing Officers – International (ACUHO-I). According to Patton (2002), a purposive sample should be used when a researcher selects people he/she believes will provide the best information relevant to the topic at hand. The participants were selected based on their employment at ACUHO-I member institutions as well as the span of years based on when the first and last participants served as president. Pseudonyms were used in the study for all participants, institutions, and locations. The participants were identified as: Participant 1 – Kate Johnson; Participant 2 – Haley Mills; and Participant 3 – Renea Ogden

Data Collection

The format used to collect data was a semi-structured interview process that involved a one-hour face-to-face interview with each of the three individuals selected for the study. The first round of interviews were conducted at the Hilton Hotel in Anaheim, California. The hotel was the location of the 2012 Annual Conference and Exposition of ACUHO-I, and all three women were in attendance. The second and third interviews occurred telephonically within the following three weeks. Table 1 illustrates the interview schedule.

According to Fontana and Frey (2003), interviewing is one of the most common and powerful ways in which we try to understand our fellow human beings. By using a semi-structured interview process, a “negotiated text” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p 48) is developed
Table 1. Interview schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kate Johnson</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>July 8, 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renea Ogden</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>July 9, 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haley Mills</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>July 10, 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate Johnson</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>July 19, 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renea Ogden</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>July 31, 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haley Mills</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>August 2, 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate Johnson</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>July 24, 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renea Ogden</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>August 2, 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haley Mills</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>August 8, 2012</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

between the respondent and the researcher. Denzin and Lincoln stated that interviewing requires openness, emotional engagement, and the development of a potentially long-term, trusting relationship between the interviewer and the subject. Interviewing allows for human-to-human relation with the respondent, with the desire to understand rather than to explain (Fontana & Frey, 2003).

Several basic elements of interviewing need to be taken into consideration when using the semi-structure interview method (Fontana & Frey, 2003): (a) accessing the setting; (b) understanding the language and culture of the respondents; (c) deciding on how to present oneself; (d) locating an informant; (e) gaining trust; (f) establishing rapport; and (g) collecting empirical materials.

**Ethical considerations**

The first step taken to ensure this study was conducted in an ethical manner was to gain approval through Iowa State University’s Institutional Review Board. Following
submission of the research proposal and gaining approval, contact was made with the potential participants by email. All three agreed without hesitation to participate in the study. Participants encountered very little risk; nevertheless, the following steps were taken to ensure they were comfortable with their involvement:

1. The participants’ involvement was voluntary. They were able to withdraw at any point in the process.
2. The participants were informed they were not required respond to questions they did not want to answer.
3. The participants received the questions prior to the second and third interviews. Two of the participants said it was very helpful as they had the time to reflect on the questions, their experiences, and their subsequent responses.
4. Each participant was able to provide her own pseudonym. Pseudonyms were chosen which had meaning to each person. The interviews were transcribed by the interviewer; therefore, no outside person was provided access to their identities.

**Human subjects approval and informed consent**

The first step when gathering data is to present the research plan to the Institutional Review Board at Iowa State University (Appendix B). The questions (Appendix C) asked of each participant were approved prior to conducting the interviews.

**Accessing the setting**

Possessing the qualifications as a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies program at Iowa State University and as a university housing administrator, the researcher was able to access the setting of the interview. The first set of interviews took
place at the Hilton Hotel in Anaheim, California, and the second and third interviews were completed telephonically.

Understanding the language and culture of the respondents

This researcher is a practicing university housing administrator and active member of ACUHO-I. Thus, I was able to understand the language and culture of the respondents.

Deciding how to present one-self

As a practicing university housing administrator and a doctoral student at Iowa State University, the researcher was able to build the trust and openness that is required in a phenomenological study. Thus, I relied on my established reputation as a housing professional with experience spanning more than two decades.

Locating an informant

The ACUHO-I website <acuho-i.org> was used to locate possible informants to interview. This website enabled me to identify those women who have served as president and which years they held office; locate member schools and directories of staff members within those institutions; and ascertain the titles of those staff members.

Gaining trust

I was able to gain trust during the interviews by presenting myself in a true sense, both personally and professionally. This enabled each participant to speak freely when responding to the questions.
Establishing rapport

Establishing rapport began with the initial presentation and introduction via an email message. It was followed up by phone calls and text messages as the interviews were being scheduled. Based on our similar backgrounds, I was not only able to connect with the respondents as a practicing housing administrator but also as a colleague who could be trusted to remain confidential during and after the interviews.

Collecting empirical data

A digital audio recorder was used to capture the interview material. This enabled me to record each interview conversation in a non-intrusive manner. Field notes were taken immediately after each interview to capture the non-verbal aspects of the interview such as tone of voice, inflection, and pacing. Finally, word-for-word transcription was done to collect all data used for analysis.

Reflexive journaling

Journaling is a critical component of research. Through the process of maintaining a reflexive journal, the trustworthiness of the researcher and the research is enhanced (Patton, 2002). Through recording my thoughts in a reflexive journal and analyzing the content, I demonstrated that “reflexivity is important for striving for objectivity and neutrality” (Snape & Spencer, 2003, p. 20). My journal was comprised of several spiral-bound notebooks, a folder on my computer, and digital recordings of my thoughts when I was not able to physically record my reflections.
Interviews

Three in-depth interviews were conducted with the study’s participants utilizing Seidman’s (2006) three-interview series technique. The length of each interview was no more than 60 minutes. Over time, in-depth interviews allow for more thorough descriptors of events. According to Seidman, “people’s behavior becomes meaningful and understandable when placed in the context of their lives and the lives of those around them” (p. 17). In the current research:

*Interview one* was a focused life history. The questions asked were about the participants’ childhood and family backgrounds, including the core values and beliefs imparted by their families as well as how they decided on a career in collegiate housing.

*Interview two* attempted to gather information to learn more about the details of their experiences. Determining the “lived experiences” was the focus. Questions asked were about educational backgrounds, achievements, mentors and reason(s) why the participants vied for the position of president.

*Interview three* provided the participants with opportunities to reflect on the meaning of their lived experiences. It was in this interview that the participants spoke about defining moments, lasting legacies, and reflected on their lived experiences.

I interviewed each woman face-to-face only one time. These first interviews all took place at the Sheraton Hotel in Anaheim, California. The participants were attending the Annual Conference and Exposition (ACE), which is the international conference of Association of College and University Housing Officers – International. The following two interviews were conducted telephonically. The interviews were spaced out, with a minimum of one week between the interviews, with the exception of the second and third interviews with Kate Johnson. The last two interviews with Kate were conducted with only five days separating them. This aligns with Seidman’s (2006) recommendation: “As long as a structure is maintained that allows participants to reconstruct and reflect upon their experience within the context of their lives, alterations to the … spacing of interviews can
certainly be explored” (pp. 21-22). Data were collected in a one-month span from July 8, 2012 – August 8, 2012.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data collected throughout this research study were analyzed using categorizing and contextualizing strategies. Categories are a way of organizing data based on common themes within the data. The researcher determined these themes from the theories guiding this study. Through the contextualization of strategies, the researcher is able to understand the data within the environment in which they were gathered. This is especially true in research involving case studies and interpretive biographies.

Trustworthiness Criteria

Ensuring trustworthiness is necessary in order to demonstrate that the results of the research are “worth paying attention to” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290), and the research findings, outcomes and interpretations can be trusted. Elements of trustworthiness in qualitative research include: triangulation of data, member checking, and ensuring a solid audit trail.

Triangulation of data

Triangulation is a critical aspect when conducting qualitative research. The use of triangulation supports the trustworthiness of the data. Through the use of different methods and sources, the integrity of the data is ensured. While each data collection method has strengths and weaknesses, incorporating triangulation into the process supports the validity and reliability of the research. In this study, three respondents were interviewed on three occasions. They were all asked identical questions about their experiences and backgrounds.
**Member checks**

Following each interview, the data were immediately transcribed and sent to the participants for verification. Emails were utilized for follow up with the participants to clarify questions and ensure accuracy of the transcribed notes as well as the intent of the content. Merriam (2002) discussed how member checking adds to the validity and reliability of studies. When using member checking, the participants should be able to “recognize their experiences in your interpretations” (p. 26).

**Audit trail**

Following Merriam’s (2002) guidelines, an audit trail was used to add to the reliability and trustworthiness of this study. Included in this audit trail was my reflexive journal, a data collection list, and a chronological listing of all tasks completed throughout the study. “An audit trail in a qualitative study describes in detail how data were collected, how categories were derived, and how decisions were made throughout the inquiry” (Merriam, p. 27).

**Summary**

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the defining moments of women who have served as president of ACUHO-I. In essence, the study was conducted to ascertain how the participants’ experiences, their mentors and their family backgrounds impacted their aspiration to the position of president. What role did mentors play in their professional careers and how did defining moments impact their choices and decisions? Findings of this research illuminated the careers of these professional women and explored
barriers they faced in their lives. These lessons may then be extrapolated to answer the question of why only eleven women have served in this auspicious role.

Three women were selected for participation in this study based on their having held the position of ACUHO-I president. The association was founded in 1949; however, the first president was not elected until 1952. It was not until 1976 that a woman held the office of president. Since then, women have served as president in 1983, 1988, 1991, 1996, 1997, 2001, 2002, 2007, 2011, and 2012. The three participants in this research study held office over a span of 15 years. The appropriate research design for this research was a qualitative study utilizing phenomenological methods.

Two research questions guided this study:

1. How did the childhood and family backgrounds influence three women to aspire to the presidency of ACUHO-I?

2. How did defining moments, in their personal and professional backgrounds, impact their role as president?

The results and analysis will be presented in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Three female past presidents of the Association of College and University Housing Officers – International were interviewed for this study. To ensure the confidentiality of the women who participated as well as the people they may have discussed in the interviews, all identifying information was removed and pseudonyms were used. This protected the participants, the individuals and institutions mentioned in the interviews, and adhered to the guidelines established by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Iowa State University.

All three participants had rich backgrounds in their careers, including holding the position of ACUHO-I President. They were passionate about the profession and have remained committed to making a difference in the lives of the staff and students with whom they work. In addition, the participants all expressed appreciation for the opportunity to reflect on their careers and the defining moments that helped shape their professional and personal lives. According to Moustakos (1994), “The method of reflection that occurs throughout the phenomenological approach provides a logical, systematic, and coherent resource for carrying out the analysis and synthesis needed to arrive at essential descriptions of experience” (p. 47).

Participant Profiles

In order to fully acquaint the reader with the study, a brief profile of each participant is included. The pseudonyms were selected by each participant and utilized to ensure confidentiality. Each woman had a personal reason for selecting her pseudonym.
Kate Johnson

Kate spent the majority of her professional career at the same institution. When writing about Kate’s experiences, it was necessary to remove all identifying characteristics as, for many years, Kate and her employer were synonymous. Kate worked in residence life, housing, and the vice president’s office throughout her tenure as a professional. Kate is married with a grown son. She is a soft-spoken woman who was highly reflective during our conversations.

Haley Mills

Like Kate, Haley also has spent the majority of her professional career at the same institution (albeit a different one than Kate’s). Haley has a very warm and friendly “conference persona” but, in our interviews, indicated she is generally more reserved when she is at work or at home. She is married and has two sons.

Renea Ogden

Renea is the youngest of the three participants. She has a ready smile and is a gifted orator. Renea has worked at several institutions and, in a side conversation, indicated she may be open to new opportunities in new locations. As a single woman, Renea is a devoted aunt to her many nieces and nephews.

How Did They Get Here?

Educational preparation

Even though all three women identified themselves as first generation college students, it was never a question as to whether they would attend college. Instead, the
question was: Where would they attend college? All three participants have an earned master’s degree, while Kate earned her terminal degree (a doctorate) and, in addition to her administrative position, became a faculty member of her institution. Haley indicated she had considered furthering her education but has since determined she will not pursue it.

**ACUHO-I leadership**

Threaded throughout the literature is the concept of defining moments that significantly shape the direction of an individual’s life. Such moments typically represent a “leadership development ‘jolt’ or turning point that causes individuals to re-think their self-perceptions” (Avolio & Luthans, 2006, p. 11). Fredrickson (2001) proposed a theory of positive emotions often termed broaden-and-build. “According to Fredrickson’s research, emotions build on one another like building blocks; the broader the foundation (high frequency of positive emotions), the more likelihood of building upward, thus contributing to further positive emotions such as self-efficacy and hope” (Avolio & Luthans, 2010, p. 254). Defining moments provide the building blocks for a strong foundation that enable individuals to define personal and professional success.

Each of the participants spoke about the experience as president of ACUHO-I as being transformative in their professional careers and their personal lives. Renea spoke about her travels to Hong Kong for the Global Housing Summit while Haley talked about her trip to New Zealand, accompanied by her son. Kate spoke more broadly about the experiences she had leading the association. She was able to summarize one of the defining moments:

... being president was realizing the board and the people you were working with really do want you to exhibit leadership. By that I mean, when you go into these board meetings, and you could say, “Well, what do you guys want to do? What do you think we should be doing? Where do you think we should...
be heading?” You can’t be void of all ideas. You’ve got to be able to say, “Here are some of the ideas I think are important. Here are some of the things I think we ought to be working on. Now I’d like your feedback on that. Let’s make some decisions on how you’re going to do this.” I just think that, when you have a group of people that come together, and they really don’t know one another and they’re from all over the country and they don’t have a lot of time together to know one another very well, they expect you to come in with and show some type of leadership that the association needs to go. And that was a real learning moment for me, too.

Themes

Two research questions guided this study: (1) How did the childhood and family backgrounds influence three women to aspire to the presidency of ACUHO-I; and (2) How did defining moments, in their personal and professional backgrounds, impact their role as president? Through the answers to these questions, three central themes emerged. The themes are family, education, and mentors. Responses from each participant is discussed first as they relate to the three themes—family, education, and mentors. Following the discussion of the themes, there is an analysis of the common threads of the participants’ defining moments.

Kate Johnson

Kate grew up in a rural area in the southern part of the United States. She lived with her parents and her younger sister and next door to her grandparents.

Family

Kate’s mom was a bank teller and her dad was an accountant for a power company. As neither parent attended college, Kate identifies herself as a first-generation college student. Even though money wasn’t plentiful, her childhood was happy and one of her
favorite playmates was her sister. Kate describes her father as one of the most influential people in her life.

*He was a very, very fine man. Very humble, honest, good, hard working, gentleman. Who always wanted to do well, always wanted to excel.*

**Education**

When asked the question, “How did the messages from your family about professional success impact your decisions? Kate responded by saying, “You know, it’s interesting because, to be honest with you, I don’t think they did that much.” She went on to say: “Because neither of them were professionals. Neither of them really went to school. They wanted us to go to school. They wanted us to be well-educated. Very much so. Because I think they knew that they didn’t get the advantage when they were growing up.”

**Mentors**

It was when we spoke about mentors that Kate shared some of her feelings as well as her experiences. After some organizational restructuring, Kate had the opportunity for work for a man, Don Wallen, for the majority of her professional career. Working for Don changed her life:

*He was, without a doubt, with the exception of my dad, the most influential person in my life. He is one of the smartest, most motivating, understated, humble people I have ever met in my life. So, if you want to know where I learned values, it was from him. I loved him so much I was never going to let him down.*

As Kate continued to speak about Don, she acknowledged that she got a little teary-eyed. She spoke to how so much of who she is she owes to him. She immediately went on to say, “And, yes, he knows it.”

Speaking further about her mentor, Kate said:
If you think about it, not many people have that. You know, not many people have supervisors or mentors that they get to know that well. Or be able to trust, or know they’re going to get good guidance, that they know they’re not going to be manipulated.

Kate was extremely open and honest when sharing her stories with the researcher. She was willing to share details about her experiences, whether they were positive or negative.

**Haley Mills**

Growing up in the northern part of the country, Haley is the youngest of three children. Her two brothers are 10 and 13 years older than she is.

**Family**

Haley was six years old when her father died, leaving her mom to raise the children on her own. In Haley’s words, “… my mother was both parents and I thought did a masterful job and was my hero.”

Even though her mother rarely spoke about her father and he died when Haley was so young, she has memories from when he was sick:

_The doctor said, “if you’re going to do something, you better do it now.” So, he took me and my mother to Birmingham, Alabama and New Orleans just for a few days (my brothers were in school). And I think it was an opportunity just to spend time with me. I remember bits and pieces from that trip and I’m so grateful to have those._

Her Catholic faith was a large part of her experience growing up and continues to be as an adult, “I think probably that Catholic upbringing assisted me, too. Sometimes I hate to admit that but I really think it did. Catholic guilt really has been a large part of my life and continues to be so.”
The values about family Haley learned growing up continued when she became a parent:

*I think just the sacrifices she made, and the time commitment she gave me were such great examples. It was just really easy for me to be that way with my own kids. So I think that’s a great deal of it. When you’re young, you really don’t think about it but as you mature and you look back, you think “wow”, she gave up a lot for me. Willingly. I don’t feel as if I gave things up for my kids but I just really wanted to give them everything I could.*

**Education**

Haley was asked how messages from her family about professional success impacted her decisions. Her first response focused on her college education:

*My mother never had an opportunity to go to college. And, I think between that and the Catholic school, it was just expected. Of course, you will. One way or another, you will go to college. You know, I guess now, the next generation, you just expect it. Some type of education.*

As Haley was finishing her undergraduate degree and begin looking for jobs, the economy took a downturn and jobs were scarce. Many of Haley’s high school friends had permanent jobs while she was doing odd jobs through the unemployment office. It was then that Haley decided to return to school and earn a master’s degree.

**Mentors**

Haley identified two people who were so influential that she identified them as mentors. The first is a woman she worked for in her hometown. Terry Belden was in charge of the softball programs around the city:

*She was really the person I wanted to emulate and follow in her footsteps. She had served in the service – had served on a cruiser and gone to Germany. And I just thought that sounded so interesting, sounded like a really good plan. But, later in life, I decided that really wasn’t what I wanted to do in life. But, she kind of showed me, as a woman, particularly back then, she was one in a*
million. She really garnered the respect of everyone. So, she was a really good role model for me in that way.

The second mentor Haley identified is Michael Lee. Michael was the first director of housing at Haley’s alma mater. He was responsible for building the residential system and doing so in such a way that the facilities would be desirable places to live for decades to come. Haley reconnected with Michael when she was elected president of ACUHO-I as Michael is a past president of the association. Echoing the literature, Haley said, “The sad thing is, and I probably shouldn’t say this, but I’ve never found another woman role model on my own campus.”

Haley’s passion for the profession, the association, and the impact it had on her throughout her professional career was evident in all three interviews. This was apparent by the words she used and the inflection in her voice.

Renea Ogden

Renea Ogden grew up in a small town in the Midwest. While living at the poverty level with her four younger siblings, Renea helped her parents take care of the animals on their family farm. Surprising to the researcher, Renea was the least verbose of the three participants.

Family

Renea was able to immediately speak to the lessons learned and the values imparted by her family:

So I learned the value of hard work and a commitment because you always had to make sure the animals were fed, and things were in its right place before you went to bed at night. So, that’s where I learned that. It would probably be helpful to say I grew up in a fairly pretty conservative
background family-wise and religion. Religion and political thinking and it was also about having good manners and knowing your place.

Renea learned that hard work was critical to success, “You’re never going to be given something, you’re going to have to work for it. And, there was this message that we’re going to support you no matter what you do.

As a single woman, Renea dotes on her nieces and nephews. Serving as a role model is a very important part of Renea’s life and vision of herself: “For some reason, I have never thought I was going to have my own children. I don’t know why. But I have nine nieces and nephews and I want to be the best aunt ever and I want to be a good role model for them.”

Education

Even though Renea’s family had very little money and neither parent attended college, all five of the children have earned either associate’s or bachelor’s degrees. According to Renea, the importance of a college education was ingrained at a very young age. They expected Renea and her siblings to take advantage of opportunities that allowed them to pursue higher education. On a related note, the family dynamic was also that, once a child turned 18 years of age, they needed to be able to make it on their own. Through the use of scholarships, grants and work study, Renea was able to work her way through school and graduate with very little in student loans.

Renea’s education went beyond the classroom. Renea’s freshman roommate was the child of missionaries in Africa who came from a more democratic, liberal background than did Renea:

And, my conversations with her and other individuals really kind of started to challenge my basic beliefs and I started to value and respect diversity and different ways of thinking which is not something that was a foundation of our family, coming from a very conservative background.
Mentors

According to Renea, mentors have played a significant role in all of her professional positions:

_I’ve had good relationships with my supervisors for the most part. And I’ve also had individuals who have said to me, okay, what else are you going to do besides your job? Which got me involved in looking at the profession more broadly than what I just do at whatever institution I’m currently working at. So, I think, if it wasn’t for those mentors, I don’t think I would have been involved in ACUHO-I._

Renea shared an anecdote about one of her mentors. At the time, Renea was frustrated with the regional association she was affiliated with. This mentor told her to “fix it.” Renea responded to the challenge by increasing her involvement, eventually being elected to the position of regional president:

_Instead of complaining about it, I figured I’d better do something about it. And if I can’t do something about it, then I should stop complaining about it. Either you’re on the way or you’re in the way. And if you’re in the way, then you need to figure out a way to get out of the way. That’s always one of my favorites._

Analysis

Several themes emerged from the data, all of which promoted a new awareness of the experiences of the women who have served as president of ACUHO-I. As the interviews were progressing, emerging themes were identified in the researcher’s field notes. Initially, the researcher identified six themes but, by the conclusion of the interviews and the discernment of the content, three overlapping themes were determined: family, education and mentors.
Family

All three women spoke very highly of their families and their childhood experiences. Each participant talked about the values that were imparted to them by their families. These women, through the expression of their comments and the emotions, were defined by their families. Their families provided them with love and support, guidance and direction. This strong familial background empowered Kate, Haley and Renea to aspire to positions of leadership. As Renea said, “So I think that, that message of hard work, it was never “you’re going to be given something, you’re going to have to work for it.” And, there was this message that we’re going to support you no matter what you do.

Haley spoke to the sacrifices her mom made that had a direct influence on how Haley raised her children:

My mother was a very hard worker. She didn’t want to work when I was young. Thank God for social security, she didn’t have to. For a long time she didn’t work outside the home. When I went into high school, she worked 8-3, so she would be home when I got out of school. I think just the sacrifices she made, and the time commitment she gave me were such great examples. It was just really easy for me to be that way with my own kids.

Each also talked about their modest upbringings. Renea indicated her parents, living with five children on a sheep and dog farm, the family lived at the poverty level. Haley spoke about the insight she gained while she was serving as president:

I did an icebreaker when I was on the board before with the executive board and the foundation board and I remember Bradley Dean, one of the furniture vendors, said, “We were poor but I never knew it.” And that’s when I got thinking and that’s exactly what I thought, too. We really didn’t have much but I had everything I needed. Because my mother was so good to me.
Kate also spoke about her upbringing: “And, it was very rural, area of the country. Never grew up near a city. Really didn’t do a lot of traveling or anything like that. Very modest income.”

All three women made career decisions because of their families. As Kate said:

I remember my son, when the first person asked me, he would have been about three or four. And I said I’m not going to do it right now because he’s just too young and I don’t want to be traveling and away from home so much when he’s quite that young. And, then, I think it was probably around the time when he was nine that I had people still asking me if I would run.

Haley echoed her sentiments with the following comment:

And, really, when you think about it, I believe there’s no perfect time for it. I thought mine was the perfect time and then my mother became really ill and it wasn’t the perfect time anymore but it was too late. You know, there is no perfect time. If you have kids, hopefully they can travel with you for some of these events or they would understand how important it is to you and that’s why you’re not there for them every moment of every day.

One of Renea’s primary goals is to be present for her nieces and nephews: “I have never thought I was going to have my own children. I don’t know why. But I have nine nieces and nephews and I want to be the best aunt ever and I want to be a good role model for them.”

Whether the participants were being interviewed for the first, second or third time, all three had messages that resonated with the importance of their families, including their parents, their siblings, their children and their nieces and nephews. They spoke about making decisions that were professionally sound, based on personal needs and principles.

**Education**

Based on comments in the first interview, the researcher added the question, “Do you consider yourself a first generation college student?” to the start of the second interview.
Even though the age difference between the three participants is nearly 20 years and their years of service as president to the association encompasses a 15-year span, all three participants identify as a first generation college student. Their children, however, have since enrolled and, in some cases, earned baccalaureate degrees.

All three women earned their baccalaureate and master’s degrees. One of the participants went on to earn her doctorate degree. All three participants learned the value of and the benefits of education from their parents.

When asked about the educational achievement or specific skills that have helped them the most in their professional aspirations, they spoke to a variety of experiences. Renea returned to an earlier message of hard work:

*I think that hard work piece comes back into play here. That I’m willing to do what needs to be done to get something accomplished. But I also think my commitment to teamwork, trying to make sure other individuals are involved in the process has also contributed greatly to me being able to move forward. Because you never do anything on your own. So being able to understand how your actions impact others and involving them in that process makes the process even more rich and hopefully, you cover more areas or bases.*

Haley spoke about her experiences in her undergraduate and graduate programs translating perfectly into her career as a housing professional:

*Well, I think, with the recreation background the programming aspect was very helpful for me. Both in recreation itself when I worked during summer and as I’m working now with residence life as well. I think I maybe mentioned before I served as a playground leader working summers and that experience, that internship I had, was very helpful for me, too. Maybe it’s not really formal education but it was kind of “on the street” education and forcing me to talk to people and be much more of an extrovert than I was. That has helped me a great deal.*

Kate spoke about her experiences in the classroom as well as on the job:

*There certainly were a few courses in my doctorate education that were outstanding. They just were, you just learned so much and the faculty were so*
good. And then I think that my former supervisor that I talked to you about was certainly one. I really think a lot of people along the way that I met and they were in different positions around the university ...

Mentors

Mentors, whether one or many, were identified as key components in the success of women. Throughout the literature, many women indicated they primarily had male mentors. These mentors were both formal and informal and provided support, contacts, sponsorship, information and coaching. In all cases, mentors recognized their potential. Some of the mentors pushed them in directions they might not have pushed themselves. According to Young (2010), “…when women are mentored by men, they often end up getting more money and higher positions” (Panel recounts history of women leading student affairs, p. 2).

Supporting the literature, the majority of the participants’ identified mentors were men.

Renea used the terms mentor and supervisor to describe those she has learned from through her career. When asked how mentors impacted her professional career, Renea said:

Incredibly. I feel very strongly that I have had strong mentors in all of my professional positions. I’ve had good relationships with my supervisors for the most part. And I’ve also had individuals who have said to me, okay, what else are you going to do besides your job? Which got me involved in looking at the profession more broadly. So, I think, if it wasn’t for those mentors, I don’t think I would have been involved in ACUHO-I. Because there was a point in time where I was just fed up with the regional association and I said, You know, what this is representing right now is not what I believe we should be as professionals. I was challenged by someone to say, okay, then fix it. And I was like, oh, doggone you for putting it back on me.

This quote emphasizes that Renea credits her aspiration to lead the ACUHO-I organization to her mentors.

Kate was very eloquent when she spoke about the impact mentors had on her career:
I was very lucky to have some folks who were willing to help me out. Who were willing to tell me I was doing something that might be done better. Who were willing to help me figure out when I went through a situation what was really good and what was really bad. And, those people were incredibly important to me.

As with Renea, Kate identified some mentors, including her former supervisor and friend, Don Wallen, as well as some colleagues within ACUHO-I, as having a strong influence on her aspiration to do better and to aspire higher.

We served on the board together and if you ever needed anything, if you had a question or you needed to talk something through and you didn’t feel comfortable doing so on your campus, there were a couple of folks through ACUHO that were always there. They also wanted you to be successful.

Defining moments

The focus of this research was about defining moments. The three participants shared stories and experiences that, as they reflected, they determined had been defining in their lives.

Kate Johnson

Kate identified several defining moments in her professional career that impacted her presidency. The first one she spoke about was the decision of her then-husband to ask for a divorce as she was pursuing an advanced degree:

It was a defining moment in terms of understanding the world and that some folks, like my first husband, just didn’t like the fact that I was earning this degree. It was a defining moment in that I had to decide to keep moving on and get finished and develop a new life and that had an impact on my career and where I was.

At another time in her professional career, Kate found her department in a position where the revenue being generated was not nearly enough to sustain the program. As such,
she needed to make decisions to significantly slash the budget, including closing buildings, which resulted in laying off staff members:

... it was a defining moment because you don’t really share a lot of this with folks when you’re going through it ... the feeling that you were really sort of on your own. I had mentors and people above me but when it came down to it, it was really just me that had to decide what I was going to do to save the program. So, I went for weeks and months without sleep. Just worrying about were we doing the right thing and what was going to happen to these people and how all this was going to turn out. I learned the lesson that it is sometimes very lonely at the top. You absolutely have to make decisions that in the future people will say she did the right thing, or she made the right decision, she made the right call. She didn’t do things for political reasons and all those sorts of things. That she made great decisions. Hard decisions. But they were the decisions that would get us through and get us back on our feet again.

The third defining moment Kate spoke to was her decision to remain at the same institution and not apply for vice presidency positions:

That was a really tough decision because I thought I might really want to do that. And then I came to the realization that I didn’t want to do what it would take to be able to do that. I had a husband. I had a son. I had my family. I just decided that I had watched a lot of VPs who were working outrageous hours and were never home at nights or on the weekends. If I had done it, I wouldn’t have been that kind of a VP. But I think it probably would have taken somebody who was willing to do that and I decided that it just wasn’t going to be for me. Just making that decision and being comfortable with it was a tough one. And I never regretted it. But it was something I had to do.

In all of these defining moments, Kate was often on her own. That is not to say she was without colleagues or support; instead, Kate’s moments were ones where she needed to reflect and make decisions, independent of input from others. The experiences of these defining moments provided her with the skills to lead an international association of housing professionals.
Haley Mills

When asked about defining moments, Haley said she wasn’t able to think of many from her day-to-day career. However, she indicated she had a number of them during her term as president:

*And the first thing that came to mind, which was interesting, was I had an interview with the Boston Globe. I thought that was just really cool. They give so much credibility to you because of you being president and it could be anybody that works in housing that could speak to these issues.*

Another defining moment for Haley was her work with one of the annual conferences. Haley proposed the idea of the conference, the location, the theme, and the content to those involved with the executive board several years earlier and it came to fruition under Haley’s leadership and tutelage, “*But the most rewarding of my profession was the yearly conference [that I proposed four years prior]. It was incredibly life-changing. I don’t know that I would have wanted to get out of the field at that point but if I had, it kept me in.*”

The third moment that has defined Haley’s professional career, thus far, also occurred during her tenure as president of ACUHO-I. As president, Haley was able to travel to New Zealand to work with housing professionals in that country. Her ability to bring her son with her on her travels not only made the experience memorable, but a defining one in her life.

Finally, Haley spoke regarding the opportunity to present the Parthenon Award (ACUHO-I’s highest award, given to members who have made significant contributions to the association and the profession), “*As I presented the Parthenon awards, it kind of brought it all back to me. It was a really big deal and I was really honored to be involved in that, in the whole process, and to receive a Parthenon Award.*”
Haley is a woman with a very positive approach to life. She often looks for the bright side of a story and, even when recounting something painful, is able to pull herself back with a positive comment or story. Haley spoke about a couple of situations that highlighted the challenges she faced, because she’s a woman, in the profession:

*In the very beginning, I really saw the old boys club very active around me. Folks that I worked with, most of them were older gentlemen that, I think, felt more comfortable with other men. You know, they’d have coffee together or play golf together, that type of thing. I remember one time I worked for a woman, for a really short period of time, and it just hit me. I went in the restroom with her and we continued to talk and I thought, “Wow, this is what it’s like every day for men.” You know, that they can go in there, have a conversation, finish it, come out and the job is done. They know what they’re going to do and move forward with it and, sometimes, they would forget to let the rest of us know their plans. I really saw that.*

She went on to share a very personal story of what she experienced as a new mom:

*When I had my first son, I felt a lot of discrimination. Yeah, I felt discrimination because my bosses’ boss expected me to come in on my maternity leave. He never expressed that to me but when I came back to work, he was really not very nice to me and I couldn’t figure it out. I talked to my boss and he said, “Oh, he’s upset because you didn’t come in on your maternity leave to make sure things are going okay.” Well, I had worked overtime for months before I went on leave so that everything was caught up as much as it could be. And that was a time before we really used computers so it’s not like I could check on things from home. So I didn’t. I divorced myself from work and I had six weeks with my son. That was a really difficult time to come back to work and to feel that discrimination. If I knew then what I know now, I probably would have done something about it. I would have at least talked to HR about my concerns. But, I didn’t even know enough to even do that at that point. And then the bosses boss left and things got kind of back to normal. But that was a difficult time for me. I think that’s the most difficulty I’ve had.*

While Haley didn’t identify the aforementioned story as a defining moment, I interpreted it to be a very significant defining moment. Her pain was evident, even though her son is now grown.
Haley indicated these moments helped define her presidency, including her ability to merge her personal and professional lives. This ability to incorporate her family into her presidency allowed to create a familial approach to the professionals she worked with.

**Renea Ogden**

The first defining moment mentioned by Renea was also not a positive experience. During her first year as a professional staff member, Renea had 8 of 15 resident assistants who either resigned or were terminated during the year. One of the student staff members had a rather severe mental health issue:

*It really opened my eyes to how you process employment issues and making sure you are being fair throughout the process. Because I was done ... and kept good documentation and realized there was a process above and beyond our department that we had to accommodate. So I think that has helped.*

However, the second defining moment Renea spoke about was a positive experience. Through her role as president of ACUHO-I, Renea had the opportunity to travel to Hong Kong for the Global Housing Summit. It opened her eyes to how much we know, and how much we don’t know, about our colleagues working in the Chinese higher education system:

*The Global Housing Summit had a huge impact on wanting to learn how we fit within this global village. And also impacted me in ways that it changed my lens when I went to a board meeting. It became much more clear, when you’re sitting in a board meeting and you don’t have data, you’re basing those conversations on your own perceptions and I realized how narrow my own perception was.*

Renea was the only participant who did not identify a story or a defining moment that was a professional or personal barrier that related to her as a woman. In fact, she questioned whether or not gender is even a significant issue in our profession at this junction as, anecdotally, more women than men are employed in residence life positions:
Part of me struggles with the thought of female presidents because we’re at a very different point in the association from when the first women became involved. Because at that time, it was very male-dominated. And I don’t feel we’re a male-dominated field any longer. So I don’t know if my gender really played into the fact that I was president of ACUHO-I. So I struggle with that. But I also think there are young professionals in this association and within housing that didn’t have struggles that other individuals did. I’m sure there are struggles, bits and pieces, but probably not across the board like in previous years. So part of me is like, am I advocating for women because I’m a woman or am I advocating for women because I think there’s an issue? And part of me thinks there isn’t an issue but perhaps I’ve been blindsided because I’ve been given opportunities that I don’t realize or because I’m a woman. And I don’t think that’s true but I don’t know. So I struggle answering this question.

Additional findings

Before this section concludes, additional quotations from the three participants are being included on topics that are outside of the three primary themes. Even though these women’s ages are separated by 20 years and their presidential terms encompassed 15 years, they expressed similar thoughts and insights when answering the researcher’s questions.

Career in housing

For those who work in college and university housing departments, it is not unusual to hear statements similar to this one: “After doing my graduate work, it became more of a realization that it was a profession. The whole background of information and experiences and network that you connect to, and that’s what I’ve tried to take advantage of as much as possible.”

Because undergraduate degrees in college student personnel or higher education don’t exist, professionals often speak to “falling into” the profession because of the opportunities they were involved in as undergraduate students. This was true for the three participants in
this study as well. What kept them in the profession is expressed with the statements that follow:

*I’m loyal to my school and my program.*

*Oh. Well, I just think this is a cool thing to do.*

**Most rewarding aspect of your job**

Throughout all of the interviews with the participants, Kate, Haley, and Renea were focused on making a difference in the lives of others. They talked about working with students and being able to see them learn and grow during their college careers. They spoke about working with colleagues and being able to assist them with challenges and support them in their efforts:

*To work with students and fellow colleagues to meet the needs of the students.*

*Working with undergrads who want to continue in the field.*

*To be seen as a problem solver and a supportive colleague across campus.*

*To work with an amazing man and to know I would never under perform because I didn’t want to disappoint him.*

**Barriers**

With the woman separated in age, geographical locations and positions, they expressed some of the same concerns in different ways. Two of the women were more open with sharing their experiences than was the third. Even though the two participants who spoke to the barriers they encountered expressed them differently and gave them varying levels of importance, it was this researcher’s interpretation that the experiences were powerful and profound. Considering the questions asked about barriers they encountered and
the experiences shared by the participants took place many years prior, the impact was obviously powerful and long-lasting:

In the beginning, I saw the old boys club very active around me. Folks that I worked with, most of them were older gentlemen that, I think, felt more comfortable with other men.

I never felt as though I had barriers although, there were some times when I would be working in the facilities area with a lot of males. Initially, I would feel like they would look at me and think, ‘Well, what does she know?’ That didn’t last very long.

One of the participants indicated she hadn’t encountered any barriers during her professional career, “I think I stand in my own way the most.” This statement was indicative of Renea’s personality. She is a problem-solver, an independent thinker, and a woman with the skills and abilities to accomplish whatever goals she puts her mind to.

Greatest career lesson

These comments were not directly applicable to the research questions. However, they did strongly resonate with Baxter Magolda’s (2004) journey of self-authorship:

You can’t be all things to all people.

You can only be at your best when you are yourself.

Because I didn’t have as much mentoring and assistance as I would have liked, I try to do that for others.

I learned you could actually form great relationships with people who were not in student affairs. And that they could be very, very helpful to students with some of the things they might work with you on.

Summary

Two research questions guided this study: (1) How did the childhood and family backgrounds influence three women to aspire to the presidency of ACUHO-I and (2) How
did defining moments, in their personal and professional backgrounds, impact their role as
president?

While there was not a direct link between childhood and family backgrounds and
aspiration to the presidency of ACUHO-I, their backgrounds did impact their aspirations. All
three women spoke about their family values of hard work and commitment. In addition, all
three shared very positive stories and reflections about their families and how important they
were, and are, to them. Finally, they all spoke about ACUHO-I as a family. Being such
strong leaders within their own personal families, it seems a natural progression to aspire to
be a leader within their professional family. This was true for Haley when she was leading
the association and the impact her mother’s declining health had on her experience as
president:

*My mother’s health had deteriorated and although she was in a medical care
facility, I was her main caregiver so it was difficult at times to leave for a
conference or a meeting when she was in such ill health. I was fortunate and
did not miss a meeting or engagement but she was always on my mind.*

As posited by Denzin (1989a), epiphanies are “interactional moments and
experiences which leave marks on people’s lives” (p. 15). Denzin identified four types of
epiphanies:

Major epiphany. This is the one big event that touches every fabric of a
person’s life. Cumulative epiphany: This is a representative event that marks a
reaction to experiences that have been going on over a long period of time.
Minor epiphany: The event may be small but serves as a symbol to illuminate
a larger issue in a life or relationship. Retrospective epiphany: Sometimes we
don’t recognize something’s significance until long after it occurs. In later
reliving the experience, we assign meaning to it. (pp. 70-71)

All three participants identified several epiphanies, or defining moments, that impacted their
lives. The researcher did not ask the participants to classify each moment as major,
cumulative, minor or retrospective. However, in at least two of the stories recounted by the women, tears were shed in the retelling, even though the events happened many years prior. “The notions that lives are turned around by significant events, what I call epiphanies, is deeply entrenched in Western thought. At least since Augustine, the idea of transformation has been a central part of the autobiographical form” (Denzin, 1989a, p. 22).

In them [epiphanies] personal character is manifested. They are often moments of crisis. They alter the fundamental meaning structures in a person’s life. Their effects may be positive or negative … the meanings of these experiences are always given retrospectively, as they are relived and re-experienced in the stories persons tell about what has happened to them. (Denzin, 1989a, pp. 70-71)

It was evident to the researcher that these moments were major moments in their lives as the personal and professional separation no longer existed.

In Gilligan’s (1982) work, she spoke about an ethic of care. “The ideal of care is thus an activity of relationship, of seeing and responding to need, taking care of the world by sustaining the web of connection so that no one is left alone” (p. 62). Furthering her research, Gilligan posited that “… identity is defined in a context of relationship and judged by a standard of responsibility and care” (p. 160). This was borne out in all of the interviews. In fact, when asked what they hoped their legacies would be, each spoke to the relationships and the care they brought to their jobs.

Well, I hope it will be that I was a strong and compassionate leader and that I had accomplished things that would move the profession forward. And I did that while keeping my integrity about me and that I was a good role model for women in that I had a sense of balance about the way I did the job and believed strongly that if folks are happy at home they’re happy on the job and if they’re happy on the job, then they’re usually happy at home. And, so, if you can strike that balance, then you will be happy and you will have a good career.
I’m hoping my legacy will be that when you surround yourself with great people and that you are a strong team member, then anything is possible. And I think the other dynamic is when you’re committed to something and you follow that commitment, you realize you don’t get there on your own, but opportunities make themselves available to you.

I want people to believe, to understand that I cared, that I laughed, and I certainly cried. I hope that my legacy includes people understanding or believing that I made people feel welcome.

At their core, cognitive-structural theories are rooted in the belief that meaning making is fundamental. These theories focus on how meaning is structured as opposed to what is known or believed to be true. Baxter Magolda’s (2004) theory of epistemological reflection was strongly influenced by King and Kitchener (1994), who posited college students make meaning in four primary ways:

- Absolute knowing which is identified as knowledge being absolute.
- Transitional knowing is when alternative points of view are considered by the learner.
- Independent knowing is when the learner understands that knowledge is uncertain.
- Contextual knowing is when the learner is able to make judgments independent of others. (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, pp. 38-1).

Initially postulated by Kegan (1994), Baxter Magolda (2004) unveiled her self-authorship theory in 2001. This theory focuses on ways of knowing over time. “From interview data collected as part of her longitudinal study of ways of knowing, Baxter Magolda (2001) found a significant shift in epistemological orientation as her participants moved into postcollegiate roles and contexts” (as cited by Pizzolato, 2007, p. 31).

The journey of self-authorship begins with a reliance on external forces. In other words, the individual focuses on what others value and believe in order to help define her or
his identity. Arriving at a crossroads is the next step on the journey towards self-authorship. Developing an identity that is distinct from others’ perceptions is the key. Finally, 

…the full development of self-authorship involves an internally generated sense of self that guides interpretation of experience and choices, accompanied by the ability to evaluate and interpret knowledge claims in light of available evidence, and the capacity to genuinely consider others’ perspectives without being overshadowed by them. (Creamer & Laughlin, 2005, p. 17)

Throughout the interviews, the participants often commented on the opportunities to reflect on their families, their careers and their defining moments. The development of their identities followed the self-authorship journey as the participants spoke about others’ perspectives. However, the nature of their decision making incorporated their self-perception as well as their relationships with others. In addition, Denzin’s (1989a) philosophy of epiphanies and Gilligan’s (1982) ethic of care were evident throughout this research study.
CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION

Summary

The purpose of this study was to hear the lived stories of three women who have served as president of ACUHO-I. Questioning whether their family and educational backgrounds influenced their aspiration to the presidency was explored as well as defining moments that impacted their term as president.

The study drew from an interpretive biography methodology. Utilizing Seidman’s (2006) three-interview series technique, three in-depth interviews were conducted with the study’s participants. The length of each interview was no more than 60 minutes. Over time, in-depth interviews allow for more thorough descriptors of events. According to Seidman, “people’s behavior becomes meaningful and understandable when placed in the context of their lives and the lives of those around them” (p. 17). The following two questions were the key research questions that guided the study:

1. How did the childhood and family backgrounds influence three women to aspire to the presidency of ACUHO-I?

2. How did defining moments, in their personal and professional backgrounds, impact their role as president?

Findings

Research Question 1: How did the childhood and family backgrounds influence three women to aspire to the presidency of ACUHO-I?

All three women consider themselves first generation college students. Even so, all three women knew they would attend college. It was not a question of if; rather, it was a question of where.
In 1783, Lucinda Foote became the first female to apply to an institution of higher education. Times have changed with more women earning college degrees than men. For the research participants, education was valued in all of their homes. Even though none of the parents had attended college, all three women not only went to college and earned bachelor degrees, they also continued on to attain their master degrees. Kate accomplished the holy trinity by earning a doctorate. In her interviews, Kate often spoke to the impact of her doctoral program. The courses and the faculty impacted her growth and development as a professional, which she was then able to carry on when she became a valued member of the faculty.

Family was, and still is, vitally important to Kate, Haley, and Renea. Each of them spoke to the unconditional support they had from parents, siblings, spouses and children. They talked about being role models for their family members as well as for staff and students at their respective institutions. In part because of the guiding values they learned from their families and the support they had as they were growing up, they knew they could aspire for many things. While the presidency of ACUHO-I wasn’t a tangible discussion (again, none of these women knew anything about the profession as they were growing up), they knew their family would support and encourage them in this endeavor.

**Research Question 2: How did defining moments, in their personal and professional backgrounds, impact their role as president?**

Besides being women who have served as president of ACUHO-I, the participants had several things in common. All of them had very positive memories of their childhoods. They respect and honor their parents and credit their upbringing to the strong values they
learned at home. Without fail, they mentioned hard work, integrity and commitment to others as integral to their family dynamics.

In all cases, the women identified defining moments that were less-than-positive. Some of the moments were professional, others were personal. Even when the moment was personal, it had an impact on her professional life.

The responses of Kate, Haley and Renea to this question were most revealing in how their personal and professional lives intersected while serving as president of this international association. Kate’s comments remained focused on her role as a leader:

*I would say that the lessons I learned in my professional life around being a strong leader impacted my role in ACUHO-I ... specifically two areas I would comment on ... first, it was so helpful to be able to paint a picture of how the future would look or to give people a vision of where the association should go or be ... I think being an effective leader is being able to get folks excited and bought into the future and the role they will play in getting there. Second, understanding that folks want leaders to lead! I was glad I had learned the lesson of letting others know how I felt and what I thought we should be doing, while keeping an open mind to everyone else’s suggestions and criticisms. This was important because, as ACUHO-I president, the board looks to you often to give your perspective first and not just ask, ‘What does everyone think we should do?’*

Haley answered this question by sharing both personal and professional experiences:

*Although my year had been well thought out and prepared for, you never really know what is going to happen in your professional life until it happens. My older son graduated from high school just prior to my induction as president. It was very special to have him with me when I gave my induction speech because I was just like all of the other hundreds of thousands of parents preparing to say goodbye to their son or daughter as they began their college life. It really hit home that I was entrusting my son’s care with the good housing folks at his institution as I spoke at that conference.*

She went on to speak about how her mother’s health was a defining moment while she served as president:
In addition, my mother’s health had deteriorated and although she was in a medical care facility, I was her main caregiver so it was difficult at times to leave for a conference or a meeting when she was in such ill health. I was fortunate and did not miss a meeting or engagement but she was always on my mind. I was also more able to perform as president and take care of my mother because I had been at my institution for such a long time. My absence from campus during the necessary times was not very difficult. People I worked with knew, understood, and appreciated what my role was in the organization and were very helpful in covering while I was gone. That made it easier for me to be away, do what I needed (and wanted) to do and not feel guilty.

When asked the second research question, Renea spoke about the concepts of teamwork and hard work as opposed to specific defining moments in her personal and professional background:

When I think about my defining moments, the concepts of teamwork and hard work definitely impacted my role as ACUHO-I President. When I decided to run for the president position, I was unsure of my ability to determine an agenda for the association. I was reminded by a past president that it wasn’t about my vision but instead, it was moving forward the vision that was determined by the leadership ahead of me. (And, I was involved in the two previous years of board discussions to help inform those discussions.)

She went on to say:

When I look back on my presidential year, it was not about me but it was about the work of the executive board and the central office team. That same year, it was the work of my staff team at my home institution that kept things running smoothly while I was out of the office.

Finally, Renea spoke about the impact relationships had on her and her presidency:

The relationships that I developed along the way also greatly impacted my work and the work of the executive board. Only through the shared experiences of my professional journey – work experience, NHTI, conference attendance, committee work, regional association leadership – was I able to connect to my fellow professionals to identify stakeholders in moving the work of the association forward.
All of the defining moments shared by Kate, Haley, and Renea focused on other people. Haley expressed it best by saying:

*I do think it’s because you have the ability through that presidency to not so much touch so many people but to get to know so many people. You know, it’s fun at the time and then it’s also rewarding the more you think about it. It goes back to opening those doors for younger staff that want to continue on because you’ve had the opportunity to get to know folks from around the globe, to serve as a resource for them.*

Kate, Haley, and Renea also spoke about the timing of their presidencies. They spoke about the impact on their families, the impact on their staff members, and the stage they were at in their careers, Kate expressed it well by saying, “*I know when I ran for president I had to decide that the time I ran was the time I wanted to run.*”

All three participants had moments they identified as defining. They spoke of the importance of teamwork and hard work in their presidential roles. Fulfilling the presidential roles and responsibilities meant being a strong, effective leader who is able to excite the membership about the future of the profession. Family transitions were defining moments for Haley. With her mother’s health failing and her son preparing to leave home to attend college, Haley found her work as president to be both challenging and rewarding. She was able to blend her personal and professional lives with her son present while she gave her induction speech as well as being secure in knowing her staff were taking care of things at her home campus. While some of these defining moments occurred when they were president and others happened when they were not in office, the moments were exactly what they were called—defining.

Mentors were an important part of their professional journeys. The relationships they spoke of were rich and long-lasting. Campbell and LaCost (2010) postulated that the
“Development of a mentoring relationship with either a female or male mentor was identified as a successful strategy for women wanting to obtain educational leadership positions” (p. 2). Based on the research in this study, this was proven to be true. As Renea so aptly stated:

I’ve had good relationships with my supervisors for the most part. And I’ve also had individuals who have said to me, okay, what else are you going to do besides your job? Which got me involved in looking at the profession more broadly than what I just do at whatever institution I’m currently working at. So, I think, if it wasn’t for those mentors, I don’t think I would have been involved in ACUHO-I.

Defining moments were the crux of this research. The researcher didn’t go into this process with any preconceived notions of what would result from the process. What was learned, however, was supportive of Denzin’s (1989a) theory.

In them [epiphanies] personal character is manifested. They are often moments of crisis. They alter the fundamental meaning structures in a person’s life. Their effects may be positive or negative … the meanings of these experiences are always given retrospectively, as they are relived and re-experienced in the stories persons tell about what has happened to them. (pp. 70-71)

Many of the epiphanies or defining moments the participants shared were negative and pain-filled. However, all three spoke about what they learned and how those moments assisted them in their careers as they interacted with other faculty, staff, students, community members and governing bodies.

However, the participants also shared very positive moments that have helped to define their professional careers. Included in these were international travels that raised awareness of the global nature of this profession, being interviewed by a national newspaper, hosting a national conference, and the decision to remain at the same institution in order to balance the demands and desires of family with professional aspirations.
Implications

This study has potential implications for several constituencies. The first is the obvious one of those women who are intrigued with the idea of being president of ACUHO-I. Through the exploration of the educational backgrounds, impact of family backgrounds, and defining moments experienced by Kate, Haley and Renea, future presidents may be informed about what they might be able to expect as they move up the ACUHO-I leadership ladder.

Another constituency would be those in leadership positions in ACUHO-I. Leadership positions include those in elected positions as well as those employed by the central office. One of the responsibilities of the executive board is to recruit members to run for elected office. This research can shed light on that process. In fact, Haley spoke about not waiting to be nominated for a position: “I’m hoping that people will realize they don’t have to be nominated for something. If they want to get involved, they should just volunteer and do that.”

Finally, this research study will add to the literature about leadership in the environs of higher education, student affairs and professional associations. As mentioned in Chapter 2, there is a dearth of literature as it relates to women in positions of leadership at the upper ranks within college and university residential life programs. This paucity continues regarding the literature about women leading professional associations in the same profession. This study will alleviate, in a small way, the lack of research about women in student affairs leadership positions.
Recommendations for Further Research

As mentioned previously, this study accomplished what research often does – raise more questions. There have been 11 women who have served as president of ACUHO-I (with the 12th woman set to take office in June 2013). Conducting interviews with these other presidents would fill in gaps in the stories. It is critically important that the researcher understand the culture(s) in which the research is being conducted be understood. Being able to align and identify the research with the societal pressures of the time would allow for cultural sensitivity to be explored.

The professional background of one of the women who served as president of ACUHO-I was in food services. This also would prove to be an area that could warrant further research as college and university food service programs have their own national association (National Association of College and University Food Services) and, anecdotally, the two associations don’t cross paths often.

Researching the barriers women encounter professionally is an area that would be fascinating to conduct a deeper exploration. Both Kate and Haley shared examples of barriers they encountered whereas Renea, who is younger, said she didn’t have any situations like that. In fact, she questioned whether her gender even played into the fact that she served ACUHO-I as president. She acknowledged that young professionals in this association and within housing probably no longer have struggles that other individuals did. Learning more about this would be a fascinating study, and would certainly add to the literature.

Comparing the experiences of men and women is another area for future research. What have men’s experiences been? As women’s roles have changed, it is a logical assumption that men’s roles have also needed to change. How did their family and
educational backgrounds influence their aspiration to hold the office of president? What were the defining moments of the men who have served as president? What barriers did they face?

Reflections

This study came about through a process of reflection and refinement. The researcher initially considered researching the defining moments of women who have held the position of chief housing officer and those who have not. When the researcher met with her committee, however, the idea of focusing on ACUHO-I presidents was offered for consideration by Dr. Larry Ebbers. Dr. Peter Englin immediately got on his iPad and shared the information about the 11 women who have served as ACUHO-I president. Dr. Ginny Arthur, also sitting in the room, was one of those women. When I was asked if I liked the idea, my immediate response was to ask the committee if they liked the idea. However, the more I sat with the concept and reflected on the possibilities, the more I became excited about the prospects of what could be learned. While I have never aspired to be president of ACUHO-I, I am committed to the association and am rewarded professionally through my involvement.

As stated previously in the study, there has been a growing body of literature from a wide variety of fields that have incorporated the concept of defining moments that have or will significantly shape the direction of an individual’s life. Such moments typically represent a “leadership development ‘jolt’ or turning point that causes individuals to rethink their self-perceptions” (Avolio & Luthans, 2006, p. 11). This research touched on defining
moments of three women who have served as president of the ACUHO-I association. Sharing some of my defining moments brought these stories together.

Underpinning the defining moments of the participants, stories of family, education and mentors were evident throughout this study as well as my life. My family, educational opportunities and mentors have all been critical components in my life, both personally and professionally.

**Family**

I consider my family background to be very traditional. My dad worked outside the home while my mom worked inside the home. My older brother, younger sister and I grew up in an upper middle class home. When I was in my 30s, I learned we had a half-brother who was living in California. The three of us met this older brother but have never really gotten to know him. In fact, learning about him strengthened the relationship between my brother, sister, and me.

One of my defining moments was first meeting and, 10 years later, marrying my husband. I was a freshman in college when I first met my future husband. I was waiting by the elevators [wearing leg warmers] and Mike offered to carry my bags to my room. I immediately loved everything about Mike—his warm personality, very funny sense of humor, intelligence, giving nature and, of course, exceptionally good looks. We dated continuously for several years, off and on for several more, and finally married in a very small ceremony.

Neither of us wanted children immediately. However, as the years passed, it seemed as though Mike never wanted them. Finally, I told him I would give him one year without any pressure or mention of children. I’m not sure what happened, but while Mike was on a
trip to Maryland, he called me and said he wanted to start a family. It was in January the following year that we learned we were having twin girls who were due mid-June. However, in mid-March, I went to the hospital in pre-term labor. About three weeks later, Amme and Emma were born, each weighing two pounds and needing oxygen to survive. There were numerous surgeries and several close calls before we could bring them home from the hospital and be confident they were healthy and would—barring any unforeseen happenings—stay that way.

Being a mom changed my life. Professionally, I changed my leadership style. I became even more collaborative, compassionate and understanding than I had been previously. Being a parent enabled me to relate on a different level to parents of the college students with whom I work. It also enabled me to challenge my staff on their ways of doing and knowing. I also incorporated my personal life into my professional life much more than I had ever done in the past. I told stories about my children at work; compared being a mom of toddlers (or adolescents) with working with college students; and, as my children have grown older, been able to share with them some of the poorer decisions young adults have made in the hopes that it may assist them as they are faced with those same challenges.

**Education**

The question wasn’t whether I would go to college. It was where I would go. Looking back, I wish I could say I chose a college based on the quality of the academics. However, I honestly chose my alma mater because of the beauty of the campus, the size of the student body, and the numbers of men enrolled as compared to women.

While earning my bachelor’s and master’s degrees were accomplishments, the decision to apply to and enroll in a doctoral program (and to follow through with the
program) has been a defining moment of my life. Earning a doctoral degree has always been on my bucket list (even before I knew what the degree was). The process of earning this degree has been life-changing experience. I have learned about myself, what I’m capable of, and the opportunities that are now possible.

**Mentors**

When I was a master’s student, one of the students in my cohort spoke about a woman who worked at her undergraduate institution. When she learned I had accepted a hall director position at that same school, she gave me this woman’s name and told me I should meet her. Within my first month on the job, I walked down to Brenda’s office, introduced myself, and told her I wanted her to be my mentor. Through the years, I have been blessed with Brenda’s insights, challenges, and support.

One of the draws of working at the University of Northern Iowa was working with my former supervisor. Bob is honest, ethical and one of the kindest people I know. He provided leadership to a department that was based on respect, human dignity and, going beyond mere tolerance, an acceptance and understanding of diversity. As a mentor, Bob allowed others to learn, grow, and aspire to be better professionals and better people. I know I have also served as a mentor to young professionals. In that role, I have attempted to channel what I have learned and gained from Brenda and Bob to those with whom I have worked.

Working with the three participants was a privilege. I knew one of them well and had met the other two over the years. In fact, I first met Kate at dinner where we were introduced by my former supervisor. I was in awe of her then and still am. I enjoyed spending time with Kate, Haley and Renea, and I am so honored they opened up their lives and their hearts
to me. They were extremely cooperative throughout the process and very supportive of this research project and of me as the researcher.

I have learned many lessons throughout this process. Some of the lessons were gained from my interactions with the participants and the time spent reflecting on their experiences and insights. I have been reminded of how small the housing profession is and how many people know one another. All three participants were adamant that they remain anonymous during this process. They wanted assurances that the stories they shared would be masked. In addition, I have realized how valuable time is. I first interviewed the participants in July 2012 and, most recently, exchanged emails with them in March 2013. This span of eight months enabled the respondents and me to develop further interpretation and meaning from the experiences that were shared.

The benefits of this study may be more personal than professional. I learned much from these women and have already put some of the lessons into practice. I traveled internationally in the midst of writing this dissertation and, as Renea indicated, I am much more aware of the globalization of our profession. Haley spoke about the importance of really listening to what staff and students say – to learn the story behind the story. That was timely information as I found myself in a position to listen to staff and students as we grieved the death of a colleague and mentor. Finally, taking Kate’s insights to heart, I engaged in a dialogue with an economics professor at my institution to ascertain if the downturn in occupancy was a macro issue at the university level or a micro issue at the departmental level.

There are also professional benefits to this research endeavor. The executive director of ACUHO-I has indicated a willingness to financially support further research in this area.
This would mean interviewing the other eight women presidents of ACUHO-I and publishing a monograph of their stories, their lessons, and their impact on the profession.

This study concludes with the words of the participants. When asked what they hoped their legacies would be for women who aspire to leadership roles, the participants responded thoughtfully and with the obvious passion they have for this profession:

**Kate Johnson**

*I always stepped in and wasn’t afraid to lead ... it’s okay ... don’t be shy ... step up and do it!*

**Haley Mills**

*I hope I was able to open doors for women who aspired to leadership roles. I hope I was able to connect people with others who could assist them in their career path while offering my experience and knowledge by improving their chances with a better resume. Better cover letter and hopefully their self-confidence in the process. I might also say that I hope they see my love and loyalty for the same campus as a model of what can work and the path that I took that showed I was rewarded for everything I gave. Times about 1,000.*

**Renea Ogden**

*To be truthful, I hope that my legacy is that you can accomplish whatever you set your mind to as long as you give your best, serve from your heart and work hard. I believe that the opportunities available to me are even greater for women today as there is more openness to accepting women in leadership positions. I also hope that my legacy is that it’s important to understand where you come from so that you can build on those experiences to become the leader you were meant to be. If a leader is not constantly learning about how their work affects others, then they are not giving their best to the individuals around them.*

*When you surround yourself with great people and you are a strong team member, then anything is possible.*

*When you’re committed to something and you follow that commitment, you realize you don’t get there on your own, but opportunities make themselves available to you.*
I was a strong and compassionate leader and that I accomplished things that would move the profession forward. And I did that while keeping my integrity about me.

People will realize they don’t have to be nominated for something. If they want to get involved, they should just volunteer and do that.

I want people to believe, to understand that I cared, that I laughed, and I certainly cried.

I made people feel welcome.

I was a good role model for women in that I had a sense of balance about the way I did the job and believed strongly that if folks are happy at home they’re happy on the job and if they’re happy on the job, then they’re usually happy at home.
APPENDIX A. POEM

For Every Woman

by Nancy R. Smith

For every woman who is tired of acting weak when she knows she is strong,
There is a man who is tired of appearing strong when he feels vulnerable;

For every woman who is tired of acting dumb,
There is a man who is burdened with the constant expectation of “knowing everything”;

For every woman who is tired of being called “an emotional female,”
There is a man who is denied the right to weep and to be gentle;

For every woman who is called unfeminine when she competes,
There is a man for whom competition is the only way to prove his masculinity;

For every woman who is tired of being a sex object,
There is a man who must worry about his potency;

For every woman who feels “tied down” by her children,
There is a man who is denied the full pleasures of shared parenthood;

For every woman who is denied meaningful employment or equal pay,
There is a man who must bear full financial responsibility for another human being;

For every woman who was not taught the intricacies of an automobile,
There is a man who was not taught the satisfaction of cooking;

For every woman who takes a step toward her own liberation,
There is a man who finds the way to freedom has been made a little easier.
APPENDIX B. HUMAN SUBJECTS APPROVAL

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Date: 6/25/2012
To: Lyn Redington
Redeker Center
Cedar Falls, IA 50614
CC: Dr. Larry Ebbers
N247 Lagomarcino
Dr. Daniel Robinson
N247 Lagomarcino

From: Office for Responsible Research

TITLE: Defining Moments of Women ACUHO-I Presidents

IRB Num: 12-299
Approval Date: 6/25/2012
Date fpr Cptomiomg Revoew: 6/18/2014
Submission Type: New
Review type: Full Committee

The project referenced above has received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Iowa State University according to the dates shown above. Please refer to the IRB ID number shown above in all correspondence regarding this study.

To ensure compliance with federal regulations (CFR 45 & 21 CFR 56), please be sure to:

- Use only the approved study materials in your research, including the recruitment materials and informed consent documents that have the IRB approval stamp.
- Retain signed informed consent documents for 3 years after the close of the study, when documented consent is required.
- Obtain IRB approval prior to implementing any changes to the study by submitting a Modification Form for Non-Exempt Research or Amendment for Personnel Changes form, as necessary.
- Immediately inform the IRB of (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.
- Stop all research activity if IRB approval lapses, unless continuation is necessary to prevent harm to research participants. Research activity can resume once IRB approval is reestablished.
- Complete a new continuing review form at least three to four weeks prior to the date for continuing review as noted above to provide sufficient time for the IRB to review and approve continuation of the study. We will send a courtesy reminder as this date approaches.

Please be aware that IRB approval means that you have met the requirements of federal regulations and ISU policies governing human subjects research. Approval from other entities may also be needed. For example, access to data from private records (e.g., student, medical, or employment records, etc.) that are protected by FERPA, HIPAA® or other confidentiality policies requires permission from the holders of those records. Similarly, for research conducted in institutions other than ISU (e.g., schools, other colleges or universities, medical facilities, companies, etc.), investigators must obtain permission from the institution(s) as required by their policies. IRB approval in no way implies or guarantees that permission from these other entities will be granted.

Upon completion of the project, please submit a Project Closure Form to the Office for Responsible Research, 1138 Pearson Hall, to officially close the project.

Please don’t hesitate to contact us if you have questions or concerns at 515-294-4566 or IRB@iastate.edu/
APPENDIX C. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview One:
1. Tell me about your childhood and family background experiences.
2. How have the core values and beliefs of your family impacted your career aspirations?
3. How did the messages from your family about professional success impact your decisions?
4. Why did you decide on a career in housing?
5. What was the most rewarding aspect of your job?

Interview Two:
1. Do you consider yourself a first generation college student? (Added to the list of questions after the first interview.)
2. Where did you receive your formal education and what degree(s) do you hold?
3. Which of your educational achievements and specific skills do you believe helped you the most in your professional journey?
4. How have barriers, if any, affected your career advancement? How did you resolve them?
5. How have mentors, if any, impacted your professional career?
6. When and why did you decide to run for the position of ACUHO-I presidency?

Interview Three:
1. Tell me about the defining moments that happened during your professional career (including during your term as president) and what impact those moments had on your professional aspirations.
2. What do you hope your legacy will be for rising women professionals in ACUHO-I?
3. Share your words of wisdom you have for future women ACUHO-I presidents.
4. What is the best professional and personal advice you received? What advice do you / would you give rising women housing professionals?
REFERENCES


ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Education has always been an important part of my life. It started with my grandparents who understood the importance of education. They passed that value on to their children who, in turn, passed it on to me. My educational journey started, and continued, at Iowa State University. The experiences I have had because of my time at ISU have shaped me into the person I am.

I am humbled by the opportunity to work with those on my committee. I offer my sincere appreciation to my major professor, Dr. Larry Ebbers. His support, leadership and humor empowered me to complete this exceptional program of study. Drs. Ginny Arthur, Sharon Drake, Peter Englin and Marisa Rivera have all been sources of inspiration, encouragement and guidance. In addition, prior to his departure from Iowa State, Dr. Frankie Santos Laanan was instrumental in helping me see myself as a scholar.

Special thanks to my editor, Pat Hahn, who improved the overall quality of this dissertation by her numerous suggestions and artful formatting. I learned a lot!

The women who participated in this study were incredible to work with during this research. Their stories exemplified their leadership styles – caring, honest and ethical. I am privileged they agreed to participate and am forever indebted to them.

I have truly been fortunate to work with the staff and students at the University of Northern Iowa. Every day, they demonstrate their commitment to making a difference in the lives of others, and they do so with dignity, humor and integrity. In particular, Roxanne Klepper has made sure I kept my focus – and my sense of humor. It is an honor to walk in the shadow of these special individuals.
Beth Bardonner has been a long-time friend and confidant. I have always treasured being able to share laughter, a love of mystery shows, and the belief that “we can do that” (even though we usually can’t).

Most of all, I thank my family. While I have been in school, Amme and Emma have grown into beautiful young women who are kind, compassionate and intelligent. They inspire me to be a better person. Mike, my husband and best friend, is my rock. His love and encouragement sustains me. I am blessed!