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An Examination of the Underrepresentation of Black Women in Senior Leadership Roles at Predominately White Institutions (PWIs): Exploring the Narratives of Mid-Level Managers

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Exploring the Narratives of Mid-Level Managers

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my late father Wallace Christophe. You will forever be my hero. Your love, support, selflessness, sacrifice, wisdom and strength gave me everything that I needed to be great! Thank you for teaching and instilling in me the rich history of our people. I learned so much about life and how to stand on my own because of you. You told me to have stick-to-itiveness and I did! God blessed us to be father and daughter in this life. I love you and wish you could still be here, but your spirit lives within me and we will be forever connected.

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Abstract

Black women are significantly underrepresented in senior leadership roles, particularly at predominately white institutions (PWIs). The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of Black women at predominately white institutions who hold mid-level management roles and aspire to advance to senior leadership. This study details the experiences of five Black women who shared their stories of rising above racial and gender oppressions by overcoming stereotypes, understanding the value in mentorships and sponsorships, utilizing their systems of support and being empowered in their relationships with other Black women. Purposeful sampling was used to recruit the study participants. This study was guided by the theoretical framework Black feminist thought (BFT) that highlights the intersections of race, gender and class oppressions and is centered on Black women's ideas that reflect self, family and society (Collins, 1986). A qualitative study and narrative approach was used to inform the experiences of these women. The findings that resulted from this research highlighted the race and gender inequities in the structures and practices that have long existed at PWIs. The data obtained from this study could be used to help other Black women who desire to become senior leaders at PWIs, better navigate the discriminatory practices and find the needed support to help them successfully navigate through this process. Additionally, PWIs can use the data obtained from this study to gain insight into creating more equitable opportunities on their campuses for Black women to thrive and recruit and retain top talent from this vastly underrepresented population. This study aimed to enhance the limited body of knowledge on Black women mid-level managers at PWIs and examine the unspoken truths on racial and gender biases rooted in white hegemonic organizational structures.

Keywords: inequity, racism, predominately white institution, senior leadership

Chapter One

Introduction

Women are attending college and increasingly outperforming men, now more than ever. Their pure numbers outpace men in earning advanced degrees. Women are surpassing men in competitive college admissions and in receiving equally demanding degrees on the post-graduate and professional levels (Hackett, 2011). The overall trends in degree attainment on all levels show women representing 61% of all Associate degrees earned, 57% of Bachelor's degrees, 60% of Master's degrees and 53% of Doctoral degrees earned (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). Across all higher education institutions, women comprise 56% of all management level positions, compared to men at 44% (Snyder, De Brey, & Dillow, 2019). However, women account for less than 30% of all senior level administrative positions in higher education based on a report by McChesney (2017) from the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources. Additionally, data from the American College President study, women make up just 30% percent of all college and university presidents, with Black women comprising a marginal 2.7% (Gagliardi, Espinosa, Turk & Taylor, 2017).

As discussed in Kellerman and Rhode (2017), "the pipeline is a pipe dream" (p.11), as the quantity of women in leadership roles has continued to be dismally low. The data clearly indicates that while there has been progress, there is still much work to be done in creating equitable systems of development and opportunity, as women themselves are trained, educated and prepared to lead in the pipeline (Seliger & Shames, 2009). Building a diverse leadership pipeline can be advantageous for all sectors of the workforce, but promoting women of color to senior roles has not been given the attention needed. The advancement of Black women in senior leadership roles has continued to be stagnant, even though they are increasing in numbers in

management and professional positions (Pace, 2018). The emergence of Black women as leaders in America, symbolizes a fight for freedom from oppression and a way to elevate the Black community from economic, racial and educational subjugation (Davis, 2016). It is important to consider that Black women continue to make up a growing amount of all students entering institutions of higher education (Jones-DeWeever, 2014). Black women are increasing in degree attainment and in their matriculation rates at colleges and universities all across America (Bartman, 2015). For example, bachelor's degree attainment for Black women in the U.S., has had a steady increase over the past nearly three decades, with 11% in 1990, 17% in 2000, 22% in 2010 and 26% in 2017 (Snyder, De Brey, & Dillow, 2019). Additionally, Black women hold the majority of degrees earned by all Black students. Black women have also gained more success over Black men in earning college degrees by closing the education gap, with approximately 26% of Black women obtaining a bachelor's degree or higher in comparison to Black men at 19% (Snyder, De Brey, & Dillow, 2019).

Despite legislation, affirmative action, and programs in diversity intervention, there remains a universal underrepresentation of Black women in senior leadership positions in higher education broadly (Beckwith, Carter & Peters, 2016). Gable (2011) pointed out that Black women leaders at predominately white institutions are often positioned in roles like coordinators or managers, and are not completely integrated into senior level positions that give them greater decision-making power. A report from CUPA-HR found that Black staff comprised 7 percent of higher education administrative positions, including senior executives, administrative officers, division and department heads, deans, and associate deans. Additionally, only three percent of these positions were held by Hispanics, two percent by Asians and 86 percent of these administrators were white (Bichsel & McChesney, 2017).

Black men reach higher professional levels in the workplace environment in comparison to Black women (Miles, 2012). Black men also have a considerably higher professional rank than Black women. Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010), detailed that there is existing gender bias as a result of how society connects men with being natural leaders because of their dominance and authoritative masculine qualities. Moreover, Black men might only contend with racial bias. Alternatively, Black women are confronted with the struggle to overcome racial and gender discrimination. The barriers rising from stereotypes have resulted in Black women having a higher representation in office administrative and mid-level leadership roles, like managers and directors, yet still remain underrepresented in higher level leadership positions, in comparison to Black men (Blake-Beard, 1999; Davis & Maldonado, 2015). The lack of Black women in senior level positions protects the prevailing culture of men in leadership. In order to encourage more Black women to occupy top leadership roles, there needs to be better representation of achievement and performance in these positions in order to inspire other Black women to achieve the same (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010).

Black men and women combined comprised 8% of all college presidents and Black women were only one-third of that percentage (Gagliardi, Espinosa, Turk & Taylor, 2017). Black women encompassed 62% of all Black undergraduate enrollment, which is significantly more than their overall representation as college presidents, the highest level of leadership on college campuses (Espinosa, et. al., 2019). Additionally, findings were reported from a continuous longitudinal study concerning the status of university presidents that showed Black women are not equally represented in presidency roles at postsecondary institutions (Wallace, Budden, Juban, and Budden, 2014). The American Association of University Women (AAUW) recounted on the leadership status of women, and found Black women do not hold a significant

amount of senior leadership positions in U.S. higher education institutions (Hill, Miller, Benson, & Handley, 2016).

More importantly, Black women have struggled in obtaining senior leadership positions at predominately white institutions at an equivalent level as their peers from different ethnic and gender backgrounds (Behar-Horenstein, West-Olatunji, Moore, Houchen, & Roberts, 2012; Modica & Mamiseishvili, 2010). Scholars have brought forward numerous theoretical perspectives to recognize the unique experiences and struggles of Black women in the work environment. They include "double jeopardy," which asserts a "double whammy" or an added effect of being Black and a woman (Berdahl & Moore, 2006), leading Black women to experience a greater degree of gender and racial bias. In professional settings, the complexities of Black womanhood are overstated because of "intersectional invisibility," indicating that their intersecting marginalized identities leave them both invisible and hypervisible or extremely visible (McCluney & Rabelo, 2018). Further, as researched by Collins (1986), Black women struggle with being the "outsider within," which is the sociological significance of Black feminist thought and the state of being an outsider when working in predominantly white spaces dominated by men.

There are greater amounts of Black women who work as leaders at PWIs that operate in the mid-level ranks of higher education (Frazier, 2011). They obtain mid-level positions like directors or faculty (House, Fowler, Thornton & Francis, 2007), however, less of them hold high-ranking senior or executive level administrative positions like vice presidents, provosts or presidents. Post-secondary institutions can no longer afford to ignore the racial disparities in senior-level administrative positions (Smith, 2015). Conversely, senior leadership positions in higher education at PWIs are lacking women of color, in places where they can have an impact

(Jones & Komives, 2001; Teague, 2015). Equitable representation of Black women transitioning from mid-level management to senior leadership is needed in order for PWIs to create more inclusive and diverse campus cultures (Robinson, 2012). This is important due to the increasing diversity of college students that is inclusive of a greater representation of Black women and other students of color (Espinosa, et. al., 2019).

Problem Statement

Inside the ranks of higher education, Black women in mid-level positions at PWIs face obstacles and challenges that impede their attainment of senior leadership roles (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Black women can often be confronted with numerous racialized circumstances that can make them feel inadequate and degraded by constantly explaining how their professional experiences are hindered in racist and sexist defamations (Allen & Joseph, 2018; West, 2017). These distinct barriers that Black women face have been primarily centered around racial and gender stereotypes and biases, as they make strides to advance into senior leadership roles at PWI's. Black women face the daily challenges of racial microaggressions (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal & Esquilin, 2007). They also contend with tokenism, a form of racial microaggression that creates feelings of heightened visibility, isolation, and inadequate chances for career growth (Hasberry, 2013; Loveless-Morris & Reid, 2018). Black women also face the glass and concrete ceilings, particularly when the leaders of institutions fail to implement critical approaches to embrace diversity. Black women can surpass the glass ceiling effects if researchers and administrators create clarity related to the challenges that inhibit growth and develop plans as appropriate. Having a deep understanding of the history and structure of the issue heightens the chances of devising policies that will have long-term outcomes, instead of a cycle of increased and unproductive measures. Further, instituting

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collective vision and mutual goals is more likely to overpower the issues that add to a culture of resistance. Shifting this narrative must be intrinsically linked to practices that successfully account for institutional culture and standards and not merely rely on the enhancement of external circumstances as potential solutions, which will perpetuate this harrowing issue (Jackson, O'Callahan & Leon, 2014).

College campuses persist in having rising populations of racial and ethnic minorities, both in the ranks of undergraduate and graduate students (Jackson & Leon, 2010). In order for postsecondary institutions to maximize the learning experiences of all students, it is important for institutional leaders to be willing to attract, build, and retain a more diverse leadership structure that reflects their enrollment (Smith, 2015). Overall, the literature has been limited to the traditional outlook of leadership, which is mostly focused on the managerial characteristics espoused by white men in the corporate arena (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). The underrepresentation of Black women in senior administrative roles at PWIs should be examined, especially if these institutions intend to effectively educate all students, promote and foster inclusion and prepare students to be successful in an increasingly diverse society (Chun & Evans, 2016; Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Smith, 2015). This underrepresentation of Black women in senior leadership roles is approximately 1.2% (Catalyst, 2015). This sheds light on the possibility of unique experiences that Black women face and should act as an incentive for predominately white institutions to increase their representation (Davis, 2016) and to fulfill the guarantee of equal opportunity by providing Black women with pathways to take on leadership roles. Further, advancing Black women and diverse groups of other women into leadership roles, will assist academia in increasing their human capital and help them to grow more inclusive.

The literature is limited to Black women in mid-level management roles who are primarily faculty and student affairs professionals that desire to advance to senior leadership. Overall, there is a lack of research on Black women in mid-level management roles, who aspire to senior leadership in higher education, that explore the lens of both gender and race (Emslie & Hunt, 2009; Wright, 2014). Thus, additional studies that explore this journey for Black women are needed, as Black and other women of color who are entering, considering entering, or who are already working in higher education and desire to move into senior leadership may benefit from the perspectives in this research. Moreover, PWI leaders and partners can gain better insight on the importance of breaking the cycle of race and gender oppressions that have long existed.

Statement of Purpose/Research Question

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the experiences of Black women in mid-level management roles at predominately white institutions who aspire to advance into senior leadership positions. A narrative inquiry is used and gives an account of the experiences of Black women in mid-level management at PWI's and explores the challenges and support mechanisms that are needed to help them successfully transition into senior leadership. Their shared stories can provide a point of reference for future generations of Black women higher education professionals, and shed light on the systemic inequalities that exist within predominately white post-secondary institutions.

The theoretical framework, Black feminist thought is used to guide this study, with a focus on communicating and reshaping the distinct, self-defined perceptions of Black women (Collins, 2000). Collins' (2000) outlook on Black feminist thought affirmed that Black women have been steadily placed in lower classified roles in higher education for long periods. The

interlocking pieces of race, gender and class for the majority of Black women are deeply rooted

in oppression. The foundation of BFT is empowerment and social justice. Black feminist thought

inspires Black women to share their stories centered on the importance of African American

culture (Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Moreover, when linked to higher education, BFT is

significant in assisting Black women in coping with the inequities of racism coupled with the

gender disparities that they may face in these institutions. This is recognized, as Black feminist

thought is comprised of ideas shaped by Black women that clarify a perspective of and for Black

women. Additionally, the ideas of Black women are at the center of BFT and reflect a special

outlook on self, family, and society (Collins, 1986).

The research question addresses: *How do Black women in mid-level management roles at*

predominately white institutions describe the experiences in their professional journey to senior-

leadership?

Definition of Terms

The following definitions are used to clarify terms throughout this study that are relevant to the

research topic.

Africentric: Used interchangeably with Afrocentric or Afrocentricity, it is the belief in the

centrality of Africans in postmodern history and is only superficially related to color, but more

accurately a philosophical outlook determined by history (Asante, 1988)

Bias: Bias tends to impede one's understanding by creating perceptions that hinder a person's

ability to see the viewpoints of others (Northhouse, 2013).

Black: Related to this research, Black is used to indicate people of color who identify as Black,

African American, African, Caribbean, or mixed-race persons who identify as Black and

currently live and work in the United States.

Black Feminist Thought: The intersection of race, gender and class oppressions centered on Black women's ideas that reflect self, family and society (Collins, 1986).

Diversity: "The inclusion of a variety of ethnic, racial, and gender-based groups." (Buckley, 2011, p.102).

Glass ceiling: Perceived as an invisible barrier preventing women from ascending into elite leadership positions (Northouse, 2013). "an invisible barrier to advancement based on attitudinal or organizational biases" (Davis and Maldonado, 2015, p.51).

Inequity: An instance of injustice or unfairness (Buckley, 2011, p. 102).

Institutional/Systemic racism: The foundational large scale and inescapable hierarchical system of U.S. racial oppression devised and maintained by whites and directed at people of color. (Feagin & Elias, 2013)

Mid-level managers (higher education): Mid-level managers supervise several entry-level staff members and substantial programming, or supervises no staff members but plays an important role in policy development and budget oversight. They play the role of college leader, university representative, consensus builder, mediator, and facilitator—their knowledge and expertise are vital to the success of universities (Rosser, Johnsrud, & Heck, 2003).

People of color: Describes any person who is not considered white or of European descent. People of color include African Americans, Latino Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans, Pacific Islander Americans, Middle Eastern Americans, and multiracial Americans. (Alvarez, Liang, & Neville, 2016; Franklin, Boyd-Franklin, & Kelly, 2006)

Pipeline problem: Implies that "women with the appropriate education and background are not available" (Carli and Eagly, 2001, p. 631).

Predominantly white institutions: Institution of higher education in which the majority of the student body population is white (Grier-Reed & Wilson, 2016).

Racism: Consists of racial disregard at its core, including disrespect, or most critically ill will. Racially based disregard is opposing one's wellbeing on account of the racial group to which they are assigned (Garcia, 2001).

Senior leadership: These positions include the highest-ranking administrators in higher education institutions, such as; chancellors, vice chancellors, associate and assistant vice chancellors, presidents, vice presidents, associate and assistant vice presidents, provosts, vice provosts, associate and assistant vice provosts, and deans (Hendrickson & Ikenberry, 2013).

Sexism: This word refers to "an attitude and a behavior which is based on the presumed inferiority or difference of women as a group" (Weber & Wade, 1995, p. 303).

Sponsorship (Sponsor): A higher level of mentorship is sponsorship, which is considered the "holy grail" of advancement in your career for all executive leaders and it is the "missing link for Black women" (Smith, 2019 p. 56). Sponsors lend their social capital as they acquire authority, trust, respect, influence, control and power to open doors for professional advancement (Bono, Braddy, Liu, Gilbert, Fleenor, Quast & Center, 2017).

Underrepresented: The experience of being a member of a specific cultural group whose numerical distribution is significantly less than that of other cultural groups present in the same environment (Turner, 2002)

Chapter Two

Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to present a review of the literature related to the experiences of Black women serving in mid-level management positions in higher education at predominately white institutions (PWIs) and to make connections on how these experiences effect their progression into senior leadership. This chapter will include the role and significance of Black women in higher education, from a historical overview, the pipeline issue as it pertains to Black women in senior leadership, and the significant themes that emerged on race and gender oppressions. These barriers include microaggressions, tokenism, the glass ceiling and the concrete ceiling. Additionally, support systems and strategies will be explored for Black women seeking senior leadership status at predominantly white institutions, which include mentoring and or sponsoring, professional leadership development, and spirituality and faith. In concluding, this chapter will provide a review of the theoretical framework for this study, Black feminist thought (BFT).

Literature Review

Black women continue to be greatly underrepresented in corporate leadership positions in America. Presently, Black women make up 7.4% of the U.S. population, yet they represent only 1.2% of senior management and executive roles of S&P 500 firms (Catalyst, 2015). Further, studies indicate that one primary driver of Black women's success was their ability to manage the challenge of intersectional invisibility, or the propensity to be dismissed or ignored because of their position as a part of two devalued and underrepresented populations. Moreover, Black women fought through this by assuming high-risk, visible roles that assisted them in rising to higher levels in their companies. As a result of this, Black women are capable of leveraging their

strengths to prosper at work, by going above and beyond what is expected in their performance, effectively communicating, linking up with mentors and or sponsors, developing positive relationships with supervisors, and using their cultural experiences to improve their work performance. (Catalyst, 2004).

A review of the data on Black women in higher education shows that a limited amount of them have attained senior leadership roles, as they also faced obstacles to leadership and lacked the career and leadership progression at predominantly white institutions of higher education (Bartman, 2015; Davis & Maldanado, 2015; Gamble & Turner, 2015). Data from the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics (2019), showed that Black women comprised merely 11.5% of management and professional positions in postsecondary education. In contrast, white men accounted for 38% and white women represented 41% of higher education employees in these positions.

Black women administrators across higher education institutions in America face a variety of issues. Mabokela and Green (2001) explicitly detail that although Black women in academic institutions each have different viewpoints, experiences, and beliefs, they are joined in their fight to be valued and accepted, and to have a voice in an institution with an abundance of views. More specifically, at PWIs, Black women are greatly slighted by discriminatory practices, in contrast to their white counterparts who benefit from white privilege (Harley, 2008). There is evidence that Black women are confronted with challenges as they move up the ladder in higher education leadership. This includes discrimination based on race and gender, which is linked to tokenism, microaggressions, the glass ceiling, restricting opportunities to advance, feeling powerless, lack of trust and support, isolation and alienation, unfriendly and unwelcoming working environments, and a lack of opportunities for mentorship and networking (Henry &

Glenn, 2009; Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009; Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal & Esquilin, 2007). This review of literature will examine the themes that resonated, and the gaps that exist in the literature, as it relates to Black women who desire to advance to senior leadership positions at PWIs.

Historical Overview

There is a rich history in the education of Black women in America. From slavery to the fight for formal education, Black women have battled for the right to be educated to obtain better paying jobs and have their own independence. In spite of the obstacles they faced, Black women are proficient and skilled in a culture where injustices, negative beliefs and skepticisms dominate (Davis & Maldanado, 2015). Black women are operating in places where they constantly have to prove themselves. The disparities of sexism and racism have been embedded in our history, damaging a pipeline to senior leadership for Black women.

Historically, there has not been much concern on the inequality of race and gender groups in positions of leadership, specifically Black women at the helm of these institutions, moving slower than the population growth of diverse student groups (Gable, 2011). Black women have faced many hurdles in obtaining access to education. Education to Black women was viewed as a path to creating better, more enriched lives for them and their families. Before the Civil War, educating Black slaves was often against the law (Jones, Dawkins, McClinton & Glover, 2012). The chance to become educated for some Black slaves was still possible, as some secretly pursued formal education, others were allowed access to instruction to accomplish their work responsibilities and some were given opportunities to learn for religious reasons (Jones, et. al., 2012; Solomon, 1985).

Oberlin College was established in 1833 in Ohio by abolitionists. This assisted Black women in acquiring access to education. Prior to this, Black women were left out of higher education, but they were able to make significant progress in earning degrees from Oberlin College. When the Civil War ended, new opportunities were created for Black women, yet they still faced obstacles. Black women that were educated moved to the South and helped to educate other Black Americans, as schools were created to help educate them to be functional citizens (Wolfman, 1997). Laws were established to help develop U.S. higher education. One of the most important policies related to access for public higher education, and consequently for Black Americans, was presented in 1862 with the implementation of the first Morrill Land Grant Act. This Act led the way for the agricultural and mechanical arts educational movement, that provided funding and 30,000 acres of land for the formation of public institutions in all states (Rudolph, 1990). Access was extended specifically to Black Americans when the second Morrill Act of 1890 was passed, which authorized the annual distribution of funds for education on a "just and equitable" premise to Black Americans in seventeen states (Brazzell, 1996; Bowles & De Costa, 1971). This Act guided the creation of 17 state-supported Black institutions, that joined the set of private Black colleges that existed and 54 additional Black institutions established under the first Morrill Act (Rudolph, 1990). The Act also made legal, the segregation of Black and white public institutions and highlighted a curricular emphasis on mechanics, agriculture, and the industrial arts. This model of vocational education was federally subsidized, and although it was appealing to some Black Americans, it encouraged the thought that they were less competent than whites intellectually, and should be presented with a separate and lower caliber education (Anderson, 1988; Davis, 1998).

Roebuck and Murty (1993) suggest that public HBCUs were formed to get millions of dollars in federal funds for the creation of white land-grant universities, to limit the education of Black Americans to vocational training, and to preclude them from attending white land-grant colleges. Despite the circumstances that influenced their founding, these institutions and their private counterparts jointly produced in excess of 3,400 American college graduates by the turn of the century (Anderson, 1988).

A large number of Black women chose to earn their degrees from historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), like Howard University, Wilberforce University and Fisk. The first college for Black women in the United States to award bachelor's degrees was Hartshorn Memorial College, established in 1883. Even though Black women continued to face barriers, their desire to continue the quest for higher education continued to be steadfast (Jones, et. al., 2012; Solomon, 1985). The report of Black College graduates by Dubois (1900) showed that a total of 252 women in comparison to 2,272 men earned Bachelor's degrees. From this number, sixty-five graduated from Oberlin College. Additionally, just twenty-two of the 156 Black college graduates were women. This immense inequality in educational attainment led some Black women to a concern on this troubling issue. Early advocates for the education of Black girls and women specifically through the late 19th and early 20th centuries, asserted that uplifting the Black woman's place in society would elevate the entire race. Moreover, implementing racial uplift fell mainly on Black women, with the low numbers of educated Black women in the late 19th century creating a major impact on the Black community (Perkins, 1982).

The first two decades of the twentieth century experienced an educational awareness that stimulated the American South, due to the interest in Black rural education by northern philanthropists and their Southern agents (Anderson, 1978). Anderson (1978) also explained how

the South went through an extraordinary development in their public educational system. State laws were reformed to reinforce the legal base of public education. Additionally, schoolhouses increased in value, there was a rapid decrease in illiteracy, local taxes increased, school terms were longer, and the salaries of teachers grew significantly. Historians saw this structured school movement as the official beginning of the Southern education movement. Further, the success of this movement was a result of the collective efforts of white southern educators and industrial philanthropists. Both of these groups created a powerful new force in the fight to decide on the purpose of southern education for whites and Blacks. The partnership was sanctioned by the formation of two chief educational organizations, the Southern Education Board in 1901 and the General Education Board in 1902. The programs and policies designed by these boards deeply shaped Southern Black public education throughout the first half of the twentieth century (Anderson, 1978).

Some of the most pivotal influences of Black women's education throughout the 20th century is summarized in Boukari's (2005) and Thomas and Jackson's (2007) writings on the empowerment struggle of Black women in the 20th century. Charlotte Hawkins Brown was dedicated to proper manners and she ensured that Black women students at her school, Palmer Memorial Institute which was founded in 1901, were carefully trained in the appropriate social graces. Her interests were focused in the areas of education and social manners and she had a strong determination to battle injustice and for civil rights. Mary McLeod Bethune founded several successful schools for Black girls and eventually Bethune Cookman College in 1904. Bethune Cookman College was the sole historically Black College founded by a Black woman and still currently thriving. Others like Nannie Helen Burroughs, focused on the unique strength that all Black women have been required to develop historically. This was practiced in her

National Training School for Girls founded in the early 1900s (Boukari, 2005). Burroughs created a school for Black women and girls with the goal of producing well-trained women who were capable of competing in the workforce. The focus of her school was on the whole life of Black girls, which included, health, manners, character and mind, as well as preparing them to uphold orderly homes. The school was also aimed at building solid morals, diligent and scholarly women. Burroughs sought to prepare leaders by accentuating courage, honor, order and timeliness. Ultimately, she focused on training God-fearing women and girls who would be independent and committed to the elevating their race (Taylor, 2002). Lastly, Anna Julia Cooper, who was an Oberlin College graduate, an educator, and the President of Frelinghurysen University in D.C., supported the issues of mounting sexism with the Black community and the scarce educational opportunities for Black Americans. All of these women started creating an institutional base that guided the center of economics for Black American youth in the early twentieth century (Boukari, 2005).

During the Jim Crow Era of the South, beginning in the early 20th century, it was problematic for Black Americans to obtain sufficient higher education, and it was believed that the Black population was unable to gain an education in "white America" (Wilcox, 1972, p. 101). Moreover, it was presumed that Black women would uphold their social status. They were expected to occupy particular spaces and satisfy vaguely defined roles, as opportunities for Black women were ones in which the professional and shared leadership were restricted (Crocco & Waite, 2007). The modern-day focus is concentrated on concerns about the equality and diversity of education, as well as tracing regulated testing and underachievement, along with dropout rates, and the quality of schools and teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Ladson- Billings, 2005). Further, this matter of equality has been a causal concern that has surpassed two centuries. In

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spite of the historic passing of the 1954 Brown decision, this idea of separate but equal was not the case, as higher education stayed separate and unequal (Hine, Brown, & Terborg-Penn, 1993).

In certain ways, the repeated struggle for racial equity is astounding, considering the number of policies established to close gaps in opportunities for college between Black students and their white counter parts at different stages during higher education history (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009). Additionally, efforts towards policy that passed through the late 1960s, unlocked numerous doors for Black students in higher education. However, to characterize the present circumstances of Black Americans as unequal would be a massive understatement. Over 100 years of gainful policy efforts have been threatened by the following: the consistent underrepresentation of Black students at PWIs; sustained excessive dependence on racially-biased college entrance examinations; steady efforts to demolish affirmative action; heightened admissions criteria statewide for public higher education, with no analogous developments in K-12 public schools; accounts of racial discrimination and disparaging experiences that Black students face at PWIs; low persistence and degree attainment for Black men; involuntary desegregation and inequitable funding for HBCUs; and the regression of federal financial aid based on need (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009).

When the Jim Crow era ended in the 1960's, the Civil Rights Movement of the same decade was one of the biggest societal movements in America, as it helped to create equal opportunity access for Black Americans, as well as put a stop to employer discrimination due to race, ethnicity, sex or national origin (Manicone, 2008). This period also included legislation that was designed to encourage the practices of college and university recruitment to allow opportunities for women and other minorities to obtain entry (Jones et al., 2012).

The late 1960's and early 1970's brought about the Civil Rights and Women's movements and served as a primary agent opposing racial and gender bias in education. When the landmark legislation of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 passed, they outlawed discrimination on the basis of race, color, gender, national origin, or disabled conditions. Comparably, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, banned discrimination based on gender in educational institutions that were obtaining federal funding (Thomas & Jackson, 2007). Degree attainment for Black women rose steadily in the 1960's and 1970's, with Black women completing four or more years of college in 1960 at 3.3%, 1965 at 4.5%, 1970 at 4.6% and in 1975 at 6.2% (U.S. Census Bureau, 1999).

The Black community believed that Black women would be able to secure better employment opportunities over Black men, because Black women, like the worldview of all women, carry the culture (Amott & Matthaei, 1996; Norton, 1985). In spite of the fact that the scheme of education was instituted for wealthy white men, Black women were able to gain education so that they could help progress the Black community and pave the way for other Black women who longed to be educated (Mabokela & Green, 2001; Solomon, 1985). Considerable advances have been made in the development of opportunities for Black women, but their underrepresentation in senior leadership positions in higher education remains (Biggs & Daniel, 2001; Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Jackson & Johnson III, 2011; Jones et al., 2012). Black women are increasing in degree attainment and matriculation rates at colleges and universities all across America (Bartman, 2015). The National Center for Education Statistics (2018), reports that the majority of degrees earned by all Black students are obtained by Black women. Based on the 2017 report by the U.S. Census Bureau, Black women's level of educational achievement increased between 2011 and 2015. Additionally, college enrollment rates for Black women

doubled since 1980 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). However, the disparities remain, with Black women college and university presidents represented at a dismal 2.7%. (Gagliardi, Espinosa, Turk, & Taylor, 2017). Further, to recapitulate, 11.5% of all management positions in post-secondary education were held by Black women (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2019).

Pipeline and Senior Leadership

People of color are underrepresented in higher education positions. White men are overrepresented in the more prestigious roles of faculty and administrators, while white women are concentrated in staff and professional positions (Hero, Levy, and Radcliff, 2013; McChesney, 2018). Additionally, both men and women of color have greater representation in staff and professional positions rather than faculty and administration. One of the causative influences to the underrepresentation of women in senior level leadership roles has been defined by many as the pipeline problem, which suggests that "women with the appropriate education and background are not available" (Carli & Eagly, 2001, p.631). Black women are becoming increasingly impacted by this pipeline problem. Further, post-secondary institutions would benefit their students by mending the educational pipeline. To accomplish this, they need to be ready to fix any issues in the educational arena that might hinder the success of students, as there is an increase in the population of students that is more ethnically diverse.

There is an imperative need to have persons in chief decision-making positions on college campuses to match the increased diversity of students. Black women, although underrepresented in senior positions in higher education, are overrepresented in mid-level positions, in comparison to Black men, white women, and white men, irrespective of their education level or length of experience (West, 2020). Black women also have increased their

possibilities for advancement into senior leadership positions in higher education, but they still face disparaging racial and gender oppressions and lack the needed resources and support, like mentorships, sponsorships, networking and access to professional leadership development opportunities to remove these barriers and improve their chances for success in their transitional mid-level management roles (Davis & Maldanado, 2015; Glass & Cook, 2016; Hughes & Hamilton, 2003). As our culture increases in diversity, new leadership and management styles will become mandatory, to better serve a multitude of different races, ethnicities and cultures. Additionally, there is an implication that the pipeline concept in higher education has numerous stages that Black women advance through to attain senior leadership roles (Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Kellerman & Rhode, 2017). Moreover, the root of racism and sexism accentuates the post-secondary institution's role in undertaking the disparities that Black women are confronted with as faculty and staff, to persist in advocating diversity internally (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Research revealed that racial and gender discriminations that are still entrenched at predominately white institutions, can be seen in many professional instances (Davis & Brown, 2017; Henry & Glenn, 2009; Gardner, Barrett & Pearson, 2014). As discussed in Davis and Brown (2017), Black women faculty are automatically discounted on various academic levels. This automatic disregard questions credibility, adequate credentials, collegiality, effective teaching ability, and the value of committee contributions at work. Additionally, Henry and Glenn (2009) argue that the absence of critical mass at PWIs leaves countless Black women to wade through various barriers that they face alone. As a result of the overall underrepresentation of Black Americans in higher education administrative roles, PWIs struggle to increase this representation (Gardner, et. al., 2014).

A study by Gasman, Abiola & Travers' (2015) at elite Ivy League institutions, addresses the lack of diversity in senior leadership and provided great insight into how these predominately white institutions are working around this diversity in hiring issue at the top-levels. They used the word "qualified" as a "euphemism" (p. 1) to ignore diversity and discriminate in the hiring process. They also used their prejudice to perpetuate discriminatory practices with these mental stereotypes about how people of color just would not fit into their institutional culture, hence they are not "qualified" they do not "fit" (p. 2). This study exemplified the fact that people of color are vastly underrepresented in America's higher education systems due to academic pipeline issues in the academy, which can heavily affect their career progression to the top levels of leadership. Further, this lack of representation of people of color, particularly Black women, is attributed to a long history of prejudice and racism that is persistent at predominately white institutions. This study emphasizes the significance in addressing the policies related to the objectives of diversity from a historical and contemporary perspective.

The research illustrates that the bias of racism and sexism in the workplace is commonly linked to what Black women and women of color in higher education are confronted with in their careers (Beckwith, Carter & Peters, 2016; Brown, 2005; Johnson, 2005; Mitchell, 2018; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010; Thorpe-Moscon & Pollack, 2014). At four-year PWIs, Black women in mid-level management have sustained the historical challenges of gender and racial inequalities that can often inhibit job advancement to a higher level over their white colleagues (Gardner, et. al., 2014; Lewis, 2016). Likewise, systematic racism is alive and infiltrates PWIs, affecting the professional experiences of Black women. The pipeline implies, "that the more women students, the more women junior faculty, and the more women lower-level administrators, the more women will rise to the top" (Henry & Glenn, 2009, p.12). However,

Black women, who desire senior-level positions frequently face relentless opposition and injustices, as well as mandates to prove a greater degree of proficiency in pursuit of leadership positions in higher education (Kellerman & Rhode, 2017).

Additionally, leaders of institutions need to be deliberate in their efforts to push diversity at the highest levels. They can launch policies and practices to safeguard equal entrance to senior administrative positions. Further, they can hold administrators liable for nurturing a campus that has an inclusive environment and offers chances for mentoring, sponsorship and career development for aspiring senior leaders, particularly Black women. These are examples of ways that leaders in higher education can develop a broader spectrum of senior-level leadership teams. This is important in order to repel a system historically created to provide advancement for white men, to preserve and strengthen white power and move forward with a more inclusive goal. It is necessary for the leaders in power at these institutions to face the reality of the future of the nation, their responsibility to students and the truth that their livelihood is linked to these impending students (Gasman, Abiola, & Travers, 2015). Moreover, placing value on diversity means developing a space that regards and includes differences, acknowledging the unique contributions that those persons can make and establishing a work atmosphere that increases the potential of all personnel. Diversity in higher education should also reinforce institutions and escalate their probability of sustained success as a result of reliance on relations among groups (Wolfe, & Dilworth, 2015). Additionally, if post-secondary education is to flourish in an environment that is changing, the commitment to diversity in leadership, must be fulfilled. Battin (1997), contended that strengthening the efforts of diversity and inclusion is not just ethically right, but demographically smart as well. Since the customary talent selections are dwindling, there is a continuous necessity to prepare for diverse leadership successions to lead institutions

through periods of transformation of progressively complex populations that will change the culture of campuses for years to come (Harvey, 2011). Research substantiates that diversity is valuable to the growth and development of higher education institutions holistically, and it is necessary for colleges and universities to challenge themselves to examine diversity beyond the surface level (Brown, 2004). It is not sufficient to simply include persons from racial minority groups within different positions across the structure of the institutions, or get diversity policies in place and take for granted that they will serve as the remedy for centuries of racial afflictions, as diversity and inclusion should be embedded as their core values (Wolfe & Dilworht, 2015).

Among Black women faculty, there are disparities that exist systemically in the way they are treated. Disparities in salary among Black and white faculty continue, as well as discrimination against faculty of color in the process of promotion and tenure, hindering their advancement to senior academic positions (Arnold, Crawford & Khalifa, 2016; Stanley, 2006; Zambrana, Espino, Castro, Douthirt Cohen, & Eliason, 2015). Their experiences challenge the conventional notions of meritocracy that continues to be at the core of the institutional narratives connected to academic progression (Boss, Karunaratne, Huang, Beavers, Pegram-Floyd & Tullos, 2019; Croom 2017; Overstreet, 2019).

Race and Gender Barriers

Black women have been forced to rise above immense barriers. They have been a continuous force at the heart of inequalities in race and gender, expressly through the human rights and political battles (Rosser-Mims, 2010). Black women do not simply struggle with stereotypes as leaders; they also endure negative undertones and perceptions in their workplace environments. The combined outcomes of stereotypes develop a viewpoint that is embraced by various decision makers (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). As a result, postsecondary institutions

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display gaps in gender and race disparity regarding minorities and non-observance of diversification in leadership, which ultimately leads to the disregard of discrimination against Black women in leadership roles (Ghosh, 2012).

Microaggressions

One of the daily challenges that Black women face are the understated and forthright microaggressions that are experienced in the workplace. Racial microaggressions impart harsh, demeaning, or even negative racial slurs that target people of color (Sue, et al., 2007). Several researchers corroborate that indirect biased microaggressions do not just transpire as an isolated event; in fact, they are recurring and are part of an organizational culture (Agars & Cazares, 2017; Harwood, Choi, Orozco Villicaña, Huntt, & Mendenhall, 2015; Davis & Harris, 2015; Lukes & Bangs, 2014; Sue, et. al., 2007;). A buildup of microaggression stressors can have psychological effects, which include decreased self-efficacy, increased feelings of vulnerability, powerlessness, fury, hypervigilance, alienation, and seclusion (Helms, Nicolas, & Green, 2012; Sue, 2010). There are three distinctive types of racial microaggressions. Microassaults are blatantly racist communications that can use racial slurs or insults. This can be the use of negative racial name-calling or stereotypical verbal offenses. Microinsults involve indirect exchanges that "degrade someone's racial history and character" (Sue et. al., 2007, p. 274). Lastly, microinvalidations are exchanges where someone's experiences are nullified, which could include denial of white privilege and implying that racism no longer exists.

Various other studies have noted the negative exchanges of microaggressions that are frequent and that take a considerable emotional toll on Black women and other women of color (Donovan, Galban, Grace, Bennett, Felicie, 2013; Holder, Jackson & Ponterotto, 2015; Lewis, Mendenhall, Harwood & Browne Huntt, 2016). Solórzano, Ceja and Yosso (2000) stressed the

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importance of acknowledging and studying this type of racism in our culture because of the lack of documents and examinations. Further, more clearly comprehending microaggressions as the threats posed and the attacks justified, can simply be disregarded or moderated. As explained by Pittman (2012), the goal of this research on microaggresive behavior, targets the documentation of racial microaggressions, to keep record of them in higher education, to have a clearer understanding, and have it addressed. This supports the fact that indirect biased microaggressions do not emerge as single isolated events. They are repeated as a part of an institution's culture and negatively influences Black women's lives.

Studies found important facets of gendered racial microaggressions that Black women experienced to be centered around notions of beauty, sexual objectification, subtle oppressive communications, invisibility (professional, community, leadership), exclusion, and stereotypes of the strong and angry Black woman (Lewis and Neville 2015; Lewis et. al., 2016; Holder et. al., 2015; Mena & Vaccaro, 2017; West, 2017). Additional research gave support from a psychological perspective that was connected to apparent sexist occurrences and racial microaggressions in hypothetically anticipated ways (Lewis & Neville, 2015; Helms et. al., 2012 & Sue, 2010). The results from these studies show that Black women endure microaggressions centered on the stereotypes that are present and related to their gendered racial group. These results corroborate and expand the literature by creating a classification of gendered racial microaggressions that focus on connecting forms of indirect oppression. Furthermore, while many universities are faced with the need to increase racial diversity, the research emphasizes the alarming existence of microaggressions averse to minority students and faculty across race and gender (Constantine, Smith, Redington, & Owens, 2008; Pittman, 2012; Solórzano et al., 2000).

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Further, research looked at microaggressions of Black women college students attending PWI's. Racial microaggressions were displayed through segregation, absence of representation, response to criminality on the campus, cultural bias on the course level, tokenism, and coercion to conform (Kelly, Gardner, Stone, Hixson & Dissassa, 2019; Mills, 2020). These studies highlighted the emotional toll and stress that becomes evident for Black women when they do not exercise coping mechanisms to deal with these issues when they are expending emotional labor. This results in Black women ultimately rendering themselves invisible via the systems and structures that propagate white supremacy, and other systems of oppressive hegemony.

Tokenism

A study by Holder, et. al., (2015) sees tokenism as a form of racial microaggressions, where organizations use Black and other minority employees to demonstrate the company's dedication to diversity. These employees generally experience a multitude of difficulties in the workplace, such as feeling isolation and limited opportunities for growth (Hasberry, 2013; Loveless-Morris & Reid, 2018). Within the literature, previous studies have defined tokenism narrowly in terms of gender. The current research expands on the previous by examining tokenism as a function of gender and race, with an examination of racial/ethnic subgroups. Tokenism is an added challenge that Black women face at PWI's. Black women faculty and staff are looked upon as outsiders at predominantly white institutions, when they are given a seat at the table; furthermore, they are challenged when they exercise their voice (Collins, 2009; Griffin, 2012; Grant, 2012; Wilder, Jones & Osborne-Lampkin, 2013; West, 2015; West, 2017). In a study by Lewis, Mendenhall, Harwood, & Browne Huntt (2016), on Black women at a predominately white university in professional, school, workplace, or social settings, felt silenced and marginalized. These Black women also described feeling that their contributions

were being minimized. Additionally, numerous women shared their experiences on the expectations placed on them to speak loud and boisterous or, on the flip side in certain situations, being told to speak softly. Moreover, these occurrences send the message that there is a problem with the way Black women communicate and that they should have to modify the manner in which they speak to make others feel more comfortable.

This struggle is referenced by Collins (1986) as the "outsider-within" (p. 14) status, and it continues to inspire Black women to seek out support networks and/or friendship relationships as much as possible. Studies on Black women faculty affirmed the struggle that these women must cope with, ensuing from their social identities correlated to their race and gender. These struggles involved tokenism as a part of the experience for Black women in higher education (Davis & Brown 2017; Hinton, 2010). Black women may also be requested to serve only on specific committees, such as ones that are related to diversity at their institutions, and/or assist with particular populations of student groups, because of their marginalized identities (Griffin, Pifer, Humphrey & Hazelwood 2011; Henry & Glenn, 2009; Kelly & McCann, 2014; Pittman, 2012). This can restrict their chances to increase diverse job experience desired for career progression.

A quantitative study by Lewis (2016) looked at the effects of proportional representation in higher education, positioning tokenism and advancements in cultural capital as the qualifications to career progression for Black women and men administrators. The study sample was comprised of 349 middle and senior level administrators from the American Association of Blacks in Higher Education (AABHE). The majority of these administrators worked for PWIs. The women had a higher probability of feeling stuck in the profession, isolated from other Black people in the community, and established reduced rates of participation in programs for leadership development. The study reported that Black women had substantial unintended effects

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for having their work examined more meticulously than their white men colleagues, overseeing

numerous responsibilities, and recognizing colleagues separating themselves when likened to the

Black men in this study. It is clear from this study that tokenism contributed to the substantial

distinctions in career growth patterns for Black women.

Glass Ceiling

In the pursuit of senior-level roles in higher education, which is an important occupation

sector in the U.S. economy, Black women and other women of color are faced with the

increasing concern of the glass ceiling (Marina & Fonteneau, 2012; Patton & Haynes, 2014;

Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010; Williams, 2014;). Davis and Maldonado (2015) describe the

glass ceiling as "an invisible barrier to advancement based on attitudinal or organizational

biases" (p.51). Higher education has proven to be less responsive than other segments of the

economy to diversity, particularly people and women of color (Bain & Cummings, 2000;

Burbridge; 1994; Jackson & Leon, 2010). It is essential to recognize how the existence of a

glass ceiling forms the present workforce structure in higher education. The total number of

people employed by postsecondary institutions was nearly four million, based on over 6000

institutions. Black Americans made up approximately 10% of that number, with Black women as

the majority employed at over 6% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018).

Historically, the literature on the glass ceiling is commonly described as the group of

obstacles and/or hurdles to career progression that women and people of color contend with,

growing in difficulty with professional advancement (Baxter & Wright, 2000; Cotter, Hermsen,

Ovadia, & Vanneman, 2001; Maume, 2004; Morrison & Von Glinow, 1990). The glass ceiling is

conveyed in many ways, and it expresses harsh workplace experiences, as well as customary

forms of discrimination that develop as a segment of the social setting of the workplace, such as

what is needed for jobs, and social biases (Cotter et al., 2001). Turner, Norwood and Noe (2013), argue that the glass ceiling was established by discourses of femininity and impossibility. This discourages women from realizing their potential, persisting in cultivating skills, and creating a strategy that would place them in a position to attain leadership roles in higher education. When exploring how the glass ceiling influences the higher education workforce nuances, individuals and institutions are unable to disregard what is beneath the exterior, rooted in the foundation of every organization, where hostile work environments are sustained by traditions of prejudice and the visions of a white majority (Jackson, O'Callaghan & Adserias, 2014).

While Black women have made progress in acquiring senior-level leadership positions in higher education institutions, this glass ceiling for Black women still exists, particularly for the ones who have not gained senior leadership roles in the academy (Cook & Glass, 2013; Davis & Maldanado 2015; Gamble & Turner, 2015; Ryan, Haslam, Morgenroth, Rink, Stoker & Peters, 2016; Williams, 2014). Williams (2014), elaborates that the glass ceiling persists in post-secondary institutions since the leaders of these institutions are failing to execute important strategies for diversity. Additionally, institutional leaders need to be willing to assess policies and abolish practices that adversely affect marginalized populations and eliminate them from gaining equivalent access to progressive opportunities. Moreover, they will be able to produce a more transparent climate at the institutions, develop strengths, and make sure that methods used to push efforts of inclusion bear quantifiable outcomes. These efforts for inclusion must begin at the top levels of these institutions and filter throughout the institutional pipeline. Leaders must also be willing to take the steps required to transform current structures, to develop a more inclusive campus atmosphere, so that all women are able to break through the proverbial glass ceiling and ascend to higher level leadership positions (Ryan et al., 2016; Williams, 2014). Glass

ceilings also serve as traditional boundaries that do not permit Black women administrators to move past marginalized positions (Gamble & Turner, 2015). Further, scholars suggest that the effect of the glass ceiling is a barrier to the success of Black women that ends in institutions making poorly organized decisions impacting their career progression.

Concrete Ceiling

The impact of the glass ceiling in higher education leadership affects all women, but women of color are troubled about frequent encounters with the concrete ceiling effect. Black women are faced with the roadblock defined as the concrete ceiling, which restricts progression to senior leadership positions (Bell & Nkomo, 2001). Concrete ceilings also represent obstacles that are much harder to get through due to race, ethnicity and gender disparities and they do not provide, based on the nature of what the name represents, a visual of the other side as does a glass ceiling (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). The concrete ceiling cannot be shattered as easily as the glass ceiling and signifies a unique resistant impediment to rising career mobility that Black women experience and is indicative of discrimination on a higher level, as it results in competent and qualified persons being disregarded for promotional opportunities (Beckwith et al., 2016; Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Catalyst, 2004). Additionally, the concrete ceiling effect is used to designate the barriers that minority women face, particularly Black women.

Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010) propose that the concrete ceiling is a symbol for opportunities that exist for career growth that do not take place due to the absence of mentors to motivate and give direction. Moreover, they note that the name labyrinth that was used to elucidate the problematic journey required to get beyond the ceilings, glass or concrete, and people can sometimes end up going in the wrong direction. To strategize and resolve continuing through the glass ceiling, which often times has been a concrete ceiling for Black women,

Jackson and O'Callaghan (2009) concluded that additional support from institutions should be given to women and persons of color, through mentoring or sponsorship, which is essential to their advancement.

Support Systems and Strategies

Black women need to access both support systems and strategies to persevere through the challenges of the discriminatory race and gender barriers of microaggressive behavior, feelings of tokenism, and facing the glass and concrete ceiling. This section will examine the importance of Black women thinking and acting strategically and the various forms of support emphasized in the literature, primarily mentoring, sponsorship, professional leadership development, spirituality and faith.

Mentoring

It is especially important for Black women to develop mentoring relationships, as mentoring has the most prevalent impact on career progression (Gardner et al., 2014; Green & King, 2001; Henry & Glenn, 2009; Patitu & Hinton, 2003; Patton, 2009; West, 2017). In a study by Brown (2005), a survey of 91 women college presidents indicated that they were inclined to have career mentors who helped them advance through administrative ranks. These findings further show that multiple mentorships are important in assisting women in advancing their careers as well as developing self-confidence. Moreover, as a result of the inequalities and a lack of representation among women leaders, Black women leaders have a particularly difficult time locating mentors and are confronted with discriminations that impede their experiences derived from stereotypes related to women in leadership (Rosser-Mims, 2010; Dobbs, Thomas & Harris, 2008; Hackman & Johnson, 2004; King & Ferguson, 2011).

Participants in a study by Holder, et. al., (2015), discussed that having mentors gave them a feeling of empowerment and validation to their existence in the workplace and their feelings when they were confronted on the job with racial microaggressions. Evolving Black women leaders were given a chance to be coached by senior level Black women who gave them perspective on areas that could disrupt growth in their careers. Green and King (2001) formed the Sisters Mentoring Sisters project, which supports Black women who work at predominantly white institutions on designing career plans and strategies for professional and personal growth. The idea of, "It takes a village to sustain a Black woman" (Green & King, 2001, p. 156), was the justification behind forming this program to aid Black women in advancing their careers. Green and King (2001), describe the overall goal of this project as the empowerment of "sisters" by "sisters" through a collective process of learning that was meant to support their career and personal growth. They assert that no formal evaluation of this project has been completed yet, but several of those who participated have been promoted and some have advanced their education. In addition to the mentoring role assumed in the SISTERS Project, many became mentors to the rising groups of Black students at the university. Most of the feedback from participants showed that they felt a connection with the university and their "sister" colleagues that was not there before their participation in the SISTERS Project. Furthermore, these women expressed an overwhelming heightened consciousness of Africentric social, cultural, and spiritual values related to the progress of their specific leadership plans. This Africentric structure appeared to have added to the increased sense of empowerment that these women displayed, as they got involved in conventional and new roles inside of the academy, hence establishing them as women and as leaders.

Two additional studies explored the experiences of Black women enrolled in bachelors, masters and doctoral programs at PWI's (Allen & Joseph, 2018; Croom, Beatty, Acker & Butler, 2017). Both studies looked at "Sistah Network" and "Sister Circle" programs that were focused on mentoring groups and enhancing the educational and social experiences of Black women. The networking circles contributed to the social advantages of Black women, helped Black women to advance their identity and empowerment, provided some emotional support and advocated for their academic success. The findings overall support efforts that can be put in place to execute and sustain mentoring programs for Black women and other marginalized groups.

Research has shown that mentoring assisted in solving issues related to marginalized populations, yet identifying and securing a mentor has been a challenge for women of color, expressly Black women in mid-level management roles (Blackstone, 2011; Pertuz, 2017). A study conducted by Washington (2007) discovered that formal mentoring could offer assistance by creating environments in the workplace for women that welcome opportunities that are equal for employees. Additional research revealed that mentoring evolved into a resolution to help oppressed groups, but the recognition and procuring of a mentor has remained difficult for mid-level women managers of color (Blackstone, 2011; Pertuz, 2017). Women higher education leaders, signified that the majority of women had a mentor and regarded mentoring as contributing to their professional career progression (Hill & Wheat, 2017). Additionally, many women believe that if they do not have a mentor, career advancement is more complicated (Madsen, 2012). Researchers have also suggested that women of color, need role models who can demonstrate to them how to advance regardless of current barriers (Kurtz-Costes, Helmke & Ulku-Steiner, 2006).

A higher level of mentorship is sponsorship, which is considered the "holy grail" of advancement in your career for all executive leaders and it is the "missing link for Black women" (Smith, 2019 p. 56). Sponsorship functions because of a senior leader's experience, level of their position, and the influence that they carry within their organization (Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz & Lima, 2004). Sponsors amass social capital as they acquire authority, trust, respect, influence, control and power. When a senior leader becomes a sponsor, they are lending their social capital to the individual that they are sponsoring by opening doors and providing pathways to upward mobility (Bono, Braddy, Liu, Gilbert, Fleenor, Quast & Center, 2017).

Professional Leadership Development

A significant element to improve the professional experiences of Black women mid-level managers, who endeavor to progress to senior leadership, is engaging in professional leadership development opportunities. Findings from a study by Clayborne and Hamrick (2007) on Black women mid-level administrators discovered that leadership techniques and professional challenges and experiences were essential for them to grow professionally. A valued aspect of professional development is involvement in professional associations and growing a network of professionals. By acquiring and getting involved in these professional associations, communities of color were established. They helped participants find the personal support they needed to develop navigation strategies for their career paths (Masse, Miller, Kerr & Ortiz, 2007). The culmination of these activities is critical in supporting Black women in their career growth to the top levels of institutions of higher education.

It is important for Black women to engage in professional leadership development opportunities, where they can bond with each other and share stories about their accomplishments and strategies for success. (Eveline, 2005; Gable, 2011; Hague & Okpala,

2017). Furthermore, they should have the support needed to engage in professional development and involvement in professional affiliations on the national, regional, and state levels. They should also be empowered to present at these conferences, and if not presenting, they should still be encouraged to attend. Black women often face an unbalanced workload in their post-secondary roles (Harley, 2008). This can be difficult to manage and could be discouraging them from fulfilling activities that are both personal and professional. This provides evidence that professional development programs designed for and by Black people are necessary as they give a special experience that makes sure that the voices of these women are heard and acknowledged (Patitu, & Hinton, 2003; Henry & Glenn, 2009).

Spirituality and Faith

Spirituality is regarded as a genuine medium for supporting organizational performance and commitment, as spirituality in the workplace is not about emotions, but rather signifies purpose and a consciousness of community (Fry, Hannah, Noel & Walumbwa, 2011; Karakas, 2010). Spirituality describes people's experiences and embodies concepts of trust and connectedness. It is illustrated as an outside expression of an inner desire that compels emotional intelligence (Marques, Allevato & Holt, 2008). The Afrocentric values, detailed by Green and King (2001), discuss how these concepts are not new and likely to be considered as bona fide expressions of leadership for Black women. Bass (2009), explains that spirituality is a solid practice that is engrained profoundly within Black society and is employed and markedly engaged by Black women in numerous aspects of their lives, inclusive of leadership. Additionally, spirituality was used as a mechanism for tackling the truths of their circumstances and has been echoed in other research on Black women. Spirituality has been recognized as the essential defense of Black women sustaining themselves in corporate culture, as spirituality is

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used in dealing with the stress from inequality, resulting in the glass ceiling effects, impeded

opportunities, and being omitted from informal workplace networks (Bacchus & Holley, 2005;

Sherman, 2002).

There has been a resurgence of interest and a change in organizational thought on

workplace spirituality and in the scholarly literature in the leadership arena, as corroborated in

2005 in *The Leadership Quarterly,* which devoted a complete issue on the subject (Karakas,

2010). This may be a variety of modifications in the wider range of culture, where faith was

previously a topic that was off-limits for discussion in the workplace, but has now become the

focus of diversity programs in the workplace. This resurgence has also impacted research in

higher education. Connectivity is central to the method in which numerous students exemplify

spirituality and is intrinsically multidimensional, as students stress internal and external spiritual

connections in life (Rockenbach, Mayhew, Davidson, Ofstein, & Bush, 2015).

In spite of its assurances, spirituality should be looked at as one of the various other

methods to connectedness. Marques, et. al., (2008) warns that spirituality may not be universally

accepted and she suggests that challenges in some workplace environments include exploitation,

misunderstanding and mistrust. In a study by Mitroff and Denton (1999), they surveyed and

discovered that a majority of the respondents believed that spirituality was a pertinent theme for

the workplace. Additionally, most of the persons surveyed were impartial concerning the

suitability of spirituality, signifying some degree of mental discord in stances on spirituality.

Moreover, a multidimensional approach is encouraged, as well as the use of models and

viewpoints.

Faith in a greater being has been shown to be impactful in the support of Black women in

dealing with perils in their careers. A research study of 16 Black women in mid-level

organizational ranks in higher education was performed to comprehend their leadership practices (Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007). One of the primary conclusions indicated from this qualitative study, was from the structures of support that confirmed their experiences. Their support came through spiritual associations like prayer, reading the bible, and attending church. In addition, relationships with family were essential structures of support for them. Support structures helped these women to process and free any concerns about work. As noted, the findings from this study strengthen the central values of the Black community, including faith from developing a spiritual identity to make it through challenging periods and engaging support among friends, family, co-workers and mentors.

Mattis (2002) and Shorter-Gooden (2004) led similar quantitative studies that discovered religion and spirituality as important in making meaning and dealing with Black women's experiences during difficult times. Moreover, Black women used prayer, faith, and spirituality as a coping mechanism to deal with racism and sexism. Many of the participants in Shorter-Gooden's (2004) study relied on prayer, spiritual beliefs, or their connection with God as a core strategy for dealing with the challenges of being both Black and women. Further, the Black women from this study did not possess the ability to transform the racism or sexism that they encountered, but relied on their faith to be reminded of their worth, or gained support from friends and family that could assist in alleviating the harmful outcomes of oppression.

Literature Conclusion

Black women experience things differently because of their appearances, backgrounds, educational levels, beliefs and occupations (Collins, 2009). Further, Black women connect on their struggle for respect and acceptance by society and on college campuses. They have endured racial and gender discriminations in the form of microaggressions and tokenism and there are

support strategies to assist Black women in moving past these obstacles and advance in their career. This study will provide narratives from Black women mid-level managers on their perceptions, challenges, strategies and approaches to overcoming racial and gender disparities on their journeys to reach senior leadership status at predominately white institutions.

Theoretical Framework: Black Feminist Thought (BFT)

Black feminist consciousness came out of the Civil Rights Movement, and the Black feminist movement of the 1960's. It gained popularity in response to the racism that Black women experienced in what they considered "petty-bourgeois feminism" (Taylor, 1998, p. 234). This is referring to the racist and classist behavior displayed by white women. Black women rejected surrendering the needs of their community to the edicts of elite, racist, white women in their continued struggle on various political fronts (Taylor, 1998). During the movement of anti-slavery, Black women abolitionists recognized the link connecting racial and sexual oppression and started concurrently challenging the two (Yee, 1992). Although they did not classify themselves as Black feminists and critical race theorists, they acted as such. Critical race theory grew out of critical theory. Critical theory was established as a school of thought from seminal theorists like Herbert Marcuse and Max Horkheimer. It focuses on deep evaluation and critique of culture and society to disclose and challenge power structures (Bohman, 2009). Additionally, critical theory contends that social problems are formed and persuaded more by societal structures and cultural assumptions over individual and psychological factors, and seeks to liberate human beings from the conditions that enslave them.

Critical race theory (CRT) is rooted in the field of law and is founded primarily on the initial efforts of Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman, as they aspired to create a theory to focus on race and racism in American law (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Ladson-Billings (1998) note that in

education, CRT assesses how various facets of oppression can overlap within the lives of people of color. In educational research, CRT additionally analyzes the manners in which race, class, gender, sexuality and alternative areas of oppression establish themselves in the educational experiences of marginalized groups. Although CRT intersects with BFT and provides a historical connection, it does not address the specific perils that Black women are confronted with in academia in the way that BFT does.

Black feminist thought asserts that sexism, gender identity, class oppression, and racism are closely tied together and they all relate to each other through intersectionality, which was first coined by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989). Crenshaw (1989) uses intersectionality to show that Black women are oppressed in ways that do not always match within the legal classifications of "racism" or "sexism," instead as a mixture of both. She further asserts that intersectionality brings awareness to the existing invisibilities in feminism, anti-racism, and class politics, as well as to the manner in which women of color in plain sight are invisible. Intersectionality has a significant connection to Black feminism; however, it is not focused exclusively on those challenges facing Black women, as does BFT.

Collins (1986, 1989, & 2000) further pressed this powerful movement of Black feminist thought (BFT) in her articles on *Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought*, *The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought*, and most notably in her book, *Black Feminist Thought Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. Collins, (1990) maintains that looking through the lens of BFT, sexism and racism are inseparably linked into one. She reflected on her experiences growing up as a Black girl and becoming a working-class woman, where she felt like she was a small factor in society, then quieter, until she virtually felt silenced. The book reflects one of the stages in her

continuous fight to reclaim her voice. She initially wrote about BFT to help empower Black women and create a consciousness to build a pathway to personal freedom for Black women in society (Collins, 1990). Crenshaw (1989), another proponent of BFT, debated that Black women were discriminated against frequently in ways that do not match perfectly with racism or sexism, but an intersection of both. In bell hooks (1981), "*Ain't I a Woman?: Black Women and Feminism*," she tracks the oppressive powers of racism and sexism on Black women and asserts that race and sex are interlinked facets that cannot be understood separate of one another.

Rationale and Components

The purpose of BFT, as discussed in Collins (2000), is to resist oppression. BFT contends that until intersecting oppressions are eradicated, Black women are not empowered. Intersecting oppressions can, for example, derive from persons in an organization like a higher education institution and the systems established by the organizations themselves, via microaggressions, tokenism, and other racist and sexist behavior. When applied to higher education, BFT is crucial in assisting Black women in coping with the disparities and discrimination they may encounter in these institutions (Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Collins (2000), stressed the value in examining the Black women's experiences, because they signify a source of information that is worthy of consideration. Black feminist thought is constructed around the experiences of Black women. The framework was developed partially because Black women's experiences were viewed as substandard compared to those of Black men, white men and white women (Willingham, 2011). Collins' (2000) perspective on BFT affirmed that Black women have been continually placed in lower level roles in higher education for a very long time. The premise of BFT is social justice and empowerment, as it inspires Black women to communicate their stories around the importance of Black culture (Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Moreover, when applied to higher

education, BFT is important in helping Black women deal with the inequalities and racism they may encounter in these organizations.

The literature on BFT explores academia, as well as the historical, cultural, and organizational discourse associated with the struggles and stereotypical perceptions of Black women (Collins, 2000). Collins (1989), in one of her first writings about BFT, specifically addressed academia. She explains how Black women with academic qualifications who are seeking to exercise power in institutions suggest new knowledge assertions about Black women, as they must deal with pressures to dismiss the majority of Black women. Institutions do this by allowing a few of them to obtain these positions of power, and then urge them to work inside of the neglected beliefs of Black women's inferiority, common among the academic community and the culture collectively (Collins, 1986). Additionally, bell hooks (1981) discussed the "continued devaluation of Black womanhood" (p. 51) occurring because of Black women being sexually exploited throughout slavery with no change over hundreds of years. She points out that America has been successful in "sexist-racist conditioning," (p. 52) placing little worth on Black women, while the politics of white feminism minimized the sexist oppression of Black women. Further, she outlines this "social hierarchy" (p. 52) grounded on race and sex, where white men are first, white women fall second, but are occasionally equal to Black men who are third, and Black women are last.

There is a pressing need for BFT, as the holistic position of the Black woman has been typically omitted from customary feminist theories (Henley, Meng, O'Brien, McCarthy & Sockloskie, 1998). BFT highlights family, society and self, but also explores the meaning of self-definition and self-valuation, the interlocking nature of oppression, and the importance of Afro-

American women's culture (Collins, 1986). These components are strongly connected to this study.

Black feminist thought is exercised across many disciplines, as a lens to examine the intersection of sexism, gender identity, class oppression, and racism among Black women. More specifically, numerous studies in higher education research employ the BFT approach to examine the narratives of Black women. Studies show that the significance of the role Black women can play in diversifying and transforming an institutions culture and climate, as a conduit to grow consciousness, access and expand the possibilities for Black women to move into senior leadership roles is paramount (Davis & Brown, 2017; Lloyd-Jones, 2009; Patterson, Kinloch, Burkhard, Randall and Howard, 2016). Additionally, Patton, Haynes and Croom, (2017) conclude that the framework of BFT is at the center of Black women's experiences.

Core Themes

Collins (1986) asserts how Black women shaped BFT, and includes accounts and interpretations about Black womanhood that define and explicate varied countenances of shared themes. She identifies three core themes, which represent the thrust of the dialog about BFT.

The first theme is self-definition and self-valuation, which challenges the stereotypes of Black womanhood, as expressed by Collins (1986). These images illustrate Black women as intimidating or a threat, and if they display aggressive behavior, they are seen as angry Black women or "sapphires" (p. S17). Black women may also feel at times invisible in different circumstances, like a room filled with white men in positions of power. Women must define their self-worth in spite of these stereotypes. This theme can relate to how Black women could progress to senior leadership roles, in how they value and define who they are and move past the indignities of stereotypes. These stereotypical images are embedded in discriminatory practices

like microaggressions and tokenism. A study by Jackson & Harris (2007) demonstrated how Black women were strategic in overcoming stereotypes, feeling invisible and other obstacles, such as going above job expectations, having more workplace visibility and growing leadership skills.

The second theme of the interlocking nature of race, gender, and class oppression is described by Collins (1986) in how Black women experience oppression privately and universally. Collins further explains this oppression through the economic exploitation of Black women's "free" labor recounted from slavery and the internalized vision of being devalued workers and failed mothers. A study by Hague & Okpala (2017), on women leaders at predominately white institutions, showed that the experiences of Black women with various discriminations, which included demands, expectations, thoughts and problems, were in contrast from those of Black men and white women. This theme is at the core of this study, which more specifically addresses the dual oppression that Black women are confronted with, and the interlocking of race and gender that is a critical exploration in this study.

The third theme is the importance of Afro-American women's culture, which may help provide a frame of reference for self-definition and self-valuation, that help Black women to see the conditions that form race, class, and gender oppressions (Collins, 1986). Collins adds that if Black women would use their full resources in Black women networks, their churches, their roles as mothers, and support and encourage one another, then a Black woman's daily behavior would be activism. Black women college administrators can be great mentors or sponsors to each another, because they bring unique and diverse views to the workplace as both a woman and being Black (Johnson, 1998). This particular theme demonstrates how important it is for Black women to support one another. This study explores support strategies like mentoring, which

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embraces the support of Black women's culture through other Black women and Black women networks for mentorship and sponsorship. Additionally, I examine professional leadership development through professional associations from cultural networks. I also look at developing communities of color and family support, all of which perpetuate the importance of Black women's culture.

Distinguishing Features

Collins (2000) also discusses exploring six distinguishing features that characterize BFT and may provide the common ground that is greatly needed among Black women, as well as all others whose shared knowledge has a similar goal. She contends that these characteristics are not necessarily unique and may share with other areas of knowledge. It is the convergence of these features that gives BFT its "distinctive contours" (p. 22). In spite of the challenges that are explicated in the three core themes of BFT, the six distinguishing features take the next steps in discovering common ground for rationalizing the limits of Black feminist thought. Cleage (1993) explains how this continues to be significant, because Black women are in a unique category, unquestionably separated because of race and sex with a distinctive series of challenges.

The first distinguishing feature of BFT is a "dialectical relationship" (Collins, 2000 p. 30) connecting the oppression of Black women with activism. This type of dialectical relationship indicates that two parties are both opposed and opposite. This frames Black feminism as activism and is a response to the subordination of Black women, as long as their oppression persists.

The second distinguishing feature emerges from tension connecting experiences and ideas. Black women as a whole encounter comparable challenges existing in a culture that oppresses them as a group. This does not mean that all Black women have the same experiences

and/or that there is an understanding of the implications of the various experiences. This research is concentrated on Black women's professional experiences (Collins, 2000).

The third distinguishing feature of BFT instituted the significance of the experiences of Black women in America as a "heterogeneous collectivity" (Collins, 2000 p. 46) and the developing group perspective expressed from their "lived experiences" (Collins, 2000 p.48). From the viewpoint of oppressed groups, Black women are muted, which as a result provokes resistance. Moreover, there is a dialogical relationship where variations in thoughts and actions lead to a changed consciousness of Black women's culminating experiences and group knowledge. BFT is connected to the lived experiences of Black women, with a longing to develop those experiences by using conventional knowledge that helps Black women in America deal with, survive in and resist the disparaging acts that are happening every day.

The fourth distinguishing feature of BFT originated from the vital support of Black women intellectuals. The daily thoughts and information that Black women share with each other is a central portion of their knowledge that has frequently been neglected. These notions develop into theories, which become Black women's perception that establishes the specific knowledge of BFT. This permits Black women to examine the interlocking oppressions that imprint upon Black women's lives and retort with a proactive movement for social justice (Collins, 2000).

The fifth feature of BFT relates to the significance of change and the concept that Black feminism as a social justice project needs to stay dynamic, not stagnant (Collins, 2000). Further, as social settings change, so must the information and practices that are designed to oppose them. Post-secondary institutions sustain unavoidable change. Black women must then develop methods to navigate that workplace change.

The sixth and final distinguishing feature of BFT emphasizes the relationship to social justice projects. Black women have recognized political actions like supporting Black community groups, running for a political office, or working with Black women's organizations as a way for human empowerment over just benefiting Black women exclusively (Collins, 2000). BFT acknowledges that there is a big picture view of the prominence of social justice to address the oppression that many, including Black women tolerate. It is important to note that the purpose of Black feminist thought stretches beyond hastily reacting to the next apparent offense. Alternatively, opposition denotes doing diligent, careful and important intellectual effort that targets to disassemble unfair intellectual and political constructs (Collins, 2016).

Criticism

As criticism of BFT arose mainly from the feminist movement, which was the platform that Black women like Sojourner Truth observed. She was brave enough to use her voice to speak up for Black women, who did not have a forum to address their grievances due to white women's racism, that barred them from full participation in the women's rights movement (hooks, 1981). Essentially, Black women did not have a voice or a fight in the women's right movement, as it did not address the oppressions of Black women. A widely held criticism of BFT is that racial dissections weaken the power of the traditional feminist movement. Fulenwider (1980), a critic of BFT, discusses the lack of Black women's support for the women's feminist movement and their opposition of working together with white women to support all women. Despite any criticisms, research and studies in scholarly literature using BFT are prevalent, and provide valuable information to consider.

Connections

Black women represent a significant portion of the culture of post-secondary student enrollment, yet they still face a myriad of challenges in their pursuit of senior leadership roles in higher education (McGee & Martin, 2011; Sheared, Johnson-Bailey, Scipio, Colin, Peterson & Brookfield, 2010; Turner, 2007; Turner, 2008; Turner, Gonzalez & Wood, 2008). This research focuses on the discrimination and obstacles faced by Black women advancing to senior leadership, which fits seamlessly with the framework of Black feminist thought. The problem in this research is focused on the challenges of racial and gender discrimination that Black women at predominately white institutions contend with and the conditions that impede their progress in gaining an equitable share of senior leadership positions. BFT connects to the research problem, as it centers on the experiences of Black women from the perspective of race and gender intertwined (Collins, 1989; Collins, 1990; Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1989; hooks, 1981). BFT also creates a lens for examination of leadership experiences, while Black women remain the predominant focus (Collins, 1990). Additionally, within BFT, the idea of intersectionality in race and gender, both individually and within the institution are addressed (Collins, 1990; Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1989), as this serves as a lens for the experiences of Black women in mid-level management positions at predominately white institutions. Black feminist thought shows the profound interconnections involving race and gender and how Black women in the workplace struggle to be free of the oppressions that they face as a result (hooks, 1981). Evans-Winters and Esposito (2018) discussed how the white feminist movement encouraged solidarity established on gender, but rejected the acknowledgement of race. The dialog in their review of *This Bridge Called my Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color,* Moraga & Anzaldua (2015) note that there is a bridge between the personal and the academic communities that Black women grew up

and work in. It is further illustrated in the poem that spoke; "We are tired of being the bridge, our backs are sore from the perpetual stretching we must do to straddle two spaces and yet be comfortable and thrive in both simultaneously" (p. 873). Black feminist thought is significant to this study because this framework precisely lines up with how Black women in academia are marginalized. Collins' (2000) depiction of the importance of Black women gaining positions of power, connects directly with the overarching goal of this research. She further suggests that this broader structure of oppression functions to restrain Black women's intellectual ideas. The exclusion of Black women from positions of power within mainstream institutions resulted in the advancement of elite white men's ideas and interests and the subsequent suppression of Black women's ideas and interests in traditional scholarship (Collins, 2000 p. 5).

CHAPTER 3

Overview

The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of Black women who serve in mid-level management roles and aspire to senior leadership. Race and gender barriers, as well as support systems and strategies, were explored. A qualitative study using narrative inquiry and Black feminist thought (BFT) as the theoretical framework was conducted using Black women employed in mid-level management roles at four-year predominately white four-year universities. Data collection consisted of a demographic questionnaire and recorded semi-structured one-on-one interviews that led with open-ended questions. This chapter will detail the research methods to include the research design, participant selection, recruiting strategies, data collection and analysis, and the researcher positionality.

The research question guiding this study is; *How do Black women in mid-level management roles at predominately white institutions describe the experiences in their professional journey to senior-leadership?*

Research Design

This study used a qualitative research design. Qualitative research best served this study, in that it is most focused on comprehending how people find meaning in what they experience (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Qualitative research has the possibility of changing the lives of the participants, the organizations that they work and live in, and the researcher's life. The voices of these Black women brought awareness on ways to advance diversity in post-secondary senior leadership, by providing a path to their professional advancement. Qualitative research uses an inductive approach that highlights data collection to inform ideas and theories grounded in the participants experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Qualitative research allowed this study to

distinguish between the diverse stories and experiences expressed by these Black women, particularly dealing with the intersections of race and gender, and the role that institutions play in aiding or impeding these women who are seeking to advance in their careers. Qualitative research also produces data that is rich and descriptive as well as enriching to the current body of literature on mid-level managers in higher education institutions (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016).

The inductive approach is where the strengths of a qualitative study are derived. The emphasis is on particular circumstances or people, and its focus is on recording what is being said rather than using numbers (Maxwell, 2013). Further, qualitative research allows finding predominant themes without compromising details and perspective. The qualitative research approach is befitting to design a comprehensive view of the topic and to accentuate the role of the researcher as someone learning while also telling the story from the participant's perspective rather than as an expert (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Narrative inquiry is an examination of the phenomena of a person's experiences and a method for gathering information that allows an intimate study of personal experiences over time (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Due to the heightened acceptance of postmodern research approaches, telling personal stories is currently viewed as a legitimate method of knowledge production (Cotterill and Letherby, 1993; Riessman, 1990, 1993; Skeggs, 2002). Mishler (1986) defines narrative analysis as denoting the responses received from interview questions as not just answers, but stories, accounts and narratives. BFT describes narrative analysis as honoring the need for Black women who are often ignored and silenced, by serving the most effective research methodology, that empowers participants to explore inequalities in gender and racial oppressions, as well as other powerful practices that may be neglected by the individual speaker (Mishler, 1986; Reissman, 1993). Mishler (1986) further suggests that the

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presence of the interviewer as a co-participant cannot be avoided and is a vital portion of the dialog. The manner of questioning by the interviewer influences the production of a story and assists in creating the narrative (Misher, 1986; Reissman, 2008). This makes a narrative approach to the experiences of Black women mid-level managers at PWI's expressly fitting.

This research study used Collins' (2000) Black feminist thought as the conceptual framework for better clarity on the professional experiences of Black women mid-level managers at PWIs who want to advance their careers to the senior leadership level. Some of the core tenets of BFT helped to validate choosing a qualitative design for this study. To explicate this, diversity exists within the community of Black women, which means that they are likely to have had a variety of experiences within this cultural group that cannot be quantitatively summarized. Additionally, BFT has a transformative and interpretive framework as its base that has discourse on Black women's marginalized identities, while empowering and supporting them to oppose the organizational structures and people that subject them to oppression (Collins, 2009). BFT guided the construction of the methodological approaches by positioning Black women's experiences and perspectives at the center of the research, as opposed to their traditional marginal stance (Collins, 2000).

Tillman (2002), likewise points out that from a culturally sensitive viewpoint, shared understandings of the experiences that are being studied are implicit, and the singular and collective knowledge of Black Americans is positioned at the center of the research. Moreover, both Tillman (2002) and Dillard (2000), argue that the use of culturally sensitive methods to research in studies that are focused on Black Americans, can use the cultural perspectives of the researcher and the researched as a framework for data collection, data interpretation and the design of the research. Tillman (2002), further explains that research frameworks rooted in Black

culture and knowledge can add value to the educational research as well as substantiate

knowledge that can encourage excellence in education for Black people. As the researcher and a

Black woman with experiences and challenges that connect and resonate with the Black women

who participated in this study, I used my cultural standpoints as explained by Dillard (2000), to

frame the design of the research as well as the data collection and analysis. Dillard's (2000)

expanded notion of e*ndarkened feminist epistemology,* articulates reality based in the historical

roots of Black feminist thought, exemplifying a distinct difference in cultural standpoint,

positioned in the intersection of the race, gender and the historical perspectives of oppressions of

Black women. Dillard (2000), further confers that in order for people to understand their reality,

they must transform it by using language that "must possess instrumentality" (p.662) and be able

to do something related to the transformation of "particular ways of knowing and producing

knowledge" (p. 662). My unique positioning and deep connection as the researcher, allowed me

to view the narratives of these women, as part of what Dillard (2000) expressed as, "evidence of

things not seen'' and "demystifying African-American feminist ways of knowing in moments of

reflection, relation, and resistance: Black women's spaces where one can know who we are when

we are most us" (p.664).

Black feminist thought also correlates to counter storytelling. This is detailed by telling

the stories of people whose experiences are not often told or overlooked, like those of

marginalized groups in society (Solozano & Yosso, 2002). Further, the counter-story is also a

means for uncovering, examining and challenging the stories of racial privilege, and the

dominant discourse on race, as well as the fight for reforming racism. As it relates to Black

women, storytelling and counter-storytelling their experiences can assist in fortifying their social,

cultural and political survival (Solozano & Yosso, 2002).

Amoah (1997) argues that Black feminist thought is mirrored in the stories of Black women and given the mutual connection between theory and practice, this narrative is the foundation of Black feminist thought. Moreover, Black women are educated and shaped by not only their personal experiences, but the experiences of the people around them and the ones who came before them. Further Collins (1995), expresses that living life, as a Black woman, is an essential criterion for creating Black feminist thought, since among Black women's communities, thought is substantiated and devised with reference to specific historical, physical and epistemological circumstances. The narrative theory of Black women includes an analysis of race and gender within the storytelling.

Participant Selection

The goal of this study is to recruit five participants. Reissman (2008) describes narrative approaches as "not appropriate for studies of large numbers of nameless and faceless subjects" (p. 6). Additionally, some methods of analysis are "slow and painstaking," making it necessary to give attention to subtlety, nuances of speech, the structure of an answer, associations between the researcher and participant and historical and social settings. In essence, this is referring to the cultural narratives that create the possibility of personal stories. Five participants provided sufficient and significant data sampling for this narrative research approach. Further, data saturation, as explained by Faulkner and Trotter (2017), occurs when there is no longer any new information that is found that adds to the study. Reaching saturation is not expected in narrative inquiry, as its role for saturation is harder to discern (Saunders et.al, 2018).

The five participants were recruited from five different predominately white four-year institutions of higher education within the United States, including the southeastern, southwestern, northeastern, mid-western and west coast regions. This diversity of regions within

the U.S. gave perspectives from institutions that operate in different cultural climates and provided various outlooks for mid-level manager's experiences. Predominately white institutions are the focus of this study due to the examination of race. The researcher resides in the southeast region of the U.S. and is employed at a four-year predominately white public institution; however, the researcher excluded participant selection from their associated institution to avoid any conflicts of interest. The researcher has large network connections within predominately white U.S. higher education institutions, which helped with participant selection. The participants were chosen from three public and two private predominately white institutions. Since this study is exclusively focused on Black women's experiences, all participants self-identified as Black women, which included women from biracial or multiracial backgrounds. Participants were employed in the capacity of a mid-level manager's role at the time of the study to keep the focus of the study in line with the aim of this research. Their experiences in mid-level management in higher education were five or more years. This helped to recruit participants that met the career experience in this role in order to provide the necessary data for this study. In a national study on mid-level leaders in higher education, Rosser (2004) described mid-level leaders as academic or non-academic employees who provide support within the structure of higher education. They can be classified in higher education institutions in many of the following categories, such as; Assistant or Associate Deans, Executive Directors, Directors, Associate or Assistant Directors and Managers. Additionally, all participants were in pursuit of a senior level position within a higher education institution to keep the connection in sync with the research goals. Moreover, participants held or were in pursuit of a doctoral degree, inclusive of either a Ph.D., Ed.D or J.D. This is important because many senior-level positions in higher education may require one of these terminal degrees.

Recruitment Strategy

Purposeful sampling was used to recruit the study participants, since the research sought to include participants from specific regions within the United States. Purposeful sampling allows a researcher to hand select a sample that satisfies what is needed for a study and produces cases that are rich in information (Patton, 2002). Since this was a smaller sample size, the researcher used her LinkedIn network for the contacts to acquire the research sample. The researcher has statewide, regional and national professional organization networks of colleagues across the United States within her LinkedIn connections, that allowed her to gain access to potential study participants. The researcher initially emailed approximately twelve potential participants for this study. Five out of the twelve contacts responded to the request, met the qualifications and agreed to participate in the study. The criteria for eligibility are outlined in the participant recruiting email (See Appendix A). Additionally, all five participants signed a consent form (See Appendix B).

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Data Collection

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Journaling was used throughout the data collection process to document thoughts and connections or differences of experiences for participants in this study. Narrative research is developed around storytelling and researchers typically use a conversational style of interviewing (Riessman, 993). Data for this qualitative study was collected using a demographic questionnaire (See Appendix C) that collected specific information on each participant and two sets of interviews per participant. The interview protocol was semi-structured. Semi-structured interviews are commonly organized around a group of preset open-ended questions, with additional questions evolving from the interview discussion (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The first set of interviews consisted of questions related to their early careers, current careers and

faith and spirituality (See Appendix D). This interview lasted from 105 to 120 minutes. The

second set of interviews focused on the participant's career goals, career experiences at PWIs

and race/gender issues (See Appendix E). This interview lasted from 90 to 105 minutes. Due to

the physical distance of the participants, all of the interviews were conducted via Zoom video,

recorded and transcribed. Utilization of Zoom as a method of communication increased due to

the Covid-19 pandemic. The Zoom video interviews were a pragmatic instrument for data

collection and analysis. My immediate connections and trust building with participants was

strong, which enabled for rich data collection. The ability to cross reference the Zoom video

recordings of the interviews with the Zoom transcriptions, made the data collection and analysis

process seamless. It was however necessary for me to make some corrections in the Zoom

transcription interpretations. Member checking was used by having participants review the

written analysis that pertained to their shared stories. It is suggested that member checking is a

manner of correcting or controlling any subjective bias from the researcher and is helpful in

checking the truth of any knowledge (Birt et.al., 2016; Lincoln & Guba, 1995). There was an

outpouring of positive feedback and support from the participants related to how the data was

used to tell their stories. One of the participants, Tina, called me to say how pleased she was with

the way that the data was conveyed in sharing her story. Rhonda, another one of the participants,

sent me an email correspondence to say that she found it emotional to read my thoughts in print

since she had not verbalized those feelings to many people prior to our conversations. She also

thanked me for the space to download her experiences, as she felt as though she's been on a

"professional metamorphosis" that has had her desire to reclaim her passion and fire for her work

at its center. A third participant, Ava emailed me to express that she almost cried reading what I

wrote, especially when she read a quote that she shared; "We have to work twice as hard to not

be considered problematic, inept, and incompetent." She thanked me for sharing the stories and for "doing a wonderful job synthesizing all the pain," as it was a needed validation of things that she remarked she was "sadly" still going through.

Both sets of interviews captured the participant's stories and their desires to move into senior leadership, as well as their overall experiences serving in mid-level management roles at predominately white institutions in this process. The interviews were aimed at creating and building a strong rapport with study participants and attentively listening to their truths. As noted by Seidman (2013), interviewing is storytelling, and communicating narratives of experience and as a primary means throughout history where people have made their experiences significant. Further, interviewing is powerful and provides an understanding of individual experiences echoed in a person's life. It is a person's capacity to give "meaning through language" (p.14). All of the interviews encapsulated the participant's stories and highlighted their specialized experiences and goals (Seidman, 2013). Moen (2006) adds that narrative research accounts are developed from conversations with the participants in a dialogue. Semi-structured interviews provide the room needed for narrative storytelling.

Data Analysis

Black feminist thought places Black women's experiences and ideas at the center of analysis. By positioning the ideas of Black women in the center, BFT places privilege on those ideas, but also encourages white feminists, Black men, and all others to examine the likenesses and differences within their own perspectives and those of Black women (Collins 2000). BFT influences data analysis without placing privilege on Black women's experiences, and reveals how intersectional patterns can be a very crucial aspect for reassessing this matrix of oppression that symbolizes U.S. society. Additionally, with continuous racial inequities in education, employment, housing, and public services, there are signs that Black women's experiences

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definitely challenge the ideologies of class in the U.S. in asserting that a personal worth is the only thing that matters in deciding on the rewards in our society. Furthermore, viewing the sexual politics of Black womanhood shows the false assumption that gender has the same effect on all women, however, race and class are significant factors. Lastly, Black feminist thought helps reimagine social connections of hegemony and its resistance (Collins, 2000).

As discussed in Earthy and Cronin (2008), a narrative approach is not just concerned with story-telling or the detailed characteristics of a story, but also with the social exchanges among the interviewer and interviewee that inspire and guide the way that the story is presented. When embracing a narrative approach, it is necessary to choose to recognize and analyze data from that perspective, as opposed to concentrating exclusively on the content of what participants are speaking about or the rules that cause the interaction. Moreover, Connelly and Clandinin (1990), offer methods that can be used in narrative studies. These techniques, referenced as narrative sketches, describe the event, structure and character. An analysis is completed via the support offered by explanations of the processes, presenting the outcomes, risk, conclusions, and concessions connected to the narratives. There are also additional breakdowns into various subheadings to aid the researcher.

Thematic analysis was used to analyze categories and depict themes and patterns that connect to the data. It displays in great detail the data and handles diverse themes with interpretations. Further, thematic analysis allows observers, scholars and practitioners to utilize a broad array of information in an organized manner that improves the precision or sensitivity in interpreting and understanding observations about persons, situations, events, organizations and other activities (Boyatzis, 1998).

A common approach for conducting thematic analysis was originated by Braun and Clarke (2006). They offer a six-phase guide that is a highly useful framework. Phase one involved me familiarizing myself with the data. Braun and Clarke (2006), further discuss how essential it is to immerse in the data to the point that you are fully aware of the scope and complexities of the subject matter. Moreover, immersion typically includes reading the data repetitively and vigorously and searching for patterns and meanings. Reading through all of the collected data is optimal at least one time prior to the start of coding, and as a result my thoughts and how I identified potential patterns were formed. Taking notes to chronicle my ideas was also very helpful throughout this phase and I was then able to proceed to a more formal method of coding. My journal notes helped me to identify and process codes that led me to form the initial coding. Essentially, the development and delineation of coding persisted through the complete data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I fully immersed myself in the data by reading, rereading and taking detailed notes to identify the meanings and patterns in the analysis of the data.

Additionally, transcribing verbal data is critical, as some researcher's debate that it needs to be viewed as "a key phase of data analysis within interpretative qualitative methodology" (Bird, 2005, p. 227). What is most important is that the transcript holds the needed information that is derived from the verbal narratives. Further, to ensure accuracy, cross-referencing the transcripts with the initial audio recordings is necessary (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I used the transcription data taken from the Zoom recordings of each interview and cross referenced all of this data with the Zoom audio transcripts to make any corrections or updates needed to ensure the accuracy of the data that was shared. There were updates needed to correct and clarify words and ideas that the Zoom transcription interpreted.

The second phase entails generating initial codes. This started when I read and become familiar with the data and I created a preliminary listing of ideas on what was included and what was appealing about the data. I coded as many possible themes as I could and found noteworthy patterns later (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I kept small amounts of the surrounding data that was pertinent to this study, keeping in mind that a common critique of coding is how context is lost (Bryman, 2001). To ensure that the context of the interviews was not lost, I kept both the video and transcripts from Zoom and watched and read through both after the initial coding was completed in case anything was missed. Additionally, I coded specific data excerpts and I uncoded and coded as many times as was necessary.

In phase three I searched for themes. As suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006), this began when all of the primary data was coded and organized, and I had an extensive listing of the various codes that had been identified throughout the collection of the data. Additionally, the analysis on broader themes was the focus in this phase; it was comprised of categorizing different codes into possible themes, and collecting all of the significant coded extracts of data inside the themes that were identified. I began to analyze the codes, and considered how various different codes might merge to structure predominant themes. This phase resulted with a group of themes and sub-themes, and all of the data extracts that were coded in connection to them. At this stage I did not eliminate anything before viewing all of the data sets in detail, as some themes needed to be merged, developed and segregated or separated and eventually discarded if not relevant for use in research (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To clarify this, in identifying themes through this process, there was a small amount of data that was not used, which was initially identified as potential themes, but after completing this phase, that data was not the most feasible and relevant for this study.

In the fourth phase, I began reviewing and refining the themes. It became obvious that what might look like a theme may not be if there is not sufficient data or the data is overly diverse. In addition, other themes collapsed into each other as two clearly separate themes may form one theme. The end of this phase gave me a reasonably sound idea of what the themes were, how they connect, and the overarching story told about the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Phase 5 involved defining and naming themes, and as noted in Braun and Clarke (2006), this began once I had a suitable thematic map of the data. I defined, continued to refine the themes presented for the analysis and I examined the data. It was essential to not just paraphrase the content of the data presented, but to characterize with was appealing about it and why. For every theme, I wrote a thorough analysis and considered how it matched into the overall larger story that was being told about the data, relative to the research question, confirming that there was not an excessive amount of overlap between the themes. I reflected on each theme in relation to the others and identified whether or not a theme included sub-themes. I was able to define what the themes were and what they were not at the conclusion of this phase. I also started thinking about concise names for the themes in the final analysis (Braun & Clarke).

In the sixth and final phase, I began producing my report after I completed analyzing all of the themes. The written thematic analysis relayed the complexities of the data to give it value and legitimacy. It was a clear, rational, and interesting narrative of the story across the themes and it gave adequate support of the themes from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Additionally, during the data analysis process, I used journaling notes to trace the preliminary codes and themes, as this was key.

Researcher Positionality

The researcher discloses her positionality by acknowledging that she identifies as a Black heterosexual woman. She earned a master's degree in higher education administration and is currently employed in a mid-level management position at a four-year public, predominately white institution. The researcher also aspires to a senior level leadership role in higher education. Additionally, she has experienced both personal and professional challenges related to her race and gender, and has had to navigate these challenges throughout her professional career. Further, the researcher has had limited mentorship and sponsorship opportunities and continues to search for them particularly among Black women and other women of color. She acknowledges that her experiences influenced her interest in researching this topic. Moreover, the researcher recognizes that her race and gender positionality will strengthen this study, as it presents the narratives of Black women's experiences. The researcher's shared race and gender identities with the study participants allowed for an open and trusting rapport. Her positionality and experiences overall impacted this study and influenced the research design and data analysis process. The researcher has a unique connectedness and insight to the study, as a Black woman and a mid-level manager at a four-year predominately white institution, who is on her own journey to attain a senior leadership role.

Trustworthiness

There were steps put in place to ensure trustworthiness that included credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability and ethical considerations, which will be explained further. Additionally, bracketing was practiced by the researcher throughout the data collection and analysis process. This was done by identifying and setting aside assumptions as the researcher, as well as personal experiences and cultural influences. The researcher also revisited

her interpretation of the data and was careful in the development of the language usage that was represented in the findings (Fischer, 2009).

Trustworthiness in qualitative research is a vital methodological issue that Lincoln and Guba (1985) spent quite a bit of space in their persuasive *Naturalistic Inquiry* that addressed the matter. The researcher is responsible for the trustworthiness of the findings in qualitative research, as this is the goal of any qualitative study (Patton, 2002). Lincoln and Guba (1985) outline four areas in the establishment of trustworthiness in qualitative research that will be discussed.

Credibility

Lincoln and Guba (1985), describe credibility as the examination such that the probability that findings will be discovered to be credible is enriched. Further, Lincoln and Guba (1985) define numerous methods for determining credibility. This includes, prolonged engagement, persistent observation at a site, peer-debriefing, triangulation of data, referential adequacy materials and member checking. This research used peer debriefing and member checking. Peer debriefing occurred, as the researcher discussed the data analysis and preliminary findings with a peer not connected to the research study, to check for unconscious bias and to test emerging themes for credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Further, in the member checking process, data interpretations from chapters 4 and 5 were sent to all participants to review for accuracy and to allow for clarity on anything that may have been omitted by the researcher (Carlson, 2010).

Transferability

Lincoln & Guba (1985), describe transferability or generalization as the overview of the research findings to further the perspectives and situations. Moreover, they noted that the researchers responsibility is to provide adequate descriptive data that the reader can use to assess the applicability of the data to other settings. Although this study uses rich, descriptive data, via the comprehensive narratives of the participants and the connections discovered across their shared experiences, it is not generalizable. The participants were self-selected mid-level managers from only five different predominately white institutions, therefore not representative all PWIs or the complete community of Black women mid-level managers.

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability was secured by explaining the research methods in a concise manner and securing comprehensive records of the research process. This also ensures the reliability of the findings in the event another researcher attempts to duplicate the study. Field notes were also taken to keep track of the data analysis, research design, as well as in interpreting the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Confirmability is the extent of researcher bias in the study findings, as they should be fashioned by the participant's responses, not the biases of the researcher. This study narrated the stories of the participants in their own words and not from the perspective of the researcher. Dependability and confirmability were reached from an audit trail by providing the raw data and note taking through the whole research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). An external audit was completed by a qualified external impartial auditor within the researcher's professional network.

Ethical Considerations

The primary ethical concerns for this study was in protecting the confidentiality of the participant's shared data. The participants are mid-level leaders at predominately white institutions, and as Black women, protecting what they share is crucial to avoid any backlash from discussions on their career experiences, especially as it relates to any race and gender issues which are potentially very sensitive concerns. To protect participant confidentiality, pseudonyms for the names of participants and the names of their respective institutions were used in all of the interviews, transcription of data and the data findings. The researcher also used password protected computer drives to store any and all data.

<div align="center">

Conclusion

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For many Black women, racism and sexism is met in the work environment, schools, stores, and daily social exchanges and interactions. Women of color, particularly Black women in leadership roles, including mid-level managers aspiring to higher level positions, must navigate through these oppressions daily, while meeting their job expectations. Mid-level managers may have comparable experiences working at PWIs, even though they recognize that people will give different values and meanings to their own experiences within higher education (Collins, 2009). Collins (2000) delivers the culminating message on BFT that Black women's empowerment entails the revitalization of U.S. Black feminism as a social justice project that would be centered on the dual goals of empowering Black women and promoting social justice in a global setting.

Black feminist thought is the theoretical framework for this narrative study, which examines the experiences of Black women in mid-level management roles, who aspire to advance into senior leadership at predominantly white institutions, and how they navigate their

own racial and gender identities in their professional roles and careers. Overall, this study aims to contribute to the limited research that examines the experiences of Black women in mid-level management roles at PWIs, as they strive to advance to senior leadership levels.

CHAPTER 4

Findings

Black women have etched a place in mid-level management at predominately white post-secondary institutions (PWIs), however, advancing to senior leadership in these spaces is scarce and as a result, they continue to be underrepresented in these roles (Gamble & Turner, 2015; Jackson & Harris, 2007; West, 2015). This study pursues the examination of the experiences of Black women in mid-level management roles at PWIs, the challenges that they faced and continue to face, and the support mechanisms needed to help them successfully transition into senior leadership roles in higher education. The research question for this study addressed:

- How do Black women in mid-level management roles at predominately white institutions describe the experiences in their professional journey to senior-leadership*?*

Throughout the interviews, participants detailed their experiences that exemplify the communal narratives of existing as Black woman mid-level managers. These women are navigating the challenges of racial and gender biases and ultimately are displaying the fortitude to persevere in their quest for a place in senior leadership at predominately white institutions. Narrative inquiry allows for the intimate study of the experiences of persons over time and in context. Moreover, the centrality of narrative research is relationships. Participants live and relate amid stories that speak of and to the experiences that they live (Clandinin & Caine, 2013). The data from the research findings was analyzed using two sets of semi-structured interviews and demographic questionnaires. The theoretical framework of Black feminist thought (BFT) was reflected through empowerment, social justice, self, family, society and the value of Black culture, that is the core of its foundation (Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Further, in connection to higher education, BFT is vital in highlighting surviving racism and other inequities that these

participants encounter at these institutions. Black feminist thought's influence on the findings of this research was in the framework for formulating the narratives of race and gender oppressions, which is at the center of Black feminist thought that the research participants experienced.

The structure of Chapter four consists of two primary sections. The first section is comprised of a description of all participants. Five Black women, all mid-level managers at PWIs, were interviewed for this study. The anonymity of all participants will be maintained by the use of pseudonyms to replace their names. Additionally, the names of their current and former institutions of employment are not disclosed, along with the names of any colleagues at these institutions they may have been mentioned in their interviews. The second section includes the data that surfaced, which will be analyzed and the findings will be reported. There were three emergent themes that resonated throughout the participant's stories, as well as several associated sub-themes as follows: (1) Rising Above Racial and Gender Bias (overcoming stereotypes (microaggressions), tokenism and sexism (gender sexualization), (2) Black Women Surviving (value of mentorships and sponsorships, systems of support and empowerment), (3) Black Women Thriving (self-worth and determination, perspectives on leadership and the next level).

Research and Participant Summary

Email invitations were distributed outlining the specific study criteria, to recruit participants. The target of five participants was reached successfully for this study. All interviews took place in the spring of 2021 and were held via Zoom videoconferencing and recorded. This had a positive impact on the data collection and analysis, as the Zoom video interviews and transcripts were used as reference points throughout this process. All participants identified as Black cisgender women who lived in the United States for at least ten years, and currently served as mid-level managers at PWIs for a minimum of five years. Additionally, the

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participants are all seeking to move into senior level roles within higher education institutions. Two of them have earned Ph.D.'s, two are pursuing their Ph.D., and one is seeking to earn an Ed.D. The age range of the women at the time of this study is 33 to 47 years old. All of the participant's higher education professional experiences have been exclusively at PWIs. Participant demographics can be found in Table 4.1. The succeeding section will include an outline of each participant at the time that interviews were conducted for this study, followed by the detailed findings of this study.

Rhonda

Rhonda identifies as a Black woman. She is a Director in Student Affairs in the Student Success area at a small private elite PWI in the southwest region of the United States. She comes from a long family of educators. She completed her Ph.D. and her long-term goal is to become a Vice-President of Student Affairs. Rhonda's interest was always to work in areas that bridge student affairs and academic affairs, or ways to look at students holistically and address all the components of what their needs are as students. She describes herself as having a willingness to innovate, always connecting her work to academics, giving back, serving and supporting students, and trying to make institutions a better, more accessible and equitable place for all students.

Ava

Ava identifies as a Black (Afro-Latina) woman and as a first-generation college student. She never imagined that she would end up with a career in higher education. She serves as an Assistant Director in Student Affairs and Diversity and Inclusion in the Career and Professional Development area at a large public PWI in the northeast region of the United States. Ava's interest lies in diversity, equity and inclusion, and creating equitable spaces for all students. She

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is currently pursuing her Ph.D. and she describes herself as being outgoing, making people feel comfortable with her and being genuine and authentic with students.

Marie

Marie identifies as a Black woman. She serves as an Associate Director of Housing at a large public PWI in the southeast region of the United States. She became interested in having a career in higher education when she worked as a Resident Assistant in her first year of college. Marie aspires to become a Director of Housing/Residential Life, and eventually a Vice President of Student Affairs. She prides herself in her hard work and determination.

Tina

Tina identifies as a Black woman and a first-generation college student. She was a teenage single mother, who with the support of her mother was able to complete college and graduate school. She is a Director in Academic Advising at a large state PWI in the mid-western region of the United States. She is currently pursuing a Ph.D. Her goals are to become an Assistant or Associate Vice President of Student Success, and ultimately a Vice President of Student Success. She believes that she has a purpose that lies with students, as they are her motivation and they keep her grounded.

Dawn

Dawn identifies as a Black (Bi-Racial) woman that came from a family that did not have big college going expectations. She is an Associate Dean of Admissions at a small private elite college on the West coast. She is pursuing an Ed.D. Dawn's immediate goal is to be a Dean of Admissions. A large part of what makes her happy in her career in higher education is that it offers a better quality of life, productivity, and engagement at work.

Table 4.1 *Participant's Demographics*

Name	Race	Ethnicity	Age	Highest Degree earned	Years in Mid-Level Management at PWIs	PWI Type:	U.S. Region
Rhonda	Black	Non-Hispanic or Latina	45	Ph.D.	13	Small Private	Southwest
Ava	Black	Hispanic or Latina	36	Master's (Pursing Ph.D.)	6	Large Research Public	Northeast
Marie	Black	Non-Hispanic or Latina	39	Ph.D.	13	Large Public	Southeast
Tina	Black	Non-Hispanic or Latina	47	Master's (Pursing Ph.D.)	10	Large Public	Midwest
Dawn	Black	Non-Hispanic or Latina	33	Master's (Pursuing Ed.D.)	5	Small Private	West Coast

Results

The intent of this study is to explore the career experiences of Black women mid-level managers at PWIs who are pursuing senior leadership positions. This study will detail more directly the stories shared on the challenges and support of five Black women mid-level managers on their journeys to senior leadership. Their stories revealed three emergent themes: (1) Rising Above Racial and Gender Bias, (2) Black Women Surviving, and (3) Black Women Thriving. In analyzing, the data there were various commonalities in experiences that these women shared. The emergent themes identified the challenges that these women faced that are ingrained in race and gender disparities, their shared ability to survive through mentorships and or sponsorships and support structures, thrive in their strong sense of self-worth and

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determination, their outlook on leadership and their next level in this process. Their collective passion, tenacity, and perseverance to reach their leadership goals in these predominately white men dominated spaces, is essential for growth and ascension in higher education. The following sections will be structured according to the themes. The experiences of the participants will be expressed from their perspectives as their own unique stories and how they connect to Black feminist thought. Overall, the findings signify that Black women in mid-level management positions at PWIs experience a variety of challenges on their path to senior leadership. As they struggle to rise above racial and gender inequities, their motivation comes from their mentors or sponsors, sources of support and empowerment, their own self-worth and determination, and leadership perspectives.

Rising Above Racial and Gender Bias

Racial and gender bias was a shared salient theme in this study. The way that each of these participants expressed the marginalization of being a Black woman and enduring these institutional inequities were vital to the experiences in their roles at PWIs. They also discussed how racial and gender biases influenced their career and functions on their campuses and they clarified how these discriminatory practices effected how they operated within their careers. Additionally, they shared stories of how they learned early in their careers that as Black women, they would have to work twice as hard as white men, white women, and even Black men counterparts. For instance, Rhonda shared:

> It is cliché and has been said a million times, but it's not just that we have to work twice as hard to be considered half as good, it's that we have to work twice as hard to not be considered problematic, inept, and incompetent. The bar for competency for us is not the

same as the bar for competency for non-people of color, it is just not, and it is not

equivalent.

This type of communication was shared by every participant and connects to the theoretical framework Black feminist thought's "interlocking nature of race, gender, and class oppression." Collins (1986) explains this in the way that Black women contend with oppression both universally and privately, as they are bound by their interlocking identities and internal battles with tokenism and isolation. This theme also specifically speaks to the dual oppression of race and gender faced by Black women. The participants each expressed in one way or another that being Black women at PWIs fueled them to champion for marginalized populations on their campuses, including students, faculty, and staff. Several sub-themes arose from this overarching theme and they include, overcoming stereotypes (microaggressions), tokenism, sexism (gender sexualization).

Overcoming Stereotypes (Microaggressions)

Overcoming negative stereotypes is a struggle that Black women have confronted throughout history. Black women are ambushed by the stereotypes that often come in the form of microaggressions. Stereotypes such as angry Black women, antisocial, isolating, not being a team player, and being viewed as unintelligent, continue to plague them throughout their careers (Carli & Eagly, 2016; Domingue, 2015; Jeffries, 2015; Howard- Baptiste, 2014). Moreover, these historical stereotypical images of Black women like, "the caretaker Mammy, the loud-talking Sapphire, and the seductive Jezebel," added to evolving images, such as the "unstable Crazy Black Bitch (CBB) and the constant overachieving Superwoman," and can have an effect on the professional goals of Black women, their relationships in the workplace and their comprehensive organizational experiences (Reynolds-Dobbs, Thomas & Harrison, 2008, p. 130).

These perceptions were apparent in a review of the data from the participant's stories. The concept of being viewed or potentially viewed as an angry Black woman, bitchy, overly ambitious, moving too fast, a fixer, trying to outshine others, problematic, and overreacting or too emotional, were similarly expressed in this study by all participants. The idea that Black women are domestics that take care of and clean up messes, as well as the mammy dynamic of a parenting role with white women, was also included in the data. Each of these women have either been directly, indirectly or feared being potentially perceived in this way in their career experiences at PWIs.

This concept of Black women being seen as overly aggressive does not exemplify leadership qualities and these negative stereotypes can often overpower their competence and talents (Reynolds-Dobbs, Thomas & Harrison, 2008). Rhonda recounts her experiences at a previous PWI where she was employed earlier in her career. She pointed out:

> I think it's fascinating to me how, when Black women come into a space, if we have any level of drive, gusto, focus or plan, we are perceived as overly ambitious or not patient, or just insinuating ourselves in ways that we shouldn't be doing, which in my mind, I'm like this is why you hired me.

Rhonda discussed that she presented herself as driven and focused in her interview for this role, which is what she understood was the reason that she was hired. However, after she started the position, these attributes were viewed negatively. She expressed in one particular instance how this made her feel, "It was the first time that I had ever been in a space where I felt like my ambitions or goals were used like darts thrown back at me in a negative way." Most of the participants shared common expressions of how some of the stereotypical perceptions are expressed by their white women colleagues. For example, Ava discussed an incident with a

white women colleague who started speaking about how she was "such a mean person and just used a whole bunch of angry Black woman rhetoric." These defamatory microaggressions were communicated to another office on campus where Ava had great relationships with colleagues. She explained this as stemming from a conversation that she had with her colleague around performing a process differently with their student assistants, and she thought that Ava was "stepping on her toes." The colleague even told their mutual supervisor that Ava was "trying to take over things" and that she "wanted to change things in ways that were not appropriate." Ultimately, instead of confronting the issue, the supervisor "silenced" Ava by telling her that she could no longer speak to her colleague. She said that she was made to feel like she had done something wrong, without an opportunity to discuss the matter. This type of stereotypical imagery projected on these Black women collectively makes them feel like their character is unjustly being attacked and places them in a position to feel like they always need to defend themselves, and this makes their work environments unpleasant and unwelcoming.

Several of the other participants shared how they viewed these negative stereotypical images of Black women. Tina expressed the sentiment of this stereotyping of Black women as an oppressive thought process that can be explained like, "I have to throw stones and pebbles in her water so she can hurt herself." She felt like this is due to her white women colleagues feeling a sense of intimidation from the high level of competence in her work. Additionally, Marie commented that she does not feel like she has to "provide validation to fuel this stereotyping that has been placed on Black populations, particularly Black women." She said that she does not engage in conversations that are perpetuating these negative stereotypes and tokenism, when she is sometimes looked at to react on remarks that are made. Dawn explained her observations at a previous PWI. Many Black women in her office were labeled as disruptive and troublesome.

Dawn described that this stereotyping certainly impacted her thoughts on how she would be perceived. She shared:

> I understood the actual dynamics of what was going on, but it definitely was really startling to me to come into an office like this, which was the first office where there had been a really significant cohort of Black women. I want to be a part of this community of Black women, because that's valuable to me personally and professionally, but how were we all painted as disruptive or troublesome?

She expressed that this was an interesting tension to navigate while still relatively early in her career, and it was the first environment where there were all white direct supervisors and a majority of minority staff, made up largely of Black women. These were the types of questions thoughts and feelings that she had to process being a Black woman at these PWIs. That was the point that she learned the dynamics and some of the disrespect that Black women were experiencing at PWIs. She called this "cultural misunderstandings," which are different understandings of what respect in the workplace looks like based on your culture.

Rhonda, Ava and Tina talked about how the mammy dynamic/domestic caregiver perception is placed on Black women and is executed in their workspaces, particularly those in mid-level management roles. For instance, Rhonda expressed thoughts that she had in her mind as it related to a former white women supervisor: "I can't parent you or make you feel better about the stress that you're under, because all of the stress that you have, I have all of that stress plus all these additional stressors as well." This illustrates Rhonda's frustration with feeling burdened with her white colleague's emotions, when she feels that she has so much more stress herself to process. Ava explained the concept of how Black women are viewed as domestics at PWIs; "We are domestics, we're taking care of the kids, we're cleaning up all the messes, and we

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are making sure that the household is running all the time." She feels that there should be a comparative study between where Black women are in terms of the parallel roles that have been created in white collar America that are not called domestics, but are still domestic roles. Similarly, but from a different perspective Tina shared:

> Black women are always that mother figure to students, it is innate, and it is ingrained in us. This is how we operate. We always have to be someone's mama because we want to make sure people are taken care of. White women do not usually have to do that because they have their privilege to fall back on.

In relation to the current workplace, this modern-day Mammy is nurturing, supportive, all giving, is an advocate for other Black colleagues and is viewed as a senior-ranking or older Black woman (Bell & Nkomo, 2001). Moreover, she is competent in her work; however, the nurturing and emotional attributes that she possesses might overshadow her professional strengths. This is how Black women who embody the Mammy image are still looked upon in the workplace.

These women shared some very powerful dynamics that explicate the plight that Black women face in their careers as mid-level managers at PWIs, and how they are perceived and treated. Collins' (1986) first theme in Black feminist thought, self-definition and self-valuation, challenges the stereotypes of Black womanhood. These stereotypical imageries illustrate Black women as intimidating or threatening. Again, if they present behavior that is aggressive, they are viewed as "angry Black women" or "sapphires." Collins (2000), also discusses further in her writings on Black feminist thought that the "mammy work" that Black women take on from a historical perspective, is when Black women were constricted to domestic work and the Aunt Jemima image was created to control and designed to conceal the exploitation of Black women. A large aspect of Black women's labor market growth has been measured by the transition away

from domestic service. Despite this, Black women in the United States still do a great deal of the emotional nurturing and cleaning up after other people, often times for less compensation. In this respect, the work of Black feminist thought rests in explaining the shifting of these relationships and emerging analyses of how these commonalities are experienced in different ways (Collins, 2000).

Another discussion lending to Collins' (2000) perspectives on Black feminist thought was the prevailing standards of beauty and how this connects to Black women's hair. Ava and Tina spoke about microaggressions related to the way that Black women wear their hair that was observed and experienced at their PWIs. Ava explained how one of her white women colleagues would touch Black women's hair on her campus, asking them why their hair looked different on one day versus another. Tina shared a personal story of how she would wear her hair straight for a long period of time and then switch to wearing her hair in a short-tapered cut. She explained how many of the white women on her campus would say to her, "You change your hair every two weeks and I don't know who you are." Her response was, "I'm still the same person." She further elucidated that she would also wear her hair natural and that they seemed confused as to why she would do that. She commented, "One girl walked up to me and said, who are you?" She then gave Tina a hug, proceeded to put her hands Tina's hair and said, "oh your hair is so…" Experiencing and observing these microaggressions was very frustrating to both of these women and made them feel quite disrespected as Black women. Through the lens of Black feminist thought, Collins (2000) expresses the informal shared ideas among Black women that they experience on a daily basis around issues of how they should style their hair. This is yet another hurdle that Black women must contend with by simply living their normal lives, which appear in some ways abnormal and confusing to white America.

Tokenism

The sub-theme of tokenism was prevalent throughout the data in this study. Black feminist thought's second theme of the interlocking nature of race, gender, and class oppression exists in the intrinsic contexts of institutional tokenism and the intersections of race/ethnicity and gender (Collins, 2000). All five participants had the general commonality at some point in their careers at PWIs of being the diversity and inclusion minority representative, counselor and or problem solver for their respective departments, whether they formally held this role or not. As an illustration, Rhonda explained:

> I have sat on more search committees than I can even count across all the institutions, because they just consistently need diversity on their hiring teams. I am just like why can't we do better, why can't we have more diversity in the group, at the leadership level, at the table with people who are actually making the decisions.

She elaborated that this should not always happen on the entry or administrative level. She posed the question, "Can we have the diversity higher up?" What Rhonda shared is an example of the deficit in diversity representation that is prevalent on PWI campuses, and how Black women often times are the "token" face of diversity representation that these institutions stand on.

Another stance comes from Ava, who is a strong proponent for effective change in diversity, equity and inclusion. Ava recalled how her white colleagues were culturally incompetent and not champions for dialog on diversity issues with students. This left minoritized students feeling uncomfortable coming to the department's office. Ava, on the other hand, was always trying to raise awareness, understanding, and provide a safe space for marginalized students. This forced her to be the go-to person for diversity matters. She referenced what she called "an underground railroad" of students of color being referring directly to her, even though

she was not a counselor. It was understood that she was going to cause less harm than some of her white colleagues, as she would try to find the answers to their questions.

Dawn shared very significant, uncomfortable experiences with tokenism throughout her career working at PWIs. Throughout her interviews, she shared her distress being the reference point for resolving issues for Black students and other students of color, because she was often the only Black employee in her offices, or one of the only within a small number of women of color. She stated feeling like; "This can't be forever because the emotional labor is not sustainable." She discussed diversity, equity and inclusion work as being valuable work, but that there were not a lot of campus partners that were involved in this work. She felt at times like she was a one woman show and that the expectation was to be able to speak to every student of color's experience. She found this to be really challenging. Being bi-racial, mostly all of her relatives were white; she grew up in a predominantly white community and attended predominantly white schools. In one of her roles, she was expected to go to the inner city in Chicago's public schools and spend all of her time there talking to Black students about their experiences, when her experiences were nothing like theirs. She spoke of how she had none of the fears or challenges that these kids had. She expressed; "This should be everyone's work, this should be everyone's challenge, but there was a lot of resistance to that." Black feminist thought posits that Black women are confronted with these ideologies through a compilation of unquestioned daily experiences. When the discrepancies between Black women's self-definitions and everyday treatment are intensified, controlling images grow progressively evident (Collins, 2000).

Sexism (Gender Sexualization)

All of the participants acknowledged that sexism also plays a role in the discriminatory practices at PWIs. They expressed that often it is a dual discrimination of race and gender for Black women. Examples of this are from Ava and Dawn who shared their direct experiences with gender sexualization. Ava shared how she was told indirectly that because she was pretty, she was just going to be sexualized in situations with men on her campus. She was also told that she would not be seen as credible and her mind would not be considered in those spaces. She said that those things had her thinking about what clothing she should wear, depending on who is going to be in a particular meeting that she was going to. She spoke about times when she was the only woman in a room. She recalled an experience of being the only Black woman in a room with Deans comprised of all men. She explained that there was a joke that was made and "it was a little bit more for the ears of men." They apologized to her after not regarding her and what was said as being offensive. She referenced this being, "the good old boys saying it and I'm just sitting there like, okay." She also shared that, as women, we have to determine what we are comfortable with and if something is offensive to us. She posed the question: "If we are offended, do we sweep it under the rug or do we address it?" She also spoke about; "how do you know if they are being dismissive of you because you are brown or Black, or because you are a woman or both." This is part of what is referred to as the "double jeopardy" that affirms a "double whammy" or an extra consequence of being Black and a woman (Berdahl & Moore, 2006). This dual discrimination leads Black women to encounter higher degrees of sexual and racial injustices.

Dawn shared how she experienced being gender sexualized at a previous PWI in her career. She spoke about how she had a great professional relationship with one of her former

Deans. She traveled for work purposes with him, and when she decided to leave that role, everyone thought that she left because he made inappropriate advances towards her, or that they were dating. She explained that she left to pursue professional advancement. For instance, she would hear, "It's probably not your fault, I'm sure he was inappropriate with you." She would respond, "No one was inappropriate with anyone and also this isn't happening, I think this is insane." She illustrated her reaction to this very candidly to her colleagues, as she denounced the thought of inappropriate behavior as completely unfathomable, emphasizing her steadfast professionalism.

These stories of gender sexualization connect to how Collins (2000) explains the alleged passionate and emotional nature of Black women that for a long time has been used to substantiate the sexual exploitation of Black women. Relatedly, restraining Black women's knowledge, then maintaining that we lack the essentials for sound judgment, lowers Black women to the inferior side of the truth versus opinion. Additionally, the Jezebel character surfaced over 100 years ago, and it is an image that still exists today in the corporate world and higher education institutions. This modern-day Jezebel concept is the view of Black woman who are overly aggressive and will do whatever it takes to reach the top. Further, a Black woman may be seen as someone who slept her way to the top and doing anything to reach career success, instead of being viewed as a professional, competent, talented, and a business minded Black woman (Reynolds-Dobbs, Thomas & Harrison, 2008).

Black Women Surviving

The need for mentors and or sponsors and the importance of support was extremely vital to these Black women surviving. Each of the participants were either seeking mentors, sponsors or building, maintaining and benefitting from different mentor and or sponsor relationships.

Mentors provide psychosocial support like serving as a role model, acceptance and confirmation, friendship and counseling (Kram, 1985). Mentorship can be implemented in private and without the mentor taking on any risks. The sponsor-protégé relationship is highly visible. Sponsors provide both psychosocial and career-related support, as they openly advocate for the promotions of their protégés for them to reach their desired roles and develop their career successes (Smith, 2019). Expressions and observations about how crucial it is for Black women to have mentors and or sponsors, particularly to help them advance to senior leadership, was shared among all of these women. Each of the participants to some degree also served as mentors to others throughout their roles at PWIs and viewed this as valuable. Mentoring relationships offer treasured access to information through networking and education, and when Black women gain access to support systems at PWIs, this contributes to their professional career development and progression (Davis, 2009; Hague & Okpala, 2017; Harvard, 1986). It is virtually impossible to survive the journey to senior leadership without having mentoring relationships that support essential networking and the necessary knowledge for growing professionally (Harvard, 1986).

Support structures of faith and spirituality, for most of the participants was another major influence in both their personal and professional lives in surviving their experiences at PWIs. Collins' (2000) Black feminist thought also included a perspective from Cannon (1985), who wrote about Black feminist consciousness that gave insight into how Black women use faith and spirituality as a source of support, "It was biblical faith grounded in the prophetic tradition," that helped Black women "devise strategies and tactics to make Black people less susceptible to the indignities and proscriptions of an oppressive white social order" (p. 35).

Additionally, support from family, friends and most importantly from other Black women either in their friend's circle, externally and or on their campuses, was truly impactful to all five

of the participants. Feminist, womanist, civil rights activist Audre Lorde (1984) describes that for Black women, the listener most able to "pierce the invisibility created by Black women's objectification" (p.42) is in fact the Black woman. This process of trusting each another can appear risky since only Black women know what it means to be a Black woman. Lorde (1984) expounded, "If we will not listen to one another, then who will?" (p. 42). This gives a compelling depiction of the connection and understanding that Black women innately share with one another, thus the immense value in Black women supporting one another.

Value in Mentorships

These women shared common experiences on how they viewed the connections made for mentor and mentee relationships, and how critically essential these types of relationships are for Black women at PWIs. Some of the participants similarly shared that they felt that mentors usually have mentees who are like-minded and who exhibit some commonality with them. This is explained by Welch (1996), as he stated; "Individuals tend to identify with persons who are like themselves on salient identity group characteristics" (p. 10). For instance, Rhonda referenced how she has witnessed a mentor or more specifically as she explained, a sponsor vacating higher-level positions and their mentees or protégés moving into those roles. She explains that this happens because that particular mentor/sponsor resonated with that mentee/protégé, and they have the influence and the ability to open doors for them. Rhonda's explained her observation:

> The mentor laid the foundation and were intentional about it for their mentee to be able to shift into that role. That is a tremendous gift and I just do not think as Black women, we get that in the same ways. I even think Black men get that from Black men more than we

get it, because we just do not typically have as many Black women in the roles and the

non-Black people that we have are unicorns who are trailblazing for us.

She sees these types of higher-level mentor/mentee relationships or sponsorships as ones that are

powerful and not typically afforded to Black women. In fact, Rhonda expressed that she believes

this happens less for Black women than any other racial or gender population.

Ava discussed her own personal like-mindedness and similar work ethic as her mentors.

She explained, "People who will mentor are always trying to find others that are like them in

terms of how hard they are going to help them." She commented about being placed in situations

where mentors or sponsors have helped her "rise above the crop" and have advocated for her in

rooms on her campus, where others have said: "oh she's too green," and her mentors or sponsors

will respond, "No you don't know her." She was clear on how this has been very impactful in

helping her gain the leverage that she needs for her professional growth.

In my review of the literature, I did not come across how influential white men can be for

Black women as mentors, but especially as sponsors. However, a more novel discovery in my

research in several of the participants, were expressions that white men have been the most

influential mentors or sponsors to them. Ava shared that she has both white men and men of

color as her mentors or sponsors, but she relies more on white men as sponsors to endorse and

open doors for her. She referred to having that "extra security from people that are from majority

groups in those spaces." She believes that majority groups are taken more seriously and would

vouch for her. Ava shared, "I think being a true mentor is about opening those doors, otherwise

they are just a sounding board, there has to be some action there you know, there has to be

something." Ava discussed that she sees herself as having been lucky enough to be around men

at PWIs that have been very self-assured and see her value.

Dawn gave similar, yet different perspectives when she spoke about her experiences with white men as mentors or sponsors and how these relationships have impacted her. She shared:

> My experience with mentors has been mostly with white men, which has been great for accessing spaces, but certainly, this means that the mentorship relationship leaves out a lot of my experience in being able to have conversations about what it is to be a woman of color in this role.

This is a significant point. Although Dawn sees these higher-level mentoring or sponsorship relationships as highly beneficial, she also recognizes the void of not being able to have the important conversations around her marginalized identity in her respective roles at PWIs in these types of relationships. She elaborated that although it has not been in a traditional sense, it has been powerful to have white men who have sponsored her. They have been very eager to push her forward, ask questions and physically bring her into rooms to provide opportunities for her. She added that it has been a benefit to have them available to bounce around ideas, send them job descriptions for feedback, and get referrals to recruiters on her behalf.

The vital importance of Black women gaining mentors that help them to develop as professionals and move into senior leadership roles was a common discussion among these women. Tina expressed that it is "absolutely necessary for Black women to have mentors." She said, "Black women need to get a few mentors, people who look like them and people who do not look like them." She emphasized the value in having mentors that contributed to her growth and development, by giving her insight and direction that is enhancing her path to senior leadership. Tina shared one of her mentor relationships that is with a white woman who is a Vice President at her current PWI. She explained what this relationship feels like:

She is the person that I will call to say, what do you think about this or how can you help

me prepare for this interview? She is really, really, ready to go the extra mile with me and

she gets it. I can talk about situations that I have experienced as a Black woman and she

validates my feelings.

Tina expressed that she feels "seen" by her mentor and that even though she does not share a

marginalized identity like hers, she empathized that this mentor is someone that she can rely on

for advice and perspective.

Some of the participants voiced the responsibility that PWIs should have in creating the

necessary mentoring and sponsorship opportunities that Black women need to survive.

Connected to this, Rhonda shared:

PWIs must have mentorships in place for Black women in the pre-director and pre-mid

manager phases, and give Black women opportunities to get the kinds of experiences that

they will need to be competitive, for those senior level positions.

She explained that she does not know how people, particularly Black women at PWIs, progress

to higher-level roles without sponsors and mentors. Participants also expressed the ongoing

challenges that Black women have in finding a mentor, especially in other Black women.

Rhonda said that she sometimes feels that she comes off as very competent and it is assumed that

she already has a mentor, so this poses challenges for her in finding one. She explained that what

people like about mentorship is actually helping someone. Rhonda shared:

I really need perspective from someone who knows me well enough to also be able to

check me, not only about work but for the parts of me where I may be responding

emotionally or irrationally.

This was something that Rhonda expressed was important to her and she knows that lacking this perspective could hinder her career growth.

Having worked exclusively at PWIs, these women shared that they have not been in environments where they have had a lot of women of color and particularly Black women that were even available to serve in a mentor role. Collins (1998) discussed the notion of "difference" and its significance for creating stronger bonds among all cultures of women as well as the impact of Black women building an awareness of identity that fosters collaborations and not eclipsing their distinct personal needs. She details this form of collaborating as being, "a well-intentioned effort to explore differences among women in order to build a multiracial, multicultural feminist movement" (p. 74). Patton (2009) explains that this might alter the role and recognition of all women in higher education. She further points out that it is crucial that Black women preserve their legacy by serving as mentors and progressively working to build networks that would offer additional opportunities to place Black women into the academia pipeline. Even though the possibility exists that white men and women or Black men can assist in these capacities, these endeavors of Black women can generate unity with this group to support each other. Moreover, it forms a prototype that can be followed to enrich the existence of Black women in higher education (Patton, 2009).

Serving as a mentor, although not exclusively for Black women, was something that was essential and meaningful for the participants to engage in, as they all had mentees in different capacities. For example, Tina is a formal mentor to Black graduate students. She draws mentees from presentations that she delivers along with one of her doctoral classroom peers at conferences called "Why Black Women Rock." It is centered on the support of Black graduate

students. She currently mentors several graduate level students, primarily Black women. Ava articulates the vision of her role as a mentor as follows:

> The pillars of my mentorship are centered on "radical honesty, vulnerability, the collectivist society and moving forward, by grabbing onto the hands of somebody in front of you and pulling up the person behind you.

She expressed this from the perspective of how she has benefitted and grown from her mentors and the importantce of giving back or paying it forward.

Systems of Support and Empowerment

The participants mutually shared sources of support and empowerment that included friends, colleagues, professors, Black women "sister circles" and faith and spirituality. Most participants discussed having internal support on their campuses. For instance, Dawn shared that she has a community of colleagues/friends and this helped her to face challenges at work. She was immediately pulled in socially to their families, which was very helpful to her. This made her feel like the things that were happening outside the office were much easier to manage. She also felt like she had a place to go and that she had friends and a community of people. Dawn explained how this helped her not feel some of those external burdens and instead feel supported as a Black woman on campus.

Rhonda, on the other hand, shared that most of her closest support networks are external, as she has a robust group of friends and family that are outside of her campus community. Early in her career, and currently, a significant source of support has been with a close friend from college, who was a woman of color, and another close friend, who is a white woman. She said they both keep her from "going off the rails." Rhonda shared that in general she thinks that mid-

level managers are not well supported and tend to be forgotten, because, "the potential for them to be transitory in order for them to move up is great." Rhonda shared:

> Organizations just do not have a ton of places for mid-level managers to go if they want to ascend. You're basically waiting on somebody to retire or die and so there's not a lot of energy placed in supporting that level period."

Black women were the strongest source of support and empowerment for each of these women in different ways. Dawn described the Black women in her office at a previous PWI as "awesome." She shared:

> This was the biggest community of Black women that I have ever been a part of, really culturally, socially, and emotionally enriching and probably the best part of that experience that happened to me. This was probably the least fulfilling and the most difficult job that I have had, but it was probably the most supportive and emotionally fulfilling and it made me feel like I was part of a bigger culture.

She expressed such compassion about this community of Black women and how supported and empowered this made her feel, even in the midst of what she considered to be a difficult job.

Ava shared how being around Black women is "healing" for her and she seeks those spaces out a lot more. She referenced how cathartic and healing it is to just be in the presence of Black women and enjoy quality time over dinner together. She explained that she felt like, "I can get through this. I can go on another day and there's a network of women that do want to see me succeed and we are in the same struggle." Ava expressed further how, with Black women, she does not have to explain her hurt and pain. She elaborated, "You don't even have to say anything, it's just in the eyes." She commented that even if there is just one other Black woman in a

conference room, she could just look up and know that there is somebody that understands some of the discomfort that she might be going through.

Both Tina and Marie described this sister circle of Black women colleagues and friends that they relied on for support and empowerment. Tina shared that although at her current PWI there are not a lot of Black women administrators, she does have a "sister circle" of Black woman on her campus that are a strong source of support and empowerment for her. They usually meet for dinner once a month to decompress and enjoy each other's company, as they support one another. She expressed that she can call any one of them if she needs different perspectives on something that she may be dealing with and knows that she will get different answers that will help her to determine the path that she should take.

Marie identified having a circle of Black women on her current PWI campus as "very empowering and vital to survival." She shared that they have conversations about shared experiences related to impediments in their career advancement, working ten times harder to get things done and persevering through their adversities. Marie also commented on their discussions about white colleagues not giving Black women the respect by using their title of Dr., when they address them. She stated that her relationships with these Black women are a "safe haven" for her to vent about what she has experienced at PWIs. Additionally, she can turn to them to bounce ideas off and get advice on how to handle situations. Marie saw this support network of Black women as being "very beneficial, safe, and a saving grace."

Another strong system of support for most of the participants was faith and spirituality. Spirituality has been recorded as valuable in helping Black women fight "the everyday struggles that come with living in a socially and politically oppressive system," (Watt, 2003, p. 29). The role of faith and spirituality has been defined by researchers as a coping mechanism

(Constantine, Wilton, Gainor, and Lewis, 2002), a focus of psychological endurance (Brookins and Robinson, 1995; Robinson and Howard-Hamilton, 1994) and an identity concept that is accentuated in the Black woman's effort to cultivate a positive identity (Stewart, 2002). Rhonda describes having a connection to something spiritual and a" belief that it is bigger than you are." She shared:

> When the systems fail you, your faith does not and that is the only way to me to survive the burnout. That is the only way to survive feeling anxious, feeling depressed, feeling like this is not where I was supposed to be.

She explains her faith as giving her perspective when she reflects on the plans for her career that she had mapped out and where she thought she was going to be professionally, and she realized that she was not there.

Ava referred to faith and spirituality as, "being a part of my life forever." She talked about how Jesus was, "the biggest revolutionary that ever existed on this planet" and, as a Christian, that is where her "radical need for equity comes from." She feels that if she can give someone permission to be who they are, then she feels like that is her purpose and calling and she stated in relation to this, "that's very much God to me." She elaborated, "That's how God shows up in my life and I wouldn't be doing justice to the blessings that I've been given if I wasn't utilizing them to help others utilize their blessings, that's the core of who I am." She expressed how her faith helped her to put things into perspective, made her a better person and that she does not know who she would be if she had not been raised with spirituality and in the Church.

Tina speaks to the point of how faith rooted in prophetic practice helps her better deal with the daily biases that she encounters as a Black woman working at a PWI. She expressed that this has been a critical source of support in all aspects of her life. She shared:

> I go to Sunday school on Saturdays and Sundays and Bible study. I would not be where I am without God, having faith, going to church, reading the Bible and just surrounding myself with positive people who believe in me.

She explained how this is vital to her and Black women overall because she says, "We do tend to know our faith and I'm not saying it's not important to other people, but that is a staple in the Black community. We have to stay prayed up." She feels that in certain situations, "you just have to be still and pray before you walk into them." Moreover, spirituality has been intertwined into the identities of Black Americans and it has become a powerful resource for the personal development of Black women (Williams et al., 1999) and it may be used as a strategy to help them move past the issues of marginalization and isolation that they encounter in higher education (Henry &Glenn, 2009).

Black Women Thriving

The manner in which all of these women viewed and valued themselves and their will to keep pushing through adversity was resounding throughout this research. Their personal awareness, perseverance, and perspectives on leadership and the next level were key components in who they are and how they defined themselves. Collins (2000) promoted BFT's self-definition and self-valuations and connected Black women's self-reliance to survival issues. Steady (1987), describes Black women as possessing the spirit of independence, self-reliance, and uplifting each other to value the image of womanhood that distinctly challenges predominant perceptions of femininity.

Self-Worth and Determination

The participants all shared a strong sense of self-worth and determination on various

levels, even in the midst of the challenges that they face in their roles at PWIs. Many of these

women have struggled with "imposter syndrome," feeling inadequate, like they do not belong, or

that they are failures. Moving past these mental hurdles has not been easy, but these women have

displayed resilience, belief in themselves and the motivation to persevere through adversity. For

instance, Rhonda shared that at times she sees her life as parallel to her students, particularly in

terms of identity development, understanding yourself, and imposter syndrome/feelings of

failure. Although she has struggled with these things professionally at PWIs, she stressed the

importance of Black women knowing their worth. She shared how often times she is seen as a

competition to her white women colleagues. She reflected on a situation with a particular

colleague at a PWI, by recalling her unspoken internal thoughts:

> I have my own standards of excellence and what I think excellence looks like, but we're
>
> not in competition with each other, because if I wanted your job I could have applied for
>
> it, because I was the interim to it, so that's not even in play. I am not competing with you,
>
> there is no competition, and I compete with myself.

In light of this, Rhonda feels that PWIs have been a space that has significantly contributed to

her own development and understanding of self.

Ava suggested that Black women should have a good therapist to help them deal with

distress, as she feels this leaves more room for innovation and self-discovery. Both Ava and

Dawn expressed the power of having a voice and being seen, which can be at times a constant

struggle for Black women at PWIs, as they face feelings of isolation and invisibility. Ava shared,

"I have the confidence to push forward and I understand that I deserve to be heard, I deserve to

be seen and I deserve for people to champion me." Collins (2000) noted one important

component that contributes to the enduring silence between Black women, and within Black

feminist thought, it rests in the lack of access to positions of power in U.S. institutions for Black

women. Those in control silence the collective voices of Black women. Tina and Dawn

connected on the notion of being strategic and intentional on how to operate at PWIs, by not

fighting every battle nor internalizing everything based on feelings. This can be challenging as

Black women battle the racial and gender inequities that plague PWIs. As an example, Dawn

expressed:

> I think as early as you can in your career, come up with strategies to protect your energy.
> I think protecting yourself, learning not to get on every emotional roller coaster that you
> are invited to, and staying grounded will help you to stay centered in the confidence that
> you know you have.

Dawn, along with the other women, were extremely self-reflective and able to illustrate clearly

who they are, how they valued themselves, and their persistence. Marie repeated numerous times

how focused she is on her goals, how she remains grounded, has a strong work ethic, and a

growing determination. Tina was compelling and passionate when she shared, "Nothing will stop

me from accomplishing my goals. I stand by what I do 100%." These accounts reinforced how

self-aware and steadfast these women are in accomplishing whatever they set their minds to.

Perspectives on Leadership and the Next Level

This subtheme was common for all of the participants in how they spoke about their

leadership. All of them were confident in their leadership skills and felt that they were well

prepared and successful in these experiences, both in spite of and because of their experiences at

PWIs. In projecting the future, each of these women could visualize their next level in

leadership. These women evaluated their own leadership in ways that helped them to see the quality of their leadership. To that point, both Rhonda and Marie shared insight into how they lead their teams. Rhonda posed some thought provoking and insightful questions to herself that aided her in assessing her leadership abilities. "Am I a competent leader? Am I a competent professional? Am I competent in my ideas? Are we smart in how we execute? Do I hire good people?" Answering these questions helped Rhonda to evaluate how she hires and assesses talent in her office. She shared that as a leader, she is a great contributor, communicator, and great at managing teams. Additionally, she regards herself as having a high level of competence, as she says she is excellent at what she does and continues to strive for excellence, but also deserves a chance to grow professionally.

Marie gives another perspective on her team leadership. She feels that it is important as a leader to take the time to say, "Let me just explain to you why we do what we do and this is how it impacts the bigger overall picture, and these are the decisions that we make." She commented that just by having that conversation with staff, they appreciate that so much more and can have a little bit more insight. She explained further that it does not mean that they are going to agree with you, but if nothing else, you have shown them that there is reasoning behind your thought process and decision-making. Marie discussed the importance of fairness, consistency, principles, processes, procedures, and explanations as it pertains to communications with staff. She expressed, "Being fair and consistent goes a long way, because staff are going to compare notes and we're not just making random decisions, we're running the operations of 200 individuals." Marie also commented that she faces a multitude of critical management and decision-making issues daily within her area. She sees this as strongly preparing her for the next

level of leadership. In noting how she leads her teams, she explained that sometimes a person cannot understand and see the big picture that we see.

Tina recalled hiring someone four years ago that she started pouring her knowledge into, so that no one person holds all of the information needed to perpetuate the success of her department. Additionally, she wants to share her knowledge to develop others for the next level. She noted that this is what real leadership is about. These women collectively spoke about things that strengthened their leadership, for example serving on and chairing campus committees, professional development, conference presentations, building campus networks around their departments, observing different leaders on their campuses and incorporating what is good for them into their own leadership style. An example, as explained by Dawn, is how she got involved in her current PWIs professional organizations and was able to be part of a smaller community and was given leadership roles very early on. She expressed how getting involved in these organizations has helped give her the confidence she feels is needed for leadership. Dawn expressed:

> I feel like I have a real place in this work, because sometimes in my own office I feel that really tokenized experience. I was thrust into leadership roles, and I felt like, I do not know that I want this. In building my confidence through the work that I was doing and representing what I studied in college, I began feeling like, okay I'm standing on ground that is under my terms and I'm doing something I'm excited and passionate about.

Dawn also shared that, over the last couple of years, she had been able to branch out and be on more cross-campus committees that work outside of the scope of admissions. She thinks that this has really helped her, especially as she thinks about senior leadership roles at her current institution. Dawn sees value in getting to know many more colleagues on her campus and the

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various ways that they could collaborate. She would like to get a better understanding of how the

colleges on her campus are run. It has been helpful for her to meet senior leaders on her campus,

as they can get to know her. This has made things less intimidating for her while in rooms with

the President or Vice Presidents. Ultimately, Dawn admits that she thinks that she would be

moving into senior leadership facing uncertainty in some areas, but feeling confident and

prepared in other areas. She stated, "My experiences are well beyond what they need to be and

probably well beyond others that have come before me that are moving into senior leadership

roles, so I'm like very confident in that." Dawn sees herself as being well prepared for the next

level in her leadership journey because she has had and continues to have these experiences in

her career.

All of these women are aware and are defining who they are as Black women

mid-level managers and future senior leaders at these predominately white institutions. Collins

(2000) notes that Black women's capacity to establish these individual, frequently unspoken, but

potentially powerful expressions of daily awareness into an articulated, self-defined, mutual

perspective is key to the survival of Black women. As pointed out by Lorde (1984) "It is

axiomatic that if we do not define ourselves for ourselves, we will be defined by others—for

their use and to our detriment" (p. 45).

Summary

This chapter's essential themes from all five of the research participants were outlined as

it relates to their journeys to senior leadership at PWIs. The three primary themes are identified

as: (1) Rising Above Racial and Gender Bias, (2) Black Women Surviving, and (3) Black

Women Thriving. These themes were embedded in the participant's experiences and shared

throughout their stories of facing disparities and adversities while surviving through mentorships,

sponsorships, support and empowerment and thriving in self-determination and leadership. These stories were garnered in their perspectives from college to their early and current careers, through various experiences that they encountered at PWIs. Their stories predicate the leaders that they are today and who they will become in the future. Each of these Black women has a compelling narrative that is uniquely their own throughout different stages of their lives. The Black women who participated in this study have faced and continue to struggle with the inequities and challenges in gaining adequate support and resources that should be available to them at predominately white institutions on their journeys to advance into senior leadership status. Chapter five will outline the implications of findings, recommendations will be made, and the exploration of areas for future research will be presented.

CHAPTER 5

Overview

Black women must overcome considerable barriers to rise into senior leadership roles at PWIs. Hughes and Howard-Hamilton (2003) affirmed that Black women's challenges may occur long before they start making a pathway to senior leadership. PWIs are significantly deficient in the number of Black women senior leaders, despite Black women's unmistakable professional and educational achievements. They remain in a continuous struggle for equitable representation among white women, white men and Black men counterparts for positions in senior leadership. This research chronicles the experiences of five Black women in mid-level management roles at PWIs on their journeys to advance into senior leadership. These women share their stories that are viewed through the lens of Black feminist thought (BFT). This chapter will provide an analysis of the findings and their association to Black feminist thought and the literature researched for this study. Additionally, implications for policy and practice in higher education, recommendations for future research and a review of the research limitations will be explored.

Discussion of Findings

The research results help to add to the scarcity of literature on the oppressions of race and gender faced by Black women in mid-level management roles at PWIs, who are striving to move up the ranks in higher education. The literature has historically been limited to conventional leadership perspectives that are vastly concentrated on white men in the corporate realm (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). After I identified initial codes, I searched for commonalities to determine the core themes. These core themes are prominent and largely broad in scope and focused on wider reaching concepts. The sub-themes are more narrowly focused on concepts connected to the overall themes. There are three prominent core themes that are highlighted from the accounts

shared by the participants in this study as follows: (1) Rising Above Racial and Gender Bias (2) Black Women Surviving (3) Black Women Thriving. Numerous sub-themes also emerged. The sub-themes for "Rising Above Racial and Gender Bias" were: (1) Overcoming Stereotypes-Microaggressions, (2) Tokenism and (3) Sexism-Gender Sexualization. Additionally, sub-themes for "Black Women Surviving" were: (1) Value in Mentorship/Sponsorship, (2) Systems of Support and Empowerment. The final sub-themes for "Black Women Thriving" were: (1) Self-Worth and Determination, (2) Perspectives on Leadership and the Next Level. Largely, the women in this study shared experiences that were primarily linked to their race and gender as Black women.

Addressing the Research Question

This study has a single research question; *How do Black women in mid-level management roles at predominately white institutions describe the experiences in their professional journey to senior-leadership?* The review of the literature revealed the struggles that Black women faced in their efforts to attain senior leadership roles at predominately white institutions, equal with that of their peers from opposite racial and gender backgrounds (Behar-Horenstein, West-Olatunji, Moore, Houchen, & Roberts, 2012; Modica & Mamiseishvili, 2010). Further, the majority of higher education senior leaders remain white, specifically at PWI's (Dean, Bracken, & Allen, 2009; Altbach, Lomotey, & Smith, 2002; Snyder, Dillow, & Hoffman, 2008). In Bichsel and McChesney's (2017) report from the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources (CUPA-HR), 7% of higher education leaders were Black, that included top executives, administrative officers such as division heads, department heads and deans. Additionally, Hispanics represented 1%, Asians held 2% of these positions, 1% were classified as another race or ethnicity and the remaining 86 % were white. Further, Black women represent

an overall 3.6% of senior leadership positions in higher education (Taylor, et.al., 2020). This low representation of Black women is unacceptable, especially given the growing numbers of Black women earning advanced degrees, yet still facing incessant racial and gender oppressions, being disregarded, silenced and made to feel that they are not qualified for senior leadership roles.

This study revealed that the participants experienced racial and gender oppressions in their pursuit of senior leadership positions at PWIs. Since each of these women's professional higher education experiences were all at PWIs, they expressed the difficulties that they faced throughout their respective careers, which included racism through various forms of stereotyping, including microaggressions, tokenism, as well as sexism through gender sexualization. The negative stereotypes that have been attached to Black women have been central to their oppression (Collins, 2000). As a result, Black women are left to deal with a system that is broken, racist, sexist, classist, and one that has failed to take responsibility for the lack of equitable opportunities and resources that would be a game changer, for not only Black women, but the entire organizational structure of higher education.

The findings suggest overwhelmingly that Black women's survival is critical in the importance and value of mentoring relationships for their career advancement, as this corresponds with literature from various researchers (Gardner et al., 2014; Green & King, 2001; Henry & Glenn, 2009; Patitu & Hinton, 2003; Patton, 2009; West, 2017). As a testament to this survival, Ava discussed having built strong mentoring relationships or sponsorships that helped her to navigate her way into spaces that she would not normally have access to on her campus. She was able to move into a role connected to diversity that she desired, in order to continue to build on her path to senior leadership. Alternatively, Rhonda expressed her struggles and frustrations with surviving in finding mentors to help her navigate to the next level. She

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explained how the career progression that she desires has not moved at a pace that she had hoped at this juncture in her career.

Survival for most of these women also relied on their faith and spirituality and the connections and influences of other Black women for their systems of support and empowerment. Collins (2000) described the spirituality of Black women as being strong enough to battle the oppressions that they struggle with in society. The third theme of Black feminist thought, on the importance of Afro-American women's culture, specifically expounds on how pertinent it is for Black women to support one another (Collins, 2000). Further, Collins explicates that she wrote Black feminist thought to empower Black women to help other Black woman in their journey to personal empowerment. Each of the women participating in this study felt a sense of empowerment when they were in the presence and influence of other Black women through their sister circles and other connections made with Black women in both their professional and personal lives. Collins (2000) discusses Black women helping each other, but she affirms that the ultimate responsibility for defining and valuing who they are is within the individual woman herself. Black feminist thought develops a lens to examine leadership experiences, as Black women continue to be the primary focus (Collins, 1990). Rhonda illustrates this as she discussed having her own standards of excellence and what that means to her individually. While the other women each had their individual principles and visions for leadership, Dawn was steadfast on establishing a foundation that would be the blueprint for her leadership. She noted that it would be "under my terms," which drives the excitement and passion that she has about becoming a greater leader. Although Black women in mid-level management roles at PWIs confront numerous barriers that may hinder them along the way in attaining senior leadership roles (Davis & Maldonado, 2015), the women in this study had a

unique sense of themselves and a value and potential for senior leadership, which seemed to help them better deal with these challenges. In addition to the themes, which are the shared perceptions that resonated from the findings, this study did yield four primary takeaways, a panoramic view that is the culmination of what experiences stood out most among the study participants, and they include: Perpetuating Stereotypes, Influence of white Men, Sister Circle Connections Among Black Women, and PWIs Responsibility to Black Women.

Perpetuating Stereotypes

Race and gender stereotyping of Black women that is being perpetuated at PWIs, is one of the greatest takeaways from this study. The very history of stereotyping Black women is rooted in slavery and perpetuated at PWIs all across our nation. Its prevalence is so damaging to the psyche of Black women, that unless it comes to an end, Black women will continue to suffer the mental and emotional anguish that is counterproductive to their success. Ava demonstrated this when she talked about being viewed as a threat by white women colleagues in her workspaces, when speaking on matters that she was passionate about. She described that this was perceived as her being angry or combative and having her personal interests at heart instead of the interests of the institutions. This was a resounding commonality that the participants all discussed in this study from a personal perspective or an observation that was directed at other Black women in their workplaces. Dawn reflected on how she observed "the constant stereotyping of Black women by white women supervisors play out." This involved Black women not having an outlet for legitimate grievances without receiving written reprimands and being labeled as troublesome or disruptive. Alternatively, both Ava and Dawn endured gender sexualization. Ava's experiences entailed remarks about not being taken seriously because of how she looked and being a woman. In a different context, but nevertheless with the same aim,

Dawn's encounter with gender sexualization related to a professional relationship with one of her superiors, was perceived as sexual in nature by her colleagues. Their experiences perpetuate the sexual exploitation of Black women that dates back to slavery (Collins, 2000). These stereotypical images of Black woman were prominent in the discussions with the participants, as they saw this propagation at PWIs as part of the norm or culture of how Black women were categorized and treated at these institutions. They also recognized potential barriers that could exist due to some of these perceptions. For example, Rhonda was viewed at a previous PWI for a job interview as someone who could get things accomplished. After she was hired, she felt that her ambition and assertiveness in her work was eventually perceived as "bitchy and too ambitious" by her supervisor, who was a white woman. She also expressed that her work standards of excellence were viewed as a "competition with white women colleagues." These participants all shared their care and commitment for their students and the institutions for which they worked. They shared that the negative stereotypical impressions that they were labeled with, primarily from white women, potentially created barriers related to how they were viewed by senior leadership at these institutions. They both felt like this could have affected their career advancement. These women do, however, strive to rise above these challenges by dispelling myths through networking and cultivating their own professional relationships.

The literature explores the double jeopardy endured by Black women as they faced both racism and sexism (Collins, 1990; hooks, 1981; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003). The stereotyping of Black women is frequently viewed on a personal level as gendered racial microaggressions that objectify and diminish Black women to their race and gender. The experiences of gender and class discrimination for Black women are embedded in social stereotypes and oppressive images that are designed to minimize and objectify Black women and

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are rooted in racist and sexist views of womanhood (Collins, 1990; Essed, 1991). Black feminist thought's purpose is primarily to foster Black women's empowerment and conditions surrounding social justice (Collins, 2000). Collins further suggests that there is a need for Black women's political activism to fight through their oppressions and their commitment to the struggles for group survival and institutional change. As Collins (2000) notes, negative stereotypes that are branded on Black women have been central to their oppression. Former Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm (2010) spoke; "We must reject not only the stereotypes that others have of us but also those we have of ourselves and others" (p.181). The internal struggle to dismiss these stereotypes in this way is something that most of the women in this study battled throughout their careers as they endured these biases at PWIs. Collins (2000) writes that as part of a universal system of power, stereotypical images of Black womanhood assume special meaning. This is because the authority to define what society values is a vital tool of power used by the elite in exerting influence and manipulating notions about Black women. Additionally, Collins (2000) explains how they exploit the current images that exist, develop new ones, and make racism, sexism, and other types of social injustices seem normal and an expected part of daily life. Myers (2002) discussed the complexity of Black women's leadership roles and asserted that issues of racism and sexism are inextricably connected and a major barrier to effective leadership. Further, he explains that race and gender work collectively towards the oppression of Black women in the workplace and both outlooks are rooted in stereotypical beliefs about Black women. These misconceptions and stereotypes concerning race and gender lead to the labeling of Black women, clouding the actual persons responsible for stigmatizing and promoting "self-fulfilling prophecies about sex and race that hold power" (Myers, 2002, p. 23). PWIs are espousing images that embrace racial and gender equity, while simultaneously

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disregarding the impact that a more equitable representation of Black women in senior leadership could have on college student recruitment, enrollment and retention, based on an increasingly diverse student population. This disheartening reality for Black women has fueled their fortitude to rise above adversity and remain resilient in their battle to dispel these negative stereotypes and use their voices for justice, inclusion and their visibility as professionals at PWIs.

Influence of White Men

A second takeaway and a unique characteristic of this research is how white men at PWIs have had significant influence on the career trajectories of the Black women in this study, by serving as higher level mentors or sponsors. Whether it was directly or indirectly, these women discussed the powerful influences of white men in their experiences at PWIs. This was not found in the review of the literature and creates a novel aspect to this study. Ava, Marie, and Dawn spoke intensely about the impact and influence of white men on their careers. They shared stories of the white men who provide them with support, motivation, and sponsorship, a willingness to use their power and influence to open doors and provide pathways for their career advancement at PWIs. As an example, Dawn reflected on being lucky to have white men that have been very eager to push her forward, ask questions, physically bring her into rooms, and give her opportunities. She stated, "They are really effectively looking out for me and when I do get to connect with them, it's really helpful and it's certainly been powerful in the traditional mentorship sense." She did on the other hand communicate the difficulty in conveying the experience of being a Black woman to her white men mentors. She noted that it was just not a part of their conversations when talking about how things were going with her career. Dawn viewed these as "great, but limiting relationships." Further, initial researchers indicated that mentors who have more organizational power might be more adept to offer exposure and

sponsorship than less powerful mentors overall. White men are generally more powerful within institutions than women or non-white men (Ragins, 1997; Ragins & Sundstrom, 1999). Research also indicates that because white men have greater access to powerful networks, having them as sponsors is a clear advantage (Giscombe, 2007). White men's dominant status and accessibility to senior level positions is the reason they are often sponsors for women of color. The majority of institutional leadership positions are occupied by white men and they hold the decision-making power to offer these women opportunities (Davis & Maldanado, 2015).

bell hooks (1984) stated, "Black women must recognize the special vantage point our marginality gives us and make use of this perspective to criticize the dominant racist, classist and sexist hegemony" (p. 15). Davis' (2012) research showed that influential networks in virtually all institutions are usually comprised exclusively of men, often white men. Access to these networks is typically a challenge to permeate. Moreover, this reinforces the reality that Black women are confronted with, in being excluded from informal social networks and lacking the official memberships to the "good old boys" club. Davis' (2012) study participants corroborated that obtaining sponsors who were inclined to advance their careers, provided opportunities for them to do so. These sponsors were commonly white men, who were making decisions and had powerful positions within the organization. Facing barriers that often position them as outsiders in the campus communities at PWIs, Black women do not typically get the opportunity to integrate themselves in spaces that will expose them to sponsors who can give them the leverage needed to propel into senior leadership positions. PWIs should be challenged to create opportunities for sponsorship that are attainable for Black women by creating transparency and accessibility to those with influence and power that can open doors that are generally exclusive and unattainable for many Black women.

Sister Circle Connections Among Black Women

A third and impactful takeaway from this study is the sister circle connections that these women shared with other Black women. Each participant in this study uniquely defined the importance of other Black women in their personal and professional lives. Tina illustrated this in discussing the overwhelming joy that she feels when she connects with other Black women and how she is always seeking out ways to do this. She does find it difficult to make connections with Black women, especially in senior leadership at PWIs, due to the limited number represented. Further, Tina and Marie both recount their sister circles of Black women on their respective PWIs campuses, as the group of Black women that they connect with to gain different perspectives, share ideas and decompress from all of the trauma that can comes with working at a PWI. Black women endure numerous challenges at PWIs, which may involve racial disparities (Schwartz et al., 2003) or feeling isolated and invisible (Tuitt, 2010). These struggles can cause Black women to experience feelings of inferiority and imposter syndrome that has effects on their development in the academy (Allen & Joseph, 2018). In light of the issues that Black women encounter, it is crucial to understand the possible avenues where they can find the needed support at PWIs (Harley, 2008). The literature does propose the necessity for Black women to make connections with each other (Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Collins, 2000), however, their lack of representation in senior level positions at PWIs makes this hard to accomplish, particularly through in person communications. In relation to Black women supporting one another, Hughes and Howard-Hamilton (2003) describe support systems as "opportunities for Black women to form sister circles and share counter stories that refute some of the negative information they may have received during their daily campus routines (p.101)." Moreover, they explain that these support systems are not meant to depict or support a failing perception of self

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and despair, but alternatively to offer an environment that creates an identity that is not established on gender roles or racial stereotyping. These support group organizers and role models should be Black women.

PWIs Responsibility to Black Women

The fourth and final takeaway from this study is the responsibility that predominately white institutions have to provide support and resources for Black women. A review of the data on Black women in higher education indicated that few have attained senior level positions at PWIs (Davis & Maldanado, 2015). Further, the treatment of Black women has been different, as they have worked within predominately white systems that have not provided them with the support that they need. Additionally, they may be required to function at higher levels than their men counterparts to reach success (Sturnick, Milley & Tisinger, 1991). Ross and Green (2000) explain "This is a value problem and is one that through observation, discussion, and verification should be eradicated in a democratic society based on merit" (p. 15).

There was a consensus among the participants that PWIs have a responsibility to recruit and retain Black women by having resources and support mechanisms in place. This is illustrated well by both Marie and Ava. They both pointed out that PWIs should ensure that they are intentional in hiring to fill the equity gaps in senior leadership. This is often addressed by increasing the number of Black women hired in these roles, along with programs and resources to support them. They also spoke about PWIs messaging on fostering a healthy campus culture and changing the campus climate. This is critical to the responsibility that PWIs have to provide a safe environment where marginalized groups, particularly Black women, can thrive professionally without suffering with the constant racial and gender oppressions. The literature reveals the scarcity of Black women attaining senior level leadership roles, contending with

obstacles, as well as a lack of career and leadership progression at PWIs (Bartman, 2015; Davis & Maldanado, 2015; Gamble & Turner, 2015).

Tina expressed the need for PWIs to first acknowledge that Black women do not have the same opportunities as their counterparts of opposite races and gender. This sheds light on the importance for them to create programs for career development to address the weaknesses on their campuses. Tina also stressed the need for PWIs to survey their campuses to "get to the heart of what is needed," as it relates to diverse leadership representation and equity. Social isolation, marginalization, limited or lack of mentoring opportunities, and campus communities that are not welcoming, are all environmental dynamics that have influenced Black women's experiences in leadership and the likelihood of them being retained and having upward mobility in their careers (Jones, 2013; Wallace et al., 2014). Black administrators, particularly Black women, need to feel included, supported and welcomed prior to pursuing senior leadership roles and assimilate socially and professionally on campuses (Grant, 2012). Moreover, it is necessary for higher education to devote attention and time to the experiences that lead to retaining Black women leaders. Inclusionary approaches will help to retain Black women, as it is crucial now more than ever to have a concentrated effort that recognizes the value and contributions that Black women provide to their respective PWIs. Unfortunately, PWIs have not only failed to put the necessary resources and support mechanisms in place, but they have not made adequate strides to dispel their racist and sexist views of Black women, to fully allow them the space needed to transition successfully into senior leadership roles, and PWIs should be held accountable.

Connections to Theoretical Framework

Collins (2000) asserts that explaining Black women's experiences and ideas is embedded in the core of Black feminist thought. She also believed that Black women formed a shared

knowledge that served a common purpose in cultivating the empowerment of Black women. Black feminist thought was designed to chronicle that this knowledge exists and draw the outline. The women in this study shared impactful stories about their career journeys to senior leadership and were engaged in experiences that connected them to several facets of Black feminist thought that will be discussed and include: self-definition and self-valuation; the interlocking nature of race, gender, and class oppression; Black women's activism; Black women intellectuals; and the importance of Afro-American women's culture.

Self-Definition and Self-Valuation

Black women's self-definition addresses the power dynamics connected to important images of self and community, and their self-valuation speaks to the authentic content of these self-definitions (Collins, 1986). The stories shared by the women in this study epitomized what Collins (1986) further elucidates as Black women creating their own standards for assessing Black womanhood and placing value on what they create. This clearly resonates throughout the study in how these women each held their own personal ideologies on how they lead with excellence and how they visualize the path of their leadership. Having endured the perpetuation of racial and gender stereotyping throughout their professional careers at PWIs, these women have been confronted with struggles in their pursuit of senior leadership. Various characteristics that exist in stereotyping Black women are essentially inaccurate representations of the attributes of Black women's behavior that are viewed as the greatest threat to white patriarchy (Gilkes, 1981). Collins (1986,) postulates that Black women endure the common attacks of controlling stereotypical images that require a considerable amount of internal strength. Moreover, from this perspective, self-definition and self-valuation are not luxuries but necessities for Black women's survival.

Collins (2000), writes about Katie Cannon, professor, scholar and one of the founders of womanist ethics, who suggested that "Black womanist ethics embraces three basic dimensions: "invisible dignity," "quiet grace," and "unstated courage," all qualities essential for self-valuation and self-respect" (p.116). When faced with adversity in their roles at PWIs, the narratives of the women in this study collectively demonstrated dignity, grace and courage that was authentic, personal, and often internalized in how they carried themselves as professionals and the value that they placed on themselves as Black women. Collins (2000) referenced Black feminist-influenced scholar Maria Stewart's essay, which promoted the self-definition and self-valuations of Black women. She connected this to Black women's self-reliance with survival issues and never having had a chance to exhibit talents, suggesting that "the world thinks we know nothing" (p. 116). This was echoed in Tina's experiences at PWIs. She reflected on a time when she was made to feel like she didn't belong and was not competent by one of her colleagues who was a white woman. Tina described how her colleague used every opportunity to discredit and challenge her leadership. Going through this adversarial ordeal, she recalled saying to herself, "You don't even know me, you don't even know what I'm capable of." She discussed how this colleague did not want to work with her or be in the same room with her and this went on for years. Tina would ask herself, "What am I doing wrong?" She expressed that this experience felt racially motivated and even though at times she doubted herself and dealt with imposter syndrome, she was confident in her qualifications and competence in her position. Tina defined and valued who she was as a professional and a leader, she stated "I know my work, and I know what I bring to the table, so I try not to get caught up in all the other stuff. I remind myself of my worth and I won't allow anyone to discredit me, because I know who I am."

Collins (2000) points out that self-definition and self-valuation are essential and significant themes for Black women to be conscious of. These themes are particularly important, as intellectual Black women in the academy find themselves writing for audiences in academia that are mostly resistant to embracing Black women as students, faculty, and administrators.

The Interlocking Nature of Race, Gender and Class Oppression

The oppression that most Black women have experienced is created by their subordinate status, as Black women have been assigned the inferior half of numerous dualities, and this positioning has been vital to their sustained domination (Collins, 2000). Collins (1986) describes the interlocking nature of oppression as being significant because the perspective changes the emphasis from examining the components of race or gender or class oppression, to the goal of establishing the connection within these systems. Further, Black feminist thought cultivates a central paradigm shift that rejects approaches that preserve oppression and views these distinguishing systems of oppression as part of one principal structure of power. The experiences of oppression by Black women are personal and holistic and Black feminist views that are developing seem to be a similar universally in examining oppression (Collins, 1986). Each of the women in the study shared stories of what this looked like within PWIs. Dawn reflected on her early career, her observation of the campus climate, and how this impacted the lives of Black women. Dawn shared, "I was in an office culture that painted Black women as disruptive or troublesome and that was an interesting tension to navigate still relatively early in my career." A historical recap by Collins (2000), noted that Black women domestic workers gave accounts of frequently being called upon by white employers to "play roles as deferent, contented servants grateful for handouts of old clothes in place of decent wages" (p. 204-205). Collins further noted that Black domestic workers emphasized feelings of self-affirmation they encountered watching

"racist ideology demystified" (p. 11). An illustration of this is when Rhonda discussed her experience with changes that were being made by the Dean in combining her office with another. At the time, her office was new and in the process of growing. She expressed her disagreement and concern with the change and that it would be difficult for her office to "carve out its own unique footprint" when they would be sharing very close physical space. The Dean, who was a white man, commented to her supervisor, "She really needs to back down because we've done a lot for her." Rhonda felt like this was a "get back in your place type reminder," that is experienced by Black women at PWIs, as reaffirmed in Black feminist thought and the narratives of this study. Moreover, Black women do not have a voice unless they challenge individual and institutional racism, sexism, and classism in academia and society and the dominant perceptions of truth (Alarcón, 1994; Evans-Winters, & Esposito, 2018). Further, even when Black women have a seat at the table, they endure being the outsiders within (Collins, 2009; Howard-Hamilton, 2003; West, 2017).

Black Women's Activism

Collins (2000) writes, "This dialectic of oppression and activism, the tension between the suppression of African-American women's ideas and our intellectual activism in the face of that suppression, constitutes the politics of U.S. Black feminist thought" (p. 20). She explains furthermore current models of suppression that entail integrating, altering and depoliticizing the thoughts of Black feminism. In order to comprehend the intricacies of Black women's activism, it is necessary to consider how essential it is to address the importance and structure of single and multiple forms of oppression (Collins, 2000). Collins (2000) proposes a framework for Black women's activism that increases the strength of the type of action that is deemed legitimate and she contends that Black women have developed a tradition of activism through the

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work that they do. Black women form spheres of influence that rebel against structures of oppression by condemning them and adopting a worldview that perceives the Black lived experiences as vital to developing Black awareness.

Activism illustrated by the women in this study occurred amid them contending with racial and gender bias at PWIs. Ava gives an example of this in her discussion, where she talks about whenever she is in an oppressive space, she is verbal and makes her voice heard. She is admired by her Black and brown colleagues for having the courage to speak out, being authentically herself, and being honest about what is happening with students and in the real world as it relates to racial disparities. Ava said, "I'm a millennial, I'm a woman, and I'm a woman of color, so there's this thought process that I have more of a knee jerk reaction to things." She admits that she keeps things in perspective professionally but uses her voice to take a stand for injustices. The women in this study may not see themselves as political activists, even though their mere presence is often viewed as threatening to the historically dominant structures of PWIs. The use of their voices for resistance to the intolerance on their campuses is the activism that they find necessary to add value to their roles at PWIs.

Black Women Intellectuals

Collins (2000) describes the eminence of Black women intellectuals as part of Black feminist thought and this greater scheme of oppression that operates to inhibit Black women intellectuals' ideas and safeguard the outlooks and interests of privileged white men. The exclusion of Black women from powerful positions at PWIs have resulted in the rise of the elite thoughts and interests of white men and the parallel suppression of the thoughts and interests of Black women in conventional scholarship (Higginbotham, 1989; Collins, 1998). Collins (2000) further outlines how Black women give a distinctive perspective regarding Black womanhood

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and notes that it is unlikely that they will turn away from the struggles of Black women when they are faced with tremendous obstacles or when the rewards diminish if they stay. Moreover, Black women can support autonomous groups to develop successful coalition building that would involve group dialogue and embrace similar social justice projects. Intellectual Black women can tap into their outsider-within status to build these valuable coalitions and engage in dialogue with others who share common ground with them (Collins, 2000).

Black women intellectuals must insistently promote self-definition, since using your voice and creating your own personal plan is critical to empowerment (Collins, 2000). In her story, Tina shared that she has spent her career at PWIs fighting for herself. She said, "You really have no one looking out for you, you have to fight for yourself, you have to fight for what you believe in and stick to your values." She also discussed the bureaucracy and politics ingrained in higher education institutions. She realized that she needed to use her intellect to be strategic and band together with others in her network on and off campus that she could confide in and have dialog with about ways to overcome many of the obstacles that she and other Black women at PWIs were facing. Tina was able to make most of these connections in her professional associations and sister circles on her campus. Collins (2000) reports, it is key for Black women intellectuals to engage in the fight in order to grasp the entire scope of the contention of activism and oppression as it relates to Black women.

Importance of Afro-American Women's Culture

The prominence and connectedness of Afro-American women's culture in this study resonates in these women's stories. Collins (1986) described that the culture of Black women can assist in offering the theoretical reference point or standards of self-definition and self-valuation that help Black women view the conditions that influence race, class, and gender oppression.

Moreover, the innovative expression in influencing and supporting self-definition and self-valuation came out of Black women's culture and has gained significant attention among Black feminists. Collins (1986), further reports that the experiences of Black women propose that they may openly conform to the roles that society has placed them in while privately resisting these roles in various areas, an opposition created by the awareness that they are at the bottom. Additionally, the activity of Black women in their communities, churches and families, as well as how they express their creativity, may symbolize more than an attempt to alleviate burdens that result from oppression.

All of the participants referred to the significance and influence of other Black women in their lives, although limited on their campuses, within their sister circles, in their communities and their personal lives. Dawn has worked mostly at elite, private PWIs and has not had very much exposure to Black colleagues, particularly Black women to form strong connections or sister circles with. However, she expressed that early in her career it was important for her to be a part of the community of Black women that were in her office, because this was valuable to her both personally and professionally. Marie and Tina spoke about having close knit sister circles with other Black women colleagues who were also mid-level managers on their campuses. They would meet up regularly to support one another and share discussions about their experiences as Black women at PWIs. Black women's culture has had the long-standing support of the Black church, as it is deeply rooted in African history and a point of view that acknowledges and promotes self-expression and a standard of caring (Collins, 2000). Ava spoke about her connection to her Christian faith and the church and how she found spiritual music in church to be healing "culturally, creatively and spiritually." Music is a profound aspect of African culture and history. Mahalia Jackson (1985) declared, "There's something about music that is so

penetrating that your soul gets the message. No matter what trouble comes to a person, music can help him face it," (p. 454). Ava also explained that spirituality is a huge part of who she is and how she operates. She talked about her spirituality helping her to have humility and to put things into perspective, making her a well-rounded person. She connected this to carrying over in her career, her leadership, and how she is unafraid to stand for injustices. Collins' (2000) work connected self-definition to Black women's relationship with the church and their spiritual faith. Rhonda and Tina both emphasized the role that faith played in their lives and how it helped them to value themselves, define their worth, and realize the goals that they set may not always go as planned, but having faith keeps them motivated and helps them to persevere.

Collins (1990) writes that Black feminist thought stresses that there is an ongoing exchange among Black women's oppression and their activism. She adds that, "living life as a Black woman is a necessary prerequisite for producing Black feminist thought" (p. 227). The stories shared by these women not only validate how the core themes of Black feminist thought are intertwined, but they are a testament to the strength, resiliency and empowerment that these women display within their families, churches, communities, and as intellectuals and activists at PWIs. This is the foundation of Black feminist thought and how Black women have historically risen above adversity to become leaders and fight for social justice by moving past race, gender and class oppression, defining themselves and having an awareness of their personal value for their own survival.

Implications

The participants shared their unique challenges as well as their perspectives on how PWIs can implement more equitable practices and support Black women mid-level managers advancing to senior leadership. The implications for PWIs entail abating long standing

oppressive practices, like race and gender stereotyping in various forms of microaggressions and structuring systems support to help Black women thrive and achieve success in senior leadership roles in spite of these obstacles. The women in this study also gave their advice to other Black women mid-level managers on this journey and referenced much of their own experiences in both their trials and triumphs at PWIs. These women shared very deep emotional stories of their professional lives and the blatant and covert racist and sexist defamations that they have endured throughout their careers.

PWIs

Predominately white institutions are facing numerous challenges, particularly in an era of Black Lives Matter, with increased student activism connected to racial unrest and a reckoning of social injustice on campuses all across our nation. Moreover, college enrollments are rising with diverse populations of students and increasing numbers of Black women earning degrees. Due to the inequitable representation of Black women in senior leadership positions, PWIs will need to actively develop intentional practices to stop the perpetuation of racism and sexism that has been historically embedded in the foundation of these institutions, recruit Black women and provide mechanisms to support their leadership, growth and ultimately their retention. Moreover, Grant (2012) suggests that Black women need to feel like they belong and are welcomed and supported, prior to pursuing leadership roles and assimilating socially and professionally on these predominately white campuses. The participants shared their deep, passionate and insightful perspectives on implications for PWIs that is supported in the literature.

Many PWIs across the nation are facing backlash as a result of long historical race, gender and class oppression policies and practices. The participants suggest areas that PWIs should address collectively as it relates to recruiting, retaining, and supporting the leadership

development of Black women on their campuses. For instance, Marie proposes; "PWIs need to respond to oppressive incidents that happen on their campuses and hold people accountable." PWIs need checkpoints for their systematic accountability, to ensure that they not only say that they will follow through, but that there is evidence that the necessary changes have been put in place. Marie explained further that there needs to be a clear message of what the campus climate and culture should be and how a healthy campus culture is being fostered. She also referred to the importance of removing statues that represent historically racist figures and other racist relics that plague the campuses of PWIs, as they send a disheartening message to the oppressed. There has been increasing attention across PWIs to address the removal of statues that degrade the very spirit of minoritized groups. Many of the statues or relics are linked to slavery, slave owners and or slave labor, even with the founders of PWIs, that advocated for racial discrimination and inequality that was at the core of their belief system. These representations are oppressive and revictimize Black women, as they contend with existing overwhelming discriminatory practices. Jones (2020) writes that the history of racism is embedded in campus traditions and universally represents white norms. Further, the higher education community's commitment to social justice needs to be intentional, by creating visibility of these racist standards. Top leaders of these institutions have a big responsibility in the messaging that is perceived. Dawn shared; "The presidents of these institution have to value and convey a level of commitment to supporting Black women and marginalized communities on campus." Dawn also acknowledges her belief that PWIs should "promote from within, highlight the work that Black women do in recognizing their hidden labor and commit to diversity and equity work in job descriptions." She also expressed that PWIs should be hiring persons who understand that supporting Black women will be a part of their job expectation. Wolfe and Dilworth (2015) assert that culture, history, and race

are all connected and play a role in framing the landscapes of predominately white institutions, with an approach that consistently supports normalizing white privilege in the hiring and promotion process in higher education.

The participants discussed the mental and emotional labor that Black women battle with and how this impacts the hard work that they do at PWIs. Leaders at PWIs should give serious consideration to how they can mitigate these experiences, as Black women are feeling exhausted and undervalued in their careers. It is crucial that Black women are positioned for success, especially where the odds are not always in their favor. Tina suggested that PWIs create staff engagement surveys on how they need to address deficiencies and develop skills to assist Black women in obtaining senior roles, build confidence and trust, and provide the necessary resources to support them. On a larger long-term scale, both Rhonda and Dawn expressed the need for PWIs to develop a pipeline for Black women's retention and leadership development early in their careers. Rhonda specifically explained that through this pipeline, Black women need intentional and planned experiences that will make them competitive for senior leadership. This can be done through mentorships/sponsorships as undergraduate and graduate students, and in the pre-director and pre-mid manager phases, in order for them to be competitive for senior level positions. Understanding the root causes of why Black women are not being retained at PWIs is an important factor. When Black women see other Black women in roles of leadership and power, this reassures them that they can also rise into similar positions (Jackson & Harris, 2007; Patitu & Hinton, 2003). Dawn noted that there is a value in Black women on PWI campuses and seeing them in leadership roles. She shared her views; "We're losing Black women because they're not having positive experiences, they're not getting into these pipelines on the entry level to be included in mid and upper level management." This was a pivotal statement and a great

indication for PWIs to explore pipelines in the early careers of Black women to foster their

success. Across all university positions, Black women face institutional practices and policy

dynamics that hinder their accomplishments and career progression (Wilder et al., 2013).

Further, researchers contend that there is a weakened pipeline effecting how Black women are

represented on every leadership level at PWIs that starts with their lack of support for Black

women at the undergraduate and graduate levels of enrollment and persistence (Blockett et al.,

2016; Griffin & Muñiz, 2011; Patitu & Hinton, 2003). It is indeed time for PWIs to look at the

much-needed support for Black women, not just as they enter their careers, but throughout their

academic journeys as well.

There are a few noteworthy areas that Ava proposed PWIs can examine as it relates to

recruiting, retaining and supporting Black women from mid-level to senior leadership. She

suggested that they should receive equitable pay, campus and community resources and insight

into the school districts near the institutions if they have children. She added that PWIs should

account for what their campus community looks like for Black and brown people and provide the

support needed for retention. West (2017) points out that along with being underrepresented,

Black women lack the needed access to Black and brown mentors, sponsors and colleagues in

senior leadership positions. Ava also asserts that PWIs may be located in places where people of

color do not feel safe, therefore they should acknowledge this and create systems to protect them

so that they are not afraid for their lives or the lives of their spouses and children. Alternatively,

Black women rely on their faith, family and or communities of color as safe places for them to

retreat as they face the oppressive challenges at PWIs.

Additional support is needed from PWIs, specifically in the leadership development of

Black women mid-level managers, as they navigate the intersections of race and gender in their

quest for senior leadership. This is a critical time where developing Black women is necessary for PWIs to retain them, to validate the work that they do and to foster them moving to the next level. Rhonda demonstrates this by sharing that PWIs must acknowledge that Black women in mid-level management roles have experiences that are different than others. She said: "In general mid-level managers tend to be forgotten, because the potential for them to be transitory in order for them to move up is great." She continues to explicate that the level of investment is not always as deep for mid-level leaders, especially if they are Black women, and PWIs don't tend to place a lot of energy into supporting on that level. In fact, she adds that most institutions don't have a lot of places for mid-level managers to go if they want to ascend, which is even more challenging for Black women. This has long been an issue for mid-level managers, as research shows that they indicate limited career advancement as a primary reason for leaving institutions (Evans 1988; Fey and Carpenter 1996; Lorden 1998; Johnsrud and Rosser 1999). Comparably, the literature proposes that employment turnover occurs even with job satisfaction, due to the lack of opportunities for the future (Johnsrud & Rosser 1999). This poses an even more challenging feat for Black women as they face obstacles that differ from other mid-level managers and add to the already limited odds.

Additionally, there were some questions that were posed for PWIs by both Ava and Dawn. The table below details the questions that PWIs should consider as it relates to the recruitment, retention, and support for the successful progression of Black women in mid-level leadership roles at their institutions.

Table 5.1 *Questions for PWIs to Consider*

Ava
• How long does it take Black women versus white women in a department to reach tenure?
• How many Black women are in the candidate pools, or in consideration for senior level positions?
• How are Black women being professionally developed for experiences that are necessary for them to move into a senior level position?
Dawn
• How do we create positive work environments and diverse communities on college campuses?
• How do we make sure that being a mother does not deter Black women from moving from mid-level management to senior level management?

Black Women Mid-Level Managers

These implications are connected with the shared advice from the women in this study. This was reflected in their own experiences and observations. The participants were asked specifically about advice that they would give other Black women in mid-level management seeking senior leadership positions at PWIs. Most of the advice that they shared was a collective reflection rooted in the core themes from this study and the connections to Black feminist thought, related to Black women's self-definition, self-valuation, culture and intellect. Their perspectives will help Black women in mid-level management roles at PWIs prepare themselves to successfully ascend into senior leadership with the support, self-confidence, self-awareness, determination and the necessary use of their voice, in an environment that has traditionally silenced Black women.

It is essential for PWIs to listen to the voices of Black women on their campuses. Their voices represent a history of distress and oppression that is entrenched in the very foundation of these institutions. Collins (2000) points out that the voices of Black women "are not those of victims but of survivors" (p. 98). Moreover, they bring ideas and actions that evoke not only that self-defined Black women's perspectives are real, but necessary for their survival. This study illustrated that some level of collective experiences that exist among Black women at PWIs. As PWIs move forward in addressing changes in racial and gender disparities on their campuses, it would be wise to listen to the voices of Black women and how they are impacted by these inequities and discriminatory practices while simply doing their jobs. Not only did the women in this study use their voices on the campuses of PWIs in their careers, but they authentically narrated their experiences and shared them with me. The final question for the participants was; *What advice would you share with other Black women seeking senior leadership positions in higher education at PWIs?* A summary of each participant's advice and direct quotes of their advice are illustrated as follows in the table below.

Table 5.2 *Advice for Black Women*

Participants	Advice for Black Women
Rhonda	*(Summary: Be intentional in finding mentors, self-worth, and use your intellect)* "Ground everything you do in some aspect of academics. Be as indispensable as you are intellectual. Seek out a mentor who really knows you, not just professionally, but someone who knows you as a person, because they are going to be critical in providing perspective since there are not a lot of Black women in senior positions. Know your worth, don't sacrifice what you want and need just to ascend."

Ava	*(Summary: Use support systems, your voice and your intellect)* "Make sure you have mental and emotional support systems in place. Battle to be seen and to be heard, to do the right things for your community and for yourself. All of these things are going to sometimes conflict with each other. You have to make sure that you have the support systems ready. This is needed in order to figure out what your priorities are among all these varying things that will inevitably come up because you are a woman, because you're Black, because of what you're trying to do at a predominantly white institution."
Marie	*(Summary: Maintain self-control and avoid labels)* "Keep pushing and keep striving for your goals, but never lose focus. Never let anybody take you out of your character, because the minute they do you will get labeled and it's hard to reverse that, so don't give anyone that opportunity."
Tina	*(Summary: Research positions, have self-awareness, seek professional development and use your voice)* "Do research on the position that you want to attain. Know your strengths and your challenges. Seek professional development and don't be afraid to use your voice."
Dawn	*(Summary: Keep positive energy, control your emotions, have self-confidence, pick your battles, find good mentors)* "Protect your energy. Don't get on every emotional roller coaster that you are invited to. Stay clear, stay grounded and it will help you stay centered in the confidence that you know you have. Fight when you need to fight, but know that it's okay that you don't have to fight every battle. Find good mentors in your life, believe in yourself, your skills and abilities, have confidence and channel positive energy."

The most critical components needed for Black women to survive is their own self-worth, self-reliance, and creation of networks that support them both inside and outside of PWIs (Alfred, 2001; Atwater, 1995). Collins (2000) expresses that the "overarching theme of finding a voice to express a collective, self-defined Black women's standpoint remains a core theme in

Black feminist thought" (p. 99). Additionally, Harley (2008), asserts that Black women understand that their voices and presence are essential for change to occur. Mentorship and support are other critical areas of concern for Black women and those who lack support and mentorship are underrepresented in leadership roles (Alexander, 2010; Growe & Montgomery, 1999; Patitu & Hinton, 2003; West, 2019). Research also indicates the positive effects on Black women who find other Black women to serve as their mentors and assist in their leadership growth (Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Henry, 2010; Henry & Glenn, 2009; Hinton, 2012). Other scholars noted that developing a valuable support system assists Black women in advancing their careers in higher education (Patitu & Hinton, 2003; West, 2017b). Ultimately, when Black women use their intellect that can create concepts and experiences that permeate a new way of defining daily living that renders potentially powerful tools that can combat the oppressive reflections of Black womanhood (Collins, 2000).

The women in this study provided advice that came from their own personal experiences, observations and lessons learned in their career development at PWIs. This information can be a valuable resource for other Black women in mid-level management who are seeking knowledge and perspective for successful progression into senior leadership roles at PWIs. The research indicated that Black women need to be self-defined, culturally aware, embrace systems of support, persevere, and use their voices, all in the midst of rising above oppressions that can derail their career advancement. Black women are mentally and emotionally fatigued, and it is time for PWI leaders to be accountable for equity and inclusion on their campuses. It is necessary for them to step up and be intentional in connecting Black women early in their careers with valuable mentors and influential sponsors, to foster support

systems on their campuses and to welcome the voices of Black women who speak their truths through activism that creates change and will positively impact their careers.

Future Research

There are several implications for future studies as a result of the findings from this study. The first includes a better, more detailed understanding of the personal and professional experiences of Black women at PWIs throughout their careers and as they progress into senior leadership roles. This study examined five Black women mid-level managers at four-year predominately white institutions in different U.S. geographic locations. Future studies could examine greater sample sizes and include experiences from the entry-level or early careers of Black women at PWIs. This could uncover different perspectives and experiences that would add to the body of research.

Additionally, further research is needed on the development of a pipeline that could prepare Black women for success in senior leadership positions. This surfaced in the interviews from two of the participants. Black women need to be competitive and positioned for success in transitioning into senior leadership. Future studies on this pipeline can focus on mentorships, sponsorships and professional leadership development that starts early in the academic journeys and/or the early careers of Black women, from undergraduate to graduate and/or entry-level career to mid-level/management to senior-level leadership.

Having high level mentorships was one of the primary factors that the participants expressed as vital to their career advancement, particularly at PWIs. Acquiring mentors has been traditionally challenging for Black women. Future studies comparing the experiences and successes of Black women who have mentors to those who don't, in securing senior level leadership roles at PWIs, should also be examined.

Lastly, the participants described a longevity of racial and gender microaggressions in their careers at PWIs. This was a prominent concern throughout this study and these women endured mental and emotional anguish as a result. They credited their self-value, determination, strong connections of their culture and varied systems of support for their survival. Further research is needed on the impact that these microaggressions have on Black women's development from mid-level to senior leadership. Microaggressions have a harsh impact on Black women long-term and influence how they operate and internalize the work that they do. PWIs should be proactive in making concerted efforts in scheduling regular, ongoing mandatory diversity, equity and inclusion training for all employees, that creates an awareness around racial and gender discriminatory practices, with employees bringing this awareness into professional practice in their work areas. This is necessary, as often times the perpetrators of microaggressions may not realize that they are in fact revictimizing their own colleagues by perpetuating these discriminatory practices.

Limitations and Delimitations

There are some limitations to this study that need to be discussed. Although this study was conducted with a sufficient number of participants to accomplish the goals, this was a relatively small study sample of five participants and the data was obtained from two sets of interviews. This was not a longitudinal study, as the data was collected over a two-month period of time, which did not allow for the examination of the participant's professional growth that could have enriched the research. Additionally, this study is not generalizable in that the participants were self-selected mid-level managers from five different predominately white institutions and this does not represent all PWIs or the complete higher education community of Black women mid-level managers.

The delimitations of this research include exclusively Black women working at PWIs that are currently serving as mid-level managers. This excludes Black women in entry level positions, who may have comparable stories to share. Additionally, the participants were required to have five or more years of experience in mid-level management. This criterion was selected to ensure that the participants had sufficient experiences in mid-level management to share impactful stories. However, this eliminates Black women who are mid-level managers with less years of experience who may have different perspectives to share. Another requirement to participate in this study is being in pursuit of a doctoral degree (Ph.D. or Ed.D.) or a Juris doctorate (J.D.). This criterion was selected to show the participants commitment to advancing into senior leadership, as it narrowed down the choices tremendously of who would be able to participate in this study, taking into consideration that the percentage of Black women who are pursuing these terminal degrees is scarce. Moreover, this excluded a vast amount of Black women who may have many different perspectives and shared experiences related to racial and gender oppressions.

Conclusion

Black women are making strides to overcome the barriers that are inhibiting their advancement from mid-level management to senior leadership at PWIs. PWIs are not fully addressing the profound oppressions, the outright systemic racism that is embedded in their institutions that would shed light on the inequitable representation of Black women in senior-level leadership positions. Townsend (2019) proposed that higher education must recognize that there exists a "Black Tax that African American women have to experience that their non-Black counterparts do not endure" (p. 596). This research explored the narratives of Black women who have spent their higher education careers at PWIs, as they shared compelling stories on the

oppressive practices that they endured and witnessed. While still in pursuit of senior leadership roles, these women are prevailing over the hurdles that they face by using their voices and focusing on their self-valuations, systems of support and cultural empowerment.

The findings from this research illuminate the shared racial and gender oppressions that Black women are confronted with at PWIs in various regions across the United States, but more impactfully, the systemic racism that is profoundly entrenched in the hegemonic structures of PWIs. All of the women in this study possess the fortitude to continue to push forward in their quest for senior leadership. The implications in this study leave room for reformations in higher education policies and practices and future research that can aid in awareness, improve racial and gender oppressions and provide more equitable representation of Black women in senior leadership at PWIs.

Conducting this research taught me a lot about myself and my ability to thrive in this space as a Black woman serving in mid-level management roles at PWIs for a large portion of my professional career. My deep examination of the core principles of Black feminist thought helped me to gain different perspectives throughout this research. I made meaningful connections with my study participants, as we all share the understanding and often unspoken feelings of what it is like to live through these experiences at PWIs. I also recognized how much I embody Black feminist thought, as my experiences are rooted in the core tenets, particularly as an activist and intellectual. I have not allowed my "outsider within" status as a Black woman to silence me. I have used my intellect and my voice to stand up against race, gender and class oppressions and social injustices that I have both experienced and witnessed throughout my career at PWIs. Having faced many instances of racial microaggressions, using my self-

definition and having my own intellectual strategy to continue fighting against them, is crucial to being empowered as a Black woman, specifically at PWIs.

My hope is that the stories shared by these remarkable Black women, inspire and encourage other Black and brown women to use their voices when being silenced, by calling out racist and sexist behaviors and other injustices that should never be tolerated and to visualize themselves as senior leaders, even if it seems impossible. Lastly, my hope is that Black women persevere in the face of adversity and never lose sight of their dreams and aspirations.

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Appendices

APPENDIX A

(Recruitment Email)

Greetings _____:

My name is Celyn Boykin, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership, Counseling, and Foundations Department at the University of New Orleans. I am currently conducting a research study for my dissertation, on the underrepresentation of Black women at predominately white institutions (PWIs), narratives of mid-level managers on their journey to senior leadership. More explicitly, my interest lies in the stories of the experiences of Black women in mid-level management roles, who are on their journey to senior leadership at four-year predominately white higher education institutions.

I am communicating to determine your interest in participating in this study. If you meet the criteria and are interested, your information will be kept and remain strictly confidential. Your name, your job title, your department's name, your institution's name, the names of others mentioned in the process, and any other easily identifiable information would not be used in this study and will be replaced with pseudonyms.

If you are in agreement, you would participate in two interviews lasting approximately 1.00-1.25 hours each.

The following criteria is needed for this study:

- Self-identify as a Black woman (which can include women from biracial or multiracial backgrounds)
- Have lived in the U.S. for a period of at least 10 years
- Currently employed in the capacity of a mid-level manager, at a predominately white institution (PWI) (e.g. Director, Assistant Director, Assistant Dean, Manager, etc.)
- Must have a minimum of 5 years-experience as a mid-level manager in higher education
- In pursuit or intending to pursue a senior level position in a higher education institution
- Have earned or be in the process of earning a doctoral degree, inclusive of either a Ph.D. or Ed.D. or a J.D. degree

Please let me know if you meet the criteria and would like to participate in this study. I would really appreciate your assistance with this very important study, and I believe that you can provide great contributions to this research.

If you have questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at (504) 301-8994. You may also contact my advisor, Dr. Christopher Broadhurst, at

Respectfully,

Celyn C. Boykin
Ph.D. Candidate, Educational Leadership, Counseling, and Foundations
University of New Orleans

APPENDIX B

(Letter of Consent)

Dear _____:

I am a graduate student under the direction of Dr. Christopher Broadhurst in the Department of Educational Leadership, Counseling, and Foundations at the University of New Orleans. I am conducting a research study on the underrepresentation of Black women at predominately white institutions (PWIs), narratives of mid-level managers on their journey to senior leadership.

I am requesting your participation, which will entail two interviews, lasting 1.00-1.25 hours each, coordinated and scheduled at an agreed upon date and time. The interviews will be qualitative, so that every participant's experience will be understood and evaluated by the researcher. The risk level is minimal and every precaution will be taken to avoid any concerns on exposure of your interview responses, or any potential discomfort that you may experience in responding to the interview questions. Your information will be kept and remain strictly confidential and the results of the research study may be published. Your name, your job title, your department's name, your institution's name, the names of others mentioned in the process, and any other easily identifiable information would not be used in this study and will be replaced with pseudonyms. Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose to participate, you can withdraw from the study at any time without further obligation.

There may be no direct benefit to you, however the possible benefit of your participation would be advancing the literature on Black women mid-level managers at PWIs who desire senior leadership roles.

If you have any questions concerning this research study, please call me at (504) 301-8994.

Sincerely,

Celyn C Boykin

By signing below you are giving consent to participate in the above study.

_____   _____   _____

Signature   Print Name   Date

If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, please contact Dr. Ann O'Hanlon at the University of New Orleans at (504) 280-7386.

APPENDIX C

(Demographic Questionnaire)

1. Name

2. Race

3. Ethnicity

4. Age

5. Highest Degree Earned

6. Number of Years in Mid-Level Management at PWIs

7. PWI Type

8. U.S. Region

APPENDIX D

Interview Protocol #1

Background, Early Career, Current Career, Faith/Spirituality

1. Tell me the story of how you got into your career and what led you to mid-level management?

2. Tell me what has helped you be successful in your career thus far?

3. Describe to me a time that you were confronted with some type of opposition in your current role?

4. Can you discuss with me a time in your career when you faced being stereotyped and how did you react?

5. Share with me some significant challenges that you have faced in your career?

6. Tell me about any formal or informal relationships that you have established in your career as a mentor and any challenges faced in this process?

7. Tell me about any formal or informal relationships that you have established in your career as a mentee and any challenges faced in this process?

8. Can you share with me if faith/spirituality played a role in your career and if so, how?

9. Tell me about your interactions with other Black women and how those relationships influenced your career?

10. Can you describe to me any sources of support that helped guide you in your early career?

APPENDIX E

Interview Protocol #2

Career Goals, PWI Career Experiences, Race/Gender Issues

1. Can you tell me what your career goals are?

2. Can you help me to visualize what your career experiences have been like working at a PWI?

3. Describe to me how working at your current institution has helped or hindered you from accomplishing your goals?

4. Can you describe to me what you feel you would need to get your goals accomplished?

5. Tell me about your decision to pursue a doctorate degree?

6. Describe to me how a terminal degree would fit into your career goals?

7. Can you describe any personal or professional support systems or other mechanisms that you have in place to help you navigate your journey into a senior leadership role?

8. Describe your professional rapport with other Black women and other races both men and women at your current institution?

9. Tell me how working at a PWI has impacted how you view and value yourself?

10. Can you describe any situations of racial and gender bias observed at PWIs?

11. Can you describe some of the discourse that Black women are engaged in with superiors and colleagues through their roles at PWIs?

12. Tell me how you would describe the role of PWIs in creating a culture that supports the career development of Black women in mid-level management roles?

13. Describe to me how you think higher education can recruit and retain more Black women in senior leadership roles?

14. What advice would you share with other Black women seeking senior leadership positions in

higher education at PWIs?

VITA

Celyn Boykin is a visionary, future focused higher education leader, who advocates equity, diversity, inclusion and social justice for all campus communities. Her primary professional experiences include leadership in four-year universities and community colleges in both Louisiana and Texas in continuing and workforce education, corporate and professional training and career development. Many of these experiences are heavily connected to communities of color and other underserved populations. Her partnerships and collaborations with higher education institutions, secondary school districts, chambers of commerce, workforce boards and agencies, community stakeholders, and business and industry, has given her insight on enriching student outcomes and closing equity gaps to increase student access, retention, and completion.