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Women in the Trenches: Barriers to Female Staff's Advancement in Higher Education

Carla A. Costello
College of William & Mary - School of Education

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Women in the Trenches:
Barriers to Female Staff's Advancement in Higher Education

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of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

by Carla A. Costello
November 14, 2014
Women in the Trenches:
Barriers to Female Staff's Advancement in Higher Education

by

Carla A. Costello

Approved November 14, 2014 by

Pamela L. Eddy, Ph.D.
Chairperson of Doctoral Committee

Jamel K. Donnor, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Monica D. Griffin, Ph.D.
Committee Member
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The process of writing my dissertation has taught me a lot about myself. I have learned that I can persevere through the hard times, and through times when I felt like giving up. Throughout this process I have felt that my research was not important, that it was really insignificant in the vast world of higher education literature. I learned, through family and friends, and through my wonderful participants, that I was wrong. My research is significant, and even if it only makes a difference in one person’s life, if it gives one person the sense that they are not alone, that is enough for me.

I have so many people I want to thank who have helped me along the way. This small list in no way pays just dues to all who deserve them. First, I would like to thank my husband who has given me tireless support throughout this entire process. He gave me the freedom to attend classes at night and to write whenever I needed to. To my parents – especially my mom – who have always been an inspiration, thank you for everything you have done for me. To my colleagues in the Brafferton, thank you for your support and for believing in me. Most importantly, I could not have accomplished this without the invaluable gift of time – thank you for giving that to me. To my dissertation chair and committee members – I could not have asked for better colleagues to learn from. Thank you for your honest feedback and your wonderful candor. You have forced me to think critically and have faith in my abilities.

Finally, I would like to dedicate my degree to my son. I hope that he always remembers to never give up and to always reach for the stars.
Abstract

This qualitative phenomenological case study examined the intersection of organizational structures and gender, as well as perceptions of climate, and their collective impact on professional advancement opportunities of women working in lower-level positions in higher education, namely classified and professional staff (Acker, 1990; Allan, 2011; Kanter, 1977). Kanter’s (1977) theory of the role of structure in organizations posits that position in the organizational hierarchy and work role influence the amount of access an employee has to information, resources, promotional opportunities, and support. In gendered organizations (Acker, 1990, 2006), women face barriers in advancement. While Kanter (1977) argued that structure not gender creates an imbalance of power within organizations, this study found that both structure and gender bias (Acker, 1990) act as intersecting promotional barriers for women, in particular for women located at the bottom of the hierarchy. Confidential interviews were conducted at two case sites with 10 female professional staff and 10 female classified staff. Findings showed that women in lower-level positions perceive a hostile work climate which perpetuates an us vs. them atmosphere; supervisors hold much power over the perceptions of climate and seem to be the key to access; the sticky-floor is alive and well for women in higher education; and the intersection of gender and position significantly impact women’s ability to advance professionally. Methods of improving policy and practice are discussed to include investing in people, shifting values, breaking down the caste system, supervisory training, communication, and career progression plans.
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Women activists have made progress in increasing gender equity for students in higher education as women now comprise 57% of all undergraduate students, for example (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2012). However, much remains to be accomplished in achieving universal equity within institutions of higher education. As the American Association of University Women (2013) reports, on average, women are still paid $.77 for every $1.00 a man earns for equal work. Although women have greater access to higher education thanks to policies such as Title IX, women are still underrepresented among higher education leadership (American Council on Education, 2012). Women working in higher education continue to face hostile and patriarchal climates with limited opportunities for advancement, and continue to be segregated into lower-level positions (Allan, 2011; Costello, 2012; Harlan & Berheide, 1994).

Hart and Fellabaum (2008) describe organizational climate as a perception of work-life within an organization. What is a hostile work climate? According to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (2014), a hostile work climate exists when an employee experiences workplace harassment to include offensive, intimidating and oppressive conduct. Offensive conduct may include, but is not limited to, toxic language, offensive jokes, slurs, epithets or name calling, physical assaults or threats, intimidation, ridicule or mockery, insults or put-downs, offensive objects or pictures, and interference with work performance. A patriarchal climate is defined as a social system where power
is held primarily by men, and men receive the majority of rights and privileges (Allan, 2011).

What is the impact of a hostile and patriarchal climate on women working in higher education? Further, why should this be an area of interest for higher education research? The perception of a patriarchal climate with little advancement opportunities can lead to diminished productivity, decreased job satisfaction, and little commitment to the organization (Allan, 2011). In contrast, studies have shown positive and welcoming organizational climates foster satisfied employees who exhibit improved performance, increased productivity, and more organizational commitment (Allan, 2011; Bretz & Judge, 1994; Judge, Bobo, Thoresen & Patten, 2001). Fraser and Hodge (2000) noted that job satisfaction is influenced by perceptions of climate, organizational structures, and how these “structural features are relevant to the individual employee” (p. 174). Job satisfaction is also influenced by one’s desire and ability to advance professionally (Bretz & Judge, 1994). Therefore, it can be inferred that the perception of organizational climate, organizational structures, and the ability to advance professionally, play a significant role in employee performance and productivity as well as job satisfaction.

Thus, the perception of a patriarchal climate with little room for the advancement of women can have a negative impact on job performance.

For women working in lower-level staff positions in higher education, climate is often more hostile, and advancement opportunities very slim. Much of the research on climate, structure, gender, and advancement in higher education has focused on faculty and administrators. What remains unknown is the impact of climate perception, organizational structures, and the gender bias embedded within these structures on the
ability of women working in staff positions, particularly those at the lower-level of the organizational hierarchy to advance professionally. As a result, more research on female staff working in higher education is needed to advance the understanding of women’s experiences as a whole. This study focuses on the role of organizational structures, and perceptions of institutional climate on the advancement of women working in lower-level staff positions in higher education. Further, this study centers on the role of gender and gendered organizations (Acker, 1990, 2006; Allan, 2011) as barriers toward women’s career advancement.

To understand the context in which lower-level female staff members work, it is critical to understand the history of educating women in the United States. The following section covers the original purpose of educating women as well as the impact of Title IX on education and equity for women as a whole. I will then briefly discuss my personal perspective on this study, followed by an overview of higher education. The research problem and the purpose and research questions are then addressed. Chapter one concludes with the significance of this research study and overview of the existing literature.

**Women in Higher Education**

Women’s presence in higher education has always taken a back seat to men; of note, it was not until 1977 that there were more women students than men (Solomon, 1985). Further, elite universities like Yale and Princeton refused to admit women until 1969 (Graham, 1978). Examining the history of women in higher education in the United States, Solomon (1985) found that the original purpose behind educating women in women’s K-12 schools from 1790-1850 was to prepare them to be mothers and wives.
The first coeducational college in America was opened in 1833 at Oberlin College of Ohio, and prior to that opening, women were unable to enroll in colleges and universities (Graham, 1978). During this time of coeducation, the amount of women obtaining a college degree significantly increased, creating a panic among the elite males (Solomon, 1985). To deal with these educated women, men placed them in roles where they were primarily in charge of other women leading to the creation of Deans of Women positions (Solomon, 1985). From the late 1800s through World War II, Solomon (1985) noted that these Deans of Women worked very hard to establish themselves at predominately male universities.

During the Progressive Era in the 1930s, a backlash against college educated women occurred as they began working in the fields of medicine and athletics (Nidiffer, 2002). As a result, the purpose of educating women reverted to preparing them for the roles of wives and mothers, closing the door to elitist professional opportunities. Even as late as the 1950s, the purpose of educating women was considered different than educating men (Solomon, 1985). According to Fass (1997), the GI Bill implemented after World War II, which emphasized educating veterans, again pushed women to the sidelines (Eisenmann, 2006).

Title IX, implemented in 1972, was instrumental in changing the face of equitable access to education for women (Eisenmann, 2006). Initially created to promote equity in athletics, Title IX encompasses all educational programs that receive federal funding (Eisenmann, 2006). Despite the increase in access that Title IX provided for women in the areas of athletics and education, women continue to face inequality. According to Eisenmann (2006), women only receive one-third of the funding for athletics that men
receive, and racial disparities continue to grow in athletics. In addition, women face
discrimination through the ever present structural and social barriers such as the “good
old boy’s network,” which helps to explain the underrepresentation of women in the
upper-levels on the hierarchy, and the limited opportunities they have for advancement.

Educating women has proven beneficial in many areas (Eisenmann, 2006). According to the American Civil Liberties Union (2013), Title IX accounted for 40% of the rise in employment for women between the ages of 25-34, 1.5% of an increase in women in male-dominated fields, and 8% higher wages for women. Therefore, equity in athletics and in all facets of higher education, are beneficial not only to women, but to the economy and to society as a whole. What remains unknown is the impact education has on the ability of women working in lower-level positions to advance in their careers, and what barriers they face when trying not only to advance, but also when trying to further their education.

In the following section, I discuss my personal perspective on women working in higher education. I also discuss my personal reasons for embarking on this research study of female staff members. Finally, I argue the importance of creating a positive and welcoming work climate for female staff.

**Personal Perspective**

My interest in the perceptions and experiences of women who work in higher education in part, comes from my current employment role that is, I believe, viewed as secretarial with little room for advancement. In my view, women in lower-level staff positions, especially if they are considered secretarial, are seen as less intelligent and less capable of performing challenging work that requires high-level thinking. In my
observations, women in support roles have little opportunity for promotions, limited access to professional development, and are predominantly excluded from the knowledge base within the institution. Based on the research of Kanter (1977) and Acker (1990, 2006) and these combined experiences and observations, I argue that organizational structures, including the organizational hierarchy and the gender bias embedded within these structures act as significant barriers to the advancement of women. In particular, I perceive these barriers are acute for women in positions located at the lower-levels of the hierarchy.

Based on experiences other women have shared with me, there seems to be a significant difference not only in the opportunities female staff have for career advancement and professional development, but also a significant difference in the type of work they are given, particularly if they are in clerical roles. Colleges and universities concerned with equal opportunity should be aware of the possible sense of isolation and segregation experienced by female staff as these feelings can lead to job dissatisfaction and performance issues (Allan, 2011). As Bretz and Judge (1994) found, being dissatisfied with one’s job can lead to a lack of productivity and feelings of disconnection from the organization. Creating a supportive and welcoming climate with opportunity for internal advancement can not only increase efficiency and productivity, but also help to eliminate high turn-over rates among employees (Allan, 2011; Bolman & Deal, 2008; McLendon, Hearn & Deaton, 2006).

In the next section, a brief overview of higher education organizations is presented. The concept of dual governance and the different types of institutions are discussed as well as the main components of organizations.
Overview of Higher Education Organizations

Traditionally, the purpose of higher education was to educate elite White males, and "replicate the existing elite and fulfill elite roles" (Lombardi, 2013, p. 21). It was not until post World War II that higher education in America began to educate the non-elites (Lombardi, 2013). However, despite increased access to higher education, the elitist mentality remains in higher education as evidenced in the constant struggle between access and affordability (Lombardi, 2013; McLendon et al., 2006).

According to Birnbaum (1988), higher education is different than other organizations due to its governance structure. Governance consists of "the structures and processes through which institutional participants interact and influence each other and communicate with the larger environment" (Birnbaum, 1988, p. 4). The governance of higher education consists of state governments, governing boards, administration, including presidents, and faculty (Birnbaum, 1988). This governance structure creates intersections among several positions, which all compete for power and lead to complex management and structures. According to Lombardi (2013), managing higher education is complex as "the management of universities is always more of an art than a science" (p. xi). The structure of higher education consists of an academic core, which includes faculty members who create, cultivate, and have authority over the curriculum and academic decisions, and the administrative shell, who attain and allocate resources (Lombardi, 2013). As Birnbaum (1988) posited, this dualism of control often leads to conflicting goals.
In examining research universities, Lombardi (2013) found that these institutions in particular, have widespread revenue seeking behavior as money is critical for these institutions to compete for excellent faculty and students. “The goal of research universities then, is to accumulate the highest level and the largest amount of quality they can through the competitive purchase of scarce quality elements” (Lombardi, 2013, p. 12). These aspirations result in creating institutions built upon competition and this competition translates to roles within universities.

What then are the main components of an organization? According to Mintzberg (1979) the five basic parts of an organization are: the operating core, the strategic apex, the middle line, techno structure, and the support staff. The operating core of faculty members carries out the basic work of the organization, while the strategic apex consists of those at the top of the hierarchy. The middle line is essentially comprised of the middle managers, and the techno structure, according to Mintzberg’s (1979) model, consists of analysts who impact the standardization of organizations. Support staff make up the fifth group, and they support the functioning of both the operating core and the apex. “The support staff goes largely unrecognized in the literature of organizational structuring, yet a quick glance at the chart of virtually any organization indicates that is a major segment…” (Mintzberg, 1979, p. 19). This gap in the research underscores the importance of researching those in staff roles, as this group consists of a significant number of employees within an organization who have a vital role. Figure one below is an example of Mintzberg’s (1979) model of organizational forms. The model highlights the large role of the operating core, or the faculty. The model also shows the authority of the strategic apex, the connection by the middle line, and the fact that support staff and
Techno structure are there to assist both the apex and the core. I have included a table (Table 1) to show where positions in higher education may fit into Mintzberg’s (1979) model.

Figure 1: Mintzberg’s Organizational Forms. Source: Mintzberg (1979)

Table 1: Basic Subunits of Mintzberg’s Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subunit</th>
<th>Example Positions from Higher Education</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strategic Apex</td>
<td>President, Vice President, Provost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technostructure</td>
<td>Strategic Planning, Institutional Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Staff</td>
<td>Public Relations, Payroll, Mailroom Clerks, Food service, Office Assistants and secretaries, Facilities and grounds crew, housekeepers,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Line</td>
<td>Assistant Vice Presidents, Associate Vice Presidents, Directors,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operating Core</td>
<td>Faculty</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Institutions of higher education are quite bureaucratic in operation (Birnbaum, 1988). Characteristics of bureaucracies, according to Birnbaum (1988) include, “campus constituencies finding themselves isolated from each other… rules and regulations become the important mediators of interaction, and administrators become specialists in
distinctive areas" (p. 107). However, bureaucracies appear necessary in large organizations, as this type of structure tends to help coordinate the work done by many people. Another common characteristics of a bureaucracy is the organizational chart, which indicates lines of authority. These lines of authority influence university priorities and the distribution of resources and power (Birnbaum, 1988). According to Birnbaum (1988), "the [hierarchical] structure of a college affects how offices will interact and influence each other" (p. 110). Figure two is an example of a college organizational chart. Figure three is an example of a college department organizational chart. One can see that there are evident chains of command, with varied reporting lines within both colleges as a whole and individual departments. Of note is the location of classified and professional staff, particularly those in clerical roles, at the bottom of the hierarchy.

*Figure 2: Sample College Organizational Chart*
While the organizational hierarchy is a prominent feature of bureaucracies, another related characteristic is that people function based on rules and regulations that foster predictability and set standards for acceptable behavior (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Birnbaum (1988) added that the predictability and standards for behavior are often resistant to change and based on the premise things have always been done this way.

As evidenced by the literature on the organization of higher education, universities are highly structured, hierarchical in nature, and plagued with rules and regulations (Birnbaum, 1988; Bolman & Deal, 2008; Lombardi, 2013). In addition, the governing hierarchy that typically leaves staff on the outskirts, and the constant struggle for power and resources shows that universities remain highly bureaucratic which influences priorities and interactions (Birnbaum, 1988). For those working in the
trenches of these bureaucratic organizations, the influence of power cannot be underestimated. Understanding more about the organizational structure of university settings highlights the positionality of classified and profession staff, clearly locating these groups at the margins of power.

Research Problem

The next section discusses the influence and role of power, organizational structures and gender on the ability of women in lower-level positions to advance professionally. Further, this section shows a gap in the literature base for the experiences of classified and professional staff at the lowest levels of the hierarchy in higher education. Finally, the definition of classified and professional staff is shared as well as the revelation of the purpose statement and research questions.

The influence of power. According to Birnbaum (1988), “power is the ability to produce intended changes in others, to influence them so that they will be more likely to act in accordance with one’s own preferences” (p. 12). This influence of power can have significant impacts on those at lower-levels of the university hierarchy, thus, primarily women (Acker, 1996, 2006). Gottfried (1996) argued that research into women’s experiences helps to uncover the hidden dimensions of domination, power, and oppression that have continually been reproduced by males. Juxtaposing this notion of domination with Birnbaum’s (1988) view of power, it can be inferred that the dominant group, typically men, who hold and exert power, set the rules for acceptable behavior, create the policies, and control the resources; all of which influences organizational behavior.
What types of power influence behavior and create domination? Legitimate and referent power are prevalent in hierarchical structures (Birnbaum, 1988; Bolman & Deal, 2008; Morgan, 2006). Legitimate power occurs when one person influences and the other complies, whereas referent power, “results from the willingness to be influenced by another” (Birnbaum, 1988, p. 13). Both legitimate and referent power can have a significant impact on those lower on the hierarchy who tend to possess less overall power and are unable to control the effect power has on actions that impact them (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Costello, 2012).

Within institutions of higher education, power is manifest through formal authority figures who control limited resources, create and enforce rules and regulations, control the decision making process, and regulate the flow of knowledge and information (Morgan, 2006). Lombardi (2013) identified two areas of power within colleges: the academic core and the administrative shell. The academic core, consisting of faculty members, have primary power over the academic side of the institution. The administrative shell, including presidents, provosts, deans, and department heads, are responsible for “the acquisition and distribution of resources and for the management of the enterprise” (Lombardi, 2013, p. 2). Lombardi’s (2013) description of power in higher education, makes no mention of support staff, reflecting that they have little to no power within the organization.

Organizational hierarchies are one example of a power driven social structure that prevents certain groups from advancing (Acker, 1990; Bronner, 2011). An organization’s structure and culture often serve the interests of some groups but not of others, reinforcing the influence of power (Dahm, 2011). According to Acker (1990,
2006), the hierarchy is not only a manifestation of power, but also a manifestation of gendered organizations. Gendered organizations, which cluster the majority of women at the bottom of the hierarchy, are shaped by the power and influence of the dominant group, typically the male (Acker, 1990, 2006). Employees in positions at the lower-level of the organizational hierarchy seem to have less access to information, professional development, training support and resources, reflecting little power and influence within the organization (Kanter, 1977; Kanter & Stein, 1979). Pointedly, research shows female support staff working in higher education, particularly those in classified roles, perceive that professional staff, especially males, have distinct advantages, such as flexible scheduling, better benefits, and more opportunity to advance in their careers (Bauer, 2000; Costello, 2012; Iverson, 2009). Bauer’s research (2000) substantiated this perception noting that women in classified support roles working in higher education feel they are in the most demeaning positions on the campus. This perception can be influenced by the amount of power others have, or are perceived to have, as well as the behaviors that are rewarded in the organization (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

What remains unknown about power in the organizational structure of college settings is the way power and the influence of power can serve as a significant barrier for women who are seeking to advance professionally. In particular, what needs further research is the way power impacts women who perceive themselves to be caught in the trenches unable to advance in their careers.

Structure, gender, and roles. There are many studies in the extant literature on organizational structure, the influence of hierarchy on work roles, levels of power, and decision-making and the way these factors influence professional advancement (Acker,
1990, 2006; Birnbaum, 1988; Dahm, 2011; Morgan, 2006). However, most of the research on higher education and advancement focuses on the experiences of men in general; the research on women typically concerns female faculty or the role of gender and leadership. Scant attention is given to the experiences of female professional staff, and even less to classified staff as they seek to advance through the hierarchy (Allan, 2011; Costello, 2012; Iverson, 2009). Female support staff who make vital contributions to higher education on a daily basis are, for the most part, not the focus of higher education research, and not the focus of career advancement within higher education (Costello, 2012). Thus, there is a gap in the literature on research regarding the advancement of female support staff in higher education, specifically in regards to the influence of organizational structures, the perception of climate, and power privilege as barriers. The research problem for this study focuses on organizational structures, power privilege, the perception of institutional climate, and the role of gender as barriers to the advancement of women in higher education who occupy staff roles at the lower-level of the hierarchy.

Defining classified and professional staff. For the purpose of this study, female staff are divided into two categories: classified staff, and professional staff. The Department of Labor (2013) notes these classifications are based on duties, responsibilities, complexity, results and accountability of their jobs. According to the Department of Labor (2013) classified positions generally require routine mental, manual, mechanical or physical work and usually require little independent decision making. Job duties and goals are achieved by applying established processes and systems through substantive experiences requiring high school or post-high school education.
The Department of Labor (2013) reports that professional positions require advanced knowledge, consistent exercise of discretion and judgment and incumbents typically need an advanced degree or specialized experience. Professional staff will be referred to as professionals throughout the study and classified staff will be referred to as classified staff throughout the study.

Purpose statement and research questions. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological case study was to examine the intersection of organizational structure and gender on the ability of women working in higher education, particularly those in roles at the lower-levels of the hierarchy, to advance professionally (Acker, 1990, 2006; Allan, 2011; Kanter, 1977). Further, the purpose was to show the intersection of structure, gender, and the perception of organizational climate and their collective impact on female staff’s ability to advance in their careers. To examine the impact of these intersections on women’s advancement, I posed the following research questions:

1. How do female classified and professional staff perceive organizational climate and what is the impact of climate and gender on their ability to advance professionally?
2. How does organizational structure and the influence of power impact female classified and professional staff’s ability to advance professionally?

Overview of Literature

This section of the introduction provides a brief overview of the topical areas of literature that will be covered in Chapter two: organizational structures and power privilege, perceptions of institutional climate, and gender. These topics provided a framework in answering the research questions and informed the interview questions,
namely querying: the role of organizational structures, power privilege, the perception of institutional climate, and the role of gendered organizations as suppressors for the advancement of women, particularly those located at the lower level of the hierarchy (Acker, 1990; Allan, 2011; Kanter, 1977). Feminist literature is also included in the review to further counter Kanter's (1977) notion that organizational structure, not gender, is what really prevents the advancement of employees in lower-level positions. I argue that gender is integrated into the structure of an organization and is the driving force behind power privilege. I also argue that gender influences the perception of organizational climate and is a significant barrier to the advancement of women, especially those in positions at the lowest levels of the hierarchy.

The organization. The review of the literature examines roles within an organization, the hierarchical structure that dominates organizations, and the influence of power on structures. Structure, including work roles, the influence of the hierarchy, and power – both real and perceived – often determines who advances within an organization and who remains in disadvantaged positions (Acker, 1990; Kanter, 1977).

Roles. The extant literature on roles and role theory (Bess & Dee, 2008a; Biddle, 1986; Welbourne, Johnson, & Erez, 1998) suggest two categories for defining roles: functional, thus what function does the employee perform and what function do they fill in the overall role structure of the organization; and behavioral, thus what is expected of an employee within their role. Biddle (1986) termed these categories organizational role theory and cognitive role theory. Organizational role theory posits organizations are social structures that are task-oriented and hierarchical in nature, meaning roles help to define both position on the hierarchy and define acceptable behavior; cognitive role
theory suggests that expectations are major generators of roles, meaning roles set the standards of expectations, especially in regard to behavior, for employees (Biddle, 1986).

While roles tend to set expectations on how employees are supposed to act, having roles within organizations often leads to role conflict based on "role ambiguity, role malintegration, role discontinuity, and overload" (Biddle, 1986, p. 83). According to Bess and Dee (2008a), "Inefficiencies in operations arise in part from misunderstandings of what the different roles entail and from miscommunication, or uncoordinated communication among members at all levels of the organization" (p. 244). Roles within an organization set limits on employee behavior, standardize behavior, stabilize expectations, circumscribe responsibilities and create contractual relationships, which can cause problems within the organization (Bess & Dee, 2008a, 2008b). For example, the concept of circumscribing responsibility is problematic because it can lead to employee apathy and unwillingness to take on tasks outside of their immediate job descriptions (Bess & Dee, 2008a). Creating contractual relationships can become problematic if these relationships are based on and influenced by power. Roles are essentially necessary within an organization and are beneficial for maintaining order; however, overemphasis on roles is problematic as this can lead to both employee stagnation and domination (Morgan, 2006). This research study examined the influence that the role of being a female classified and professional staff member has on the perception of organizational climate, the influence of power, and the ability to advance professionally.

Hierarchies and power. A prominent organizational structure that influences the way institutional participants interact is the hierarchy (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Kanter, 1976; Weber, 1946). According to Kanter (1976) "the hierarchical system in which most
work relations occur define which people are mobile, which will advance, which positions lead to other positions, and how many opportunities for growth and change occur along a particular chain of positions" (p. 415). Weber (1946) described the hierarchy as a functional response to work dividing labor among employees where those in lower-level positions depend on those with power for rewards and act in ways that are acceptable to the organization’s culture to avoid punishment. Therefore, roles are inextricably linked to the hierarchy, reinforcing the influence of power on interactions and behaviors.

It is helpful to look at sociological research when examining the hierarchy and power. One of the most prominent sociologists in this realm is Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu’s (1977) theory of power and practice discusses the concept of the reproduction of social hierarchies and the idea that power is recreated through socialized norms. Those in positions of power, or the ruling elite, retain their power and privilege while those who are marginalized remain in the margins (Bourdieu, 1977). The idea of capital – social, cultural, and symbolic is also prominent throughout Bourdieu’s work (1977, 1989). The term cultural capital refers to non-financial assets that promote social mobility beyond economic means including intellect, dress, or physical appearance. Social capital refers to economic benefits resulting from preferential treatment. Symbolic capital denotes resources available to people based on honor or prestige (Bourdieu, 1986). The organizational hierarchy reflects these concepts of capital as those in the higher levels have prestige and symbolic power. Having symbolic power by position on the hierarchy can lead to social capital, and increased access to cultural capital.
According to Conger and Kanungo (1988), the principle sources of organizational power are one's position on the hierarchy and level of access to information and resources. As a result, individuals often compete for resources, status, and career advancement (Morgan, 2006). One of the focus areas for my research was on the influence of the organizational hierarchy, with its clear divisions of labor, on female classified and professional staff's perceptions of their ability to advance in their careers.

**Life in an organization.** Life in organizations, according to Kanter and Stein (1979) is a system of complex interactions among workers in competition for prestige and power. They describe life at the top of an organization as a group of leaders who are "insulated: the tendency for leaders to create closed inner circles consisting of doppelgangers – people just like the leaders who look like them and tell them only what they want to know" (Kanter & Stein, 1979, p. 10). What Kanter and Stein (1979) posit is that these doppelgangers often prevent leaders from obtaining any real information about what is going on in the trenches of an organization by insulating them from bad news. This insulation can have negative consequences for leaders as:

Those with accountability for results but without the capacity to take action – to bring in the needed resources, to mobilize the needed people, to influence the wider environment [because of insulation] are essentially powerless, even though they might have formal authority of a wide scope. Powerlessness [for leaders] often engenders punitive behavior: the tendency to coerce and punish where moderate persuasion will not work; the tendency to become tight, detail-minded, rule-minded, and inflexible; and the tendency to control even more closely with
those aspects of the system over which the leader feels he or she does have some power. (Kanter & Stein, 1979, p. 11)

Thus, leaders who are insulated can feel powerless to rule their organization, and often resort to punishment and coercion to exercise their authority. While it is fairly certain that those at the top have power, what is not certain is their ability and understanding of how to use it and maintain it. Further, there is an assumption that leaders are “loyal and conform to a prescribed pattern of behavior” (Kanter & Stein, 1979, p. 24). Leaders and managers, according to Kanter and Stein (1979) tend to protect their own kind, “guarding power and privilege for those who fit in... a bureaucratic kinship system” (p. 24). It can be inferred that because white males have typically held the majority of leadership positions in organizations, they are guarding and guiding the future leadership of other white males.

In contrast, life at the bottom of an organization, “people are often rewarded the least, valued the least, and considered the most expendable and replaceable - in a sense, not fully members of the organization at all” (Kanter & Stein, 1979, p. 176). As Kanter and Stein (1979) described life at the bottom of an organization, they made reference to the amount of control and power exerted on these employees, and the idea that most jobs at the bottom of full of monotony and repetition. To further reiterate the lack of power employees may feel at the bottom they said, “since power often comes out of a sense of uniqueness and irreplaceability, it is very hard for people at the bottom to gain much power” (Kanter & Stein, 1979, p. 178). Thus, while people at the top struggle for power and control, workers at the bottom struggle to survive. While Kanter and Stein (1979) described what life may be like for workers at the bottom of a factory, what remains
unknown in the vast majority of literature is the impact of life at the bottom for female staff working in higher education. In addition, the impact of gender and gender bias is missing from Kanter and Stein's (1979) work.

**Institutional climate.** According to Allan (2011) campus climate includes a variety of factors that contribute to employees' collective experiences and perceptions at work. Schneider, Ehrhart, and Macey (2013) define organizational climate as “the shared perceptions of and meaning attached to the policies, practices and procedures employees experience and the behaviors they observe getting rewarded” (p. 362). The perception of a patriarchal climate, where men receive the majority of privileges, has a significant impact on women – especially if they work in lower-level positions (Allan, 2011; Acker, 1990). The four dimensional framework for assessing campus climate as discussed by Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, and Allen (1999) focused on the following factors: the historical context of the institution and its inclusion or exclusion of various minorities; the structural diversity; psychological factors, including perceptions and attitudes towards particular groups, and behaviors. Factors shaped by intergroup relations climate, or the “shared perception of a constituency” (Allan, 2011, p. 66) can be manifest in access to information, support, resources, professional development and opportunity for career advancement. Through my research, I investigated how climate impacted access to information, support, resources, professional development, and primarily the ability to move up the hierarchy for female classified and professional staff, particularly when the patriarchal climate long associated with higher education, is considered (Allan, 2011; Williams, 2000).
Perception of climate can strongly influence the way employees feel about their work environment, the barriers they face, and even career goals (McWhirter, 1997). As discussed by McWhirter (1997) perceived barriers to both education and careers play a significant role in understanding the gap between ability and achievement. The perception of climate barriers related to women and careers might include the expectation of discrimination and lack of support (McWhirter, 1997). For women, the perception of gender and support barriers can intersect with differences in opportunity structures and organizational climate (Kanter, 1977; McWhirter, 1997). Therefore, even if there is no gender discrimination within an organization, women may perceive their lack of advancement opportunities as directly related to gender and not another unrelated factor. Kanter and Stein (1979) describe perception as being shaped by position. In other words, where someone is located within an organization has significant influence on their perspective about the organization. How then, does this impact job satisfaction?

Work satisfaction is connected to the perception of organizational climate (Allan, 2011; Hart, 2009; Johnsrud, 2002). Environmental conditions on campus can greatly impact work satisfaction, and in particular the satisfaction of women (Allan, 2011; Hagedorn, 2000). For example, Brockner (1988) found that support from supervisors played a large role in employee satisfaction and work motivation. As Kane-Urrabazo (2006) noted, “It is crucial that managers at all levels are aware of their roles and responsibilities in upholding positive workplace environments that can increase employee satisfaction” (p. 188). The influence of climate, especially patriarchal climate, can be inferred to be particularly vital for women in low-level positions as they may become disheartened by failed attempts to advance professionally (Costello, 2012). While the
extant literature discusses the influence of climate on female faculty and administrators, the impact of climate on female staff has been scarcely examined.

Access to information increases employee perceptions of a positive climate and can increase work satisfaction (Bauer, 2000; Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Lawler, 1992). Lack of access to information on the other hand, can lead to the perception of a hostile climate, leading employees to feel embittered toward their work environment (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). What impact does access to resources and information, and support from the institution have on the work satisfaction for female classified and professional staff? This question remains for the most part, unexplored in the literature.

**Feminist research.** Feminist research places gender at the center of research and shows the inequality of the distribution of power and privilege (Gottfried, 1996). Acker, Barry, and Esseveld (1996) posited that feminist research attempts to reduce the continuing role of male dominance and the devaluation of women. Research from a feminist standpoint provides grounds for knowledge about women who have traditionally been marginalized (Gottfried, 1996; Harding, 1987). According to Gottfried (1996), "It is not enough for feminist researchers to collect data. Feminist research must be part of a process by which women's oppression is not only described, but also challenged" (p. 26). Acker and associates (1996) argue that almost all who rule and manage are men, not women. Therefore, gender and feminist research play a critical role in creating change for marginalized groups. In fact, Gottfried (1996) argues that the act of women researching women, and examining the structures starts to bring to light hidden dimensions of oppression. According to Harding and Norberg (2005) feminist research is concerned with how "our lives are governed not primarily by individuals but more
powerfully by institutions, conceptual schemes which are seemingly far removed from our everyday lives" (p. 2009). Thus, feminist research is concerned with social transformation, and can have a significant impact on changing institutional policies and practices that have long been based on the male norm.

Feminist research, while primarily focusing on patriarchal domination, must also recognize and eliminate other "forms of domination ... such as racism and classism" (Hooks, 1989, p. 612). One such form of domination, according to Hooks (1986) is the role women themselves play in creating and perpetuating sexism. "Women are divided by sexist attitudes, racism, class privilege, and a host of other prejudices. Women have to work together to combat the sexism we all face regardless of race" (Hooks, 1986, p. 127).

Hooks (1989) described women's role in domination as both victim and dominator. Further, she discussed women in terms of relationships with each other:

Women are the group most victimized by sexist oppression. As with other forms of group oppression, sexism is perpetuated by institutional and social structures; by the individuals who dominate, exploit, or oppress; and by the victims themselves who are socialized to behave in ways that make them act in complicity with the status quo. Male supremacist ideology encourages women to believe we are valueless and obtain value only by relating to or bonding with men. We are taught that our relationships with one another diminish rather than enrich our experience. We are taught that women are 'natural' enemies, that solidarity will never exist between us because we cannot, should not, and do not bond with one another. We have learned these lessons well. We must unlearn them if we are to build a sustained feminist movement. (Hooks, 1986, p. 127)
Therefore, it can be deduced that women can, in many ways, serve as barriers toward other women and to the feminist movement as a whole.

**Gender and higher education.** The world of higher education is not immune to the impact of gender. The ivory tower has long been known as patriarchal in structure and climate (Caplan, 1994; Sutherland, 1994; Williams, 2000). Gender bias against women can be found in organizational processes and procedures that appear to be gender-neutral (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000). Chliwniak (1997) stated, “The academy has comfortably reproduced itself for several centuries and a male dominated patriarchy has been solidly established” (p. 131). Thus, the male dominated patriarchal culture, structure and climate of higher education, acts barriers to women’s advancement, particularly for the majority of women who are placed in roles at the lower-level of the hierarchy (Acker, 1990; Glazer-Raymo, 1999; Peterson & Morgan, 1995).

The concept of the ideal worker reinforces gender inequality within higher education, as ideal workers devote themselves completely to work and are able to work long hours because someone else (usually a woman) is taking care of their personal commitments (Williams, 2000). According to Williams (2000), these ideal worker qualities are typically associated with males. As men have been the standard for developing organizational rules and regulations, the concept of the ideal worker manifests through work roles, the organizational hierarchy, and expectations of behavior (Allan, 2011; Harlan & Berheide, 1994). Within the walls of higher education, the majority of women are typically found in the trenches, in positions that have little possibility for advancement (Allan, 2011; Iverson, 2009). Therefore, gender bias, and power privilege
continue to act as a deeply rooted structural barriers toward women’s advancement (Acker, 1990, 2006).

**Leaning in.** Some feminist literature discussed the idea that external gender barriers may not be the only factors interfering with women’s advancement opportunities. In her book *Lean In*, author Sheryl Sandberg (2013) discussed the internal barriers women place on themselves. Sandberg (2013) stated that women lack self-confidence and are “reluctant to apply for promotions even when they are deserved, often believing that good job performance will naturally lead to rewards” (p. 63). According to Sandberg (2013), women often make the mistake of thinking that someone is going to notice their hard work and reward them for it. In contrast, men own their success, which is “key to achieving more success” (Sandberg, 2013, p. 44).

Sandberg (2013) argued that social stereotypes of acceptable and non-acceptable behavior cross-over into the workplace. As Sandberg (2013) said, “Professional ambition is expected of men, but is optional – or worse, sometimes even a negative for women” (p. 17). Women can be their own worst enemies when it comes to career advancement, as many times they are not open to risk taking, they are strongly influenced by external pressures, and even tend to make career sacrifices to accommodate their partner’s career goals (Sandberg, 2013). Sandberg (2013) argued further that men seize the opportunity to share their accomplishments, while women tend to hide in the background.

While Sandberg (2013) makes a compelling argument about women standing in their own way, the influence of organizational structures and the bias embedded within these structures can in no way be discounted for the marginalization of women. However, as men continue to succeed and advance by touting their hard work, while
women's work goes largely unnoticed, women's perception of organizational climate will continue to play a significant role in their lack of career advancement. The combination of a negative perception along with the significant structural barriers in place, can create difficult barriers for women to overcome. Further, negative perceptions of climate can affect women's belief in their own abilities and ultimately, their capacity to succeed (Morris & Daniel, 2008). What remains relatively unknown in the literature is how these barriers impact women working in the lower-levels of the organization.

Introduction to the Theoretical Frameworks

This section introduces the theoretical frameworks which focus my study. The first framework is Rosabeth Moss Kanter's (1977) structural theory of organizational behavior. The second framework, used to bridge the gap between structure and gender, is Joan Acker's (1990) theory of gendered organizations. In this study, the intersection of these frameworks shows the impact of structure and gender bias on women's ability to advance professionally within higher education.

Kanter's (1977) structural theory of organizational behavior suggests that work structures including location of position on the organizational hierarchy, access to information and training, advancement opportunities, institutional support, policies and practices influence employee perceptions of power, organizational climate, and job satisfaction. These factors are particularly relevant for employees in positions located at the lower-level of the organizational hierarchy, as most of these employees find themselves in jobs with little advancement opportunity (Kanter, 1977).

According to Kanter (1977) the disproportionate distribution of power and the abuse of power have detrimental effects on employee morale, the desire and ability to
advance professionally, and job satisfaction. Several research studies have shown that employees who feel empowered have a stronger sense of organizational commitment, increased morale, and are more invested in their work (Acker, 1990; Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Lawler, 1992; Schneider & Snyder, 1975). This increased commitment is beneficial both for the employee and the organization.

Bolman and Deal (2008) outlined the Human Resources frame for organizations, which posits that “employee energy and commitment are vital resources that can make or break an enterprise” (p. 122). Issues can arise when supervisors view employees as passive, lazy, and having little desire to advance (McGregor, 1960). McGregor (1960) referred to this attitude as Theory X, where supervisors use coercion and tight control to manage employees. As a result, employees behave antagonistically and have low organizational commitment, fulfilling the supervisor’s expectations (McGregor, 1960). Instead of using techniques of Theory X, McGregor (1960) suggested what he called Theory Y. According to McGregor (1960), the main idea behind Theory Y is, “the essential task of management is to arrange conditions so that people can achieve their own goals best by directing efforts toward organizational rewards” (p. 61). McGregor (1960) added that rewards can be incentive programs, or even a promotion. Therefore, as Kanter (1976, 1977) suggested, empowering employees by providing promotional opportunities as well as the information and resources necessary to perform their jobs, is in the best interest of both the worker and the organization.

What then is the underlying cause of so many women in low-level positions? Kanter’s (1977) theory focuses on work structures as the explanation for the large numbers of women in lower-level positions. However, as Acker (1990, 2006) posited
through her concept of gendered organizations, gender bias plays a critical role in the segregation of women to the lower-levels of the organizational hierarchy, greatly impacting their ability to advance. Therefore, I argue that it is the intersection of both structure and gender bias that influence the ability of women in lower-level positions to advance. Kanter (1977) further stated that employees in these lower-level, or disadvantaged positions, tend to limit their goals and desires for a better position, as they tended to believe they have little chance for advancement. In her observations she found that workers in lower-level positions tended to focus more on personal matters such as family life, friends, and social activities, leading to decreased productivity and lack of organizational commitment as well as a lack of empowerment (Kanter, 1977).

Discussion of the theoretical frameworks will be expanded in the next chapter.

Research Significance

Why is it important to understand the perceptions of climate and advancement opportunity for female staff in higher education? First, the number of women in staff roles, particularly classified roles, working in higher education is significant. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2011) report that 20% of all clerical workers, which are almost always classified positions, in the United States, are employed by colleges and universities making them the largest employer of this group in the country. The National Center for Education Statistics (2009) found that 85% of clerical workers in higher education are women. Therefore, higher education employs a large number of women, and in particular, a large number of women in classified clerical positions. Additionally, it is important to understand the experiences of all workers within and organization, not just those in high-level positions. As research on organizational hierarchies shows, there
are more positions at the lower-levels employing more people in these roles (Lombardi, 2013; Morgan, 2006), making it prudent to understand their experiences.

External and internal relations are very important for organizations, and many female staff members, in particular, those working in secretarial or office manager positions, are the first point of contact with students, parents and other constituents. Their presentation of the college environment can have a significant impact on the perceptions of both internal and external constituents. Research has shown that women in these roles are underpaid and undervalued (Bauer, 2000; Iverson, 2009), so it can be inferred that their presentation of their work environment may not always be positive. According to Bonk, Crouch, Kilian, and Lowell (2006), "colleges and universities would grind to a halt without their armies of support staff" (p. 111). Therefore, staff members are vital to higher education institutions, and more research on their work experiences is warranted.

Finally, conducting research on female classified and professional staff can have significant policy implications for colleges and universities – in particular, on human resource and equal opportunity policies. Some of these policies include training and professional development, the evaluation process, career planning and progression, mentoring, and the hiring process. Modifying existing policy language or creating new policies that specifically address the issues of gender-bias and career progression can greatly improve the overall climate and increase the advancement opportunities for women working in higher education. The potential impact on institutional policy and practice increases the significance of this study.
Summary

Despite the large proportion of women employed in classified and professional roles, very little existing research in the field of higher education focuses on this group (Costello, 2012; Iverson, 2009). One inference about the lack of studies on female staff is that minimal value is placed on their contributions to higher education, particularly classified staff (Costello, 2012; Iverson, 2009; Payne, 2002). According to Payne (2002), women's work is often undervalued, and their work is even more undervalued when that work is perceived to be secretarial or clerical. It is clear that, given the significant proportion of female staff employed by colleges and universities, more research on their roles and ability to advance within higher education, and barriers that are in place, is needed.

Through examining the literature base and conducting a qualitative case study, I sought to increase the understanding of the ways in which female classified and professional staff, employed at two institutions of higher education, experience barriers toward professional advancement as influenced by organizational structures, power privilege, the perceptions of institutional climate, and gender bias embedded within the organization (Acker, 1990; 2006; Allan, 2011; Kanter, 1977). Since this group of women is largely unexplored in the research, my study adds to the literature base increasing the knowledge of women's experiences as a whole in higher education.
CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

There are many studies in the extant literature that focus on aspects of organizational structures, including the hierarchy, power, access, support, and advancement opportunity for members (Bess & Dee, 2008a, 2008b; Kanter, 1976, 1977; Magee & Galinsky, 2008; Morgan, 2006). A subset of organizational research focuses on issues of gendered and unwelcoming climates for women in higher education, which highlights the intersection of organizational structure, gender bias, and power (Acker, 1990, 2006; Allan, 2011; Lester, 2006). This literature review examines organizational structures including aspects of the hierarchy, job roles, and the influence of power privilege. Higher educations’ patriarchal climate (Acker, 1990; Hart, 2009) and its impact on work-satisfaction, particularly for female employees (Hart, 2009), has a significant role in understanding the experiences of women working behind the walls of the ivory tower. Gender and the workplace and work and family are explored in this literature review as sources of barriers for women’s advancement. The role of climate perception on job satisfaction and women’s ability to advance is also examined. Finally, because gender mediates work role functions (Acker, 1990, 2006), it is vital to understand the impact of gender and gendered organizations on women’s access to power and opportunity as well as the impact of feminist research and feminist theories.

The research included in this literature review focuses primarily on the experiences of female faculty and administrators, which highlights the literature gap regarding research that investigates issues for female professional and classified staff (Costello, 2012). The few studies on female staff are also included in the review.
Overall, the bulk of the literature reviewed failed to give attention to female staff. The final section of the literature review discusses Kanter’s (1977) structural theory of organizational behavior, and Acker’s (1990) theory of gendered organizations, the intersecting frameworks used for analysis for this study.

**Life in an Organization**

Prior to examining organizational structure of higher education, it is first helpful to define an organization. Organizations are “groups of people filling roles and working together toward the achievement of common objectives within a formal social structure” (Birnbaum, 1988, p. 1). This section of the literature review examines the structure of higher education as an organization, what life is like at different levels of the organization, and the impact of hierarchies, job-roles and power privilege.

**Structure.** How are colleges and universities structured and organized? Colleges and universities can be considered primarily bureaucratic organizations (Baldridge, 1971; Bolman & Deal, 2008; Weber, 1946). Features of bureaucratic organizations include a fixed division of labor, hierarchy of offices, rules that govern performance, and little emphasis on interpersonal relationships (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Weber, 1946). In addition, bureaucracies have employees that are tightly connected through formal authority relationships working in roles defined by the organization (Bess & Dee, 2008a, 2008b). Weber (1946) described these roles, or the organizational hierarchy, as ordered systems of authority revolving around power. Those at the top have the power and monopolize resources and opportunities (Weber, 1946).

Conflict within hierarchies is frequent and centers on deadlines, the flow of information, the perception of needs, and the availability of resources, which is
commonplace in higher education (Baldridge, 1971). Baldridge (1971) noted that conflict can also arise when those in higher-level positions, or what he called, authorities, make decisions for the whole, or partisans. This level of control is often seen in higher education, as “higher levels coordinate and control the work of subordinates through authority, rules, and policies” (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 54). This division can pose challenges, as it is necessary for departments to have a level of autonomy and therefore, “a critical structural challenge [in higher education] is how to hold an organization together without holding it back” (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 75). However, because colleges are both overseen by administrators and also heavily dependent on the work of faculty, there is strong support for the duality of governance (Bess & Dee, 2008a; Birnbaum, 1988). This duality of governance, of centralization and decentralization, is one prominent way colleges and universities differ from other organizations (Baldridge, 1971; Birnbaum, 1988).

What does this shared governance mean to those who work in higher education? Lombardi (2013) notes that governance means different things to different people within higher education. For example, to faculty members governance is their direct involvement and control over the curriculum and tenure and promotion policies. For those at the top of the hierarchy, governance usually refers to governing boards that essentially control the institution. To staff, governance means “the organization of the university’s bureaucracy that establishes reporting relationships and lines of authority” (Lombardi, 2013, p. 158). Thus, shared governance, can create power struggles within an organization.
Lombardi (2013) argues that public institutions, with their bureaucratic systems, have an overabundance of written rules and policies used to “buffer the many political micro-constituencies that seek advantage, opportunity or platform within the institution” (p. 167). In addition, Lombardi (2013) notes that public bureaucratic institutions resist change and have a significant predisposition toward inaction until there is a significant force requiring them to change. The bureaucratic nature of higher education allows it to function even during times of crises and conflict. According to Birnbaum (1988), “much that happens in [these] institutions is influenced by the standard operating procedures, programs, and scenarios, created by the legitimacy of the hierarchy and reinforced by structures and rules” (p. 120). It is the rigidness of the system that helps contribute to the longevity of institutions of higher education, but this same reliance on rules makes it difficult for the system to change (Birnbaum, 1988).

This bureaucratic system of higher education that creates power relationships has been examined from the perspective of administrators and faculty. However, female classified and professional staff’s experiences within the bureaucracy have not been explored in depth. Research on lower-level staff is important because the bureaucracy can have an even greater impact on these employees as many feel essentially powerless to change their situation (Costello, 2012).

Hierarchies, roles, and power. Hierarchies and their inherent assumptions are usually accepted as standard practice within organizations (Acker, 1990, 2006). Hierarchies influence the way institutional participants interact (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Kanter, 1976; Weber, 1946). Weber (1946) described the hierarchy as a functional response to work where labor is divided among employees, and those in lower-levels are
often motivated to move up to increase rewards, and those lower rely on those in the higher levels for rewards and to avoid punishment. “The very existence of the hierarchy is supported by an ideological acceptance of inequality – that differential levels of status and power are legitimate” (Magee & Galinsky, 2008, p. 41). Thus, the organizational hierarchy automatically disadvantages those in the lowest level positions—in this case classified staff on college campuses.

According to Kanter (1976) hierarchies indicate which positions will advance, which positions have a chance for growth and expansion, and which positions are stagnant. Further, Kanter and Stein (1979) argued that there are different experiences in different positions, and these positions have different levels of access. Leaders, for example may hold much symbolic power, but “at the same time, are themselves controlled by a relationship of power” (Kanter & Stein, 1979, p. 7). In their role as leader, they give orders, but these orders must be followed for any real power to be exerted. Leaders must also follow through with their promise of reward or punishment, otherwise they will lose their credibility and power as a leader (Kanter & Stein, 1979). Those working in the middle of an organization, are described by Kanter and Stein (1979) as a connecting link between those at the top and those at the bottom. According to Kanter and Stein (1979) those in the middle often have issues getting into an organization as these positions are often on an advancement track and more selectivity may be taken when hiring for these jobs. However, those in the middle also have a difficult time moving up because there is stiff competition for scarce positions (Kanter & Stein, 1979). For employees at the bottom Kanter and Stein (1979) described their situation as alienated, powerless, and highly replaceable. The aforementioned
experiences were based on men and women working in corporations. What remains unknown is the impact of life at the bottom for women working in classified and professional positions in a higher education setting.

As Bess and Dee (2008a, 2008b) noted, roles within the higher education structure are tightly connected through hierarchical relationships. Research on work roles posits that people are part of an organization, or social structure, and in these roles, individuals hold certain positions that have expectations for their behavior (Biddle, 1986). According to Biddle (1986), there are two schools of thought around role theory: organizational role theory, which suggests that organizations are position focused and hierarchically structured; and cognitive role theory, which suggests that roles are often influenced by expectations (Biddle, 1986). Therefore, individuals in certain roles are expected to behave in certain acceptable ways, and behavior outside the norm of expectations tends to disrupt the flow of work.

Mintzberg (1979) described employee behavior as formalized in one of three ways: by the job, by workflow, or by the rules. As noted in chapter one, roles are typically sub-divided based on the hierarchy and functional areas. Formalization by job means that behaviors are specified in a written job description in which employees can be told step-by-step how to complete a task. Much like a position in a factory assembly line, formalization by workflow means that behavior specifications are attached to the work itself and the relationship of the work within the span of the process. Formalization by rules means that all jobs have rules specifying who does what, and whose permission you need to complete a task. These formalizations create regulations (Mintzberg, 1979). "No matter what the means of formalization – by job, by work flow, or rules – the effect on
the person doing the work is the same; the behavior is regulated" (Mintzberg, 1979, p. 82). Those who hold the power “…want to regulate behavior to predict and control it” (Mintzberg, 1979, p. 83). Thus, the roles within the structure offer power to some over others.

Mintzberg (1979) pointed out that bureaucracies can be a logical way to structure an organization, but highly formalized structures can lead to high levels of dysfunction as too many arbitrary rules can destroy relationships leading to high levels of power imbalance. In addition, many decisions in bureaucratic institutions are made in “blind spots” (Mintzberg, 1979, p. 90). In a lot of cases, those with most of the necessary information needed for productive decisions are not consulted, leaving decision making power to those without sufficient knowledge to make them (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Mintzberg, 1979; Weber, 1946). For example, many classified staff working in higher education understand the daily operations of colleges and universities much better than those at the top of the hierarchy. However, most of them are never consulted when questions about maintenance and operations arise. Although they may have insider knowledge, they are powerless to utilize this information.

Conger and Kanungo (1988) argued that the principle sources of organizational power are one’s position on the hierarchy, and level of access resources. Hierarchies create power struggles because resources are unequally distributed, typically granting more resources to those at higher levels (Katznelson, 2005; Magee & Galinsky, 2008). According to Morgan (2006) employees work together in pursuit of a common goal, but overtly or covertly work against each other in competition for limited resources, status, and career advancement. Status and power are the foundational bases of the hierarchy,
and the consequence often pits those in high rank against low rank in a competition for
resources and prestige (Magee & Galinsky, 2008).

Kanter (1976) described a prestigious position on the organizational hierarchy as
having both real and symbolic power. Symbolic power (Conger & Kanungo, 1988;
Morgan, 2006) allows those in high-level positions to influence the organizational
structure, policies and practices, even if they in fact, have very little actual power
(Pfeffer, 1982). Therefore, one can infer that position on the organizational hierarchy
also influences the perception of one’s own power, and the power of others. According
to Smircich and Morgan (1982), those in power are able to stop others from advancing by
trained inaction, or diverting them from tasks deemed valuable by the organization. This
trained inaction can lead others to perceive that an employee is lazy, not a responsible
worker and adds little worth to the organization (Smircich & Morgan, 1982). In addition,
as others also found, Smircich and Morgan (1982) argued that the authority relationships
imbedded in the organizational hierarchy creates power relationships, forcing some to
rely on others for rewards, resources and opportunity. Those at the lowest levels of the
organizational hierarchy, in particular female staff, are forced to rely on those in higher
positions, like supervisors, for resources, information, and opportunity, reinforcing
Kanter’s notion of the disadvantaged position (1977). My research examined the impact
of the hierarchy, role and power privilege on female staff’s ability to advance.

Kanter (1977) argued that position, not gender played a larger role in the amount
of power an employee has while Lewis and Simpson (2012) contended that there are
hidden dimensions of gender influence on power. Lewis and Simpson (2012) examined
Kanter’s (1977) work through a post-structural lens and determined that although gender
was not supported by Kanter (1977) as a reason for the lack of women in high-level positions, gender discrimination was manifest through women’s invisibility in the organization. The authors argued that the lack of visibility of women within the organization shows a gender bias within the structure (Lewis & Simpson, 2012). Further, Lewis and Simpson (2012) determined that women in Kanter’s (1977) study were caught in the invisibility vortex because they held little organizational visibility or power based on their position. My study examined the impact of power and positions by female support and professional staff on their perception of visibility within the hierarchy.

The influence of power on organizations is not always in plain sight. According to Harlan and Berheide (1994):

One of the most important and least visible set of rules elite men establish is the one distributing valued resources, including the power to write the rules, as well as income and promotional opportunity. This power to rewrite the rules and procedures relating to hiring, promotion, seniority and other personnel processes constitutes a sometimes hidden but critical barrier to women’s upward mobility. (p. 20)

Since the majority of women tend to occupy positions at the lower-levels of the organizational hierarchy, this influence of power significantly limits their ability to advance, as the culture of organizations is typically based on values associated with male norms (Harlan & Berheide, 1994). Opportunities differ across the organizational hierarchy and women are often sorted into jobs that have little value to the organization, leaving women with less chance for promotions (Peterson & Morgan, 1995). The power of the pay gap also plays a significant role. In fact, the larger the pay gap between those
at the top of the hierarchy and those at the bottom of the hierarchy, the greater the barriers to advancement (Harlan & Berheide, 1994). Recent data reported by the American Association of University Women (2013) shows the wage gap is still stuck at 23 cents. This means that women still earn, on average, 77 cents for every dollar that men earn, a number that has not budged in decades. Table two shows data compiled by the American Association of University Women (2013) highlighting the median annual earnings ratio for full-time, year round workers 16 and older by state and gender. As evidenced by this data, one can see that in the main, women remain in lower relative position to men, and the state of Virginia is among the states nearer the average versus states leading the narrowing of the pay gap.

Table 2: Median Earnings for Full-time Workers
(Source: AAUW, 2013)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Earning Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>D.C.</td>
<td>$66,745</td>
<td>$60,116</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>$57,447</td>
<td>$49,000</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nevada</td>
<td>$42,137</td>
<td>$35,941</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vermont</td>
<td>$44,776</td>
<td>$38,017</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>$51,247</td>
<td>$43,000</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>$50,139</td>
<td>$41,956</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>$40,889</td>
<td>$34,202</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawaii</td>
<td>$45,748</td>
<td>$38,040</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maine</td>
<td>$42,280</td>
<td>$35,057</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>$42,618</td>
<td>$35,974</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>$41,859</td>
<td>$34,421</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>$43,707</td>
<td>$35,479</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delaware</td>
<td>$50,689</td>
<td>$41,047</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhode Island</td>
<td>$50,689</td>
<td>$41,074</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Mexico</td>
<td>$41,211</td>
<td>$33,074</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>$50,509</td>
<td>$40,402</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota</td>
<td>$44,802</td>
<td>$35,453</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>$60,243</td>
<td>$47,651</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>$47,402</td>
<td>$37,381</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>$52,125</td>
<td>$41,104</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>$60,878</td>
<td>$47,787</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>$51,262</td>
<td>$40,309</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Connecticut $61,097 $47,900 78%
Washington $52,529 $41,062 78%
South Dakota $40,721 $31,792 78%
Wisconsin $46,898 $36,535 78%
South Carolina $41,740 $32,402 78%
Iowa $45,305 $35,106 77%
Nebraska $42,878 $33,218 77%
Tennessee $41,828 $32,398 77%
New Hampshire $54,136 $41,774 77%
Ohio $46,789 $35,984 77%
Arkansas $40,153 $30,843 77%
Missouri $42,974 $32,868 76%
Montana $41,656 $31,775 76%
Kansas $44,765 $31,131 76%
Oklahoma $41,415 $31,543 76%
Kentucky $42,321 $32,157 76%
Pennsylvania $49,330 $37,414 76%
Mississippi $40,081 $30,287 76%
Idaho $41,664 $31,296 75%
Alaska $57,068 $42,345 74%
North Dakota $45,888 $33,877 74%
Michigan $49,897 $36,772 74%
Indiana $45,620 $33,419 73%
Alabama $44,567 $31,674 71%
Utah $48,540 $34,062 70%
West Virginia $44,159 $30,885 70%
Louisiana $47,249 $31,586 67%
Wyoming $51,932 $33,152 64%
United States $49,398 $37,791 77%

Organizational structures and the influence of power play a significant role in women's advancement. As evidenced by the studies conducted by Harlan and Berheide (1994) and Lewis and Simpson (2012), power can be a visible or invisible barrier for women, particularly those at the lower-levels of the organizational hierarchy.

Approaching this study using a critical lens, allowed me to question these organizational structures as they intersect with the role of gender and power (Glesne, 2011). Utilizing a critical feminist lens allowed me to place women at the center of my research, making them the focus of this study.
Feminism

This research study used a critical lens with feminism at the center. Feminism places women as the focus of research, is generated from the perspective of women's experiences and the studies of feminist research are conducted for the benefit of women (Harding, 2008). According to Allan (2011), feminism consists of a wide range of ways in which to examine gender inequities that recognize the many roles and identities that women have. Feminist research also shares the common goal of analyzing and challenging the status quo (Allan, 2011). Feminist researchers have long believed that traditional research focusing primarily on dominant groups, such as White males, marginalizes others, and empowers the privileged (Harding & Norberg, 2005). As Harding and Norberg (2005) argue, research on privileged groups enables organizations to fulfill the interests of the elite and continue the influence of dominant power. Yet, when these dominants are challenged, women tend to become labeled as “man-haters, and political backlash ensues” (Allan, 2011, p. 18).

Early feminist research focused on policies in which women were denied opportunities because of their gender (Fiss, 1994). This type of feminism, typically referred to as liberal feminism, argued that despite societies perception of women as the less intelligent and less capable sex, people are essentially equal and should not be judged by their gender (Fiss, 1994; Ross, 2008). This liberal phase of feminism dominated the 1970s. During the 1980s, feminism changed its focus slightly to take a closer look at organizational and social hierarchies (Fiss, 1994). Thus, discrimination became not just about gender but also about gender “subordinating women as a group, creating a perpetual gender hierarchy” (Fiss, 1994, p. 417). Central to the idea of subordination is
the ever-challenging issue of child care (Fiss, 1994; Ross, 2008). Society still believes that the primary care giver in a family is the mother, making it the responsibility of the mother to stay at home, "...unable to obtain the experience and qualifications needed for the offices that have the greatest prestige and rewards in society" (Fiss, 1994, p. 418). Women required positions that afforded the most amount of flexibility to balance work and child rearing, and these jobs were typically at the bottom of the organizational hierarchy.

Harding (2008) outlined that within feminist research, gender is viewed as part of four different kinds of social entities. First, gender is a property of individuals, meaning we all are assigned a gender. Second, gender is a property of social structures. For example, the majority of occupations in the United States are described as either women's work or man's work. Institutions of higher education, for example, "have usually insisted that their managers and administrators be men and that the low-paid work of secretaries, data managers, etc. be women" (Harding, 2008, p. 112). Third, gender is a property of symbolic structures, and men are typically the symbols of power. Finally, gender relations change over time and are shaped by interactions with different people—family interactions, work interactions, and relationships between men and women. Overall, feminist research thus focuses on advancing social justice, impacting policy, and decreasing power inequities to influence the lived experiences of women (Harding & Norberg, 2005). As Hooks (1989) pointed out, "[feminists] want to begin as women seriously addressing ourselves, not solely in relation to men, but in relation to an entire structure of domination of which patriarchy is one part" (p. 618). Thus, feminist
researchers must not only examine overt male domination, but also examine the hidden dimensions of domination rooted in society and entrenched within organizations.

According to Allan (2011), there are three commonalities in feminist research: inequality exists and is imbedded in the structure of social organizations; inequality is a product of social relations; and inequality should be eradicated through social change. Hooks (1989) added that "feminism as a liberal struggle, must exist apart from and as part of the larger struggle to eradicate domination in all its forms" (p. 615). Therefore, it is prudent to approach this study with a focus on feminist research, as women continue to struggle with domination and inequality.

Feminist research has helped bring to highlight gender and gender-bias' role as barriers for women in higher education (Acker, 1990; Glazer-Raymo, 1999). The next section examines the role of gender on the workplace and position, as well as the impact of families on women's career trajectories. The perspective of the abundance of this research is from female faculty and administrators leaving much unknown about the impact of gender-bias on women working at the lower levels of the hierarchy.

Gender and the Workplace

Gender, and the way it is woven into organizational structures and practices is a significant barrier for women's advancement, as the majority of women are found in lower-level positions with short career tracks (Acker, 1990; Glazer-Raymo, 1999; Peterson & Morgan, 1995). Gender has been defined as "a social structure which places women and men in different and unequal positions in society based on expectations, division of labor and access to power and resources" (Anderson, 1993, p. 33). According to West and Zimmerman (1987), gender is rooted in social structures and is "the product
of social doings” (p. 129). The authors further stated, “Doing gender means creating differences between girls and boys, and women and men, differences that are not natural, essential, or biological” (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 137). In other words, the idea of gender is socially constructed (Anderson, 1993; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Gender is embedded in traditional organizational structures that value loyalty, the hierarchy, and evaluations controlled by supervisors – all traditional male implemented structures (Williams, Muller, & Kilanski, 2012). Men thus become models of the ideal worker. The concept of the ideal worker reinforces gender inequality in the workplace, as the ideal worker is devoted to work, able to work long hours, and willing to align their personal commitments around their work (Williams, 2000). Acker (1990) referred to this type of worker as the disembodied worker, typically a man who lives only to work, with little outside obligations or distractions.

To examine gender factors within organizational structures and to test Acker’s (1990) theory of gendered organizations, Williams and associates (2012) interviewed women working in the oil industry asking questions about perceived barriers towards career advancement. They found that women were blocked from career advancement by many factors including supervisor bias, lack of flexibility in scheduling (i.e., maternity and family leave), lack of consistency regarding policies and procedures, and no accountability for supervisors when policies and procedures were violated (Williams et al., 2012). Traditionally male dominated fields have inherent gender issues and as Yoshino (2006) concluded, “Long after traditionally male college programs admit women, they retain cultures favoring men” (p. 145). Traditionally, male dominated fields provide very few mentors for women and have distinct divisions of labor.
As higher education is a traditionally male-dominated field of work, my research examined barriers faced by women in support and professional roles, including the role of gender.

One distressing issue for women is that many of the workplace barriers in place today are covert (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000). Gender discrimination, for example, is so deeply woven into the workplace, many women fail to realize when discrimination has occurred (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000). The law prevents blatant discrimination like firing a woman immediately after maternity leave but, as Meyerson and Fletcher (2000) noted, there is still plenty of discrimination through a "plethora of work practices and cultural norms that only appear unbiased" (p. 128). Women, particularly those in roles that are essentially seen as women's work, face hidden barriers such as being placed in dead-end positions, and being excluded from networks vital for advancement (Harlan & Berheide, 1994).

Examining literature on women and leadership reveals that most women are not seen as serious leaders because valued leadership skills are associated with male traits of aggression, toughness, and decisiveness (Nidiffer, 2001). In her study of women serving on college governing boards, Glazer-Raymo (2008) found that "the perpetuation of masculine stereotypes that continue to set the standard of effective leadership continues to serve as a major barrier for women" (p. 202). Further, women who exhibit these masculine traits are often referred to as a "bitch" as they are exhibiting characteristics outside societal norms (Tedrow & Rhoads, 1999). Consequently, women find themselves struggling to maintain their femininity while trying to succeed in a man's world.
Studies have shown that men [and sometimes women, but men are more often found in positions of power] try to stifle the advancement of women into more prominent positions to maintain their grasp on power and control within the organization (Harlan & Berheide, 1994; Fraser & Hodge, 2000). Regarding male privilege, Fraser and Hodge (2000) found:

Since gender status beliefs generally privilege male workers, males generally will be disinterested in correcting these forms of discrimination. If female organization members violate these gender status beliefs, for example, by being promoted above male co-workers, then it is likely to trigger a negative reaction and further development of gender status beliefs from male workers (p. 175).

As evidenced by the research, men, as the dominant group, advance their own agendas by creating policies and practices that are beneficial to them (Fraser & Hodge, 2000; Harlan & Berheide, 1994; Tedrow & Rhoads, 1999). The extant literature seems to offer no real solution to this societal and organizational problem that ascribed gender roles to individuals. Women in low-level positions are often left without recourse, as barriers to advancement are systemic versus due to individual skills or education.

Meyerson and Fletcher (2000) posed an interesting question, do women really fit in in the workplace? In their manifesto on shattering the glass ceiling, Meyerson and Fletcher (2000) reported three ways organizations have been “dealing” with women in the workplace, trying to make them fit-in: 1. Assimilate—women need to adopt masculine traits and attributes like assertive leadership and decision-making. 2. Accommodate—organizations have created mentoring programs, created alternative career paths for women, and use flexible scheduling and 3. Celebrate differences—organizations promote
respect for female traits such as listening and collaboration, and try to place women in jobs that are best suited for them. However, these tactics “proffer solutions that deal with the symptoms of gender inequity rather than the sources” (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000, p. 130). The actions do not address the inherent biases within the structure of organizations. As further evidenced by the research of Glazer-Raymo (1999) and Tedrow and Rhoads (1999), these tactics of dealing with women perpetuate the male norm and do very little to enhance or promote equality.

Despite organizational efforts to “deal” with women by accommodating women in the workplace, women still face an uneven playing field. Glazer-Raymo (1999) found that offices such as equal opportunity or affirmative action represent organizational efforts to assist women and minorities, but their role is often one of protection for the institution as opposed to helping workers. In addition, asking women to assimilate by taking on more masculine qualities, or become ideal workers, fails to address the root cause of male norms within an organization, neglecting the deeply embedded factors that keep women from advancing (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000). To combat issues of gender inequity, Meyerson and Fletcher (2000) suggest women adopt a small wins strategy. Making small changes, like changing interview protocols from ways that might give males an advantage, valuing teamwork, promoting a more disciplined use of time, valuing the contributions of employees at all levels, and increasing the flow of information, are a few suggestions. These suggestions can be tied back to feminist theory, in particular liberal feminism, as these changes work within the existing system to make a more equitable workplace. “The reason small wins work so effectively is that they are not random efforts. They unearth and upend systemic barriers to women’s
progress" (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000, p. 134). What remains unknown is how women in low-level classified and support positions have been able to break down historic gender barriers using these or other tactics.

**Gender and position.** For female support staff, in particular clerical staff, "...the lack of career ladders linking clerical jobs to professional and managerial positions has always dead-ended the upward mobility of millions of women" (Harlan & Berheide, 1994, p. 6). Women are overrepresented in low-grade occupations at the bottom of the hierarchy, in particular secretarial and clerical roles (Costello, 2012; Iverson, 2009; Kanter, 1977; Truss, Alfes, Shantz & Rosewarne, 2012). Kanter (1977) found that women in clerical positions had little hope of advancing to a more prestigious or higher-paying position unless they happened to accompany a male boss who was promoted. "The segregation of women's work cuts women off from routes of advancement in organizations" (Harlan & Berheide, 1994, p. 27). These shortened career routes result in stagnation for women located at the bottom of the hierarchy.

According to Nidiffer (2002), the higher you go on the hierarchy, the less women you typically find. Johnsrud and Banaria (2005) found that clustering of women in low-level, less prestigious positions creates advancement barriers for women, and if their position is traditionally female dominated, for example, a secretary, they will have even greater difficulty with upward mobility. "Most jobs are sex-typed, as appropriate for only one sex or the other. Consequently, people of a particular gender become identified with certain kinds of work, such as women with clerical work, and men with administration and top management positions" (Harlan & Berheide, 1994, p. 18). Baron and Pfeffer (1994) argued that organizing work roles based on gender can have a significant impact
on the perceived worth of a job. This study adds to the literature base on perceived worth of jobs based on gender, and in particular it examined the impact of gender and position for women working in the lower levels of the hierarchy, which is largely missing from the research.

Figure four below, shows the percentage of women in higher education support positions (Allan, 2011; Johnsrud, 2002). This figure shows the majority of women in higher education work in technical/paraprofessional roles (60%) and clerical roles (86.6%). Thus, most women are segregated to lower-level support positions within higher education.

Figure 4: Percentage of Women in Higher Education Support Positions

![Bar chart showing the percentage of women in different support positions.]


Bauer (2000) reports that support staff, particularly women and minorities, are treated far different than professional staff and faculty. Is this a result of position, gender, or both? Patriarchal structures create traps for women in certain occupations, including secretarial work and paraprofessional (Truss et al., 2012.) Truss and associates (2012) refer to secretarial work as a “ghetto occupation, having the following characteristics:
low status, poor pay, feminized job content, and little promotional opportunity” (p. 351). The authors posit that even if a woman in a secretarial role were to advance to the top of the secretarial job ladder within an organization, there is very little chance of access to a job outside a secretarial role. Even when these women further their education, for most, they are still typecast and seen as only being able to perform in a secretarial work role (Truss & associates, 2012). This poses a discouraging prospect for women as it assumes that even with increasing education, women in secretarial roles are unable to advance. Costello’s (2012) research supported this assumption as the clerical women she interviewed felt there was no need to seek a higher degree as it would make little difference in their chance for advancement within the institution.

Truss and associates (2012) found that the reason for clerical workers inability to advance is the result of employer’s failure to believe they have acquired any transferrable skills that would prove beneficial to any role other than a secretarial one. This perceived lack of skill level can be linked to McGregor’s (1960) Theory X. In theory X, McGregor (1960) argued supervisors who set very low expectations for employees and make the assumption that these employees have little transferrable skills, will likely produce employees that exhibit these characteristics. In contrast, McGregor’s (1960) Theory Y argued that supervisors who assume employees are capable of self-direction and can provide important ideas and suggestions will likely have employees who believe they are capable of acquiring skills necessary for advancement, and that their skills will be transferrable. This research examined the perception female classified staff members have of their upward mobility in comparison to both female professional staff and males.
This examination helps fill the literature gap on the perceptions of female classified staff working in higher education (Costello, 2012; Iverson, 2009).

**Gender, work, and family.** The division of labor along gender lines is expressed by the concept of the ideal worker (Williams, 2000). The ideal worker, who is typically a male, is often viewed as totally committed to an organization and therefore receives more prestigious positions within that organization (Lester, 2006; Williams, 2000). As Williams (2000) noted, women, and mothers in particular, are less likely to meet the expectations of the ideal worker. It can be inferred that one’s role within the organization is not only contingent upon gender, but also responsibilities associated with that gender, such as parenting. The second shift of parenting occurs for women after they work their first shift in the office (Hochschild & Maching, 1989). Through interviews and observations of families, Hochschild and Maching (1989) found that women are more torn between their role as mother and worker, and that men think that household work is more an issue for their wives. Kramarae (2001) added to the second shift notion by stating that some women trying to make themselves more marketable are adding a third shift, advancing their education. Therefore, women have work, home, and school, whereas men typically have only work as a focus (Kramarae, 2001). This phenomenon can create an even more significant problem for women at the lowest-levels as they are already seen as less committed to the organization (Williams, 2000).

Although children are not necessarily the main responsibility of women, women are typically seen as the primary care givers (Stimpson & Filer, 2011). In interviewing male and female graduate students, Stimpson and Filer (2011) found that male graduate students were far more satisfied with work-life balance than female graduate students. In
particular, female graduate students with children felt that they had great difficulty trying to balance work and home life. Even though my research does not focus specifically on women and family, I assumed that this topic would arise in my interviews as discussions about college policies and practices emerge. Research has shown that having children does matter to women’s career advancement (Mason & Goulden, 2002, 2004; Wolfinger, Mason, & Goulden, 2008). Mason and Goulden (2002, 2004) found that there is a consistent gap in pay and tenure for female faculty, and that one reason for this is the family. In their evaluation of the Survey of Doctorate Recipients data from 1973-1999, they found that workplace structures are unaccommodating to women with children (Mason & Goulden, 2002, 2004). The authors also found that women faculty who have babies early in their career (five years or earlier after earning their doctorate), have a significant impact on their career trajectory. Women faculty across all the disciplines are less likely than males to have children, and women faculty in the science disciplines are more likely to be single (Mason & Goulden, 2002). Wolfiner and associates (2008) found that the inflexible nature of work, modeled after the male worker, keeps women in the academy from moving up the hierarchy. It is likely that female staff in higher education will experience similar results, though this area is understudied, adding to the significance of my research.

Access, Advancement, and Support

There are many ways organizations can enhance an employee’s work experience and create a positive work environment. Among them, providing access to information necessary to perform job duties, access to resources, access to advancement opportunities and professional development (Bretz & Judge, 1994; Fraser & Hodge, 2000). In addition,
results from a survey conducted by Carless (2004) found that participation in decision-making and access to professional development are important and effective ways to increase employee satisfaction and motivation to perform well. My research study examined the impact of access to factors like professional development, participation in decision-making, and advancement opportunities, on female support and professional staff’s perception of their work environment. Access to important information, training opportunities, mentoring, and networking is important, in particular for women, as Harlan and Berheide (1994) note, “there is a lot of informal knowledge that is obtained through access to resources necessary to move up the ladder” (p. 122). Although many women in secretarial roles have a lot of informal power through access to privileged information, often they have little formal power allowing them to participate in decision making process within the organization.

The lack of mentoring and networking opportunities available for women manifest issues of access to information and advancement (Anderson, 2005). Poole, Bornholt, and Summers (1997) found that one of the main structural barriers to women’s advancement is the lack of access to mentors and networks. According to Baldwin (1985), within higher education, women are often denied access to many informal networks where they have access to other workers, especially those in higher level positions, and networks where they can promote themselves and their work to others. These networks are deemed to be the most important pathway to success in higher education (Baldwin, 1985). Networking is important for women because these social connections can provide access to information that may otherwise not be available, can help bridge gaps between various positions, and can increase work effectiveness
throughout the organization (Grayson & Baldwin, 2007). "Women's exclusion from informal networks may limit their visibility and, in turn, their chances of finding a mentor" (Anderson, 2005, p. 70). This research study examined female support staff and professional staff perceptions of their access to networking opportunities, and how women find this situation influences their ability to advance.

**Campus Climate**

Higher education has long been known for its patriarchal climate (Allan, 2011; Caplan, 1994; Sutherland, 1994; Weber, 1946). In fact, Weber (1946) referred to the patriarchy as an environment dominated by a male with almost unlimited power in the areas of punishment, rewards and promotions. Chilwaniak (1997) argued, "The academy has comfortably reproduced itself for several centuries and a male dominated patriarchal culture has been solidly established" (p. 131). Thus, in this male dominated, patriarchal climate of higher education, women in the lowest positions on the hierarchy have little hope for advancement. In addition, Hart (2009) discussed the impact a patriarchal climate can have on women's work performance. What does the campus climate mean for women? According to Allan (2011):

*Climate encompasses a range of factors, some of which are quantifiable, like salary disparities and others which are more qualitative in nature and involves aspects of institutional climate and culture that contribute to women's individual and collective experiences of feeling devalued, marginalized, and at times unsafe as a result of persistent problems with sexual harassment and assault (p. 65).*

Climate for women in higher education can be welcoming or hostile, "depending on their role and status in the institution" (Allan, 2011, p. 75). It can be inferred that women in
lower-level positions would experience a hostile climate, particularly if their positions are perceived to be of little value to the organization. There are several studies in the higher education literature on climate for female faculty and women in senior-leadership roles (Allan, 2011; Benschop & Brouns, 2013; Hart, 2009; Tedrow & Rhoads, 1999). What is missing are the experiences of women who occupy non-faculty and non-senior positions (Allan, 2011; Costello, 2012; Iverson, 2009).

When Tedrow and Rhoads (1999) interviewed women in leadership roles at a community college, they found “these women constructed their leadership identity as a response to organizational expectations and norms grounded in the experiences of men” (p. 9), thus they structured their leadership style to mesh with the culture and climate of the institution. This reifies the notion that existing cultures and climates of colleges and universities are based on male norms, and the concept of gendered organizations and women must conform if they want to succeed (Acker, 1990, 2006). Benschop and Brouns (2003) examined colleges and universities as social institutions, where gender is “done in a certain way” (p. 194). The focus of their study was on science faculty in the Netherlands. They conducted interviews and collected survey information on the campus climate, salary, and career opportunities. Their results showed only 6% of full professors in Dutch universities were women, and the farther down they went on the organizational chart, more women were found, salaries were lower, and there was little opportunity for advancement. The climate for women faculty was found to be hostile and unwelcoming (Benschop & Brouns, 2003). NCES (2012) data for the United States mirror these findings, reporting that only 29% of women faculty members hold a full professor position, compared to 49% who hold assistant professor positions. In addition, salaries
for male faculty are 21% higher than women’s salaries (NCES, 2012). These results provide further evidence of the deeply rooted patriarchal climate in higher education. While these experiences are based on female faculty experiences, my research examined the impact of the patriarchal climate on female staff in positions at the bottom of the hierarchy. The discussion of campus climate will now delve into its role in job satisfaction.

Studies indicate that job satisfaction is influenced by perceptions of organizational structure and climate, access to pertinent information, advancement opportunities, and professional development (Allan, 2011; Bretz & Judge, 1994; Fraser & Hodge, 2000; Judge, Bobo, Thoresen, & Patten, 2001). Lacy and Sheehan (1997) surveyed academic faculty in eight countries: Australia, Germany, Hong Kong, Israel, Mexico, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States. When analyzing the data, they found that job satisfaction for faculty was greatly influenced by organizational culture and climate (Lacy & Sheehan, 1997). Male faculty reported the overall climate supported job security and positive outlooks on promotional opportunity. Female faculty however, reported a chillier climate and felt less secure in their positions and saw low prospects for promotions. These results indicate perceptions of organizational climate can have a significant impact on overall job satisfaction. Based on their analysis, Lacy and Sheehan (1997) concluded, “If [faculty] are to be encouraged to express higher levels of job satisfaction and lower levels of dissatisfaction, attention must be paid to the environment, or climate, in which they work” (p. 321). Because female classified and professional staff work in this same environment, these experiences of a chilly climate may be true for them as well.
In another study about faculty and college climate, Hart (2009) interviewed non-tenure track female faculty to discover their perceptions of climate. The faculty she interviewed felt that the non-tenure track was the least prestigious and the most underpaid faculty role at the institution, and that it was obviously so. It was manifest by what participants referred to as a closed-door climate (Hart, 2009). The closed-door climate had the following characteristics: treatment of women as second class citizens, lack of resources necessary to perform their jobs (for example, an office, pertinent information, lack of recognition for the work they perform, and lack of job security; Hart, 2009).

Hart’s (2009) study further supports the assertion from Lacy and Sheehan (1997) that organizational climate has an impact on job satisfaction, and that women experience a cold climate in higher education. Fraser and Hodge (2000) found, “If employees with similarly defined characteristics [like gender and position] come to view the organization similar in some ways, then there is evidence of patterns and practices that solidifies the culture creating either a positive or negative experience for the worker” (p. 174). What remains unknown is how this environment influences perceptions and job satisfaction levels of those at the lowest levels of the organizational hierarchy—female classified and professional staff.

In recent years, researchers have focused on the influence of climate on perceptions of supervisors, managers, and administrators, but they have not included lower-level workers (Allan, 2011). Simply examining those in high-level positions is not a representative sample of workers. Female professional staff, and in particular support staff, are in the trenches on a daily basis, and they experience the workplace in a far different way than many high-level executives. As shown in the research, the perception
of climate is reflected in work satisfaction, thus reflecting in performance (Allan, 2011; Hart, 2009). Because many support staff members are on the front lines in higher education, they come face to face with the public on a daily basis, interacting with parents, students, faculty, and other staff members. Their satisfaction and perception of their working environment is vital to organizational success, work productivity and commitment to the institution (Bauer, 2000).

Building on this literature review of organizational structures, access, advancement and support, and institutional climate is Kanter's (1977) structural theory of organizational behavior. Additionally, because I argue that it is both structure and gender that act as barriers towards women's advancement, Acker's (1990; 2006) concept of gendered organizations will serve as a bridge linking structure and gender. These frameworks, introduced in the previous chapter, are examined more fully below.

**Theoretical Frameworks**

Rosabeth Moss Kanter's (1977) structural theory of organizational behavior serves as the main theoretical framework for this study. In 1976, Kanter was employed as a consultant for a large corporation she referred to as IndSCO. As a consultant, Kanter examined the organizational structures guiding IndSCO and sought to further examine the way these structures impacted employee behavior. She interviewed staff members at various levels of the organization and found the “structure [of the organization] forms people’s sense of themselves and of their possibilities” (Kanter, 1977, p. 3). These findings align with the research reported above regarding organizational structures and positions.
Kanter's (1977) study of Indsco led to the development of her structural theory of organizational behavior that posits that access to certain work structures influences both power and behavior. According to Kanter's (1977) theory, access to information, support, resources, and opportunities including, "mobility and growth, promotional opportunities, access to challenging work and increase in skills" (p. 246) influence how much power employees have within an organization, and this power impacts behavior. Access to the aforementioned work structures is facilitated by formal and informal power. Formal power includes place on the organizational hierarchy, visibility within the organization, and job flexibility (Kanter, 1977; Morgan, 2006). Informal power includes relationships with supervisors, peers and those at higher levels of the organizational hierarchy (Kanter, 1977).

Kanter (1977) found that position within the organizational hierarchy is particularly important in regard to the amount of formal power one has in the organization (Morgan, 2006). She referred to positions at the lower-level of the organizational hierarchy as disadvantaged positions. Kanter (1977) further stated that employees in these disadvantaged positions tend to limit their goals and desires for a better position and focus more on personal matters such as family life, friends and social activities. Therefore, these external factors take priority over work leading to decreased productivity and lack of commitment (Kanter, 1977). Acker's (1990) disembodied worker shows the influence of gender on hierarchical position. According to the concept of the disembodied worker, the male lives to work, and therefore deserves high-level positions. Further, according to the concept of the disembodied worker, women, who have outside obligations of home and family, are better suited for low-level positions on
the hierarchy (Acker, 1990). As Kanter (1977) concluded, those with positions on the upper-level of the organizational hierarchy, who are typically male, are more motivated and involved in their work.

An employee’s position within the organization is manifest by their place on the organizational hierarchy, which tends to create problems and fragmented groups within the organization (Kanter, 1977). “Hierarchies tend to create power and divide opportunity, impacting employee behavior” (Kanter, 1977, p. 259). In addition, power influences behavior, often in a negative way because, “individuals are seeking to meet their own needs within their position” (Kanter, 1977, p. 253). According to Kanter (1977) those with power tend to hold onto that power, and those who find themselves in positions with little to no power, usually never attain power. Her theory also suggest that power struggles can be detrimental to the success of organizations stating, “Inadequate attention to the effects of power distribution…can result in much discontent among people in the middle and at the bottom and also create great resistance as supervisors find themselves threatened” (Kanter, 1977, p, 257). In turn, supervisors who feel threatened fail to empower their subordinates, providing them with little to no access to pertinent information necessary to perform their jobs, as well as no access to resources or promotional opportunity (Kanter, 1977). What Kanter (1977) fails to address is the link between structural position and gender. Instead, she ascribes all power differentials due to position only.

Overall, Kanter’s (1977) research at Indsco revealed that employees in low-level, essentially dead-end jobs located at the bottom of the organizational hierarchy, have less access to information necessary to perform their jobs, little support from both their
supervisors and from the organization as a whole, lack of access to resources and little possibility of promotional or professional development opportunities, which she termed empowerment structures. She posited that employees without access to these structures experience a lack of empowerment and tend to feel powerless (Kanter, 1977).

Through her observations at Indsco, Kanter (1977) found that empowerment is manifested by employees who are encouraged and motivated to make meaningful contributions to an organization. These employees tend to feel their contributions and roles are valued. In addition, Kanter (1977) found that employees with positions on higher levels of the organizational hierarchy have a greater sense of empowerment and tend to associate themselves more fully with the organization.

Although she noted that more women were found in low-level, low-mobility positions, Kanter (1977) argued, “the real villain is not gender differences, but the very nature of the organizational hierarchy” (p. 427). Kanter (1977) brought to light the previously unquestioned role of organizational structure as a primary cause of advancement barriers for those in lower-level, or disadvantaged positions. Further, Kanter (1977) argued that organizations are accidentally, not inherently gendered, and what may appear to be gender differences are really structural differences in power. “The issue is really powerlessness not sex” (Kanter, 1977, p. 6). Yet, gender plays a role in this instance because of the preponderance of women populating the lowest organizational support staff positions in colleges.

According to Kanter (1977) employee behavior is a function of their placement on the organizational hierarchy, not “primarily as a function of being a man or a woman” (p. 64).
Instead of focusing on gender as the cause of inequality in organizations, Kanter (1977) focused on the structures that people within an organization find themselves working in, regardless of gender. Kanter (1977) identified three structural variables: the structure of opportunity, the structure of power, and the proportional distribution of men and women. When men are in the majority, women are often treated as tokens or representatives of their category and not as individuals (Kanter, 1977). Kanter (1977) also argued that men can be tokens, when women are the majority. However, Acker (1990) countered that the situation for male and female tokens is far from similar. “To the token woman, White men in women-dominated workplaces are likely to be positively evaluated and rapidly promoted to positions of greater authority” (Acker, 1990, p. 143).

In contrast, the majority of women in male-dominated workplaces find themselves trapped at the bottom-levels of the organizational hierarchy (Allan, 2011; Costello, 2012; Glazer-Raymo, 1999). What is still largely unknown is the extent that it is gender or position in the structure that has the largest impact on the women who occupy these roles.

It should be noted that Kanter’s (1977) book, *Men and Women of the Corporation*, was written during an era where there were even fewer women in high-level positions than there are today. Lewis and Simpson (2012) argue that there are gendered hierarchical structures present in Kanter’s (1977) book, they were just not drawn to the surface due to lower numbers of women in leadership roles. “While Kanter draws attention to the gender of organizational members, she does not see fundamentally different gendered modes of behavior” (Lewis & Simpson, 2012, p. 142). The basic issue of gender discrimination is missing from her theory.
I argue that while organizational structure plays a key role in who climbs the ladder and who remains at the bottom, gender is woven into organizational structures, polices, and practices. Joan Acker's (1990) theory of gendered organizations serves as the bridge between gender and structure. Acker's (1990) theory argues that organizations are not, as has been previously labeled by researchers such as Kanter (1977), gender-neutral. Prior to Acker, Smith (1979) maintained that organizational sociology and our ways of working are “grounded in the working worlds and relations of men, whose experience and interests arise in the course of and in relation to participation in the ruling apparatus of this society” (p. 148). In other words, the patriarchal structure of organizations was so ingrained, that it is almost invisible. Acker (1990) said, “Gender is difficult to see when only the masculine is present” (p. 142). Thus, I argue that it is central to use not only structural theory (Kanter, 1977), but also to realize the important intersection of structures with gender (Acker, 1990).

Acker (1990) argued that gender permeates through every aspect of organizations, including the academy, and therefore, colleges are gendered. What then does Acker (1990) mean when she says an organization is gendered?

To say that an organization...is gendered means that advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity, are patterned through and in terms of a distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine. Gender is not an addition to an ongoing process, conceived as gender neutral. Rather, it is an integral part of those processes which cannot be properly understood without an analysis of gender (p. 146).
Gendering within organizations is evident in five processes: the construction of divisions along gender lines; symbols and images; interactions between workers; individual identity; and the creation of social structures (Acker, 1990). According to Acker (1990) the construction of divisions along gender lines refers to labor divisions, acceptable behaviors, work space and power. As both Kanter (1977) and Acker (1990) note, men are almost always located at the top of organizational hierarchies, and almost always have the most organizational power. Kanter (1977) however, failed to acknowledge that gender was at the root of this unequal balance of power, blaming the structural placement of women at the bottom-levels of the hierarchy, or as tokens at the top, as the problem. I argue the need to study both frameworks as gender-bias is intricately woven into organizational structures. To fully understand women’s experiences, in particular those at the bottom of the hierarchy, gender and structure must be examined together.

Gendering through organizational symbols and images, such as the image of organizational leaders, tend to be associated more with masculine characteristics than feminine characteristics, setting the tone for a patriarchal climate (Acker, 1990). Acker (1990) described interactions between workers including conversations, dominance and submission, as leading to men being viewed as power players, while women are viewed as the supporters of these power men. Work divisions along gender lines, symbolic gendering, and gendering interactions can “help produce gendered components of individual identity…including choice of appropriate work language, clothing and representation of self as a gendered member of an organization” (Acker, 1990, p. 147). Finally, Acker (1990) argued that gender frames the underlying social structures and
practices in organizations and are based on the long-standing male norm. Two of these structures and practices Acker (1990) discussed in great detail are the job evaluation and the organizational hierarchy.

According to Acker (1990), job evaluations are used to determine salary and ranking of an employee, and essentially evaluate the job not the worker. Jobs have "congruence between responsibility, complexity and hierarchical position" (Acker, 1990, p. 148). For example, low-level positions have little complexity and responsibility, and these positions, as acknowledged by both Kanter (1977) and Acker (1990), are primarily held by women. Prestigious positions in the hierarchy have more responsibility and require more commitment to work. These positions are typically held by males, "while his wife or another woman takes care of his personal needs and children" (Acker, 1990, p. 149). Acker (1990) describes hierarchies as gendered because those who are viewed as totally committed to their work and deemed more suited to higher level responsibilities are typically male, while women are clustered at the bottom of the hierarchy. In this study, women clustered at the bottom of the hierarchy are female classified and professional staff working in higher education.

Kanter's (1977) structural theory of organizational behavior combined with Acker's (1990) theory of gendered organizations provided the theoretical based for my research. Organizational structures, including the hierarchy, policies and practices and the gender-bias deeply embedded within these structures, continue to segregate women into the lowest positions, or into higher-level positions as tokens (Kanter, 1977). While Kanter (1977) argued that structure was the main reason for this marginalization, I argue that male dominance and privilege are inextricably linked to the structure of
organizations, whose policies, practices and hierarchical chains were created based on male norms. Therefore, gender and structure intersect as barriers for female staff’s advancement in higher education. This intersection of structure and gender shows the justification for using two frameworks for this research study.

Summary

As evidenced from the existing literature base, organizational structures, the role of position, and resulting imbalance of power have consistently left women marginalized. The impact of gender bias that permeates through organizations manifests through the inability of many women to advance professionally. Further, the role of work and family tend to create more impenetrable barriers for women as they are still viewed culturally as the primary caregivers for children. Although most of the current research on women has focused on faculty and administrators, it can be surmised that female classified and professional staff will share similar, if not more suppressing experiences as they seek to rise from the trenches. Given the lack of study on women in lower-level organizational positions, my research examines how the role of both gender and structure influences women occupying these positions.

Figure five, below, is a visual model of the theoretical frameworks discussed in chapter two. The figure is based on the components of both Kanter’s (1977) structural theory and Acker’s (1990) gendered organizational theory. The figure shows advancement opportunities for women blocked by structural and gender barriers through the intersecting bricks. The factors include) organizational structure, power, access and the hierarchy (Kanter, 1977) and gender, power, the hierarchy, climate, outside obligations and the disembodied worker (Acker, 1990; 2006). It is important to note that
these factors will not be equally weighted as barriers to advancement, for participants in this research study.

Figure 5: Theoretical Framework Visual
CHAPTER 3
Research Methods

This qualitative phenomenological case study examined the role of organizational structures and perceptions of institutional climate as suppressors for the advancement of women, particularly those located at the lower level of the hierarchy (Acker, 1990; Allan, 2011; Kanter, 1977). Qualitative research is the best approach to examine and understand the research problem explored here because “[qualitative research] helps us understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible” (Merriam, 1998, p. 5). My interest in particular lies in understanding the essence of the phenomenon of being a female staff member working in higher education (Merriam, 1998; Moustakas, 1994). According to Merriam (1998) qualitative researchers seek to understand how people make sense of their experiences, which makes qualitative research the best fit for my study.

As Creswell (2013) noted, qualitative research focuses on the participants’ perspective and the way they make meaning of their reality. In addition, I wanted to empower the women in my study by providing a space for them to share their stories and let their voices be heard. Therefore, I viewed this study through a critical lens, which will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter. Further, I hope this research will impact and change unwelcoming, patriarchal climates and improve policies and practices so they are more equitable for all employees, regardless of gender or classification.

What is the best way to share women’s stories? Creswell (2013) noted that phenomenology is a useful technique when the researcher wants to focus on individuals with similar shared experiences. Phenomenology involves gathering comprehensive descriptions that provide an analysis of the essence of the experience using data that
reflects what the participants view as reality (Moustakas, 1994). Saldana (2011) stated, "phenomenology focuses on concepts, events, or the lived experiences of participants" (p. 67). In my study, the shared or lived experience is being a female support staff or professional staff member working in one of two institutions of higher education, Brown College and Gray College (both pseudonyms). Phenomenology is the best approach to "understand common experiences in order to develop practices or policies" (Creswell, 2013, p. 81) that can help people improve their situation.

Because my research involved bounded systems (Yin, 1994), here the two universities, a case study approach is also appropriate. A case study design "is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved" (Merriam, 1998, p. 19). Merriam (1998) also described a case study as particularistic, meaning that the method focuses on a particular phenomenon, descriptive, meaning the product is a rich, thick description of the phenomenon, and heuristic, meaning that it enlightens the reader's understanding of the phenomenon. As Yin (1994) explained, case study design is suited to situations where it is impossible to separate phenomenon from context. This design is appropriate for my research as the phenomenon of being a female staff member in higher education, and of understanding these workers’ experiences, is strongly linked to the context. See Figure six for a review of the case design.
Philosophical Assumptions

My approach to this study used a critical lens, but also incorporated a feminist standpoint, which places women’s experiences at the center of research. As Acker, Barry, and Esseveld (1996) noted, women researching women share the common phenomena of being a woman. Harding (1987) posits that feminist researchers place themselves on the same critical level as their participants. The critical feminist lens allowed me to question structures, power, policies, and inequalities based on gender impacting the advancement opportunities and treatment of my female participants (Harding, 1987).

Critical theory dates back to the economic critiques of Karl Marx and his examination of socioeconomics and class structures (Bronner, 2011). According to Bronner (2011), a key factor in this first wave of critical theory involved property ownership and how this feature perpetuated class segregation. The second wave of advancement of critical theory emerged from the Frankfurt School, which focused on false consciousness (Agger, 1991). According to the early researchers (e.g., Adorno,
Horkheimer, Marcuse, Pollock, Lowenthal, and Benjamin), false consciousness occurs when people believe their experiences are a direct result of unchangeable fixed reality brought about by social structures (Agger, 1991).

“Critical theories are those conceptual accounts of the social world that attempt to understand and explain the causes of structural domination and inequality” (Levinson, 2011, p. 2). Critical theory examines ways the overall environment impacts individuals and the way it effects their construction of reality (Bronner, 2011). Using a critical lens with a feminist standpoint allows me to question organizational structures and bases of power that perpetuate classism and gender bias. As Eddy and Moynihan (2009) stated, “postmodern critical theory questions power structures and the assumptions embedded in preconceived roles, looking at data from a context specific perspective and questioning underlying assumptions” (p. 6). The critical feminist lens along with a phenomenological case design allowed me to develop interview questions pertaining to organizational policies and practices while focusing on female classified and professional staff in the hopes of gaining a more meaningful understanding of their experiences.

Critical researchers often frame questions in terms of power – who has power, how is this power distributed and negotiated, and what structures reinforce its distribution (Glesne, 2011). As Kanter (1976, 1977) argued for the role of structure as an element of power, and also argued that those in lower-level positions are disadvantaged within the organization, critical theory supports these arguments. It is appropriate for my research as most support staff positions in higher education are located at the bottom of the hierarchy and I am arguing that position plays a role in advancement opportunity.
Critical theory allowed me to conduct my analysis by questioning organizational structures and bases of power that perpetuate classism and gender inequities. It is helpful to look at sociological research when examining power and structure. One of the most prominent sociologists in this realm is Pierre Bourdieu. Pierre Bourdieu’s (1977, 1986, 1989) sociological research focused on class based differences in power and prestige. Bourdieu’s (1977) theory of power and practice discusses the reproduction of social hierarchies and argues that power is continually recreated through socialized norms. Those in positions of power, or the ruling elite, retain their power and privilege while those who are marginalized remain in the margins (Bourdieu, 1977, 1989).

Bourdieu’s (1989) concept of habitus described mental structures of agents and he noted that, “...agents, even the most disadvantaged ones, tend to perceive the world as natural and to accept it much more readily than one might imagine – especially when you look at the situation of the dominated through the social eyes of a dominant” (p. 18). In other words, both the dominant and the dominated accept things as they are, perceiving that each has their place in society. Habitus, then “implies a sense of one’s place but also a sense of the place of others” (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 19). This orientation of power rings true within organizations, as the hierarchy is the structure for knowing one’s place, and employees accept the hierarchy and its gendered order.

The idea of capital – social, cultural, and symbolic is also prominent throughout Bourdieu’s work (1977, 1989). Those who hold the most symbolic power, such as those near the top of the organizational hierarchy, are “in a position to impose the scale of values most favorable to their products” (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 21). This power translates to social capital generated from institutional relationships and norms that shape social
interactions, and to cultural capital that emerges from the non-financial aspects that lead to social mobility, for example appearance and intellect (Bourdieu, 1977). Higher education, with its traditionally patriarchal climate and culture (Acker, 1990; 2006; Allan, 2011) has shaped the social interactions between employees, establishing the norm for acceptable behaviors, which tends to marginalize women. Researching marginalized groups like low-level female staff is important because, "To change the world, one has to change the ways of world-making, that is, the vision of the world and the practical operations by which groups are produced and reproduced" (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 23).

The next section provides information on the research design, specifically addressing site selection, participants, study limitations, and data collection and analysis. Finally, elements of trustworthiness and credibility will be discussed.

Site Selection

I chose to conduct my research at two four-year public universities in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The two sites were selected because of presumed differences in their culture, demographics, and learning opportunities, but also because of their similarities in institution type. Brown College is deeply rooted in tradition, focusing on one-on-one instruction in the classroom. Brown College has approximately 7,800 undergraduate students is categorized by the Carnegie Classification system as a highly selective research university. Gray College has approximately 24,000 undergraduate students and offers more than 70 degree programs through their distance learning program. According to the Carnegie Classification system, Gray College is a selective research university. Both colleges have strong graduate programs, but their main focus is on undergraduate studies.
The next section discusses participant selection and demographics. Tables are provided for Brown College as well as Gray College. Further, a breakdown of classified and professional staff by both position and gender for each college is provided.

**Participant Selection and Demographics**

Participants were selected through purposeful sampling (Merriam, 1998) and snowball sampling. I contacted one woman at each institution to serve as primary contacts, or gatekeepers (Greig & Taylor, 1999). I asked these gatekeepers for suggestions of women who met my research criteria of full-time female classified or professional staff. After making contact with the initial suggested participants (12), I asked them for names of other women who might want to participate in my study. This technique, known as snowball sampling, (Merriam, 1998) assisted in avoiding selection bias by the researcher.

Study participants ranged in age from 24-66, their years of service ranged from 2 years to 38 years, and their highest degrees ranged from a high school diploma to a doctorate degree. Thirteen participants identified as White, five identified as African American, one as Asian, and one as Bi-Racial. Table three provides participant demographics for Brown College and Table four provides demographics for participants from Gray College. Please note, names are pseudonyms to protect participant identity.

I had to consider my own Whiteness as I was preparing to interview the staff of color. I wanted the participants to trust me and to feel comfortable telling me their stories. Race can often be an inhibiting factor, and can cause a power dynamic. I was aware of this during my interviews, and tried to make participants feel at ease regardless of race or position.
Table 3: Participant Demographics Brown College

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Highest Degree</th>
<th>Job Classification</th>
<th>Years Employed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Betsy</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Master's</td>
<td>Classified</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dana</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Bachelor's</td>
<td>Classified</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloria</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Bi-Racial</td>
<td>Bachelor's</td>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>African</td>
<td>Master's</td>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>American</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helen</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>Classified</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>African</td>
<td>Bachelor's</td>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>American</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Master's</td>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lorrie</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>African</td>
<td>Bachelor's</td>
<td>Classified</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>American</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patty</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Master's</td>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sofia</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Associate's</td>
<td>Classified</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Participant Demographics Gray College

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Highest Degree</th>
<th>Job Classification</th>
<th>Years Employed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Bachelor's</td>
<td>Classified</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carrie</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connie</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>Classified</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donna</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>African</td>
<td>Associate's</td>
<td>Classified</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>American</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Master's</td>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Race</td>
<td>Highest Degree</td>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelly</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Bachelor's</td>
<td>Classified</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucy</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nancy</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>Classified</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shannon</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The figures below show the breakdown of classified and professional positions at Brown College and Gray College by gender and race.

*Figure 7: Brown College: Classified Positions by Gender*

**Brown College Classified Positions by Gender**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clerical/Office Manager</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical/IT</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skilled Craft</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintenance</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paraprofessional</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 8: Brown College Classified Positions by Race

Brown College Classified Positions by Race

- Clerical/Office Manager: 76%
- Technical/IT: 89%
- Skilled Craft: 78%
- Maintenance: 12%
- Paraprofessional: 72%
- African American: 20%
- Other: 4%
- Clerical/Office Manager: 76%
- Technical/IT: 89%
- Skilled Craft: 20%
- Maintenance: 84%
- Paraprofessional: 23%
Figure 9: Brown College Professional Positions by Gender

Brown College Professional Positions by Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Professional Positions</th>
<th>Managers/Executives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 10: Brown College Professional Positions by Race

Brown College Professional Positions by Race

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Professional Positions</th>
<th>Managers/Executives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>Other 5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 11: Gray College Classified Positions by Gender
Figure 12: Gray College Classified Positions by Race

Gray College Classified Positions by Race

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>White</th>
<th>African American</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clerical/Office Manager</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical/Paraprofessional</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skilled Craft</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintenance</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 13: Gray College Professional Positions by Gender

Gray College Professional Positions by Gender

- Administrative (Exec. & Managers)
- Professionals

Female
- 48% Administrative (Exec. & Managers)
- 60% Professionals

Males
- 52% Administrative (Exec. & Managers)
- 40% Professionals

Figure 14: Gray College Professional Positions by Race

Gray College Professional Positions by Race

- Administrative (Exec. & Managers)
- Professionals

White
- 75% Administrative (Exec. & Managers)
- 71% Professionals

African American
- 19% Administrative (Exec. & Managers)
- 19% Professionals

Other
- 6% Administrative (Exec. & Managers)
- 10% Professionals

84
As evidenced by the data collected from each college, although there are more women gaining ground in higher education, they are still primarily clustered into classified and lower-to-middle ranks of professional positions. Of note, 87-88% of the office manager positions at both colleges are held by women. It is also clear that Whites are still the majority of people in higher level positions at both universities while African Americans are the majority of maintenance workers.

Sample Size and Research Design

There are varying perspectives in the research regarding sample size for qualitative research, but Creswell (2013) recommends 5-25 participants for phenomenology. Following Creswell’s (2013) recommendation, I asked 10 participants from Brown University and 10 participants from Gray University to participate in my research study. In order to have an even number of cases for comparison, I divided the participants into 5 classified staff and 5 professional staff from each institution allowing me to compare within and between experiences of female classified and professional staff at both institutions. Figure 15 shows these cross comparisons.

Figure 15: Phenomenological Case Design: Within and Between
Data Collection

The first step in my data collection process was to send an email to my two gatekeepers (Greig & Taylor, 1999), asking them for names of potential study participants. Once I received the initial 12 names, I contacted these women, asking them if they would like to participate in the study. I explained to these 12 the purpose of my study, and of the initial 12, 10 agreed to participate. I then asked for additional recommendations to reach the goal of 20 participants. I received 10 additional names, and I contacted each person inviting them to participate. Of the additional 10 names, 8 agreed to participate, thus meeting my 20 participant requirement. Once study participants were identified, we set up mutually convenient times to meet or talk by telephone. Five of the final 20 participants preferred an email interview, so the questions were asked and answered electronically. These participants were more than willing to answer my questions but were uncomfortable with either a face-to-face interview or a telephone interview. I decided to include these participants even though I realize this method of data collection is not ideal. However, the participants who answered questions over email provided rich descriptions of their experiences, likely because they could write what they felt without worrying about someone else’s interpretations of what was said.

Prior to each interview, I provided participants a consent form (Appendix A) and a demographic information form (Appendix B), which collected information on age, race, family, position title, and job classification. Participants were advised that they could withdraw from the study at any time. Face-to-face or telephone interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes, and email interviewed ranged from 30 to 40 minutes of
communication. There were 10 face-to-face interviews, five telephone interviews, and five email interviews. Detailed notes were taken from the telephone and face-to-face interviews, and face-to-face interviews were audiotaped. While telephone interviews were not audiotaped, the researcher typed answers as they were given, and the same questioning techniques were used to probe for detailed information. In addition, interview transcripts were sent back to participants for review. During the email interviews, I was able to ask probing questions or ask for more explanation if something was unclear. The techniques I used during the interview process allowed participants to richly describe their experiences.

Of note, many of the participants of all interview types, asked several times if I could assure them their responses would be confidential as they expressed concern about repercussions of their participation. Without even reading the findings of this research, this fear of repercussions is very telling. I reassured participants that no identifying information would be included in my study. Therefore, I limited the amount of information I provided about the two colleges, and the information provided about participants.

Since I have lived through many of the same experiences that my participants have, I believe that made me a reliable confidant. I feel that I was able to gather more detailed information than someone who may not understand what they are going through in their work environment. This, however, led me to be extra cautious during my data analysis to ensure that I was staying true to participant's experiences and not allowing my personal bias given my lived experiences as a classified and professional staff to influence my findings.
Development of Interview Questions

My interview questions consisted of descriptive, open-ended questions seeking to obtain a large amount of information from participants (Spradley, 1979). Another very important type of question is the probe, or follow-up questions that deepen participant’s responses (Merriam, 1998). As the interviews progressed, I was able to ask probing questions as well as other questions that were sparked from participant responses. I also utilized interpretive questions to confirm what participants said (Kvale, 1996). Kvale (1996) noted this is a useful technique because it helps eliminate researcher bias, as it acts as a clarification of the researcher’s interpretations.

Interview questions were developed using Kanter’s (1977) structural theory of organizational behavior. Participants were asked questions about access to Kanter’s (1977) empowerment structures: information, resources, professional development, career advancement opportunity and support. Participants were also asked questions about formal and informal power (Kanter, 1977).

Since I examined the experiences of female staff, and this study focused on the intersection of structure and gender, interview questions were also developed using Acker’s (1990) theory of gendered organizations. Including Acker’s (1990) theory allowed me to ask questions pertaining to participants’ perceptions of gender and how gender may or may not have a role in advancement opportunities. Participants were also asked for ideas on ways to improve policy and practice allowing me to use my critical feminist lens to examine and critique the status quo. Interview questions can be found in Appendix C. The interview questions are linked to the theoretical frameworks and literature, which can be found in the Crosswalk Table (Appendix D).
Next, I discuss the concepts of trustworthiness and credibility. These two factors are important in any type of research, but are particularly important in qualitative research (Merriam, 1998). Of note, the delicate nature of my subject matter required me to pay close attention to trustworthiness to ensure participants were comfortable sharing their experiences.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

To establish trust and rapport (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 1998) with my participants, I informed them that all responses were confidential and only I had access to their identifying information. In addition, Spradley (1979) noted that building rapport is facilitated by the following: keeping participants talking, explaining repeatedly, restating what participants have said and thinking of the interview as a connected process of questions and answers. According to Kvale (1996) for the interviewer to establish rapport, they must listen attentively, show understanding and respect for what the participants are saying, and allow them to proceed with their responses at a comfortable pace. I followed these guidelines throughout my interviews.

As previously mentioned, I believe that because I could relate to many of the participant’s experiences, they felt comfortable talking with me and sharing their experiences. Further, some participants shared very personal things with me, some that would have been too revealing had I included them in this study. My main goal was to tell their stories without unmasking the participants, and therefore I used my discretion when including information told to me in confidence. Based on the fact that I understood their feelings and assured participants their identities were safe, I was able to ask probing
questions that would allow very rich responses, yielding a true revelation of their experiences. My positionality in this instance afforded me access and insights.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) argued that a qualitative study must provide a reader with enough detail to ensure that the conclusions make sense. The researcher needs to ask: are the results credible based on the data collected? Ensuring the data makes sense increases the trustworthiness of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Bracketing my experiences through reflective journaling prior to each interview helped with trustworthiness because as the data collection instrument, it was important for me to set aside my biases to provide the reader with a clear understanding of the participant’s experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Moustakas, 1994). This journaling was helpful for me as well because I was able to see how my biases might have impacted the results of this study if I had not used this technique. It forced me to face my biases head-on.

According to Merriam (1998), to enhance validity of qualitative studies, the researcher should use triangulation, or multiple methods of verifying data, including member checks and peer reviewers. To triangulate my data, after interviews were transcribed, I sent the transcripts back to participants to verify that I accurately captured their experiences. In addition, I asked two peers to review my data analysis to ensure the analysis aligned with my theoretical frameworks, and also to ensure my analysis made sense based on the participant responses to the interview questions. Finally, I reviewed policies and procedures, such as information about professional development, benefits, and reviewed the structure of the organizational hierarchy on the institution websites, which allowed me to verify information on these sites with the information I received from participants during the interviews to determine whether any disconnects existed.
between reported policy and practice (Appendix E). I used Kanter's (1977) structural theory and its empowerment structures to analyze how the website information corresponded with the interview information. Acker's (1990) gendered organization theory was used to examine both the hidden and predominant factors of gender bias. These steps helped strengthen the trustworthiness of my study.

In order to increase the external validity of my study, a rich thick description of the phenomenon was provided so that readers can determine how closely their situation matched with my participants. These descriptions also help readers determine if the situations described are applicable to other institutions, or if these experiences are unique (Merriam, 1998).

Data Analysis

I first transcribed the research interviews and telephone notes, and read through the email interviews. After the initial transcription of the face-to-face interviews, I replayed the interview tapes (where applicable, as some interviews were over the phone), comparing the audio with my written transcript. After confirming accuracy, I sent the transcripts or notes back to the participants for verification. As I was unable to replay the interviews for those that took place over the phone, I wrote the narrative, and then sent the transcripts back to the participants for their review. If there were any questions about the responses provided in the email interviews, I sent those back to the participants for verification. Once verification was received from each participant, and I made any corrections they requested (the changes were mostly cosmetic in nature consisting of a few wrong dates, and a few of the participants reworded some sentences in their voice) I started in-depth analysis of the data.
I used Merriam (1998) and Creswell (2013) as guides for analyzing my phenomenological case-study. Based on previous studies (Acker, 1990, 2006; Allan, 2011; Costello, 2012; Kanter, 1977), I developed some *a priori* codes to assist with the initial steps in data analysis (Appendix F). To begin in-depth analysis, I read through each transcript and highlighted significant statements or phrases that seemed to explain the phenomenon, or essence (Moustakas, 1994) of being a female classified or professional staff member. I repeated this step multiple times until I felt I had a complete picture of the phenomenon. I also used the constant comparative model, meaning I compared “a particular incident from an interview with another incident in the same set of data or in another set” (Merriam, 1998, p. 159). These comparisons assisted me in the creation of categories as I looked for recurring patterns in the data (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 1998). These categories became a master list that emerged into themes reflecting recurring thoughts and experiences present in the data (Creswell, 2013). The initial categories were: issues with men and other women; being a classified staff member; having a low-level position; no room for advancement. These categories reflect the purpose of my study, utilizing Kanter’s (1977) structural theory of organizational behavior and Acker’s (1990) theory of gendered organization as the basis for analysis. Through the themes that developed from the initial categories, I sought to determine the essence of the phenomenon of being a female staff member working in higher education (Moustakas, 1994).

To further understand this essence, I conducted a within-case and cross-case analysis allowing me to compare the experiences across all four cases. I looked for instances and experiences that occurred across the two colleges to assist in the
comparison of the participants. Combining the multiple case analysis process with phenomenology helped yield rich results and increase the understanding of the essence of the phenomenon (Merriam, 1998; Moustakas, 1994).

**Study Limitations**

This study is delimited by the criteria for participants, namely, female full-time classified and professional staff members at two four-year colleges located in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The location of the case-sites can be a limitation as there may be no applicability of the information to other contexts, for example more northern or southern states, or differing types of governing bodies. As evidenced by the data in Table 2 (Chapter 2, p. 42), there is a significant variance in wage equity between states. This may be a limitation as wage gaps may be more prevalent or less prevalent in other states, making the findings less transferrable. In addition, both research sites are state-supported public colleges, which may play a role in the climate as well as the policies and practices that are required. Examining other sites such as private colleges, women’s colleges, and community colleges would widen the perspectives of participants as well as allow the researcher to examine policies and practices that are similar or distinct.

Further, this study was limited by two research sites, so another study comparing multiple sites, could yield more rich data to explain the phenomenon of being a female staff member working in higher education. Other limitations include the exclusion of part-time employees and male employees. The study was also limited by those who agreed to participate. Race was not a selection criteria for my research study, therefore race and ethnicity were study limitations as they were not taken into account for
participant selection. However, the participants in this study are fairly representative of the larger population at Brown College and Gray College. This representation may not apply the populations at other colleges.

Due to the limited scope of this study, it is impossible to generalize the findings to all female staff at Brown College and Gray College, and to the experiences of female staff at other institutions. To increase the generalizability of this study, examining the experiences of more staff at these two colleges, and comparing them with staff at other colleges, including private colleges is warranted.

Summary

This qualitative phenomenological case study examined the ways in which female classified and professional staff at two higher education institutions perceived their ability to advance professionally and how perception and advancement are influenced by organizational structures including the hierarchy, power, and gender bias embedded within the organization (Acker, 1990, 2006; Allan, 2011; Kanter, 1977). Using a qualitative case study approach for this research allowed me to gather rich descriptive data describing the essence of female staff’s experiences within two bounded systems. These experiences are revealed in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 4

Findings

This chapter begins with essence statements which provide a deeper meaning and overall summary from the interviews as to what it is really like to be a woman in a lower-level classified or professional position at Brown College or Gray College. While some individual experiences were better than others, these essence statements describe the collective.

The section after the essence statements provides an overview of the three main themes and sub-themes that emerged from the interviews. Following the overview, participants’ experiences will be revealed in an in-depth description of the interview themes.

Essence Statement for Female Classified Staff

Female classified staff are a group of women who go without adequate recognition for their significant contributions to higher education. From cleaning dorm rooms to serving food, from cutting checks to making sure the faculty have what they need for class, and influencing students, these women do it all. These women tend to perceive their work environments as highly unsupportive. Working within both a state and a university system, as the women of Brown and Gray Colleges do, not only are they bounded by policies and practices put in place by the legislature, they are also bounded by college policies that are often inconsistent in their implementation. Embedded in the underlying bureaucratic structure of higher education lies gender bias and racial discrimination that favors the male norm. For female classified staff, gender bias is manifest through an oppressive climate created by both male and female supervisors as
well as the institutions as a whole. These women live with the assumption that because they are in classified positions clustered at the lower-levels of the hierarchy that they are less intelligent and less capable of performing job tasks that require them to think critically. These women want to be heard and want to be seen as valuable contributors to their colleges.

**Essence Statement for Female Professional Staff**

Female professional staff are a group of women who often find themselves stuck in the middle as they are not in positions at the lowest-levels but their positions are not high enough on the hierarchy to matter. Many of these women find themselves in jobs traditionally held by men and often face sexism as men try to hold onto their dominance. Further, most of these women have advanced degrees, often higher degrees than their supervisors, but are still treated as having little knowledge, skills, and abilities. They often find themselves completing forms and paperwork instead of being assigned tasks that require deep thought and analysis. They experience gender bias not only from men, but also from women who are in equal or higher level positions resulting in power struggles. As these professional women move into higher-level positions, they find fewer women present, creating deeper resentments and struggles for power and resources among this group. They, along with classified staff, find that structures that should be in place to provide assistance for employees like human resources, fail miserably in the areas of professional growth and conflict resolution.

**Overview of Interview Themes**

Interviews with 20 female staff members (10 classified and 10 professional) garnered three main themes that best describe the participants' experiences at Brown
College and Gray College. The first theme, unsupportive climate, manifested though the perceptions of a lack of institutional support, lack of access to information, little support from direct supervisors who seem to possess the power to make or break the work environment for their subordinates, and an *us* vs. *them* atmosphere leading to tensions between classified and professional staff. Second, an overall lack of professional growth manifest through few advancement opportunities, issues with the hiring process itself, lack of career progression tracks, and a lack of professional development offerings. Finally, a good old boy’s network emerged as a prevalent theme evidenced by participant’s descriptions of more men in higher-level positions, preference for the male norm and ideal worker, and preferential treatment given to males.

These themes are discussed below and described through participants’ experiences. For reader clarification and ease of identification, participants are coded after their pseudonym: B for Brown, G for Gray, P for Professional and C for Classified. For further clarification while reading the findings, Table 5 shows participants and the gender of their direct supervisor.

*Table 5: Supervisors by Gender*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>College</th>
<th>Gender of Supervisor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Betsy</td>
<td>Brown</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dana</td>
<td>Brown</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloria</td>
<td>Brown</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace</td>
<td>Brown</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helen</td>
<td>Brown</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>Brown</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
At Brown College, more participants reported to women than men (W=6, M=4). At Gray College, it was exactly the opposite, with more male supervisors than female (W=4, M=6). Both colleges currently have a male president although Gray College recently had a female president. The dynamics of gender play out through the themes discussed below.

**Non-supportive Climate**

Participants expressed an overall sense of a very non-supportive climate for female staff, both classified and professional. Participants felt that female staff are not
valued by the institution, and many feel they are not valued by their supervisors. While the majority of participants expressed these sentiments, it was more pronounced among classified staff at Brown College while more pronounced among professional staff at Gray College. This non-supportive climate in structural barriers includes a lack of support from the colleges as a whole resulting in the perception of an oppressive climate, a lack of adequate information sharing, issues with obtaining assistance for conflict resolution, and the power of the supervisor, who seem to hold the key to access, support and climate perceptions. Finally, participants expressed the sense of an us vs. them atmosphere between classified and professional staff. This was manifest through the perception of professional staff receiving more advantages, to include better benefits, than classified staff as well as the concept of “power women.” Overall, participants felt that female staff members receive little support because they are not valued by the institution as a whole, and therefore the institution fails to invest in them.

**Institutional support.** The common perception by both professional and classified participants was that overall, the two Colleges failed to provide support for female staff. This lack of support, or backing from the institution, led many participants to feel marginalized. Sofia (BC) stated, “I don’t think the college supports me or other staff in any way. They don’t appreciate what female staff members do, and don’t hold any value for their work.” In conversation with Sofia, it was clear that for her, support meant the ability to make meaningful contributions to the college, and to be appreciated for her work. It was also clear that she did not feel that she was viewed as a valuable asset or a serious contributor to Brown, and further, she believed that female staff members’ work as a whole was not considered essential to the college.
Dana (BC) shared, “The only support I receive is my paycheck.” For Dana, the only support she feels from Brown is monetary. Throughout the conversation with Dana, she indicated how important it was for her to be valued and treated like an intelligent woman. She clearly did not feel that kind of support from Brown. For Dana, a paycheck is not enough. She wants recognition and appreciation. Dana went on to say, “Our salaries are low, that is a fact. But, they could support us in different ways. Work-life balance, professional development. There are many things possible, but they don’t do much of anything.” Dana’s response provides many ways that Brown could support women aside from monetary compensation. Creating an environment that values employee contributions to the workplace, an environment that emphasizes team building and provides recognition are all ways to show employees that they are important to an organization. Participants expressed bitter sentiments regarding the lack of support they feel.

Lorrie (BC) shared her feelings about support, “Female staff receive very little support, are excluded from almost everything, and are more or less an after-thought.” It is clear that Lorrie shared the same ideas about support as Dana and Sofia. For these three participants, their idea of support consisted of being valued as an employee and being looked upon as someone who can make a meaningful contribution to the workplace. As shown by their discussion about institutional support, participants felt that they were not valued and were treated merely as workers, not thinkers capable of making significant contributions.

Carrie (GP) shared:
I would say that I do not feel very well supported, and if I have an issue, I am supposed to just go with the flow and not make waves. This lack of support is something that the women in my department discuss quite frequently among ourselves. The fact that our male director resents working with women makes our environment very unsupportive.

I asked Carrie if she had ever taken her concerns further than the other women in her department, and she indicated that she had tried to discuss it with her male supervisor, but he turned a deaf ear. For Carrie, support was directly related to the way she and the other women in her department were treated. She felt they were not valued and there was little she could do to change the situation.

Other participants discussed a lack of support from specific institutional areas including human resources. For Betsy (BC), her experience with human resources manifested in a feeling of overall lack of support. Betsy had some issues with her supervisor and went to human resources to talk about her problems. The main issue with Betsy’s supervisor seemed to be a power struggle that resulted in verbal harassment, creating a hostile working environment. When she approached human resources, Betsy was told that she needed to work it out with her supervisor. Betsy said, “I have tried to work it out many times. There is only so much I can do or say to her if I want to keep my job.” Betsy felt that the institutional entity that was supposed to be there to help her through a work-related conflict had failed her, leaving her to deal with the situation on her own. The verbal abuse never stopped for Betsy until her supervisor changed jobs. Interestingly, Brown’s website indicates that the type of verbal harassment Betsy experienced is in violation of college policy. Yet, when she went to human resources to
discuss the matter, she was offered no assistance or guidance for resolution. This indicates a clear lack of institutional support for a policy that is supposed to be in effect. This also seems to reflect a lack of proper training for human resources staff. In order for harassment policies to be enforced, colleges need to invest in adequate training for employees so that assistance can be provided as needed. These experiences were not unique to Brown College, as Faith (GP) reports:

When I sought support and mediation through our human resources office, the “support” consisted of coaching me on how to handle a hostile and sexist environment. The area I work in is structured with the males at the top and the women at the bottom. These senior men are not held accountable for their sexist attitudes. Human resources actually encouraged me to withdraw my complaints because I didn’t have concrete proof. I feel a concerted effort was made by the institution to keep the status quo by telling me to react differently instead of addressing the sexist attitudes that dominate my department. While there is a grievance process in place, it’s a he said/she said situation, and most of the time, they side with the supervisors.

Faith was very frustrated by the inability (a feeling of powerlessness) to do anything about the sexist environment she found herself in. Her frustration was deepened by the lack of backing she received from human resources. While she received “coaching” on how to deal with a hostile work environment, what Faith seemed to really need from Gray College was someone to take her concerns seriously and to address them with the male supervisors who were causing Faith’s distress. Further, there is a policy on Gray’s
website against harassment and hostile work environments, but again, nothing was done by the college to remedy the situation.

The discussion about human resources led participants to reveal feelings about confidentiality issues and the possibility of repercussions when approaching HR about problems. In other words, participants did not feel that HR was an ally for employees. To corroborate this, Lisa (BP) said, “Staff, classified and low-level professionals, are afraid to say how things really are because we are afraid we will lose our jobs. This has a huge impact on morale. People put up with bullying, insults, discrimination, all to avoid potential negative consequences.” As shown by Lisa’s statement, participants have the perception that human resources is not there to help employees, it is there for the administrators. Therefore, participants felt that there is no place to go for assistance when needed.

Lorrie (BC) seemed to sum up the majority of feelings for the participants about institutional support:

For most female staff members, the overall feeling is that we are excluded from institutional support and are not valued at all, particularly those in classified roles. These feelings of exclusion create very low morale. In fact, I would say morale is at an all-time low for staff members.

Many participants mentioned the very low morale on both campuses, and in particular at Brown. This low morale seems to be a direct result of the non-supportive climate that staff members perceive. While it can be argued that the lack of any substantial pay increases over the last several years can have a significant impact on employee morale, participants agreed, as noted earlier, that there are plenty of other things these colleges
can do to increase morale – some even as simple as saying thank-you for a job well done. Thus, for these participants, a supportive climate runs deeper than salary.

Patty (BP) approached the lack of value placed on staff from a business model mentality:

I don’t think staff are a priority. We are not valued. Even though we do everything under the sun from processing payments to making sure the buildings are safe, staff are relatively replaceable. That is the brutal truth. Higher education with its hierarchical bureaucracy, and its limited resources, creates a culture of competition, and staff are just not going to be the winners in that competition.

In Patty’s view, the lower you are on the hierarchy, the less valuable your position is to the institution. Many women in this study share Patty’s perception. These statements support Kanter’s (1977) theory noting that position on the organizational hierarchy has a direct impact on the perceived valued of a role. However, because Kanter (1977) studied an entire organization, she was able to ascertain feelings from a wide-range of positions. One may discover if deans and others in leadership roles were interviewed, they would express similar feelings of devalue and the perception of a non-supportive climate.

What can be garnered from this study is that participants perceived that they, along with other female professional and classified staff members perceive a non-supportive climate where women, for the most part, are undervalued. Despite the harsh reality that staff are easily replaced, Patty, and the other participants in this study, have not given up on their jobs or the quality of their work. The fact that these women keep doing their jobs with professionalism speaks volumes about their work ethic and
dedication to Brown and Gray Colleges. What is discouraging is that the institutions
seem to fail to realize the value these women bring to the table. The next sub-heading for
a non-supportive climate is the perception of a lack of information flow.

**Access to information.** Participants agreed that a lot of information was
available to them through institutional websites and databases, yet there was also the
feeling that a great deal of information was withheld. Sofia (BC) said:

> My supervisor withholds information I need to perform my job. It is definitely a
control issue. I am not alone in this. Many supervisors hold onto information for
power. It gives the appearance that supervisors have all the answers. In my case,
someone will ask me a question and since I don’t have the information, I have to
direct them to my supervisor. Then my supervisor can control what is shared with
them. It is a never-ending cycle of power and control.

This control of information was referred to by Betsy (BC) and Donna (BC) as a filtering
system. By using a filtering system, staff are often left in the dark about information
needed to perform their jobs while supervisors maintain a certain level of power and
control over employees. This gap in knowing critical elements for their jobs can pose
significant problems for work-flow as staff members often contact each other to seek out
needed information. If pertinent information is withheld, there can be a halt in
production. Further, wrong information can be shared creating another set of problems.

Jenny (BP) shared:

> You really have to seek out information, which can be difficult if you aren’t sure
what to look for. I feel that my supervisors withhold information from me as I’m
not invited to meetings where a good amount of information is shared. Also, my
former supervisor, who was a male, left recently for a job at another college. I found out how much information he failed to share with me after he left. I knew it was bad, but found out it was worse than I thought. For some reason, there seems to be this strong desire for supervisors to hold onto as much information as they can.

Supervisors, whose positions are classified mainly as high-level professionals or executives, are perceived to withhold information from lower-level staff members. The overall perception is that it is a control issue, and an issue between upper-level and lower-level staff. It is important to remember that access to viable, accurate information is essential for a well-functioning institution. While the problem of access to information may be viewed as more of a departmental issue as opposed to an institutional issue, in essence, it is ultimately the responsibility of the organization to provide access to adequate information. Those in the upper-levels of administration may argue that it is the responsibility of the supervisor to disseminate information (and it is!), who holds the supervisor responsible for that dissemination? Further, who ensures that the supervisors have adequate and correct information to convey? According to various experts on organizations (Baldridge, 1971; Bess & Dee, 2008a; Bolman & Deal, 2008) information flow is one of the largest problems within organizations. A lack of trickle-down communication can be detrimental to the success of an institution leaving those at the bottom to feel undervalued and left out of important decision making processes.

The next sub-heading under a non-supportive climate is the power of the supervisor. This power of the supervisor seems to have a very significant impact on participants' perceptions of the overall climate. For those few participants who had a
supportive supervisor, their view of the climate was better than those who felt their supervisors were not supportive.

**The power of the supervisor.** Participants also discussed their perception of the power of the supervisor. The power of the supervisor to say yes or no is huge. As Donna (GC) shared:

I’m usually told that I can’t be spared to attend workshops. I desperately wanted to attend a training workshop that lasted for a few hours over four days. My supervisor said I could not possibly be out [of the office] that much time. I feel there are a lot of stumbling blocks for staff from their direct supervisor, and no one seems to do anything about it. A lot of supervisors go out of their way to thwart any chance staff have for growth.

This power of the supervisor to say no can pose a significant underlying structural problem with the consistency in policy implementation. Although overall college policies might encourage professional development, leaving policy interpretation and practice to the discretion of the supervisor can be problematic and lead to blatant acts of favoritism and discrimination. At Gray College, the training program Donna mentions is open to all staff members and is supported by the college. However, it states online that participants must obtain approval from their supervisor to attend. Therefore, supervisors hold the key to access. This phenomenon seems to be a larger issue for classified staff, as professional staff tend to have a bit more freedom in their ability to participate in out-of-office activities. As Grace (BP) echoed:

For many of the classified staff, their supervisors don’t seem to see the importance of professional development and providing opportunities for
advancement. A lot of classified staff I have spoken with say that they see the glass ceiling, and they are permanently stuck under it. They don’t get to go to conferences, take training or earn certificates. I know one staff person who pays for her own training because her supervisor refuses to support it.

It appears that for many of the classified staff at Brown and Gray Colleges they are limited both by opportunities they have available to them and also by the opportunities in which they are allowed to participate. As Grace noted, this is not the case for every department and every supervisor. Some supervisors are very supportive and encourage their staff to participate in training and even pay for off-campus training opportunities. For example, Helen (BC) said, “My supervisor is really great about training. Anytime you want to better yourself, she is all for it.” Kelly (GC) also said, “My supervisor, for the most part, is supportive of attending training.”

Unfortunately, Dana’s (BC) experience was far from positive:

My supervisor told me that I could not attend a professional conference unless I was presenting. Well, I found out that my department is sending a professional staff member, who happens to be male, to this conference and he is not presenting. That is a double standard.

When I asked Dana to talk a little more about this, she said that this was a new department rule that the director implemented to help with funding issues. There are, of course, no written rules regarding this departmental policy, it is simply left up to the supervisor. The fact that Dana was told she could not attend the conference because she was not presenting while a professional male colleague, who was also not presenting, was allowed to attend the conference, is a strong demonstration of the power of the supervisor
to pick and choose who receives a privilege. This experience also addresses the issue of rank and gender. Dana was a classified staff member and the male colleague was professional. Therefore the male professional staff member received an advantage over the female classified staff member, highlighting the significance and intersection of gender and position along with the power of the supervisor.

It was clear by participant responses that they believe supervisors hold a lot of power for creating a supportive or non-supportive climate. The power of the supervisor to say yes or no seemed to have a powerful impact on participants overall perceptions of climate in both their departments and also the colleges as a whole. Participants who had a more supportive supervisor had, for the most part, more positive things to say about the college overall. In contrast, participants who felt their supervisors did not support them had a very negative perception about the college overall. Therefore, supervisors have a vital role in staff’s perception of organizational climate, and for this study, that overall perception is negative.

The perception of an *us vs. them* mentality is described below. Participants’ opinion of a clear distinction between classified and professional staff further highlights the perception of a non-supportive institutional climate.

*Us vs. them.* Participants feel there is a clear distinction between professional and classified staff and referred to this distinction as *us vs. them.* Participants also noted that this *us vs. them* mentality was the result of a caste system created by a climate of superiority. This caste system seems to support Kanter’s (1977) idea of behavior as “a function of position in a network of hierarchical relations” (p. 427). Participants, even the professional staff, felt that classified employees are seen as workers and not thinkers,
have less access to training and professional development, and have access to even less advancement opportunities. Over time, this caste system has created deeply imbedded feelings of resentment and ill-will between classified and professional staff. To highlight some of the tangible differences, in particular, benefits, between classified and professional staff, Table 6 provides a breakdown of annual leave, and Table 7 provides a breakdown of sick leave. These are inserted to show that there are significant differences in the benefits the two categories of employees receive, increasing the perception participants have of *us vs. them*. While it may easily be argued that benefits are not a reason for differences in the way employees are treated and perceived, participants in this study felt that the benefit differences were one way those in higher positions exerted authority and another way they were shown preference and privilege over staff in lower positions.

*Table 6: Benefits at a Glance: Annual Leave at Brown and Gray College*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of Service</th>
<th>Per Pay Period</th>
<th>Per Year</th>
<th>Carryover</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&gt;than 5 years</td>
<td>4 hours</td>
<td>96 hours</td>
<td>192 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>5 hours</td>
<td>120 hours</td>
<td>240 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>6 hours</td>
<td>144 hours</td>
<td>288 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 years</td>
<td>7 hours</td>
<td>168 hours</td>
<td>336 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 years</td>
<td>8 hours</td>
<td>192 hours</td>
<td>384 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 or more years</td>
<td>9 hours</td>
<td>216 hours</td>
<td>432 hours</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Professional Staff Annual Leave

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of Service</th>
<th>Per Pay Period</th>
<th>Per Year</th>
<th>Maximum Carryover</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Upon employment</td>
<td>8 hours</td>
<td>192 hours</td>
<td>240 hours at Brown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>288 hours at Gray</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7: Sick and Family/Personal Leave at Gray and Brown Colleges

Classified Staff Sick and Family Leave

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of Service</th>
<th>Sick Leave Per Year</th>
<th>Family/Personal Leave Per Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&gt; than 5 years</td>
<td>64 hours</td>
<td>32 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-9 years</td>
<td>72 hours</td>
<td>32 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 or more years</td>
<td>80 hours</td>
<td>40 hours</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Professional Staff Sick Leave

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of Service</th>
<th>Sick Leave</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Upon hire</td>
<td>120 days at Brown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6 months at Gray</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Both classified and professional staff have the benefit of FMLA (12 weeks of protected unpaid leave)
Classified staff have 6 weeks maternity leave, Professionals have 12.

Many of the classified staff are governed by state rules and regulations regarding sick and personal leave whereas professional staff are governed by college policies.

These differences in benefits are apparent, and have created much tension between the two categories of employees. In addition to the differences in benefits, there is a strong
perception that professional staff are treated as smarter, more capable, and for the most part are given more freedom to come and go in the office. According to Shannon (GP):

There is definitely something of a caste system perpetuated here. Even though I am professional staff, I think classified staff are not seen as capable as professional staff. I’ve seen it. They are looked upon as less intelligent, which is just not true! Also, classified staff need permission from their supervisors to attend training and professional development. Professional staff can pretty much go to whatever they want. This can be problematic if supervisors don’t see the value of sending staff to training, and a lot of them don’t.

It seems ironic that a college would fail to see the benefit in educating and training all employees. Why is the training of one group seen as valuable but the training of another group is not important? One could compare this to the equal access issues that many underprivileged students face when trying to obtain a college degree. Further, one could argue that the difference in treatment between classified and professional staff acknowledges more rules for one group over another, limiting equality for all employees. Although it may appear that the “preferential” treatment of female professional staff over classified staff means these women are not marginalized, in reality, both groups of women are kept down, albeit in different ways.

Rose (GC) noted that in some departments at Gray, professional staff, especially those in higher-level positions, tend to be mentored more, are sent to professional conferences, and receive budget approval for professional memberships. She added that it is “virtually unheard of to send a classified staff member to a conference even if it is applicable to their area of work.”
This *us vs. them* mentality that seems to be created by both the supervisors and the institution as a whole may also be the result of poor training of supervisors. If supervisors were properly trained, likely they would see the benefit in sending all staff members to training and providing mentoring for all staff regardless of classification.

When asked about the differences for professional and classified staff, Grace (BP) said:

In the eyes of the upper-level administration, female classified staff don’t know what they are doing. They are assumed to be less intelligent. But, even administrative assistants, for example, need a college degree. They put that requirement in the job descriptions now. Despite the fact that administrative assistants are hired with college degrees, these jobs are considered low-level, and are at the bottom of the hierarchy. They are low-paid positions, it’s considered women’s work, and there is little opportunity for advancement.

This statement hits on the ratcheting up of credentials. Many entry and lower-level positions like administrative assistants, now require a college degree. However, because jobs like administrative assistants are considered low-level and traditionally women’s work, the salaries for these positions remain stagnant – even though requirements have increased (Truss and associates, 2012, Harlan & Berheide, 1994). Institutions seem to want employees to have certain credentials but these credentials often fail to make a significant difference in pay or advancement opportunities particularly when the positions are considered low-level and primarily women’s work.

Dana (BC) adds:
Classified staff, especially women, are viewed as unable to do certain things. As a female classified staff member, you should know your place. You better not share an idea or overstep your boundaries. I had an idea and I presented it at a staff meeting in my department. No one was interested until a male professional staff member promoted the same idea. Then, all of a sudden it was like, oh yes, we need to implement that. Also, classified staff don’t seem to be able to serve on committees. I asked to serve on a campus-wide committee directly related to my work. I was told that this committee was only for professional staff.

This quote highlights the powerlessness felt by classified staff. From her perspective, Dana’s lack of voice was based both on the fact that she is a woman and that she is in a classified position. The caste system, ultimately a climate of superiority, experienced by participants seems to influence the way they are viewed by both their supervisors and their peers. The same idea presented by a female classified staff member and rejected, while presented by a male professional staff member and embraced, speaks volumes about the intersection of gender and position. It appears that women in low-level positions are not seen as serious contributors to their organizations.

Another issue that feeds the us vs. them mentality is salary disparities. Betsy (BC) shared:

We all know state salaries are public information. Well, that creates even more problems with this caste system we have. For example, the Assistant Director in my area is a classified position. That position pays about $32,000. The Director, which is a professional position, well that person is making $80,000 or more per year. How demoralizing is that?
This statement highlights the significant issues that can arise from obtaining information about others' salaries as it can lead to increased feelings of resentment and isolation from other workers. Having knowledge of other employee's salaries seems to have expanded the divide between classified and professional staff. When I asked Betsy to talk a little more about this, she said that the Assistant Director did more work, and performed work at a much higher level than the Director, but because of the title Director and the professional role, that position is paid significantly more. This reality seems to contribute to the low morale experienced by participants, in particular to the classified participants deepening the wedge between employees.

Throughout the discussion of the caste system with both professional and classified participants, the phrase “power struggles” emerged. The idea of power struggles was not surprising, however, the discussion of the rampant power struggles between professional women and classified women was disappointing. Helen (BC) said, “Women supervisors are the worst. The power and the glory goes straight to their heads!” Participants described this power struggle between the professional and classified women as passive aggressive, underhanded, and covert. According to Sofia (BC):

There is a problem with women trusting other women at Brown. Women don’t treat each other right, and they don’t support each other. I think a lot of women in upper-level positions forget where they came from. They forget how hard they had to work to get where they are. And they don’t want to share their power with other women.
Another possible explanation is that women think, “I had to put up with this and so should you.” Women with this mindset do not make an attempt to change the system, they simply view it as I went through this and now it is your turn, which is discouraging for those still working their way up the ladder.

Betsy (BC) shared her experience:

I found powerful women to be a huge barrier for me. My supervisor made sure that we all knew she was in charge, that she was superior in every way. The Devil Wears Prada comes to mind. Anytime someone did anything that she didn’t like, she would say the person who used to sit in “that chair” had no problem doing it right. Why can’t you do it like “that chair” used to? She also had these mannerisms. She would storm into her office and slam the door. You always wondered if you did something wrong. She used bullying tactics really, even if it was sometimes subtle, it was bullying. She was definitely threatened by other women in our office.

This speaks to the culture for women at the college. It appears that they have to act a certain way to get ahead. They have to be viewed as tough to succeed, as the extant literature describes about women, power and leadership (Glazer-Raymo, 2008).

These “power women” also exist at Gray College. Nancy (GP) shared:

I think supervisors, especially female supervisors, feel threatened when there is an eager woman trying to learn about their job. These power women don’t share information; they are mean and vindictive, aggressive and assertive. You can be aggressive and assertive without being mean and nasty, but these power women,
they aren't. These women take power and the stereotype to the extreme. They make it very difficult for other women to advance.

For women in higher level positions, it seems that these women fear they will not be taken seriously by their male counterparts, and may lose their status and credibility. Further, the impact of gender and the engrained male-dominated hierarchy (Acker, 1990), cannot be ignored. Participants noted that women in higher-level roles have to assert their authority and power over others because they are afraid they will appear weak. These perceptions in combination with the lack of access to information and the lack of overall support led participants to feel that a non-supportive and oppressive climate prevailed.

The next section discusses concerns participants shared about their lack of professional growth opportunities including career advancement options, problems with the hiring process – manifest through insiders vs. outsiders, career progression plans and very little professional development opportunities.

**Professional Growth**

The absence of career advancement opportunities, career progression plans, and very little professional development offerings manifested in the theme of professional growth. Participants as a whole felt that they had little opportunity for professional growth within their current role and within their institutions. Below, the sub-categories of career advancement, career progression and professional development are discussed as they relate to professional growth.

**Career advancement.** Participants shared a common voice about the lack of advancement opportunities available for female staff. All but two of the participants,
who were near retirement, wanted to advance (in this instance to a higher position) in their careers. Participants expressed feelings of discouragement, hopelessness and resentment in regards to the lack of upward mobility opportunities available. Dana (BC) shared:

There is very, very little opportunity for female staff in lower-level positions to advance. We are put in a box and wrapped up tight. It's hard to break that mold. You have to get out of here to get off the sticky floor. I don't see the glass ceiling as an issue for most of the women at Brown because they can't get high enough to see it.

Dana’s frustration about the lack of career advancement opportunities she perceived as available to her is apparent. She felt that as a female classified staff member, she was put in a mold and expected to know her place within the institution. For Dana, her position offered very little room for professional growth.

Patty (BP) supported this by saying:

Women in lower-level positions get so frustrated because they have tried many times to move up and they can't get anywhere. Often they quit fighting and just drift along. I always warn people who want to take a lower-level job here that it's not going to pay very much and it's going to be hard to move up the chain. You will have to crawl on your elbows to advance. For women especially, they are pigeonholed into certain roles. It's very discouraging.

Patty, like Dana believed that women are pigeonholed into certain “women” roles, and become stuck, with little chance to move up professionally. Patty goes so far as to warn potential employees about taking lower-level jobs: the pay is bad and there’s nowhere to
go. For women at the bottom of the hierarchy at Brown, there is the overarching perception that once you are in one of these low-level jobs, you might as well settle in.

For participants at Gray College, the prospects seemed equally bleak. Carrie’s (GP) thoughts supported this:

At Gray, there is very little opportunity to advance, especially if you are a woman. I have applied for numerous higher positions [at Gray] and so have many of my colleagues. I have never even been interviewed. I believe the perception is that we aren’t smart enough to do the work. The only way to advance is to apply for a position outside the college.

Carrie was emphatic about her frustration that she never received an interview for any of the positions she had applied for at Gray. She felt that she never had the chance to shine during the interview process. She noted that most of the positions she applied for were ultimately filled by males. Further, she added that she stopped trying to apply for positions because she became so frustrated and discouraged by the process. Participants from Brown also noted that they stopped applying for on-campus positions because they were never able to get anywhere. Thus, they are essentially opting out before giving themselves a chance. Participants who do seek other opportunities, look elsewhere. Of note, since this study began, Dana, Betsy and Jenny have left Brown College for positions at other colleges. Jenny was fortunate enough to have an outside contact and was able to use this contact to learn about a job opening. This example speaks to the importance of having a network outside of one’s immediate workplace. Having connections in other organizations can provide a vital resource for women when they begin looking for other positions. One suggestion on how to create a network outside of
one's home college or university is to reach out to women at other institutions who have similar roles, or women who have roles you are interested in obtaining. Women can seek the advice of other women, and provide support for each other. This can prove very important when women are feeling stuck, and believe they need to leave their current workplace in order to advance.

Many of my study participants expressed feelings of being stuck in lower-level positions without hope of being promoted unless they choose to leave their place of employment. Rose (GC) said:

I felt stuck before, but now, after participating in this study, I really feel stuck. There are so few advancement opportunities for us women, in these low-level jobs. Even support staff who have completed their bachelor’s and even master’s degree programs, we are still just viewed as support staff. There is little chance that we will move up the hierarchy.

It is clear from participants’ responses that they believe advancement opportunities for female staff are few and far between.

Another topic prevalent in the interview discussions about the lack of career advancement was issues with the hiring process. Participants voiced that positions seemed to be created for certain people and never advertised. Jenny (BP) referred to this group of people as the “chosen ones.” Further, there was much discussion about hiring from the outside instead of promoting from within.

**Hiring process.** Participants discussed several significant issues with the hiring process at both Brown and Gray Colleges. One of the most frustrating problems was the continual promotion of the “chosen ones.” Grace (BP) noted that she has seen positions
created and filled over and over again without ever being advertised, and it is always the same group of people that she sees advancing:

There are certain people, and they are usually White men, they want to move up the ladder. So, a position is created, or an existing position is modified, and these certain people are essentially given the job. Others, who might be better qualified, or who have more service, never even have a chance. The administration doesn’t think that staff notice this kind of thing. But, they do notice. And it really has a significant impact on the way staff feel about the college.

Kelly (GC) added:

We are always hearing about the same people moving from this job to that job, and it gets very frustrating. There are few advancement opportunities already. You already have to wait for someone higher up to retire if you want to try and advance.

It seems from participants’ responses that the continual promotion of the same group of people has a negative impact on employee morale. When the “chosen ones” are continually moved up this process reduces the already limited opportunity for other employees to advance.

Participants also expressed great displeasure at the amount of people who are hired from the outside, further reducing their opportunity for internal advancement, and creating a conflict between insiders and outsiders. Lucy (GP) shared:

For women already in the system, there is very little growth opportunity at Gray. A lot of the women (and there aren’t a whole lot) who have been hired for senior-
level positions, have been hired from the outside. What about those of us who have been here for over 10 years and want to obtain one of these roles? I applied for one of these positions and I was very qualified for the job. But, I didn't even get an interview.

This process was very frustrating for Lucy. She saw an opportunity to move into a senior-level role and believed she fully met the qualifications. In addition, she has been working at Gray College for 10 years and possesses vast amounts of institutional knowledge. Despite all of these elements working in her favor, she never made it to the interview stage. This lack of potential advancement is very demoralizing, and because of this, Lucy has been looking for outside employment.

One of the biggest set of problems that arises from hiring from the outside is salary compression and salary inversion. Salary compression means that new employees are compensated at the same, or almost the same, rate as employees who have been at an institution for a number of years, whereas salary inversion means that new employees in lower-level positions earn more than employees in higher-level positions (Gomez-Mejia & Balkin, 1992). Both processes can wreak havoc on employee morale and create tensions between workers. Grace (BP) confirmed this by adding:

Bringing someone in from the outside, which Brown tends to do a lot, creates a multitude of problems. Mainly, because our salaries are so low, when they bring someone in from the outside, they have to pay them so much more or they wouldn’t take the job. The salaries of the outside hires are significantly more than those of people who have been working here for a long time. This creates feelings of resentment and bitterness among employees.
These feelings of tension and resentment are not unique to Brown. Nancy (GP) reiterated:

It was well known in my department that we had an open position. There are two women who currently work in the exact same position that was vacant. They hired a man from the outside and offered him a salary so much higher than the two women already doing the same work. That created a lot of tension within our department. And that tension is still present.

It is clear that hiring people from the outside and paying them a higher salary than current employees, particularly if they are performing similar duties, can create substantial problems among coworkers. These problems can interfere with job performance and can create an edgy climate, as shown by Nancy’s experience.

There was also great discontent with the amount of time it takes to hire anyone. Betsy (BC) believed this is one of the main reasons it is so difficult for the lower-level workers to advance:

What I finally came to realize within the state system is this: it is such a difficult process to hire someone and actually get them into the seat. To actually hire someone and get them working in a position can take 3-4 months. Think about that. If you have an opening, and you promote from within, then you have another open position, and you can be understaffed for almost a year. What a horrible process. I finally got that. I was a critical worker bee and I was just out of luck getting promoted.

In addition to Betsy’s revelation about offices not being fully staffed for about a year if they promote from within, she also addresses a new set of issues for people on the
bottom: they don’t advance because they are seen as so critical in their position that they are indispensable. This seems to contradict the perceptions of the majority of participants who feel that they are not promoted because they are not valued and are not seen as capable of performing important work. For Betsy, this revelation seemed to take some of the sting out of never being promoted, but not enough for her to remain in that lower-level position, as she has sense left Brown. Patty (BP) added that to hire anyone in the state system “Takes the better part of an ice age.” This statement as well as the other discussions about the hiring process indicates structural and procedural issues, imbedded within the hiring process that create significant barriers for employees seeking advancement.

Career progression plans. In addition to the overall lack of advancement opportunities seemingly available to study participants, a lack of career progression planning at both the individual level and institution-wide was cited as one of the reasons advancement is so difficult. Participants felt that for women, especially those in lower-level positions, there is a lack of career planning. Further, participants felt strongly that career mapping was a much needed addition in human resources. The lack of career planning was discussed both as an institutional problem and as an issue with direct supervisors. Rose (GC) said:

At Gray College, there seems to be a career track for higher-level professionals. They have career progression plans and something to aspire towards even if they are unable to advance. For example, they can progress from Assistant Director to Associate Director, and finally Director. Faculty have a path as well from adjunct
all the way to Professor Emeritus. There is absolutely no career progression for female classified staff. There is no structure in place and no guidance for us.

Helen (BC) also noted that there are no programs in human resources to help with career planning, and she receives no assistance from her direct supervisor. Many participants felt that there was no investment in staff career planning and for many, when they tried to discuss these topics with their supervisor, they received little to no help. Dana (BC) said:

I tried to talk to my supervisor about moving into another position. I talked to him about wanting to advance and having a career plan. He was very disinterested in having that conversation with me. He was no help at all.

Conversations like these seemed to be frequent among participants, leading to feelings of discontent and frustration. There was a clear sense of discouragement and feelings of being stuck in their current positions with little chance of advancing.

**Professional development.** One of the most discussed topics under professional growth was professional development. Some participants, especially those from Gray, felt that there were opportunities for training (for example, computer programs, some online software training) but both colleges seemed to lack in meaningful, relevant professional development. Nancy (GP) shared her thoughts on the lack of professional development:

Gray lacks focused and useful campus-wide professional development for female staff. I have seen plenty of men in similar professional positions who have access to professional development off-campus, but women, not so much. What I really need to advance, including supervisory and leadership training, is not available to me. It is very discouraging. It’s not seen as important for me to have access to
this type of professional development. I do however, by nature of my position, have the opportunity to present at various conferences, which is great. But, I need access to other types of training.

As Nancy stated, the type of professional development she feels is important for her to advance professionally, is not viewed as important by her institution. While Nancy was grateful for the ability to present at conferences, she felt that in order to make any real strides in her desire for career advancement, she needed leadership development skills. In my search of Gray’s website for professional development, I did see an existing leadership program in place, however this program was only open to existing employees in senior management. Gray does however offer a leadership development certificate that is open for all employees. Thus, there seems to be a disconnect between what Nancy was telling me and what seemed to be available. I asked her about this and she said that this was a year-long weekly program, you had to attend all sessions in order to receive the certificate, and she was not able to devote an entire year to a certificate program. In addition, she said this was really geared more for classified staff, and when she looked into the program it did not suit her needs. Therefore, even though Gray offered one program that she could have participated in, the program was not geared for her career development needs.

For women at Brown, there seemed to be even less opportunity for professional development. Patty (BP) noted:

We are really lacking in on-campus professional development and training. Any professional development I have participated in has been external. The college offers very, very little training and development for low-level employees. This is
very important to employees, and I hope that Brown will realize this and try to improve.

In the website analysis, I noticed that Brown does seem to be lacking in the types of professional development participants indicate that they want. For the majority of participants at Brown, they were seeking opportunities that provided them knowledge, skills and abilities for leadership and professional advancement. There appears to be very little offered in these areas for the vast majority of employees. That being said, participants said that Brown was trying to improve and that they were starting to see a few more offerings for staff. Of note, many of the offerings that are available at Brown are restricted to supervisors or others in leadership type roles seemingly preventing a large percentage of employees from gaining adequate skills for advancement.

Gloria (BP) expressed her dismay at the lack of professional development and training:

When I first came to Brown, I was shocked at the lack of professional development opportunities. We are slowly improving, but we have a long way to go. At my former college, we were given a booklet of available professional development and training opportunities, and professional development was such a priority, it was mandatory. I wish I had checked on that before accepting a position here. I’m not sure I wouldn’t have taken the job, but it might have made me think twice.

Gloria’s comment addresses the potential differences in college climates. At her previous college, which was in another state, professional development was valued and even mandated. When she came to Brown, she was very disappointed in the lack of
professional development offerings and even had regrets about taking her current job as a result.

Betsy (BC) was able to participate in some professional development opportunities and conferences but she felt it was really more of an after-thought:

I did get some opportunities for professional development, but by default. It was only because the Director and the Assistant Director were unable to attend. The only reason I was considered for these opportunities was because someone above me bowed out. I was never their first choice; it was almost like first loser up.

However, Betsy did say that she benefited greatly from attending these conferences because she was able to network with other women in her area from around the country. She said, “After doing this, I realized that I am good at what I do, and I can make it in this world.” So, even though she may have not been the first choice for attending, it benefitted her personally and professionally.

The final theme of the good old boy’s network described the perception that the male norm dominates higher education and that the concept of the ideal worker (Williams, 2000) reigns. Indicative here of the male norm is in the name itself. Good old boy’s network implies that this is the ideal group of association.

Good Old Boy’s Network

Although participants agreed women have made great strides in higher education, they acknowledged it is still very much a man’s world. Participants reported an array of differences in the treatment of and opportunities available to women and men including pay disparities, advancement opportunities, and location on the hierarchy. Helen (BC)
reported that at Brown College men are given extra nudges, and can advance much easier. Sofia (BC) said:

There is definitely a good old boy's network at Brown. There are still a lot of men on campus who think that women are not as smart, should not be working, and are less deserving. Women have to fight for everything. It is much easier for men to advance than women. I have a perfect example. I have a friend who has worked at Brown for 15 years. A White male came into her department, hired from the outside, and was very quickly promoted, given a much higher salary, and given the title that she really should have had. They are both equally qualified to do the work, and she had even been doing the work until they brought him in. Now, he is moving on up the ladder, and she is still stuck in the same position making the same amount of money. That is just not right.

This quote touches on many of the aspects of inequity previously discussed: salary compression and inversion, promotional opportunities, and the power of the supervisor. Sofia's friend seemed to be the victim of gender bias. The supervisor used their power to hire a White male and give him the title and salary a woman deserved. I asked Sofia about the supervisor, and he is a White male. Sofia's quote also addresses the advancement process at Brown as influenced by both gender and race. As noted earlier in the findings, the "chosen ones" are often hoisted up the ladder very quickly. As Acker (1990) said, "Managers' decisions often initiate gender divisions and organizational practices maintain them" (p. 146).

In Jenny's (BP) view:
My department is a paternalistic, sexist work environment. The person in charge of my area is a male, and whenever he starts talking about projects, he’s talking to the men. I am doing the same work, and in fact, I am doing the work of my former supervisor, a male, who recently left. No one acknowledges that I am actually doing this work. Instead of coming to me, they go to the male that I supervise. It’s a clear refusal to acknowledge me, to acknowledge the structure that was already in place. I know it is because I am a woman.

In addition to the lack of respect given to women in typical male roles, participants felt there was an obvious difference in the number of men in lower-level positions. (See Chapter 3, Figures 7 & 9 for actual statistics). As evidenced by the statistics presented in Figures 7 and 9, there are more women in lower-level positions at both Brown and Gray Colleges. Patty (BP) said, “There are these older White males who rule the roost, and they still have these sexist attitudes. And, for whatever reason, a lot of people are still very beguiled by men in suits.” Further, Carrie (GP) said that men at Gray College are promoted quicker, allowed to attend more professional development, and have access to mentors and networking that women are not privy to. These experiences support the ideal of Acker’s (1990, 2006) gendered organization. As Acker described (1990, 2006) gendered organizations divide women and men by labor, permissible behavior, images and interactions. For Jenny, interactions between her and co-workers, both male and female, seem to be based on gender lines. It appears that her co-workers dismiss Jenny’s position of authority, especially since that role was previously held by a male. As Patty noted, the presence of men in suits addressed Acker’s (1990) discussion about images
that reinforce the male norm. Men in suits are associated with power and success reinforcing the concept of “forceful masculinity” (Acker, 1990, p, 146).

After listening to the participants discuss the good old boy’s network, I would argue that gender bias seemed to be more of an issue at Brown College than at Gray College. While gender bias existed at Gray College, participants seemed to be more impacted by gender at Brown. In my view, it seems that the influence of a previous woman president at Gray likely altered the culture and climate at the university making it more favorable towards women. Brown has never had a female president or a president of color, and therefore has always been under the rule of the male norm. It would be interesting to see if, in a few years under the leadership of another male president at Gray, the climate reverses to be once again less favorable for women.

Summary

Overall, the participants in this study feel that their access to professional development, information, important work, and advancement opportunities are directly impacted by their gender and position. There were some differences between the experiences of female staff at Brown College and at Gray College which extended across position lines as well as institution lines.

The main findings of this study show that female staff in positions at the lower-levels of the hierarchy feel they work in non-supportive environments where they receive little support from the institution as a whole. Further they felt that they are not privy to important information needed to perform their job duties. The power of the supervisor holds a strong key to a supportive or non-supportive work environment. The majority of women in this study felt that their supervisor was not supportive of their desire to
advance professionally and their desire to take advantage of professional development opportunities.

The strong sense of *us vs. them* was one of the main takeaways from this study. This mentality seemed to stem from the caste system created by a climate of entitlement, particularly at Brown College. Instead of women feeling they were a united front working together to combat imbedded gender bias, there was an overwhelming aura of division among these employees. This was apparent in participants' descriptions of power women, and the lack of support women seemed to show for each other.

Lack of professional growth and career advancement were also points of contention for the study participants, as were the hiring process and the lack of career progression plans. Finally, the notion of the ideal worker as described by the good old boy’s network showed the divisions of labor, behavior and interactions based on gender lines.

The following model (see Figure 16) highlights the interactions of several constructs which ultimately create barriers for advancement of women lower in the hierarchy. The overarching organizational culture and climate creates a context in which the various factors operate. The power of the supervisor, institutional policies and practices, and the good old boy’s network all contribute to a cycle of factors that make advancement very difficult for female staff. Supervisors exert power through their ability to say yes or no, to show favoritism, or to act in sexist discriminatory ways. Female supervisors are often labeled queen bees, sometimes justifiably, but these women leaders are also subject to gendered expectations of leadership and are often just as victimized by the male norms infused in institutions. Institutional practices and policies create a stifling, competitive climate for female staff-both professional and classified- and
institutions often fail to invest in their people. Advantages seem to be given to males when it comes to advancement, mentoring, salary increases and opportunities. Female staff often find themselves judged by their appearance, requiring that they subscribe to an ideal look, and are often measured by male norms of the ideal worker. The nexus of the intersection of these individual barriers create an environment rife with challenges for the advancement of women staff.

Figure 16: Visual Model of Findings
Case Study Comparisons

This section provides a cross comparisons of the four different cases in this study: classified staff at Brown College and Gray College; professional staff at Brown College and Gray College; classified and professional staff at Brown College; and classified and professional staff at Gray College. Similarities and differences between colleges and positions are discussed.

Classified at Brown College and Gray College

This section reviews the comparison between classified staff at Brown, and classified staff at Gray. Classified participants held positions ranging from administrative assistants and finance managers to program coordinators. Most of their work descriptions were similar even at the two different colleges. Classified staff at both colleges felt there was a lack of institutional support, and that their group of employees are viewed as less capable than professional staff of performing meaningful and challenging work. While staff at both colleges agree there is a significant lack of overall support, participants from Gray College seem to have more positive experiences with their direct supervisors. This speaks to the differences in university cultures, and also speaks to the power of the supervisor. Connie (GC) shared:

I feel that I have good support from my direct supervisor. I think that I have better support than most of the female staff on campus. The college as a whole offers very little support for female staff. It is very discouraging, but I am lucky to work in my particular department.

The classified staff at Brown College report less positive experiences with their direct supervisors. Betsy (BC) said:
I was asked by my supervisor to sit in a few times at meetings when she was unable to attend. But, it was made very clear that I should not say anything. I was told just to sit there and not to ask any questions. It was obvious to me that she felt I had nothing to contribute. I think that is the overall consensus about classified staff – they have nothing of value to contribute. Supervisors seem to perpetuate this sentiment.

Helen (BC) described the morale at Brown as being, “At an all-time low for classified staff. And I have been here for almost 20 years. Supervisors are definite contributors to this low morale.” The phrase low morale was mentioned in all five of the classified staff interviews at Brown. This low-morale seems to be a reflection of the lack of support classified staff felt, as well as a reaction to the caste system perpetuated between professional and classified staff members.

Classified staff at Brown College and Gray College, perceive that professionals have more flexibility to “come and go as they please.” Classified staff felt that if they were even five minutes late, they had to make up the time, and that supervisors tended to be clock watchers when it came to classified staff. It was also noted that professional staff also seem to have the flexibility to work from home. This job perk too, is a result of the power of the supervisor. While Gray College actually had a policy in place for telecommuting for classified staff, it is left up to the discretion of the supervisor who can participate. Brown College did not have a specific policy regarding telecommuting, but again, the supervisor had the power to pick and choose who is allowed to take advantage of this benefit.
Classified staff at Gray were very enthusiastic about their ability to take for-credit classes and utilize the tuition reimbursement program. Donna (GC) shared, “I am so grateful for the ability to go to school here and study for my Bachelor’s Degree.” Anna (GC) voiced the same positive experience about being able to take classes. Classified staff at Brown, however, had a different perspective. Helen (BC) said:

One of our “benefits” is the ability to take classes. However, there are so many classified staff who are not permitted to take classes during the day. A lot of our staff would like to earn an Associate’s Degree, or a Bachelor’s Degree. I am one class shy of my Associate’s Degree. But, the policy is such that an employee can’t be a degree seeking student and take one class per year in the undergraduate program. Well, if you have to work full-time, and the classes are during the day, and supervisors won’t let you leave for an hour a few days week to take classes, then how are you supposed to utilize this benefit? They make it very difficult for classified staff to take advantage of this. And, another thing, we can’t take courses at another college and use the tuition benefit. Why can’t we take classes at a local community college, for example? Community colleges have a lot of evening classes, which wouldn’t interfere with work. This seems like a sensible solution.

Helen’s description once again leads back to the power of the supervisor – they have the power to permit or deny. Her comments also led me to more deeply examine college policies on tuition reimbursement and assistance. During my review of the colleges’ websites, I discovered that there are some differences in the policies for tuition assistance at Gray College and Brown College. Gray College allows classified staff to
take advantage of the assistance program at other schools, while Brown College only allows classes to be taken there. Also, Gray College offers tuition assistance to children and spouses of employees. This perk is not offered at Brown. Classified staff are allowed essentially the same number of classes per year, 16 credit hours per year at Brown, and 15 credit hours per year at Gray. Gray College places an income cap on the ability to participate in the assistance program, whereas Brown has no income cap. However, the cap at Gray College is $89,000, so this would not impact the vast majority of classified staff. The policies at both colleges state that time away from work to attend classes must be approved by the supervisor, and employees are subject to the same admission requirements and standards as students. While the tuition assistance benefit is offered to classified staff at both colleges, it seems that Gray College offers more flexibility in the utilization of this benefit.

Classified staff shared similar concerns about childcare and family issues. Participants felt that they had little access to affordable and convenient childcare. In fact, participants at Brown expressed how difficult it is to get their child into the on-campus childcare center, and noted that the cost was, for some, more than their monthly mortgage. Participants at Gray noted similar issues with childcare. Many of them had difficulties when a child was ill. Some of the supervisors made it very difficult for women in classified positions to take time off to care for a sick child. Again, this refers back to the power of the supervisor.

Classified staff at both colleges have a bleak outlook on advancement opportunities. None of the participants feel that they have a chance of advancing within their institutions. The shared sentiment is that classified staff have no career progression
or career mapping, and are typecast into “women’s roles,” and essentially stuck in their positions. Most of the staff said they have tried to advance to no avail.

The next comparison is between professional staff at Brown College and professional staff at Gray College. The comparison of the professional participants brought to light an interesting perspective on the overall composition of the colleges.

**Professionals at Brown College and Gray College**

Participants held positions ranging from Academic Advisor to Communications Manager to Systems Engineers. These positions covered a wide range of departments on each campus and held various responsibilities. Below, the similarities and differences are discussed, but one difference that was highlighted several times by participants at Brown College is the factor of race. When discussing the factor of race, participants are coded below to indicate White (W), African American (AA), or other (O). Although this study does not focus on race, women and minorities share similar experiences of discrimination, and a female minority can experience double discrimination. Race is a strong and viable factor to consider when examining issues with organizational hierarchies, which “create power and divide opportunity” (Kanter, 1977, p. 259).

Jenny (BPAA) shared her perception of race issues at Brown College:

There are a lot of racial disparities on this campus. There are very few people of color in my department and when you do see people of color, especially women of color, for the most part you see them in jobs like housekeeping. We have one administrator of color in my area, an African American male.

Grace (BPAA) reiterated this:
If you look at racial and gender diversity, we get 90% of our diversity from our housekeeping staff. The higher you go on the organizational chart, in terms of race and gender, we really lack in diversity. There is a lot of racial and gender discrimination that goes on here, much of it is covert, but it's there.

Figure 10 (see Chapter 3, p. 80) provides the breakdown of professional positions by race at Brown. It is clear that there are definite racial disparities in this area. Eighty-seven percent of those who hold professional positions are White.

Gloria (BPO) added that opportunities for women at the lower-level of the hierarchy, and especially women of color, were very bleak. The topic of race was not discussed by participants at Gray, seemingly because there are notably more people of color working on that campus. As Figure 14 (see Chapter 3, p. 83) shows, 71% of professionals at Gray are White, and almost 30% are African American or another race. The difference in representation between the two institutions highlights the context that creates the racial issues noted by participants at Brown that do not seem prevalent at Gray. To collaborate the statistical data, during my visit to Gray College, I saw more people of color on campus compared to Brown College.

Like classified staff, one similarity of note between professionals at Brown College and Gray College was the issue of childcare. There were difficult choices facing participants regarding family and career. Below, participants are coded with a (C) if they have children. Fourteen of the twenty study participants indicated that they had children. Grace (BPC) said:

Women have to choose between work and family, while most men don't have to make those choices. Women make a lot of career choices based on family. For
example, they delay starting a career, they stop working to have children, and sometimes they won’t take a certain job because of their family. It is just really hard for women. They are torn between work and family. It’s just a never ending struggle.

Gloria (BP) shared:

Women are expected to be the family caregivers right? Brown College, for the most part, seems to want workers with little outside obligations in higher-level positions. That is my observation and I have also talked with other women who have children. So, women are delegated into lower positions with less important work. Work life balance is unheard of here. You are looked down upon if you need to take time off for your family even though as a woman, you are expected to be the caregiver. It’s a catch 22.

Professionals at Gray College shared very similar sentiments. Nancy (GPC) said:

As primary caregivers, women have to consider a lot of different aspects about a job than men. Having a family plays a role in the type of jobs women take and who they work with. It definitely impacts career choices. And for the most part, these are choices men don’t have to make because there is a woman filling that role for them. I do want to advance, but now that I have a child I have to think about the type of job and department I would work in. What if my next job refused to let me take off when he was sick? It is very hard when you have to decide between your family and your career.

The participants noted that childcare requirements created barriers for them in their careers, in particular when considering new positions. This barrier can be linked directly
back to the concept of gendered organizations (Acker, 1990, 2006) and the male norm. Women with outside obligations such as family, are placed in a less desirable status for achieving a high-ranking position, and family obligations also play a large role in the positions they are willing to take. Further, some women choose to stay in a lower-level position because of family obligations as they may be unwilling or unable to relocate to take a higher position.

Another commonality between professionals at Brown College and Gray College is the desire for more mentoring and networking. It is interesting to note that classified women did not indicate the desire for more mentoring and networking, although they shared an equal desire for professional development. The type of professional development desired by classified staff was more skills based. Gloria (BP) said:

There are virtually no networking opportunities for women. We do have a women’s group, but I think many women are not comfortable attending some of those meetings. I’m not sure they feel it is for all women, even though it is supposed to be. We need to offer more opportunities that empower women. We all share similar concerns and we all need to be encouraged to be more engaged and involved on our campus.

The power of Gloria’s quote is that it touches on several issues that seem to be barriers for women. First, the lack of opportunity, which is a structural barrier. Next, women feel excluded as noted by the fact that many women are not comfortable attending some of the women’s group meetings. This exclusion can be a structural or a personal barrier. It can be structural if the meetings are held in such a way that they create an unwelcoming environment and it can be personal if someone feels they are not welcome based on
personal perception rather than on an actual experience. Another structural barrier for
women can be the time of day these meetings take place. Lucy (GP) said:

There are a few networking opportunities on campus for women, but I really don’t
have time to take advantage of them. I think that is the case for a lot of women.
They don’t have time to participate, or their supervisors won’t let them take time
away from work to attend.

Lucy’s statement shows both structural and personal barriers. The structural barriers
include meetings during the workday, and the power of the supervisor to say no. The
personal barrier is that she said she does not have the time to take advantage of the
opportunities. She is placing a personal restriction on herself. While she certainly has
much work to do, if networking was a priority for her, she could make the time to attend
a few of the meetings and programs offered. However, the structural barrier of time of
day may truly be prohibitive for many female professionals.

The next two comparisons examine similarities and differences between the two
institutions, shedding light on the experiences of classified and professional women at
Gray College and classified and professional women at Brown College. This section
provides an overall sense of the institutional climates.

**Classified and Professionals at Gray College**

Classified and professional staff at Gray shared similar sentiments and
experiences reporting the overall institutional climate as demeaning for women.
Professional staff made more reference to the sexist attitudes of males in higher-level
positions exerting male dominance and power. A likely reason for this is that many of
the professional women in my study hold positions that were traditionally held by men.
The men may feel threatened by women encroaching onto their “turf” and therefore they act in chauvinistic ways towards women. Classified staff did not seem to experience the same type of sexism that professional women did, likely because their jobs are traditionally considered “women’s jobs.” However, being clustered into “women’s jobs” and being considered incapable of more challenging work, is a manifestation of gender bias. Classified staff also shared more positive experiences with their direct supervisors than professionals, but noted that their experiences were the exception not the rule. A common voice was created when asked about the treatment of and opportunities available to professional staff compared to classified staff. Rose (GC) said:

Professional staff, especially those in the higher-level roles, tend to be more respected across campus and have more opportunities to attend conferences than classified staff. I see professionals having ample opportunity to take classes, attend workshops, and participate in all professional development and career related venues. Also, professional staff are asked to sit on committees, while classified staff are very rarely asked to serve on committees.

Anna (GC) said, “For the most part, the professionals, and in particular the higher-ups are more highly regarded and valued than those of us in classified roles.” Although Lucy (GP) is in a professional position, she agreed that there is a significant distinction between professional staff and classified staff. In particular, she noted, “Low-level professional staff don’t have much room for advancement, but classified staff have even less.”

While professionals and classified staff acknowledged the existence of power women at Gray College, professionals seemed to be more impacted by this group. This
distinction might be a direct result of the location on the hierarchy and the increased
interactions many professional women have with the “power” women. Nancy (GPC)
said:

Gray has an issue with women who get higher-level positions. A lot of the staff
who work for these power women are completely stressed out, especially over
family issues. These power women either don’t have children, or they have
grown children, and they don’t remember what it was like to have to deal with a
sick child.

Lucy (GP) commented:

There are women at Gray known as power women. I think that these women
influence other women in seeking promotions. I would argue that a lot of women
are afraid of being seen as too aggressive if they actively seek out promotions.
Thus, the “power” women act like men by being aggressive, and many women do not
want to be viewed this way. However, what may be assumed by the choice of not
actively seeking out promotions is that one is perfectly happy in their current role. Not
actively seeking out positions and hoping that someone will recognize their good work
and reward it seems to be a personal barrier that many women create for themselves. I
argue that this barrier, though a personal one, is heavily influenced the societal
perceptions and expectations that women should sit quietly and not make waves.

Another factor that was discussed frequently by the women at Gray College was
the opportunity to take advantage of tuition reimbursements. However, the benefit is
different depending on whether an employee is classified or professional. Classified staff
members have the option of taking courses at other colleges, while professionals must
take courses at Gray. When I asked if the participants knew why this stipulation was placed on professionals, they indicated that they had no idea. This differentiation also seems contradictory, as more restrictions have typically been placed on classified staff as a whole, whereas this is a restriction for professionals. Also, professionals are limited to 9 credit hours per year, while classified staff are allowed up to 15 credit hours per year. This difference created some frustration among Gray professionals who wanted to take more than the allotted nine credit hours, or who wanted to take courses at another institution. As previously mentioned, Gray places an $89,000 salary cap on the ability to participate in the tuition assistance program. While this is very unlikely to impact classified staff, it might impact some professionals. However, none of the participants in this study mentioned being impacted by the salary cap. What might be assumed then is that classified staff are going to take courses at a community college toward an Associate’s Degree or a Bachelor’s Degree, and professional staff are going to take courses at Gray working toward a graduate or professional degree. This assumption is placed on staff members by the institution and the policies they create surrounding tuition reimbursement.

Overall, professional and classified staff at Gray shared many of the same feelings, concerns and barriers. Both groups acknowledged the caste system, feelings of being devalued, the lack of advancement opportunities, little institutional support, and the impact that gender and gendered organizational structures can have on women’s career choices and opportunities.

Classified and Professionals at Brown College
The final comparison examines the experiences of professional and classified staff at Brown College. Participants from both groups felt very discouraged by their lack of institutional and supervisory support, their opportunities to advance, and the lack of meaningful professional development. While both groups felt disadvantaged by their positions, classified staff felt that they were further disadvantaged by the perpetuation of the caste system, as classified roles are typically found at the lowest-levels of the hierarchy. Dana (BC) shared:

Supervisors withhold information from classified staff so that we won't know what's going on. It really makes you feel inadequate. Also, classified staff are not allowed to make decisions. We aren't smart enough for that. I was put in charge of a project, and I made some decisions based on the authority I thought I had. Well, my supervisor found out that I was making decisions without consulting him, and I was made to feel less than gum on the bottom of a shoe.

Dana's experience reifies the lack of support that many of the participants (both classified and professional) felt and shared. The classified staff in particular felt that they are the lowest of the low and have very little decision making abilities. Dana tried to make a decision that she thought she had the authority to make. However, her supervisor (professional male) who likely felt threatened by her exertion of power reacted accordingly.

Participants, both classified and professional, expressed their frustrations with the continual promotion of the same group of people. Helen (BC) said:

There's this certain group of people, who are already in pretty high positions, that Brown keeps moving up the ladder. Every time you turn around, someone from
this group is getting a new title and more money. That is very frustrating and
discouraging for the rest of us.

This frustration about the same people constantly moving up was part of the
larger discussion about a lack of advancement opportunities and the definite existence of
a good old boy's network further limiting opportunities for women. Both groups also
agreed that despite their attempts and desire to advance professionally, it would not
happen for them at Brown College.

The next section shows how the findings reported in this study helped to answer
the two research questions: 1.) How do classified and professional staff perceive
organizational climate and what is the impact of climate and gender on their ability to
advance professionally? and 2.) How does organizational structure impact female
classified and professional staff's ability to advance professionally?

Findings and Research Questions

Research question one: How do female classified and professional staff
perceive organizational climate and what is the impact of climate and gender on
their ability to advance professionally?

The participants in this study consider the overall organizational climate as
stifling and disheartening for women. The climate was described as non-supportive and
oppressive for women, particularly for women at the lowest-levels of the hierarchy. They
perceive the climate as more favorable to men, particularly White men, and believe that
men have more opportunity for professional development, receive higher salaries, and
have a much greater chance for advancement. Lorrie (BC) supported this by sharing:
Men are promoted more frequently and are paid higher salaries. In fact, recently there was a male in my department and he was in a lower-level position. He was quickly promoted, given a new title and a raise and he now makes more than the women who have been here for over 7 years.

Overall, participants felt that men still have the upper hand, and as Anna (GC) said, “Are still looked to as the figures of authority.”

Participants also felt that their supervisors held the key to their perceptions of the overall climate. For example, Anna (GC) noted:

The way I feel about Gray has a lot to do with where I work. My department is very supportive. While I do think Gray has a lot of room for improvement with support as an institution my department and supervisor are very supportive.

For other participants, their supervisors were not supportive and even seemed to create a hostile environment. For example, Lucy (GP) said:

I am often forgotten about even though I do great work for my department. Last year I received a very prestigious award in my field and no one even mentioned it. My supervisor barely even acknowledged that I received it. I was so disappointed. It wasn’t that I was seeking recognition, but I just expected them to say or do something. That is my fault I guess. I should have tooted my own horn.

For Lucy, she failed to receive any recognition for a special achievement. This lack of recognition seems to speak volumes about the type of climate supervisors can create. The power of the supervisor is a strong element in organizational climate.

The intersection of climate and gender was manifest through interactions not only between women and men, but also between women and women. Of note, was the
discussion about women's appearance, and the way this can impact their ability to advance. Betsy (BC) shared her experience:

When I talked with my direct supervisor, and a few other women above me in my department about applying for a job, I was told I could apply if I wanted to but, they didn't really think I looked the part. I tried for the longest time to figure out what that meant. Then they gave me the name of someone who they feel looks the part. Well, she is 15 years younger than me and about 50 pounds lighter. So if what you are telling me is that I am too old and too fat, then I guess I don't look the part. If this is the case, then I will never advance.

The power of Betsy's supervisor to create an intimidating climate is clear. Her supervisor essentially told her that she would never advance because she could not meet the standards of the ideal look. Betsy said that this made her extremely uncomfortable and brought even more tension to her work environment. This was not unique to Brown. Nancy (GP) shared:

Appearance is a huge issue for women. When you are a man, I think it's pretty easy to look nice. They wear a black suit and tie and they look authoritative and confident. For women it's hard, especially if you are overweight. Power women, well they wear their pencil skirts and high heels, with their hair up in a bun. That is what women are expected to look like at work. There is this expectation for women that is not there for men in regards to appearance. Should I be judged by the merit of my work or the way I dress? I mean, I dress very nice, I just don't wear the female version of a man's wardrobe. Women are really judged
according to their appearance both by men and by other women. This definitely impacts their ability to advance.

Nancy’s quote supports the concept of the ideal look. The ideal look seems to go back to the male norm and the notion of being beguiled by men in suits. If men in suits are deemed powerful and professional, then of course, “power” women who want to get ahead must not only act like a man, but they must also dress like one.

As evidenced by these statements, gender bias and a hostile climate favoring the male ideal, have a direct impact on the ability for women, particularly those at the lower-levels of the hierarchy, to advance professionally. Further, at Brown, the issue of racial discrimination also created an unwelcoming climate for participants.

Research question two: How does organizational structure impact female classified and professional staff’s ability to advance professionally?

Organizational structure also impacts the ability of female staff to advance. This manifests in the lack of career progression planning, issues with the hiring process, a lack of professional development, the lack of support for female staff, and the location of their position on the organizational hierarchy. Gloria (BP) shared:

My position was changed from a classified to professional position but it took Brown over two years to make good on their promise. I was given a new title right away and of course the work, but no money. This really rubbed me the wrong way. I received an offer from another college and that made Brown make it right for me. But, really, you have to get an outside offer for them to keep their word? There are many other people I know of in the same situation. They are promised more money to go along with the additional duties and nothing happens.
This leaves a bad taste in your mouth. We are going to lose a lot of good people that way.

Although Gloria's position was changed to a professional one and she was given a new title and additional job duties, she had to obtain an offer from another university to receive the monetary compensation that she was promised. Clearly there is a structural issue with the promotional process both within the department and within human resources. The fact that it took over two years for her to receive what she earned indicates a significant flaw in the system. Gloria mentioned other women she knows that have had the same experience. They are promised a promotion with more money which never comes to fruition. Gloria at least, had the initiative to seek an outside offer and receive one. Many other women, even if they were to seek an outside offer, may not be as fortunate.

Participants also felt that the lack of professional development opportunities was a significant structural barrier for their advancement. Most participants agreed meaningful professional development that would enhance leadership, supervisory and career building skills would be of the most benefit for women seeking advancement. The overall sense that these experiences were not available to participants either through the lack of offerings by the colleges or because of the power of the supervisor to say no, was seen as a significant barriers to career advancement, particularly for women at the lower-levels of the hierarchy. Further, the power of the supervisor to say no is not only a departmental issue, but it is a larger structural issue for the colleges as a whole. The gap between policy and practice indicates a significant breakdown in the overall structure. While colleges can, and seemingly do, have policies in place that benefit all employees, there is
little benefit garnered by these policies when left to the interpretation and implementation of supervisors who use their power to show favoritism. It appeared from the participants’ responses that nothing is done by these two colleges to address the biases that remain under the radar.

Patty (BP) noted that she felt the “extreme bureaucracy and hierarchy” present at Brown was a huge barrier for women. Study participants felt that they were stuck in lower-level positions, unable to advance because of their gender and their position, which is a direct result of the bureaucratic hierarchy. It was acknowledged by participants that women, especially those in classified positions, were viewed as less intelligent and incapable of handling work that required them to think critically. The two research questions were answered by participants’ perception of the direct impact of the intersection of gender, structure and climate on their ability to advance professionally.

The next section describe the common barriers that participants believed impacted their opportunity for advancement. These barriers describe the intersection of gender, position and education. Also discussed below are the common positives participants felt about working at their respective institutions.

Common Barriers

Participants were asked to describe the main barriers toward their professional advancement. There were three common responses across both colleges and both employee classifications: gender, position, and education. These barriers all intersect to provide further answers to this study’s research questions. The barrier of gender is felt in the good old boy’s network present at both Gray College and Brown College. As
evidenced in Figures 9 and 11 (Chapter 3) the majority of the lower-level classified positions at both Brown and Gray Colleges are held by women.

The barrier of position is greatly intertwined with the barrier of gender, as women find themselves clustered into low-level, low-paying jobs at the bottom of the hierarchy. Finally, education as a barrier can be attributed to both a structural and gender issue. Participants felt that without at least a Bachelor’s Degree, women would not be considered for advancement, particularly to a professional position. There were also many who felt that without a Master’s Degree, women would not be considered for advancement. Table 8 below shows the breakdown of participants’ degrees by classification.

*Table 8: Degrees Held by Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Classified</th>
<th>Professional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associates</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in the table, all the participants in professional positions held at least a Bachelor’s degree with the majority holding advanced degrees. In contrast, 2 of the classified participants held an Associate’s Degree and three have high school diplomas (of note the three with the high school diplomas were among the oldest participants). The participants with the Associate’s and High School degrees indicated that they greatly wanted to obtain a higher degree as did many of the participants with Bachelor’s
Degrees. However, for most, the structure of the tuition reimbursement policy is such that they are not able to take advantage of this benefit. The inability of many of the participants to take classes during the day, or to take classes at other institutions is a significant structural barrier for these women. In addition, participants felt that the same standards are not applied to men and women when it comes to the consideration of an advanced degree for promotions. They noted several men, less educated than their female counterparts, who received a promotion when an advanced degree was a desired qualification for the position.

Common Positives

I asked the participants to describe some positive things about working at Brown and Gray Colleges. It was agreed that health insurance benefits were a big perk. These health benefits can ultimately be described as a form of structural support – though none of the participants described it as such. Although benefits are a very positive aspect of a job, it is important to remember that benefits can create “golden handcuffs.” Employees often cannot risk moving into a position that fails to offer the same level of benefits. In this case, benefits can be seen as a barrier, prohibiting some from seeking another job.

Most participants also had strong sense of job security noting that these colleges do not just arbitrarily get rid of employees. They also enjoyed the casual work environment that higher education tends to provide, enjoyed, for the most part working with their colleagues, and loved working with students. They were all also very grateful to have jobs in today’s economy. That being said, it was evident that these women felt very discouraged by the non-supportive climate and by the lack of opportunity to advance in their careers attributed to both their gender and position.
Summary

The findings of this study show that the ability of women in lower-level positions to advance is impacted by the intersection of gender, position, and the hierarchical structure that limits access, creates a hostile climate, and creates power struggles as employees compete for scarce resources and opportunities. The main themes in this study as described by participants were the lack of support given to both lower-level professional and classified staff; the us. vs. them atmosphere created by the caste system of labeling employees as either classified or professional; the lack of professional growth opportunities; and the good old boy’s network. These themes intersect to show that structure of an organization including position location on the hierarchy, access to professional development, advancement opportunities and information, and the embedded gender bias within these structures have a significant impact on the advancement opportunities for women, especially when they occupy positions at the lowest levels.

The main differences found between Brown College and Gray College involve the overall campus climate which was viewed in a more positive light at Gray College. I argue that this is due to the recent woman president at Gray College who put in place several family-friendly policies and seemed to invest time and effort in creating a more welcoming climate for women. This assertion is based on conversations I had with the Vice President of Human Resources at Gray College as well as participants. Another difference between Gray College and Brown College is the noticeable racial disparity present at Brown College. Brown College is noticeably more White than Gray College. The statistics in Chapter 3 indicate this, and it was also evident to the researcher upon
visiting each campus. Participants (both classified and professionals) at both colleges agreed that professionals were given more privileges than classified staff but the impact appeared more significant at Brown.

Overall, I would argue that the classified women at Gray have the most positive outlook on their college while the classified staff at Brown have the most negative outlook. Professional participants at Gray felt a significant impact of overt sexism that likely due to the fact that most of these women were in roles traditionally occupied by men. Both the classified and professional women at Brown expressed the most displeasure with their colleges. All participants agreed that advancement opportunities were very slim for women, especially if you are in a lower-level position. Therefore, I argue that the structure of organizations and the impact of gender bias on these structures act as significant barriers toward women's advancement in higher education, particularly for those occupying the lowest positions.

The final chapter discusses the findings of this study, making deeper connections to the theoretical frameworks and the existing literature. Also included are recommendations for improving policy and practice, future research, and final thoughts.
Chapter 5
Discussion

Although the voices of the participants highlight their frustrations, the research also points out ways in which supervisors and leaders in higher education can understand better some of the experiences female staff have lived through and can begin to provide changes to the system. When staff feel appreciated in the workplace, they are more motivated and are bigger contributors to the organization (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Thus, the findings and discussion are intended to identify ways to improve work climates for female staff in institutions of higher education.

The findings of this study support Kanter's (1977) structural theory of organizational behavior, namely that female staff in positions located at the lower-levels of the hierarchy have less access to professional development, less access to information and resources, less organizational support, and fewer opportunities for professional growth and advancement. While some of these themes may be supported by previous research, the vast majority of literature focuses on female faculty and administrators. What is missing in the main, but brought to light in this study, are the experiences of women who occupy staff roles in higher education.

Interestingly, the findings show that the lack of advancement, lack of access to professional development, and the lack of support are cross-generational. On the surface, one might think that older female staff would experience these barriers more acutely, and fall victim to age discrimination. As evidenced by this study, Dana (age 29), Sofia (age 66), Nancy (age 31) and Carrie (age 65), for example, all experienced similar barriers of gender discrimination, problems with supervisors, and an unsupportive climate. Further,
the experiences are cross-racial. It appears that both White participants and participants of color experienced similar treatment and similarly lacked advancement opportunities. What seemed to make the difference here was gender and position. Although it may seem that race played a minimal role, I would argue that women of color are further disadvantaged due to the combination of gender and racial disparities. This was evident by participant's discussion that 90% of the racial diversity at Brown is found in the housekeeping and maintenance staff, and 56% of these workers are women.

According to Kanter's (1977) research on organizations, hierarchical structures influence organizational behavior, and those in low-level positions find themselves disadvantaged. Participants in my study, who occupy lower-level staff roles appear to be more adversely affected both by their lack of power and by the power asserted upon them, as Kanter (1977) argued. Critically, in this study participants were impacted by the intersection of gender and position when seeking professional advancement. It appears that the culture and climate that exists at both Brown and Gray Colleges leads participants to feel undervalued by their colleges and underutilized in their departments. The phenomenon of being a female professional and classified staff member at the lowest levels, as described by participants in this study, is one of being perceived as less intelligent, unable to perform difficult and challenging work, and being stuck at the bottom with little opportunity for advancement.

These findings tell us not only how these women feel about themselves, but also illustrate how structure, policies, and practices can perpetuate the gendered organization and the perception of an unsupportive climate fostering feelings of resentment and hostility. The primary themes of this study, as revealed in Chapter 4, are discussed as
unsupportive climate, gendered organizations, and culture change in this chapter, and are further related to theoretical frameworks – Kanter’s (1977) structural theory of organizational behavior, and Acker’s (1990, 2006) theory of gendered organizations. In relating the findings to Acker’s (1990, 2006) concept of gendered organizations, one can see that a gendered organization was manifest in conversations surrounding each of the emerging themes, and in particular, the fourth theme – namely that a good old boy’s network still governs these two colleges.

Without question, there are more women working in higher education and more women in the workplace overall than when Kanter conducted her study at Indsco in the late 1970s. While there are more opportunities for women to move up the pipeline within organizations, as evidenced by the extant literature, women still occupy the majority of positions at the lower-end of the hierarchy, and are paid much less than men occupying similar roles (Acker, 1990, 2006; Allan, 2011; Iverson, 2009). This seems to indicate that although women are allowed to dip their toes in the water, men still control who fully immerse.

**Unsupportive Climate**

As evidenced by many participants’ responses, differences in power, both formal and informal, have an impact on organizational climate and the ability of women in the trenches to advance. I argue that the aspects of climate that are important to identify are those engrained into culture. Climate is malleable in ways that culture is slower to change. Although culture has been discussed to a degree throughout this paper, it has not been directly defined. For the purposes of this discussion, culture is defined as those things within an organization that are valued, what is practiced, and what are the
underlying assumptions, expectations and traditions (Cameron & Quinn, 2006).

Essentially, culture denotes how things are done in the institution, and what employees believe is valued. These beliefs influence employee thoughts, feelings and behaviors (Cameron, 2007) leading to climate perceptions. Culture and climate differ in the respect that culture is slow to change, and is a seemingly fundamental characteristic of an organization. Climate can change and shift depending on circumstances, and involves individual perspectives about an organization (Cameron & Quinn, 2006). An important notion to keep in mind, as Cameron and Quinn (2006) discussed, climate is heavily influenced by culture as traditions and values shape attitudes and opinions.

How might the culture at Brown College and Gray College be defined, and how does the culture impact the participants' perception of climate? The case studies highlight a culture of tradition, a culture of indifference, a culture of disrespect for those in lower positions, and the expectation of 24-7 availability. These cultural expectations seem to be more engrained at Brown College, but are still present at Gray. The culture present at both colleges promotes the perception of a non-supportive and antagonistic climate among female staff, particularly those who work at the lowest-levels.

One way this climate manifests is through the power struggles and the role of the hierarchy, and in particular struggles between women. Participants referred to women in higher level positions as “power women,” adding that these power women are threatened by other women, causing power struggles to increase. While the direct cause of this power struggle is not revealed through this study, participants theorized that women in higher-level positions feel they have to hold onto their power and exert power to be taken seriously and not be viewed as the weaker sex. Further, these “power women” may feel
that because they experienced hostility and resentment while they struggled up the ladder, other women should as well. Not only do these beliefs perpetuate the cycle of keeping the majority of women at lower levels of the organizational hierarchy, it requires women in upper level positions to adopt traditional authoritative leadership approaches as opposed to options that might be more authentic (Acker, 2006).

Participants commented on the strong hierarchical nature of Brown College and Gray College, the us. vs. them mentality, and the resulting caste system this hierarchy tends to create. One can see the influence of power and gender deeply rooted within the organizational structures, which reinforces the culture of power. Gloria (BP) supported this:

The different classifications of employees is ridiculous. You are put into a category and based on that category, there is a clear division of labor. That is not a healthy work environment. Also, when you look at professionals and classified, there really aren’t many men in classified roles. Most of them are in the maintenance or grounds positions, not office workers. So, that creates a gender divide. So, there is a position divide and a gender divide. At my past college, you were either faculty or staff, and they made sure staff were valued. We had recognition ceremonies, we received messages of encouragement, we were encouraged and required to take advantage of professional development. And this was a huge college. Why can’t we do that here? Here the emphasis is all on students. If it’s not on students, then it’s on faculty. There is no regard for staff. If you’re not a professor, a senior administrator or a student, you are insignificant. Rose (GC) added:
It feels like everyone is out for themselves. Especially for those without good friends higher up. While we are all very much on our own in trying to advance our careers, professional staff tend to be mentored better and have more opportunities for professional development. Supervisors play a large role in the perception of climate. In many departments there is an oppressive work environment where staff are not encouraged to better themselves at all. And the good old boy network, it still very much exists.

These two experiences provide representation of Acker's (1990) gendered organization combined with Kanter's (1977) structural organization theory and show the strong intersection of gender and position and their impact on the perception of climate. As Acker (1990) noted, the organizational hierarchy, which represents a gendered power structure, is accepted as standard practice in most organizations. Hierarchical organizations create imbalances of power, elevating those who meet certain standards to positions of power while excluding others. Lewis and Simpson (2012) call this imbalance of power dividing practices. These dividing practices create group differentials that impact employee visibility within an organization, further perpetuating the sticky floors for those lowest in the organizational chart (Iverson, 2009). Classified staff, therefore feel disenfranchised, and feel their positions are demeaning and of little value in the institution (Bauer, 2000). The dividing practices create fragmented groups within the organization (Kanter, 1977). The fragmented groups reify power differentials and perpetuate the division of labor within the hierarchy.

Below, issues of culture and climate are further discussed. Finally, a way to address cultural issues is offered. Although this may seem more appropriate for the
improving policy and practice section, Cameron and Quinn (2006) argued when an organization wants to make a change, a culture shift is often required. “When the values, orientations, definitions and goals stay constant — even when procedures and strategies are altered — organizations return quickly to the status quo” (Cameron & Quinn, 2006, p. 11). Further, as these authors noted, there is a strong link between culture and performance and culture and employee satisfaction, which are also linked to climate.

**Climate and motivation.** According to Kanter (1977), employees with access to work structures such as information, resources, support, opportunity for advancement, and challenging work, have more power and a stronger sense of connection to their workplace. Employees who feel unsupported also tend to feel powerless and tend to become frustrated with their situation. When individuals feel disconnected at work, other factors external to the job take precedence. Just as Kanter (1977) found in her research, participants in this research study reported a lack of motivation to perform at high levels. Helen (BC) said:

There is no motivation to work hard. It doesn’t seem to get you anywhere. There is no room for advancement through hard work and dedication. You see others, who do the bare minimum, get pay increases and even get promotions. If that is what they are rewarding, then why should I kill myself to work hard? You feel stifled by the system and feel like giving up. But, I still come to work every day and work hard.

Shannon (GP) agreed, and added, “The system is broken. There is no motivation to be a high performer since doing the bare minimum is readily accepted and tolerated. That is a real non-motivator.” When those stuck in these low-level positions at the
bottom of the hierarchy feel frustrated or have low motivation, they become detached from the organization, placing external commitments like family and friends above institutional commitments (Kanter, 1977). As highlighted in the quotes above, workers become discouraged when they perceive that no matter how hard they work, no one acknowledges this effort and there is no room for advancement.

One can see the link between motivation and climate for these participants, and as Herzberg (1987) described, in order for someone to feel motivated they must feel a sense of recognition, responsibility, and achievement about the work they perform. An opportunity for growth and advancement must also be provided to foster the growth of motivation. Many factors contribute to feelings of non-motivation at work including: supervision, salary, relationships, and status (Herzberg, 1987). What is it about these factors that can lead to a lack of motivation? Are these feelings the result of the structure, or are they the result of a prescribed identity? These questions lead to the next discussion, the power of the supervisor and how this power differential links to the climate. For study participants, the supervisor played a key role in every aspect of their work-life.

**The power of the supervisor.** The power of the supervisor was a key finding of this study. Often, researchers focus on college presidents and their role in organizational climate. Even though college presidents are a vital part in creating and maintaining campus climate, and participants in this study shared this belief, the role of the supervisor in creating the climate for the participants cannot be underscored. It was supervisors that the participants deemed extremely important due to their gatekeeper role. Leaders set the stage and the overall tone of the university but supervisors are on the frontlines, and
interact with employees on a daily basis. Therefore, supervisor's roles are of the utmost importance in the ability of female staff to participate in professional development, to be recommended for promotions, and they can create a positive or negative work experience for female staff.

Since colleges and universities are divided into departments, units and schools, supervisors play a significant role in the way employees perceive their workplace, and the perception of colleges as a whole. In this study, the gender of the supervisor was less important than their beliefs, values and practices. The way supervisors treated female staff, regardless of the supervisor's gender, was a key factor in the way participants perceived the overall campus climate. Of note, female supervisors were often judged by a gendered lens, characterized as uncaring and essentially a "bitch." This characterization can be attributed to what the extant literature tells us about the masculine stereotypes of leadership such as aggression and toughness, and women's need to behave more masculine in order to be taken seriously (Acker, 1990; Glazer-Raymo, 2008). In essence, it seems that many female supervisors are caught between a rock and a hard place when it comes to leadership. This phenomenon reconciles with the concept of the queen bee (Staines, Tavris & Jayaratne, 1974), which will be discussed in detail later in this chapter.

Since the treatment of staff by supervisors played such an important role in this study, it is prudent to consider McGregor's (1960) Theory X and Theory Y. The feelings of detachment expressed by some participants could be described as a self-fulfilling prophecy of their supervisor. If supervisors believe their staff are indolent and lack ambition, consistently identify and treat them like incapable workers, staff may in fact
develop behaviors that reflect these characteristics. The concept of Theory X posits that supervisors "use tight control, threats, and punishments, which, over time, generates low productivity, antagonism, militant unions, and subtle sabotage..." (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 126). In contrast Theory Y (McGregor, 1960) proposes that supervisors who provide a supportive environment that allows employees to achieve personal goals in addition to fulfilling organization goals will result in employees reflecting positive and dedicated behavior. Overall, participants in this study feel that they work in an unsupportive climate, and are stifled not only by their direct supervisor, but also by the policies and practices that govern their colleges. In addition, feelings of being stifled combined with the lack of access to advancement opportunities, "forms people's sense of themselves and of their possibilities" (Kanter, 1977, p. 3). For the female staff at Brown College and Gray College, their sense of self was low, resulting in overall feelings of low-morale, as Acker (1990, 2006) would argue, this shows the embodiment of the gendered organization. Combined with the perception that advancement possibilities are grim, these women were both bitter and discouraged.

Of note, a few of the classified staff participants from Gray College reported more positive experiences with their direct supervisors than classified staff at Brown College. The exact reasons for this are not known, but it can be surmised that because classified participants from Gray reported more frequently to faculty, this contributed to a stronger sense of appreciation and support. Sofia (BC) noted, "I believe faculty support and value staff. The administration does not." Most of the participants from Gray College echoed Sofia's sentiments that faculty are supportive of staff members. Anna (GC) added:
I work in an academic department for a faculty member. My supervisor (female) has always been supportive of continuing my education and embracing any training that is made available. With that said, those who work for administrators seem to have a very different experience.

Those at Brown College, however, had more negative experiences with supervisors. Dana (BC) said:

My supervisor (male) is always using the term support staff. The fact that people in higher level positions even refer to employees as subordinates and support staff automatically causes them to feel inferior. I am constantly micromanaged, unable to make decisions that are directly related to my job duties, and never know what is going on. I’m not important enough for my supervisor to share information with me.

Dana's perception of being inferior and unimportant shows that there are divides between professionals and classified staff as well as men and women. Additionally, Dana felt that she had little authority to make decisions, and was not privy to pertinent information. Her supervisor treated her far different from the male staff in her office. This quote further supports Kanter’s (1977) and Acker's (1990, 2006) theories, highlighting the intersection of position and gender.

Reviewing the websites of the two colleges uncovered more supportive processes in place for staff at Gray College compared to Brown. For example, Gray College has a committee specifically focused on improving work life for employees. Also, in reviewing policy language, the tone of the policies at Gray had an overall more positive nature than the policies at Brown. On the one hand, most of the policies at Brown appear
to be written heavy-handed and authoritative using language such as "mandatory," "deemed justifiable by the supervisor," and "it is required that." On the other hand, Gray's policy language used less authoritative language, such as "in the best interest of," "seems reasonable," and "the employee should." Although many of these phrases imply the same requirements, using such commanding language can create the perception of a non-supportive climate for employees. As the overall climate was perceived to be demeaning and stifling for female staff, small changes in policy language can make a significant difference for the better.

The next section addresses the impact of gendered organizations, which in this study, was referred to as the good old boy's network. Acker (2006) and Kanter's (1977) frameworks are discussed in relation to the good old boy's network participants felt existed at Brown College and Gray College, which added to the perception of a non-supportive climate.

Gendered Organizations

The stifling, demeaning and unsupportive climate at work left participants feeling stuck in the trenches. Participants used the word "stuck" many times when describing their lack of advancement opportunities. They perceive that both gender and the structure of the organization kept the majority of women at Brown College and Gray College from advancing. They felt that they were clustered into low-level positions and consistently given "women's work." These sentiments support both Kanter's (1977) theory regarding the structure of the organization, and also Acker's (1990) gendered organization theory positing that gender bias infiltrates organizational structures. This is evidenced by Carrie's (GP) experience:
Clerical duties, well they are only for women. There are several men in my department and we have very similar jobs. But, anytime there is secretarial type work, filling out a form, copying, typing a letter, well, that comes to me. Now, if there is something that requires thinking, well the men can do that.

While Kanter (1977) argued that position in the organization determined the type of work employees receive, Acker’s (1990) theory of gendered organizations comes to life through Carrie’s experience. Even though she and the males in her department share similar work roles, Carrie is given tasks commonly associated with women’s work such as typing, copying, and paperwork. Therefore, one can argue that the division of work is governed by gender (Acker, 1990).

The stifling, demeaning, and unsupportive climate reified the participants’ feelings of being unappreciated. These feelings of being undervalued were manifest not only in the expressions and statements vocalized by participants, but also in their voices when they discussed the lack of institutional support. They sounded very sad and frustrated by the lack of value they believe is placed on them and on the work they do for their colleges. This perception of being undervalued contributes to a lack of employee motivation and decreased feelings of morale. Acker’s (1990) theory argues that organizations fail to value what is typically referred to as women’s work, as men’s work is perceived to require a deeper level of commitment to the organization. Women, who tend to occupy most of the lower-level roles, feel they are not valued because they are unable to conform to organizational demands, including being available at all hours (Acker, 1990). For example, Gloria (BP) shared:
If you look around at what is valued at Brown, it's working long hours. Men who are available to work all hours of the day are valued. They get the raises and the promotions. I've seen that happen in my department. Equally qualified, they choose the man every time. Work life balance is not valued here. They just want workers with little outside obligations. So, women are delegated into these lower roles.

As evidenced by Gloria's statement, men are valued because they seemingly are available to work at all hours, having someone else to take care of any outside obligations like home and family. Thus, the male norm is still dominant in higher education.

Further, the sense from the participants of a good old boy's network dominating higher education supports Acker's (1990) gendered organization theory. The differences in treatment and opportunity seemingly available to men were telling. As Fiss (1994) argued, gender "subordinates women as a group, creating a perpetual gender hierarchy" (p. 417). Kanter (1977) contends that it was not gender causing inequality within organizations, but the structures that people within an organization find themselves in, regardless of gender. However, it is evidenced by participants' responses that they perceive gender to play a key role in the sense of organizational inequity and in the lack of advancement opportunities for women. Leadership in organizations need to be aware that they may present themselves as being unbiased and supportive of work life balance for women, but in truth, many of the policies and practices may fail to support this representation. The conscious or unconscious disparaging of women's intelligence or professional potential is a harsh reality that many women, particularly those working in the lowest positions, continue to face.

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Grace (BP) said:

For women, both faculty and staff, a huge barrier for advancement is just being a woman. There are very few women in high-level positions, and when there is an opening for an upper-level role, most of the time they don’t even advertise it, they just put a man in the position. In my office, I see evidence of that all the time.

Women who want higher-level positions, they have to make decisions about career and family. If you look at the women who have high-level roles (I think there are 3), they either don’t have families or their children are grown. If you look at women faculty, they have to make decisions about children and tenure. Most of them decide to wait, and then a lot of them end up never having children. Men just don’t have to deal with any of that. Advancement seems to come to them without any strings attached. There is definitely a gender bias when it comes to advancement and family.

As evidenced by Grace’s comments, women often face very difficult choices when it comes to work and family. As Mason and Goulden (2002, 2004) and Wolfinger and associates (2008) demonstrated, the bottom line is if you are a woman with children, your career suffers.

How do many organizations deal with women who have children, particularly young children? Harlan and Berheide (1994) argued that organizations cluster women in lower-level roles, in particular secretarial roles, which ultimately segregates them from advancement routes. Not only does this process hinder their chances for advancement, but this process also organizes work roles based on gender. Organizing work roles based on gender impacts the perceived value of a job, further supporting Kanter’s (1977)
argument about employees located at the bottom of the hierarchy, and the lack of value placed on these roles. Participants in this study felt that they are less valued than men, particularly if they have children, and find themselves clustered into positions with little opportunity for advancement. For example, Faith (GP) shared:

Opportunities for career advancement don't exist for women here. Preference for professional development and advancement are given to men. Women are not consulted when others (especially other men) have questions or concerns, even when the women have more experience in an area. Gendered values disconnect women from lines of advancement. And, sadly, there is really not a lot that we can do about it.

Overall, participants in this study perceive that there is little they can do to change their situation. As Bourdieu's (1989) concept of habitus points out, the internal meaning that these lower-level employees understand about their position creates expectations for the job and reifies their status within the system. Participants also appear to be experiencing what Bourdieu (1977; 1986; 1989) termed the theory of power and practice: those who have power and privilege retain it and gain more while those who are sidelined remain there.

It would appear that women are not only blocked from advancement opportunities because they are women, but also because they are not valued and are unable to conform to the idea of a sexless, disembodied worker devoted to their job (Acker, 1990). Acker (1990) notes that this marginalization of women creates an impossible ideal, requiring women to be more like men. Shannon (GP) shared, "My boss, he is always working late. When I need to leave to take care of personal business, well that is really looked down
upon. It’s all about work. Well, I can’t work 24-7. I have young children.” Nancy (GP) added:

After I had a child, it totally changed my perspective about work. I wanted to move into a higher-level role, but I realized that, for the most part, there aren’t any women with young children in those types of roles. In the upper-level positions, most of the bosses are very inflexible, and their staff have little outside obligations. What happens if my child gets sick? I won’t have the ability to take off, and I can’t be in that situation right now.

As evidenced by Nancy’s dilemma, the culture of 24-7 availability is an expectation if you want to succeed. I can very much relate to Nancy’s dilemma. I have a young son, and this reality influences my career choices. I have to consider not only myself, but my family when I make decisions about my future. Having a child changes many things, especially for women, as it shifts your focus and changes your priorities.

Gender issues were not only manifest in discussions about the good old boy’s network, but also in discussions about the way women treat each other, particularly women at lower levels. Acker (1990) would argue that the male-dominated climate and culture within higher education creates a competition for scarce resources, including limited advancement opportunities, pitting women against each other. Further, this male-dominated climate can lead to the queen bee syndrome (Staines, Tavris, & Jayaratne, 1974), which is discussed below.

The queen bee. This bias towards women also results in the concept of a queen bee. Staines, Tavris, and Jayaratne (1974) defined queen bees as women in leadership roles in male-dominated organizations who have become successful by differentiating
themselves from other women. These queen bees tend to distance themselves from other women and oppose the advancement of female subordinates (Staines et al., 1974). Derks, Van Laar, Ellemres, and de Groot (2011) noted that “Queen Bees set themselves apart from other women by emphasizing their masculine characteristics” (p. 1243). The authors further argue that these women restrict the advancement opportunities for other women and that these women are harder on their subordinates if they are female (Derks, et al., 2011). Nancy (GP) said:

There are these women on campus, and they are horrible to work for, especially if you are another woman. Quite frankly, they are mean. These women, and I think it’s called Queen Bee Syndrome, or something like that, they are self-centered and manipulative. And they are very aware if another woman starts sniffing around after their job. They are very threatened by smart women. But, the men, they are very nice to the men. I think they believe if they are nice to men in power, they will in turn get more power.

As evidenced by Nancy’s reflection, these power women tend to act more aggressive, a characteristic typically associated with men. As Derks and associates (2011) note, organizations that devalue women threaten the identity of female employees, causing some women to see their gender as a liability. Therefore, they suppress their female characteristics and reinforce their masculine characteristics, disconnecting from other women in the organization. Through their quantitative study on the queen bee syndrome, Derks and associates (2011) found that women in leadership positions describe themselves in more masculine terms, and therefore contribute to the replication of male norms for leadership expectations. Because some women are in the top-level roles, an
appearance of a lack of gender bias can be argued. Yet, the emphasis on masculine
class characteristics, the goal of becoming the ideal worker (Williams, 2000) and denial of
gender bias helps to validate the argument that women should be clustered into positions
at the bottom of the organizational hierarchy showing that in the main, the queen bees are
largely detrimental to other women.

Gender bias was also evident in the discussions about family life, which, can also
be attributed to the concept of the queen bee. As participants noted, women are expected
to be the primary caregivers. Although this seems to be a standard societal and
institutional expectation, participants found both men and other women fail to support
women with children by making it largely undesirable to take time off to care for sick
children, for example. Participants reported snide comment from both men and women
when they had to stay home with an ill child. Lorrie (BC) said, “I can just feel the
tension in the office when I come back from being home with my sick child. I’ve even
heard people say that they don’t believe my child was sick, that I just didn’t want to come
to work.” However, when it came to men needing time off to care for children, there was
an interesting twist. Jenny (BP) described this type of situation:

There is a male in our office, and he is a single father. Everyone, especially
women, say “Poor thing, he has childcare issues,” or “it is so wonderful that he
takes care of his son.” The women are really vocal about how wonderful it is that
he “steps up to the plate and assumes his responsibilities as a father.” However,
he is always leaving early because of childcare issues, and we even have to
continually reschedule meetings to accommodate his schedule. I understand the
childcare issues and I don’t have a problem with flexibility. But, there are several
women in my department who have children, and no one makes a fuss over them. We don’t reschedule meetings and go out of our way to accommodate them.

When I was the parent of a young child, no one felt bad for me. I was snubbed if I was late or had to leave early for family reasons. Women deal with childcare issues all the time. I don’t see anyone doting over them or bending over backwards to help them out. It is appalling to me that women fail to support each other when it comes to child-care.

Jenny’s statement demonstrates the lack of support women seem to receive both from men and from other women. This evidence supports the existence of gendered organizations at the two colleges in this study (Acker, 1990). One’s role within an organization appears to be contingent on gender and responsibilities associated with gender, such as parenting. As Mason and Goulden (2002, 2004) report, workplaces are often unaccommodating to women with children. The inflexible structure of most workplaces, modeled after the ideal worker, seems to stifle women’s advancement opportunities (Wolfinger et al., 2008). What appears to be valued at both Gray College and Brown College is total devotion to work.

Barriers toward women’s advancement. Participants in this study report three main barriers to women’s advancement: gender, position, and education. The first two barriers, gender and position, link the two framework theories (Acker, 1990; Kanter, 1977), as both gender and position intersect to impact advancement, power, and access. As evidenced by participants’ responses, and the common barriers reported, participants feel both gender and position prevent them from advancing in their careers. The third barrier, education, is manifest both in structure and gender. Structurally, education as a
barrier is apparent through the lack of ability for many of the participants to take for-
credit courses. The scheduling of courses often precludes the participants from pursuing
more education as many classes are offered only during the day, or programs have
inflexible course requirements. The perception from study participants was a significant
lack of support provided to them when working on a degree, and the stifling limitations
placed on them through inconsistent policy implementation and inequitable practices. A
gender bias was noted when women desired to pursue more education and a barrier was
evident based on gender as participants reported that the same educational standards for
certain positions are not applied equally for men and women.

Although Kanter (1977) argued that organizations are not inherently gendered,
and what appears to be gender differences are really power differences, I argue that
differences in power are caused by gender inequities and that gender inequities are the
source of power struggles, and indeed, Morgan (2006) listed gender as one of the power
levers. As shown through this study, these power struggles arise between women and
men, and between women and women. These power struggles can be traced back to the
deeply rooted gender inequities that pervade throughout higher education (Acker, 1990)
perpetuating the imbalance of power.

As evidenced by participants' stories, they perceive an issue with the institutional
climate. How can the climate be changed from non-supportive to welcoming and caring?
First, as Cameron (2007) argued, problems in the culture must be addressed in order to
make any significant progress in other areas. Discussed below is one method of
analyzing and taking first steps toward changing organizational culture.
Changing the Culture

As Cameron (2007) shared, most people are not aware of their culture until it is pointed out. Thus, it can be inferred that leaders may not realize that the culture is presenting a problem until the conflict is made overt. Further, leaders may sweep problems under the rug, leaving them for someone else to deal with. The participants in this study clearly indicated that the gendered culture is oppressive for them, but given their low rank and lack of power, this issue has not resulted in any cultural changes. If a culture change is desired, how can it happen? Cameron (2007) suggests measuring the culture through the Competing Values Framework. The Competing Values Framework "helps identify the underlying cultural dynamics and raise consciousness of cultural attributes" (Cameron, 2007, p. 433). This framework, shown in Figure 17 measures culture by flexibility, control and internal and external focus. Organizations that have a team culture are characterized by cohesion, high morale, human resource development, and mutual support. Organizations with a hierarchical culture focus more on control and are characterized by clear lines of authority, respect for the hierarchy, rules, stability, and predictability. Organizations with more of an external focus tend to have either an entrepreneurial culture characterized by flexibility, creativity, acquisition of resources, and growth or a rational culture characterized by clarity of tasks, planning and productivity, efficiency, and measurable outcomes.
According to Cameron (2007) and Cameron and Quinn (2006), the quadrants are competing on the diagonal, hence the model name of competing values. All organizations exhibit characteristics of each quadrant but develop a dominant “value set” or culture over time. For example, a team culture could be considered a great place to work where emphasis is placed on teamwork, consensus and concern for morale, whereas a hierarchical culture could be described as formalized, predictable, and governed by rules and policy. This type of culture may be assumed as an unfriendly, hostile work environment.

In order to assess the culture, Cameron and Quinn (2006) recommend using the Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI). The OCAI is a survey which provides scenarios respondents use to compare what may happen in their organization using six dimensions: the dominant characteristics of the organization; the leadership style; the strategic emphasis; the criteria of success (what gets rewarded); and the
management of employees (how employees are treated). The responses help provide a picture of how the organization is perceived, and can assist leaders in determining if there is a cultural area that needs addressing. Are we too heavy in one quadrant, too light in another, for example?

The OCAI is particularly effective (Cameron, 2007) when the assessment is completed twice. The first assessment is approached using the current cultural expectations. The second assessment is approached with the idea of how things could be. Thus, profiles of both the current and preferred culture emerge (Cameron, 2007). Undoubtedly, culture is not easy to change; however sometimes it becomes necessary in order for organizations to reach a long term goal such as improving employee morale and productivity, for instance. Cultural changes can lead employees to think differently about the organization and their role in it (Cameron & Quinn, 2006).

While this paper is not primarily focused on organizational culture, the emerging findings determined that a negative climate and culture contributed to an organizational context that devalues the work of female classified and professional employees. The aforementioned model and assessment tool are just one way of bringing potential issues to the surface. Tools such as the OCAI can assist in diagnosing issues related to teamwork, leadership, employee satisfaction and productivity (Cameron & Quinn, 2006). Participants’ consensus from both Brown College and Gray College is female staff members face an unsupportive climate that needs to be addressed, revealing the likelihood of a deeper cultural issue. Participants felt that in order for the culture to change, the directive must come from the top, noting the importance of leadership.
As previously mentioned, climate is more malleable, and therefore easier to change than culture. Some ways that climate can be improved for women include: giving women an equal voice in decision making, valuing their contributions at all levels of the organization, taking issues like sexual harassment and discrimination seriously and offering female leadership development programs and leadership workshops that value diversity. Of note, it is important when creating these female leadership programs that the organization does not reinforce ideas that women need extra help in order to become a leader. This would be counterproductive in the larger goal of increasing women’s roles within an organization. Further, it is important for leaders to take seriously what female staff report about their perceptions of climate, take action to investigate, and make changes where necessary. Finally, supervisor training and accountability are key in cultivating a welcoming climate and changing the deeply embedded issues within organizational culture.

Creating lasting and meaningful organizational change can be a long and challenging process. Federal mandates have required organizations to comply in regard to diversity. However, it is important that organizations look beyond compliance. Compliance only touches the surface of discrimination and inequity. Focusing on compliance fails to change the deeply imbedded gender bias that permeates higher education, and in this case, Brown and Gray Colleges. It is important for leaders in higher education to understand this, listen to what employees are telling them, and take action to combat these biases.
The Sticky Floor

Participants in this study commonly referred to themselves as being stuck on the floor of higher education with little room for advancement. Therefore, it seems prudent to examine the concept of the “sticky floor” further (Harlan & Berheide, 1994). Harlan and Berheide (1994) note that the majority of women working in higher education will “never advance high enough to encounter the glass ceiling” (p. 1). As I argued in this study, in order to achieve true equity within an organization, it is important to examine the experiences of all women, at every level. Existing research, for the most part, has failed to examine the experiences of women working in the lowest positions, perpetuating the power gap. “The larger the gap in power, prestige, and pay awarded to people working at the top of organizations compared to those working at the bottom... the higher will be the barriers to improving upward mobility for women and people of color” (Harlan & Berheide, 2001, p. 3).

For women working in low-level jobs, the concept of advancement rarely means a promotion, primarily because these low-level jobs lack career ladders linking them to upper-level positions (Harlan & Berheide, 2001). The authors argue that “the lack of opportunity that is inherent in the structure of the labor market is [already] a barrier” (Harlan & Berheide, 2001, p. 3), therefore combining this structural barrier with being a woman makes advancement even less likely. I argue that in addition to actual position, the lack of career paths associated with that position, the lack mentors for women, and lack training have significantly contributed to the inability of women to advance. Results from this study support this argument.
“Segregation and wage differentials by race and gender is due to channeling
women and minorities into less complex jobs, which require fewer skills and demand less
effort and less responsibility than White male jobs” (Harlan & Berheide, 2001, p. 12).
Participants in this study expressed feelings of being in jobs that required them to be a
worker not a thinker, and as a result they were deemed less important by the college.
However, participants also noted that these issues were beyond the position; even when
men shared the same positions, the men were paid more and seemed to have a fast career
track to the upper-levels of the hierarchy. This double standard validates the argument
that there are certain positions within an organization that are identified as “women’s
roles” further impeding their advancement, and men are quickly expedited from these
types of roles.

Harlan and Berheide (2001) describe low-level positions as feminized, also noting
that minorities work in the least desirable low-level jobs, and “economic trends point
toward the proliferation of low-paying [low-level] jobs in which a single worker cannot
earn enough to keep a family out of poverty” (p. 17). A scan of the charts in Chapter 3
(see pages 79-83) highlight that the maintenance housekeeping roles are predominately
staffed by employees of color. The low paying nature of these jobs, in particular, can
have significant impact on single mothers trying make ends meet. Therefore, clustering
women at the bottom of the hierarchy not only keeps them from advancing, but it also has
far reaching social and economic consequences.

Another argument Harlan and Berheide (2001) make about the sticky floor is that
employers believe mothers have to limit their occupational choices based on family
responsibilities. Through their research on employment, they discovered that employers claim women self-select low-level positions, arguing:

Women will trade off earnings, chances for advancement or interesting work for flexible work schedules, shorter hours, or the absence of travel to help them meet the often conflicting demands of family and a job, suggesting that women have a lower commitment to work (Harlan & Berheide, 2001, p. 35).

Ironically, when the authors examined literature on different jobs, low-level jobs, typically held by women, were the least flexible in nature, while flexible jobs were typically held by White males with no children (Harlan & Berheide, 2001).

Participants in this study expressed the overwhelming feeling of being stuck in their current roles with little chance of advancement. The recommendations for improving policy and practice that will be discussed later in this chapter, provide vital steps in helping these women remove the glue that has affixed them in the trenches.

Without investment in people, and in particular, investing in women at the bottom of the hierarchy by examining organizational pipelines, creating career paths and investing in employee education and training, the majority of women will remain on the sticky floor.

The next section provides an expansion of the two theoretical frameworks used in this study. These expansion areas include race, and role congruity.

**Expanding the Theoretical Framework**

While both Kanter (1977) and Acker’s (1990) frameworks proved to be good fits for this research study, as together they show the intersection of gender and positions and the collective impact on women’s advancement, there are areas in both frameworks that can be expanded. The idea of racial disparities and role congruity are discussed below as
a means to expand the existing frameworks, as evidence from this study pointed out gaps in these areas.

**Race.** Kanter’s (1977) argument that organizational structure not gender is to blame for those in low-level positions inability to advance and Acker’s (1990) argument for gendered organizations intersect as reasons participants in this study are stuck in the trenches. However, one critical facet that seems to be missing from these author’s arguments is the aspect of race. Expanding the frameworks through the lens of black feminist thought (Collins, 1986) or critical race theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001) would add another dimension to both the structural and gender barriers women face in higher education. Further, when examining discrimination within organizations, the impact of race cannot be dismissed.

Black feminist thought (Collins, 1986) argues that African American women have been marginalized in higher education and this marginalization is referred to as the outsider within. The outsider within, according to Collins (1986), suggests that African American women have been invited to the table with the dominant groups but essentially are invisible. Black feminist thought allows African American women to define and share their own stories, and discuss their experiences of the “dehumanization of Black women and the exploitation of Black women’s labor” (Collins, 1986, p. S17).

The idea of being the “other” according to Collins (1986) means being different from the norm of the White male. Therefore, conducting research on female staff using Black feminist thought would further help to explain not only the influence of gender on advancement opportunities, but also the impact of the intersection of race and gender.
Understanding the experiences of African American female staff through Black feminist thought would add significantly to the literature base in higher education.

Another framework that would help inform research on female staff and incorporate race into consideration is critical race theory. Critical race theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001) stresses the importance of examining policies to deconstruct their racial tendencies. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) note that the concept of color blindness systematically disadvantage African Americans, "allowing individuals to redress only extremely egregious racial harms, ones that everyone should notice and condemn" (p. 22). Critical race theory also advises that one should be skeptical of the dominant groups’ claim of neutrality and meritocracy, noting that these are covert claims of discrimination (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Using critical race theory to study those in disadvantaged positions (Kanter, 1977) within organizations would help expose the hidden dimensions of race and racism, bringing those to the forefront. In addition, using either the Black feminist thought (Collins, 1986) or critical race theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001) can provide another unifying factor for women against the dominant White male. Although the experiences of White women and African American women may differ to a degree, women, regardless of race, tend to find themselves clustered into positions at the bottom of the organizational hierarchy. For the women of color who participated in this study, they felt that they had three things working against them: gender, position, and race. Jenny (BPAA) said:

When you see women of color, the majority of them are in housekeeping jobs and low-level office jobs. There are few opportunities for women to advance already,
and for women of color, especially if you are stuck in a low or entry-level job, the prospects are slim.

Role congruity. While Kanter (1977) argues that structure, including one’s position in that structure, not gender is responsible for the clustering of women at the bottom of the organizational hierarchy, and Acker (1990) argues that organizations are inherently gendered, my argument throughout this research study has been that women are stifled from advancement within organizations due to the intersection of gender and position. If this concept of advancement is shifted to focus on career advancement into leadership roles, both Kanter (1977) and Acker’s (1990) frameworks can be expanded to include the theory of role congruity (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Utilizing this theory to examine the lack of opportunity for women to advance, particularly to leadership roles, shifts the focus to a sociological perspective.

According to Eagly and Karau (2002), “prejudice can arise from the relations that people perceive between the characteristics of members of a social group and the requirements of the social roles that group members occupy or aspire to occupy” (p. 573). Therefore, bias against women in leadership roles comes from the perception of women and also the perception of what characteristics leadership roles require. Gender stereotypes come from observing both men and women in their typical roles, particularly men in high-level positions, and women in low-level positions or as housewives (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Characteristics frequently used to describe women are: affectionate, helpful, sympathetic and nurturing; characteristics frequently used to describe men are: assertive, ambitious, dominant forceful and “prone to act like leaders” (Eagly & Karau, 2002, p. 574).
Eagly and Karau (2002) state:

Role congruity theory is grounded in social role theory's treatment of the content of gender roles and their importance in promoting sex differences in behavior. However, role congruity theory reaches beyond social role theory to consider the congruity between gender roles and other roles, especially leadership roles, as well as to specific key factors and processes that influence congruity perceptions and their consequences for prejudice and prejudicial behaviors (p. 575).

Thus, gender bias towards women in leadership roles arise when there is conflict in the perception of women's characteristics and the qualities necessary to fulfill a leadership or supervisory position. Further, women in leadership roles tend to manifest many characteristics of male leaders, and may be perceived less favorable by their colleagues – both men and women.

Eagly and Karau (2002) posit two forms of bias toward women leaders:

[Bias is a result of]less favorable evaluation of women's potential for leadership because leadership ability is more stereotypical of men than women; and less favorable evaluation of the actual leadership behavior of women than men because such behavior is perceived as less desirable in women than in men (p. 576).

In addition, these two prejudices result in less access to leadership roles for women, and create more hurdles for women to jump over in order to succeed at, or even be considered for, leadership. Leadership characteristics often necessary to succeed in these roles, are deemed less desirable characteristics for women than men, resulting in women facing discrimination based on gender and social expectations (Eagly & Karau, 2002).
Eagly and Karau (2002) described women’s identity as imitations of the predominant gender stereotypes, and this is particularly true in organizations with few women at the top. It is also prudent to point out that because women have these ingrained stereotypes, reflecting their self-concept and outward behaviors, they may not desire leadership roles. According to the authors, even the lack of desire for a leadership role is a reflection of gender bias, as women’s behavior and self-doubt is perpetuated by social norms and preconceptions.

The addition of role congruity theory to Kanter’s (1977) theory could help to further explain the clustering of women at the bottom of the hierarchy, not just because of organizational structures, but also because of societal expectations and directives. In addition, the social structure of an organization may not only reflect external society’s beliefs and practices, but also may further exacerbate bias against women depending on the acceptable behaviors and acceptable roles within that organization. As Eagly and Karau (2002) argue, prevailing social norms reflect a standard of leadership impacting structures and behaviors of organizations. Therefore, combining role congruity theory with Kanter’s (1977) organizational behavior theory could further strengthen both theories, noting the cause and effect relationship between social bias and organizational bias. If current leaders understand this bridge, perhaps they can develop strategies to combat the embedded gender bias. Acker’s (1990) theory acknowledges that gender bias is present within organizations, and is a reflection of societal norms. Therefore, expanding Acker’s (1990) framework, utilizing role congruity theory would strengthen the concept of gendered organizations.
The influence of societal norms and expectations of gender behavior on organizational behavior cannot be underestimated, particularly when it comes to the advancement of women. Until organizations take a paradigm shift from customary views of leadership, rooted in male-dominated characteristics, the bias women experience in these roles, and the lack of opportunity to advance in the hierarchy will remain.

Improving Policy and Practice

The next section discusses some recommendations for improving existing policies and practices at Gray College and Brown College in the hopes of creating a more welcoming and supportive climate for female staff members. It will be important moving forward to consider messaging when conveying the results of this study to different constituent groups. Language will be key in talking with presidents, supervisors and female staff. Leaders will be more focused on the marketable value that investing in people will provide for their institutions. Female staff will be more focused on the human side, and the increased value placed on employees. The sections below describe some specific things that leaders and supervisors can do to create a more welcoming climate for female staff.

Motivation plays a significant role in achieving the recommended changes in practice. As Herzberg (1987) shared, “if you have employees on the job, use them. If you can’t use them get rid of them” (p. 96). In other words, use your talented workforce. It is important to trust employees and provide them with a sense of responsibility so they can achieve personal satisfaction from their jobs. This section offers a few ways to accomplish these ideals. Most of these recommendations are not earth-shattering and most do not require a great deal of money. The majority of these recommendations
support the human resources frame (Bolman & Deal, 2008), which focuses primarily on people, leading to the first idea, investing in people.

**Investing in people.** Investing in people is important for organizational success (Bolman & Deal, 2008). To successfully invest in people, current human resource strategies, policies and structure should be examined. One of the most important structural steps is to make the Director of Human Resources (or whatever the position is called at the university) a Vice President position. Human Resources needs a Vice President with a direct line to the top so that the administration can hear the true reality. When there are people in between, a lot of information tends to be filtered out.

It is also important to develop a university-wide shared values policy for managing people and to build polices and implement practices that emphasize the value of people (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Bolman and Deal (2008) further argue that employees need to be paid well for good work, be promoted from within, share in the decision-making processes, have the benefit of a family-friendly environment, and have flexible work schedules. Organizations should invest in people by creating and promoting opportunities for professional development (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Pfeffer, 1998). Additionally, because women tend to experience discrimination and embedded gender bias, they are an often an untapped source of talent that organizations need to utilize. This utilization can begin by providing training and professional development, and offering opportunities for women to advance. Training and professional development are vital in creating a skilled workforce, though managers often hesitate to invest because the cost is immediate and the rewards are unknown (Pfeffer, 1998). However, Bolman and Deal (2008) report that many companies find large return on their investment in training
for employees. Therefore, it seems sensible to hire staff that focus on professional development, and for the institution to provide adequate funding for professional development training programs.

Since the topic of promoting from within was a significant part of this study, it is prudent to investigate the reported benefits of adopting this practice. According to Pfeffer (1998), promotion from within encourages an investment in training and skill building; increases work performance and dedication; create an atmosphere of trust and loyalty; and changes thinking from me to us. In other words, employees start to think and act in terms of what is best for the organization. This implication not only helps to create a more positive work environment, but it also touches on the marketability of the workplace. Logically, supervisors want to keep their employees, and also want to attract the best people. If a college or university has a reputation of being a non-supportive and unwelcoming place to work, this will have an impact on its ability to attract a talented and dedicated workforce.

It is clear from Pfeffer's (1998) findings that promoting from within offers significant benefits both for the employee and the organization. In order to make this career pathway successful, barriers need to be removed. A key barrier is the perception by others that female classified staff are incapable of making significant contributions to their colleges. The treatment of classified and lower-level professional women as described by study participants is engrained into the culture of Brown and Gray Colleges. How can this change? The directive must come from the top. A change in leadership focus and support is key for the culture and climate to change. As noted by many of the participants at Gray, they recently had a female president who added several family-
friendly policies, and they felt the climate was changing to one that was more welcoming and supportive. However, Gray College currently has a male president, and some participants commented that things were starting to go back to the old ways. The gender of the president is not the sole factor required in order for the climate to be welcoming and supportive. It simply means that the leader, either male or female, needs to set the tone that all people are valued and appreciated.

The structural barrier of the incredibly slow process of getting anyone hired is a huge roadblock for the advancement of female staff. Understandably, as promotions from within often mean that supervisors go an entire year being understaffed, when given the option, supervisors will hire externally. Thus, shortening the amount of time it takes to fill a position would be a welcome change. Some positions, like classified positions, are still governed by state regulations making changes to that process more difficult. However, professional positions seem to offer more flexibility. There are also other steps that organizations can take to ease the burden of being short-staffed without overburdening one or two employees. Organizations can make use of temporary workers, and also cross-train employees to fill in while there is a vacancy.

There also appears to be a structural issue of inconsistent policy implementation when it comes to the hiring process. For example, when high-level positions become available, often there is no search process conducted. Someone from the group of "chosen ones" is selected to move into a new role. This creates problems not only with the continual promotion of the same group of people, but also reinforces that certain groups are not required to follow what should be standard operating procedures with
regard to hiring. Proper training of supervisors and managers would help to alleviate these issues. Supervisor training is discussed in more detail below.

Empowering employees is another important part of improving practice (Bolman & Deal, 2008). According to Bolman and Deal (2008), “empowerment includes keeping employees informed….encouraging autonomy and participation, redesigning work, fostering teams, promoting egalitarianism and infusing work with meaning” (p. 149). It can be inferred that providing adequate access to information and support helps create an environment of trust and provides employees with the tools necessary to perform their jobs. In addition, giving employees autonomy in their work fosters trust and a sense of purpose. Bolman and Deal (2008) add the importance of allowing employees to participate in active decision-making within an organization. Research has shown that active participation is a strong tool for increasing productivity and morale (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Pfeffer, 1998). Finally, creating a diverse workforce in terms of gender, race, and classification, is vital for creating a positive work environment, particularly when certain groups feel they are devalued and isolated from the organization (Acker, 1990). Higher education leaders must acknowledge the issue, not ignore the issue.

Professional growth. How can Brown College and Gray College become more employee focused and increase professional growth? Participants provided several suggestions on improving policy and practice at Brown College and Gray College that echo many of the sentiments expressed by Bolman and Deal (2008) and Pfeffer (1998). One common suggestion was creating a modification to the employee handbook adding a requirement for mandatory professional development training each year. This recommendation not only provides access to professional development, it also addresses
the issue of supervisors not allowing employees to attend. This directive would also help change the seemingly wide-held belief by supervisors that professional development is not important. It would also be a step toward the college providing support for employees, as noted by participants, support for professional development needs to come from the top-down. Finally, it would help to improve the inequities reported between the opportunities available to professional staff compared to classified staff.

In order to make professional development worthwhile, it was agreed that the colleges would need to provide thoughtful, meaningful and useful training for staff. Sofia (BC) noted that training should involve multiple levels: sessions for those employees who are just starting in the workforce; intermediate sessions for the more seasoned employees; and refresher courses that would be beneficial to long-term employees. Currently, participants feel that they are left on their own to find training and many have no idea where to look. If there were sessions offered or sponsored by the colleges and made available and accessible to all employees, this would greatly increase feelings of support. Further, participants believe that the directive and support for professional development must come from the top and be supported by supervisors. Once again, we see the importance of leadership and the influence of supervisors on employee morale.

Tuition policy. As part of further support for professional development, participants recommend changes to the tuition assistance policy, allowing all staff to take courses at other institutions. Per the current policies, Brown College does not allow staff to take courses at other institutions, and Gray College only allows classified staff to take courses elsewhere. Participants believe that there are many staff who would like to take
courses toward a degree, but are limited by the availability of courses during the day, the necessity of being a full-time degree-seeking student, and the inability to afford to pay for classes on their own. It seems beneficial to both employer and employee to modify the tuition policy allowing staff to take courses at other institution, as well as modifying the requirement that they must be a full-time student. Although both colleges are outstanding educational institutions with a focus on undergraduate education, it seems that exceptions could, and should be made for employees, as employees increasing their education should be of value to the organization.

Participants also felt that the administration needs to support staff continuing their education, and communicate this to supervisors. This aspect remains problematic, particularly due to the decentralization of colleges and universities (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Departments must have some autonomy to function without an iron fist; however, this autonomy does not provide them with the right to deny employees their just dues. Therefore, the administration must increase their support of staff. Without a directive from the top, participants feel that they will still encounter the same barriers from their supervisors and not be allowed to attend classes during working hours.

Supervisory training and accountability. Part of creating a welcoming and equitable climate is supervisor training. This training is beneficial for the professional growth of supervisors as well as employees. Although it is considered very important, participants at both colleges noted that there was very little offered. Participants also felt that most supervisors have no idea how to value employees and have no idea how to articulate what they want employees to do. It was reported that many supervisors fail to provide any feedback until evaluation time. In reality, nothing on an employee's
evaluation should be a surprise to them. Some participants also discussed the fact that many supervisors wait until the last minute to complete performance evaluations, and then provide very little feedback, if any at all. Since the employee evaluation is a chance for supervisors and their direct reports to not only discuss past performance, but also to set performance and career goals, it is not something to be taken lightly. It must be communicated to supervisors the importance of completing these in a timely manner, and also having a candid and productive discussion with their staff. Further, supervisors need to be held accountable for completing tasks such as evaluations, and they need to be evaluated themselves. Staff should have input on their supervisor’s evaluations in order to gain an adequate representation of their role.

Evidenced by participants’ responses, direct supervisors play a vital role in setting a welcoming office environment, and the amount of access and opportunity employees have to information, resources and professional development. Thus, supervisory training is very important. In addition, this training should be mandatory and part of a supervisor’s performance plan. Participation in training should be tied to merit raise. This financial consequence would add to the accountability of supervisors, as Williams and associates (2012) described as vital to improving organizational climate, and participants described as lacking.

Supervisors who participate in a good training program are more likely to be able to be intentional about the messages they send to their employees, and be vigilant in noticing any changes in employee behavior that may indicate problems in the workplace (increased absenteeism, decreased productivity, a noticeable change in mood, for example). A supervisor’s ability to recognize problems and take quick appropriate action
can make a significant difference in the overall climate of an office. It is important to note and realize that supervisors may feel unprepared for their role. Supervisors may feel overwhelmed and lost without adequate training and support from human resources, reinforcing the importance of providing supervisory training.

Although some participants described better experiences with their supervisors than others, training is still a must. This speaks to the culture of the organizations as well. The cultural shift toward a more supportive climate at Gray led to participants perceiving better overall experiences. Therefore, again, the directive comes from the top. If training and support are valued by leaders, and made mandatory with consequences, this will trickle down through the organization. Another reason directives from the top are so important for improving campus climate for women is that supervisors often find themselves stuck in the middle. If the overall leadership fails to support a welcoming climate for women, supervisors may feel compelled to perpetuate the status-quo. Even if they believe in fostering a supportive climate for their female staff, if they are not supported by, or even shunned by the leadership, they may not take initiative to make changes. However, if the leadership believes in creating a friendly and supportive campus climate, and takes decisive action to do so, supervisors are more likely to make it a priority.

**Job and salary review.** Another recommendation the study participants felt strongly about was the review of job descriptions and salaries. Participants recommended an impartial review of job descriptions without prior knowledge of position classification and gender of the employee. Participants felt that there would be many changes to job classifications as well as an increase in pay for many positions on
campus, as the initial classification and salary, in many cases, seemed to be based on the
person in the role, and not the role itself. Participants also felt that a salary audit needs
to be completed as people hired from the outside are paid far more than employees who
have been on campus for many years. When discussing salary, it was expressed many
times that women deserve equal pay for equal work. Men at both colleges seem to be
given preferential treatment when it comes to pay, and women, in the main, are still paid
far less than their male counterparts (AAUW, 2013).

**Breaking down the caste system.** Participants also want more unity between
classifications. Most participants in this study fail to understand the distinct divide
between professional and classified staff. Lisa said, “Let’s stop saying classified can
attend this and professionals get this. How about staff should be encouraged to
participate?” Along these lines, participants discussed allowing staff of all levels,
including classified staff, to have a voice on campus. It was noted that for the most part,
classified staff are not asked to serve on college-wide committees, and for that matter,
most committee roles are filled by faculty or senior-level administrators. Adding staff to
decision-making committees is one step that these two colleges can take toward
improving morale and increasing feelings of empowerment and value on campus. It
seems impossible, and counterintuitive, to make decisions that impact all employees on
campus without having representation from each employee category on every committee.
In addition, when staff are trying to advance, they can add committee service to their
résumés, which is generally looked upon as a positive leadership role.

This divide between positions also led participants to discuss the need for equity
in policy implementation. It was noted that even within the same departments, policies
and rules were bent for some and not for others, even if they are the same classification. While it was agreed that some flexibility is needed for policies, consistency was very important for promoting equity. In addition, many participants disliked the common practice at Brown College that pay raises are left to the discretion of their supervisor. Lorrie (BC) said, "If your supervisor doesn't like you, you are in trouble." Again, this speaks to the importance and power of the supervisor.

Ultimately, the climate of an organization comes from the leadership (Allan, 2011). If the leadership values employees, values diversity, and values creating a more welcoming climate for women, and for all employees, it will become a university priority. Without the leadership taking initiative and action on these issues, little will change within the organization and women will continue to face hostile and patriarchal climates. Although supervisors are often a larger barrier for participants than the administration, particularly because of the close proximity they work in each day, the attitude and climate that the leadership perpetuates has a significant influence on the entire university.

Career planning and progression. The findings from this study show that career planning was missing from both Brown and Gray Colleges. The implementation of career planning and mapping was vitally important to employees at both Gray College and Brown College. While students have access to career centers, staff have no campus resource for career planning. Adding a staff liaison to the career center for employees is one option, as well as creating a position in human resources that focuses specifically on career planning and assistance with career advancement would be a welcome addition and show employees that the college is investing in them.
Climate issues. The most noticeable difference in the case comparisons was the difference in the tone of the overall responses for participants at Gray College and Brown College. Participants from Brown College were very bitter and discouraged, while participants from Gray College expressed more frustration. The exact reasons for this difference are not known, especially because participants shared similar experiences across the board. However, after examining the websites at both colleges, I found noticeable differences in the tone of many policies, as previously mentioned in this study. This structural issue of policy language intersects with the overall climate issues expressed by participants. To address this, a climate survey is warranted, especially at Brown. In addition, the policies should be thoroughly reviewed, even perhaps a policy task force should be created that includes employees from all classifications, to review the tone and substance of current policies. In addition to the tone, the human resources page at Gray College was warm and welcoming, while the page at Brown College was rather plain and sterile. I asked my peer reviewers to look at both pages to see if their perceptions were similar, and they were. I also discovered that Gray College has a committee specifically dedicated to improving employee work-life. I spoke to the Vice President for Human Resources at Gray College and asked her the history behind this committee. I was unable to have a similar conversation at Brown College because there are no similar committees at present. I learned in conversation with the Vice President at Gray that this committee was created in response to a climate survey instituted several years ago. The survey data indicated issues in several areas, and this committee was created to make recommendations for improvement. A key difference that was noted here is that Gray took action on the issues revealed in the climate survey while
participants felt that Brown College never took any action on information they had from a climate survey from years past. This seems to be a mistake that colleges often make. They gather information from an important tool such as a climate survey, and fail to take any actions to improve on areas that are revealed to need work. This lack of action results in employees not buying into the process when a study is conducted in the future; they know from past experience that it is likely no change will occur.

One issue that was prevalent in the climate survey results from Gray College was the lack of work-life balance for employees. As a result, Human Resources at Gray College makes it a point to advertise their alternate work schedule policy, and employees are encouraged to utilize this policy. Interestingly, I could not find a college policy for alternate work schedules on the Brown College website. Since Brown College and Gray College are both state institutions, there is a state policy on telecommuting, and it was recommended that individual colleges adapt this policy for their use. Not only has Gray College created their own telecommuting policy, they offer several different examples of possible alternative schedules. Brown College has not created a college-specific policy around telecommuting, and I had to search long and hard on their website to locate the state policy. In addition, Gray College actively promotes this policy and encourages employees to telecommute. Brown College does not encourage employees to utilize alternate work schedules, and the state policy is buried on the website.

Another directive at Gray College resulting from the climate survey involves communication. Human Resources issues newsletters each month for employees and supervisors. I looked through a recent newsletter sent to supervisors and found a section on the importance of employee recognition and encouragement. Gray has partnered with
an outside vendor that allows supervisors to use a free e-card service to send recognition and appreciation cards to their employees. Supervisors were issued a challenge to send out these e-cards quarterly. I think implementing something like this at Brown College would make a significant difference in employee morale and help increase feelings of value and appreciation. Of course, supervisors are not required to participate, but the fact that it is promoted and encouraged at Gray College is a very positive thing.

Gray College also took work-life to a different level by adding this as a challenge to their strategic plan. The importance of implementing family-friendly practices at Gray was highlighted in one of their challenges as a result of the climate survey. Their work-life committee was charged with making recommendations and implementing them.

Brown’s strategic plan lacks any real focus on employees other than to increase diversity in the workforce. That of course is a very important challenge, however, it fails to take into account the institutional climate, and the seemingly imminent need of increasing a sense of worth and value on campus.

It may prove beneficial to Brown College to create a similar committee allowing the campus to gain a deeper understanding of workplace issues, and ways they can be addressed. Further, participants from Brown expressed frustration with the administration as they have asked employees for recommendations on improving campus climate and work-life, but they felt no action has ever been taken on these suggestions. Perhaps creating a committee focused on this issue would prove helpful. As a side bar during our chat about the employee work-life committee, the Vice President for Human Resources said that this was a daunting task, and it is difficult when you are responsible for large number of employees with varying needs. She added that she has stuck with it
because it is very important. Ultimately, changes in climate are aided not only by good communication and identification of the changes in cultural values required, but also dedicated perseverance.

Promoting basic manners including respect and consideration for others is a very important step toward enhancing campus climate. Supervisors and others in leadership roles must set personal examples of respect. Further, people need to be held accountable for violating these standards of respect through lower evaluations scores, merit raises or considerations for privileges. Policies, practices and accountability are key aspects for creating a more welcoming climate for female staff.

**Communication.** A key piece in developing policies and practices is communication. Focusing on communication looks at the process versus individuals. Without a solid communication plan, policies and practices can be ineffective. It is important to gather input from women at all levels of the organization at the beginning stages of policy development (Bolman & Deal, 2008). This inclusion can be accomplished through surveys, focus groups and interviews. Supervisors need to be aware of the policies, and need to communicate options to staff. Human Resources need to remind employees about the lesser-known policies, and make sure both supervisors and employees understand policy language. It might even be beneficial to offer a workshop on college policies and encourage staff and supervisors to attend.

Part of a solid communication plan between supervisors and staff is frequent feedback. While evaluations are a critical time for the discussion of work performance and future plans, regular feedback can be very helpful in fostering more positive relationships between supervisors and their direct reports. Communication is important
on many levels including an increased level of understanding, a development of trust, and the development of a supportive work environment.

Communication can also be negative if it is handled in the wrong way. In many instances, the top levels may communicate but when addressing issues like climate and culture change, it may be perceived as condescending. It is important for supervisors and senior management to ask, not assume what matters to employees, and understand why these things matter. Leadership must also act on the information learned, not simply store it on a shelf somewhere collecting dust. Communication without understanding, and understanding without action becomes stagnant.

An important avenue for communication for women can be manifest in a women’s group. This network can act as a strong advocate for the treatment of women on college campuses. When issues arise that are impacting campus climate, a women’s network can serve as a unifying voice to approach the leadership and make a significant impact. Women’s networks can support the necessity of conducting a climate survey and ensuring that the administration takes action on the findings. These groups can also serve as an important resource for career advancement, mentoring and professional development.

Shifting values. In addition to leadership development, values development is critically important in the creation of a welcoming climate for female staff. What do leaders and supervisors value? Do they value the well-being and happiness of their employees, or is the total devotion to work the only thing that really matters? The existing climate and culture at brown College and Gray College seems to value total commitment to work, and makes many staff members feel they will be penalized and
deemed less dedicated if they participate in professional development activities, or need to care for a family member. This orientation towards work above time to develop professionally or care for family underscores the importance of encouragement and support not only from the top-down, but also the importance of encouragement and support from direct supervisors. A larger piece of the policy issue, and one that seems to be difficult, is helping staff and supervisors understand that participating in professional development opportunities, taking advantage of the tuition reimbursement policy and telecommuting, for example, are meant for the greater good. Supervisors should understand this reality, and staff should be mindful about abusing their privileges. Supervisors and staff must work together to create a working environment that is both beneficial and productive for all members.

The larger cultural issue centers on the need to modify and create policies that reflect a supportive and welcoming climate. Without a deeper commitment to address the hostile and exclusionary culture and climate that appears to be imbedded at Brown College and to a lesser degree at Gray College, change will not occur. It is important for higher education leaders to remember these words from Bolman and Deal (2008), “When individuals find satisfaction and meaning in work, the organization profits from effective use of their talent and energy. However, when satisfaction and meaning are lacking, individuals withdraw, resist or rebel” (p. 164).

**Individual action.** There are many steps women can take to improve their work situations. One important step is to keep the conversation alive. Women can’t fail to continue the conversation and continue to raise awareness. Are things better for women? Yes, but there are not where they should be. Women can take steps to research and learn
all they can about their organization - know it inside and out. If an advanced degree is needed for professional growth, find a way. This may require some sacrifice, but it can be accomplished. Whether it is through taking online courses or night courses, there are avenues that women can use to further their education. Another step is talking with your supervisor. Does he or she know that there is a problem? Are they aware of their bias? The simple act of talking with them and collaborating to reach a solution can make a real difference for the better. It is important for women to have confidence in what they bring to the table.

If we examine Sandberg’s (2013) concept of leaning in, there are some useful techniques women can adopt to improve their chances of advancement. Although Sandberg’s (2013) book failed to acknowledge the basic structures of organizations that are based on the male norm, and by their existence create barriers for women, there is still some merit in her advice. First, women must learn to negotiate on their own behalf, regardless of what others may think of her. Sandberg (2013) stated that aggressive negotiations go against the social norm of acceptable behavior for women, women must learn to advocate for themselves. The author also tells women to continually ask the difficulty question “how can I improve?” We are also advised not to be risk averse. “Being risk averse in the workplace can cause women to be more reluctant to take on challenging tasks…more men look for stretch assignments and take on high-visibility projects” (Sandberg, 2013, p. 62). This can create a self-fulfilling prophecy of women feeling and believing that they are incapable of accomplishing a goal. According to Sandberg (2013), “Women need to shift from thinking ‘I’m not ready to do that’ to thinking ‘I want to do that – and I’ll learn by doing it” (p. 62). This is sound advice.
Though of course, there are many structural barriers in place that can prevent women from succeeding regardless of their actions. Further, many of these actions require women to behave more like men, showing once again the intersection of structure and gender.

Finally, the situation for women will not improve without collaboration among women. As noted in this study, women do little to support each other to remove barriers that impact all women regardless of race or job classification. Although this seems to be recognized, at least by participants, there is little discussion about what can be done to change it. Fostering more opportunities for women to come together across party lines, to discuss our common barriers, is greatly needed. Creating a positive climate that encourages active recognition and support is vital. Climate and equity issues are concerns of all women regardless of job status. Women should not feel threatened by other women, and instead of seeking to retain power and stifling the advancement of other women, women should mentor, support and encourage each other’s success. I argue that simple acts of kindness and support between women can have a significant impact. A step forward for any woman is a step forward for all women. As Madeleine Albright tells us, “There is a special place in hell for women who don’t help other women” (2006, Keynote speech at Celebrating Inspiration).

What are some next steps to continuing this line of research? Several areas of future research emerged over the course of this study and are outlined in the following section and include focus groups, surveys and policy analysis.
Future Research

Kanter (1977) argued that regardless of gender, employees in positions at the lower-levels of the organizational hierarchy experience similarities in their lack of ability to advance. Participants in this study perceive that males have a distinct advantage over females, and that policies and practices tend to work in men’s favor. As a way to further expand Kanter’s (1977) research, case studies involving both male and female staff should be conducted. Focus groups consisting of men and women, and also same sex-focus groups could also provide a much deeper understanding of the role gender plays on staff in lower-level positions. The extant literature, and results from this study support both Kanter’s (1977) structural theory, as well as the theory of gendered organizations (Acker, 1990), and it is still unknown whether gender or position plays the larger role in the lack of women’s advancement opportunities.

Utilizing a mixed methods approach to study the intersection of gender and position and female staff’s ability to advance could occur using surveys and interviews for data analysis. If a mixed methods approach was used, a survey could be sent to a large number of staff across the country. This approach would allow for the investigation of regional differences and influences on experiences of low-level women working in higher education. Based on survey responses, participants could be selected for one-on-one interviews or focus groups to further expand on the data.

Conducting studies at different institutional types would also yield interesting results. It would be very thought-provoking to see the differences in experiences of female staff at HBCUs, community colleges, private colleges, and women’s colleges versus the experiences of female staff at state colleges, such as Brown College and Gray
College. Would these experiences be more positive, more negative, or about the same? Another fascinating study would be to examine colleges that make the best colleges to work for list in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and find out what these colleges are doing right.

Another useful study would be to conduct a comprehensive policy analysis to examine the impact of policy decisions on staff. Finally, conducting interviews with higher education leaders, including Presidents and Vice Presidents could provide valuable information on the challenges they face when dealing with the daunting task of managing a university, and how this management orientation influences their views on women at the bottom of the hierarchy (if it does). It is possible that institutional leaders, who are often largely separated from the vast majority of employees, are unaware that climate and advancement issues exist on their campus. Therefore continuing this conversation and allowing it to be heard at the highest levels is of vital importance. It is of course also possible that institutional leaders are apathetic toward the experiences of staff, and conducting interviews with this group may help to shed light on the reasons for this apathy.

**Conclusion**

This study is important for many reasons. First, it provides a voice for female staff, which is virtually nonexistent in the current higher education literature. Second, this study provides implications for improving policy and practice within organizations to support not only women’s success in their current roles, but also create a pathway for women’s advancement. Finally, this research provides further support for the existing
literature on organizational structures, as well as the impact gender still has on these structures – in particular, higher education.

There are several important take-aways from this study on Brown College and Gray College. Namely, the organizational climate is oppressive for women, particularly in the lowest ranks; the sticky floor is alive and well – inequities still exist within the walls of higher education; supervisors hold a tremendous amount of power over their staff and appear to hold the key to diversity, equity and climate. The majority of women feel trapped and see no way out of low-level positions unless they leave their respective college. Significant barriers to female staff’s advancement is not just gender or structure, it is the intersection of gender and structure and also the intersection of race. Further, this is not a women’s only issue, but it becomes a deeper issue of the workforce within higher education as talent development is critical as we move forward. Sandberg (2013) tells us that there are so few women in upper-level and executive management positions, and so few women on that career-track, that when the men who are currently in these roles leave, there will be significant issues for organizations. Higher education, in my view, is one of those organizations that will be greatly impacted by this gap in talent.

As evidenced in the findings of this research study, women in low-level positions find themselves with little access to training, information, resources, support, and little promise of advancing through the hierarchy. The findings of this study show that organizational structures as well as gender have a direct impact on the sociocultural order of an organization, making it difficult for women at the lowest-levels to advance.

Learning from the experiences of female staff at Brown College and Gray College can provide college administrators, equal opportunity offices and human resource offices
important information on institutional barriers they have the power to help break. With this knowledge, these institutional barriers can be eliminated and an environment of opportunity can be created for all regardless of position or gender. One step in the right direction can start a deeper climate shift and ultimately lead to an organizational culture change.

**Personal Thoughts**

As noted by study participants, the overall climate for female staff at Brown College and Gray College is demeaning and stifling. Historically, the tone for both Brown and Gray colleges, has been set by White male dominated leadership, and this tone is resistant to change. The caste system that appears fully engrained into both systems, is also resistant to change. Analyzing this study through a critical feminist lens, shows there is a need for change in organizational policies and practices that have historically favored men over women, perpetuating the gendered organization (Acker, 1990).

Some of the aforementioned policy changes would require funding, but some would not. There are no quick fixes or easy answers to the dilemmas faced by the study participants, or for that matter by college administrators. However, there are things colleges and employees can do, that would cost little to nothing in dollars but would yield much in return. First, simply recognizing employees for a job well done is one of the easiest ways to increase employee morale. Even something as simple as saying, “great work” can go a long way toward changing the perception of a stifling climate to a supportive climate. This encouragement should not only come from supervisors, but also
from co-workers. Worker-bees are in the trenches together, and if they fail to support each other, who will?

Students are higher education’s primary focus and its valued customers. While none of the participants deny or argue this reality they do argue that staff are vital actors in making students’ experiences meaningful and memorable. Therefore, it is beneficial to the institution, the staff and the customers to create a positive and welcoming climate that supports the retention, promotion and recognition of all staff.

The implementation of some of the changes recommended in this study would be an important first step toward creating a welcoming climate that encourages community and recognizes the valuable contributions women at all levels make to higher education. In my view, shifting the organizational climate is essential for any measurable or meaningful changes to occur. It is also important that upper-administration voice their support for staff, encourage promotion from within at all levels of the organization, and in particular, the promotion of women in lower-level positions. Administrators need to provide access to and support for professional development, and promote a family-friendly campus creating and promoting policies that are beneficial for all employees.

Part of this support is an accountability system for supervisors. Participants discussed that there are many supervisors that for no good reason at all, fail to allow their staff, and in particular their classified staff, to take for-credit classes or attend training during working hours. Thus a lack of accountability for supervisors is problematic. I argue that if in fact professional development and career advancement are supported and promoted by the college as a whole, without any accountability for supervisors, little will change with regard to access, and the stifling climate will continue. It was widely agreed
by participants in this study that without support from the administration in these areas, conditions for staff would fail to improve.

While there are many more women working in higher education, and even more women in leadership roles, the question remains, what actual power do they hold? Are these women still considered tokens, seen as representatives of the gender, not as individuals. As Kanter (1977) would note, many women in leadership roles are considered tokens, seen as representatives of the gender, not as individuals. It is acknowledged that there are federal mandates requiring certain diversity criteria be met in higher education institutions. However, it is not enough to meet the gender mandate by clustering women in low-level jobs such as secretaries and housekeepers. Further, it is not enough to place women in leadership roles and provide little guidance on how to work in a man's world. What do Human Resource Offices do for these women? Further, what do they do for the women clustered at the bottom? It is not enough to have these women meet a diversity requirement and fill an empty seat. This in no way constitutes an equitable and diverse workforce.

What then, is the function of Human Resources and Offices of Equal Opportunity? Is the function simply to process paperwork at the beginning and end of an employee's career and to meet federal mandates? Or is there an actual investment in these employees? Is there career planning, promotional opportunities and training, or are employees forgotten once they are hired? Within Brown College and Gray College, there seems to be very little promotion from the bottom-up, with the majority of the opportunities afforded to those already at the top. To create a truly diverse workforce, we must examine not only women at the top, but also women at the bottom. What becomes
of these women? Do they obtain internal promotions or do they fall off the pipeline? Do they have to leave the college to advance, and why? Only one college in this study, Gray, consistently conducts exit interviews with their employees. Failure to conduct exit interviews results in the lack of extremely valuable data on promotion, retention and climate.

When I embarked on this study, I felt that I might be on my own in the perceptions I had regarding higher education and the role of women in the lowest-level positions. However, I discovered that I am not alone. Yet, participants in my study also shared the same sentiments about feeling that they were alone. The silo influence reinforces these feelings that the issues are singular, when as this research found, they are not. Rather, the issues facing female staff are shared. In order to address the continuing inequities that plague higher education, colleges and universities must acknowledge that inequity exists. Some of my study participants believe that their college fails to admit there is a problem. Sweeping gender and race inequities under the rug will not make the problems go away. The fact that even in 2014, the United States Congress will not support the Fair Pay Act speaks volumes on how far women have not come.

What remains troubling to me, aside from the existence of inequity, is the belief of some that gender equity has been met in higher education. In reality, the current policies and practices have not resolved the issues and have not alleviated the hostile climates women experience while working in what is still very much a man’s world. Further, many programs of equal opportunity and affirmative action have failed to deal with the hidden barriers of inequality that are in place for women and people of color. While there are most certainly women and people of color in high-level positions, the
structures that devalue their work, gender and color, remain. Unless the system is fixed, the majority of women and people of color will continue to find themselves blocked from advancement. The system is still very much broken.

Working in higher education, I understand the constraints placed on leaders: the limited resources, the conflicting values and priorities, state mandates. There is seemingly no easy answer on how to solve the issue of inequity. However, investing in people is a vital first step. Although students are our customers, they graduate and move on while employees persist. What kind of environment do we create for them? What do we provide for them? What kind of real investment do we make in our employees, and in particular in the women who work in the trenches of higher education? Our primary focus is, and should remain educating students, but this should not be at the expense of workers who are largely responsible for the experiences of those students.
References


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Kanter, R. M. (1976). The impact of hierarchical structures on the work behavior of


Company.


Association of University Women Educational Foundation.


17-34.


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Appendix A: Participant Consent Form

Dear Participant,

The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You are free to decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time without any negative repercussions.

This qualitative phenomenological case study examines the role of organizational structures and climate as a suppressor for the advancement of women, particularly those located at the lower level of the hierarchy. Data for this study will be collected through a one-on-one interview with the researcher. With your permission, the interview will be recorded.

Do not hesitate to ask questions about the study at any time. I am happy to share my findings with you after the study is complete. Your name will not be associated with this study in any way, as all participants will be assigned a pseudonym. Only I will know your identity as a participant.

There are no known risks and/or discomforts associated with this study. The expected benefits associated with your participation are gaining information on the differences women experience in support and professional roles at the same educational institution, and finding ways to encourage equity. If you have any questions that arise in connection with your participation in this study, you may contact Dr. Pamela Eddy, the dissertation chair and professor in the School of Education at the College of William & Mary. Dr. Eddy may be reached at 757.221.2349 or peddy@wm.edu. You may report any problems or dissatisfaction to Dr. Thomas Ward, chair of the School of Education Internal Review Committee at 757.221.2358 or tjward@wm.edu or Dr. Ray McCoy, chair of the Protection of Human Subjects Committee at 757.221.2783 or rwmcco@wm.edu.

Please sign your consent with full knowledge of the nature and purpose of this research. A copy of this consent form will be given to you for your records.

Sincerely,

Carla A. Costello
Principal Researcher
cacostello@wm.edu
757.221.1254

I consent to participate in this research project and to have my interview recorded.

__________________________
Signature and Date

I consent to participate in this research but do not want my interview recorded.

__________________________
Signature and Date

THIS PROJECT WAS FOUND TO COMPLY WITH APPROPRIATE ETHICAL STANDARDS AND WAS EXEMPTED FROM THE NEED FOR FORMAL REVIEW BY THE COLLEGE OF WILLIAM AND MARY PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS COMMITTEE (Phone 757-221-3966) ON 2013-12-11 AND EXPIRES ON 2014-12-11.
Appendix B: Demographic Information Form

Please respond to the following demographic information requests. Remember, your identity will not be revealed in any way throughout this study. If you are not comfortable answering one of the questions, please indicate prefer not to answer.

Age: ________

Race: ____________________

Marital Status: ______________________________

Number and Age of Children: _____________________________________

Title/Role: ___________________________________________________________

Job Classification: Classified Professional

Highest Degree Completed:_________________________________________________
Appendix C: Interview Questions

1. What is your current role at X College? How long have you worked here?
2. How would you describe the organizational climate for female staff on campus?
   a. Do you think the perception of climate differs between classified and professional staff?
   b. How so?
3. What type of professional development opportunities are available to you?
   a. How does your access compare to other support staff on campus?
   b. How does your access compare to professional staff on campus?
4. What type of resources and information do you have access to?
   a. How do you feel your access compares with other support staff?
   b. How do you feel your access compares with other professional staff?
5. What type of support do you feel that you receive from the institution?
   a. What about support from your direct supervisor?
   b. Do you perceive the support you receive as different from other support staff?
   c. Do you perceive the support you receive as different from other professional staff?
6. What opportunities for career advancement do you have?
   a. Do you feel your opportunities are different or the same for other women on campus?
   b. In what ways have you taken advantage of these opportunities?
7. What career aspirations do you have?
   a. Tell me more about your desire/lack of desire to advance professionally.
8. What networking opportunities do you have, in particular with other women?
9. How do you perceive men are treated on campus compared to females?
10. What policies and practices would you recommend to encourage equity on campus?
11. Is there anything else you would like to add?
    a. Is there anything you feel I missed?
### Appendix D: Crosswalk Table

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<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Attribute &amp; Author</th>
<th>Interview Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Climate</td>
<td>Access &amp; Support (Kanter, 1977; Harlan &amp; Berheide, 1994); Networking &amp; Mentoring</td>
<td>1,2,3,4,5,6,7,9,10</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Kanter, 1977; Anderson, 2005); Professional Development (Kanter, 1977; Spreitzer,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1996; Harlan &amp; Berheide, 1994); Resources (Kanter, 1977; Harlan &amp; Berheide,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1994); Information (Kanter, 1977; Spreitzer, 1996) Career Advancement (Truss,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alfes, Shantz &amp; Rosewarne, 2013); Power structures (Morgan, 2006); Allan (2011);</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Job Satisfaction (Allan, 2011; Glazer-Raymo, 2008; Fraser &amp; Hodge, 2000); Gender</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and climate (Allan, 2011; Lester, 2006; Acker, 1990, 2006; Fraser &amp; Hodge, 2000).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barriers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Rooted in structure (Acker, 1990, 2006; Harlan &amp; Berheide, 1994; West &amp; Zimmermann, 1987; Williams, Muller &amp; Kilanski, 2012); Sex Roles (Kanter, 1977; Sutherland, 1994; Harlan &amp; Berheide, 1994; Acker, 1990, 2006; Blazer-Raymo, 1999, 2008); Ideal worker (Acker, 1990, 2006; Lester, 2006, Williams, 2000); Women vs. women (Sutherland, 1994; Kanter, 1977; Iverson, 2009); Undervalue of women's work (Payne, 2002; Costello, 2012; Iverson, 2009, Bauer, 2000; Acker, 1990); Climate and gender (Allan, 2011; Lester, 2006; Acker, 1990, 2006; Fraser &amp; Hodge, 2000).</td>
<td>1,7,8,9,10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power</td>
<td>Empowerment structures (Kanter, 1977; Spreitzer, 1996; Thomas &amp; Velthouse, 1990); Feeling empowered (Spreitzer, 1996; Thomas &amp; Velthouse, 1990); Powerlessness (Kanter, 1977; Spreitzer, 1996; Lawler, 1992; Lewis &amp; Simpson, 2012); Power and the hierarchy (Morgan, 2006; Conger &amp; Kanungo, 1988; Bolman &amp; Deal, 2008); Power &amp; gender (Acker, 1990, 2006; Conger &amp; Kanungo, 1988; Fraser &amp; Hodge, 2000); Power &amp; status (Morgan, 2006; Magee &amp; Galinsky, 2008)</td>
<td>1,2,3,4,5,6,7,9,10</td>
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</table>

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Analysis</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
<th>Interview Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HR Websites</td>
<td>Professional Development &amp; Training; Policies and language; information</td>
<td>Examine sites to see if there are opportunities available; of so, who are they open to? Examine interview questions to see if there is a disconnect between policy &amp; practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HR Websites</td>
<td>Benefits</td>
<td>Time off to attend training? Not allowed to attend? Reasons? Kanter (1977) access to resources, information, training? Tone of policy language?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Website</td>
<td>Networks/Mentoring</td>
<td>Who is at the top? What positions are at lower-levels and/or are not on the hierarchy at all? (Kanter, 1977; Acker, 1990) Power, the hierarchy, gender. Hidden and direct gender bias. Networks for women? Groups available for networking for support and professional staff? Mentoring groups? (Kanter, 1977; Acker, 1990) access, power, gender.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix F: A priori Coding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hierarchy</th>
<th>Access to information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Access to resources</td>
<td>Training Opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development</td>
<td>Networking and Mentoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power Privilege</td>
<td>Gender Bias</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disadvantaged Position</td>
<td>Lack of Support</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>