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This dissertation, directed and approved by the candidate's committee, has been accepted by the College of Graduate and Professional Studies of Abilene Christian University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership



Dr. Joey Cope, Dean of the College
of Graduate and Professional Studies

Date November 9, 2020

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Abilene Christian University
School of Educational Leadership

Exploring the Voices, Experiences, and Leadership Career Paths of Women of Color in Higher
Education

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

by

Tonya P. Cooper

December 2020

Dedication

To my loved ones, family, and friends: Thank you so much for understanding my “no” and understanding my personal educational endeavors. Thank you to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ because I know that I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

Acknowledgments

Philippians 4:19: But my God shall supply all your needs according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus. First, I acknowledge my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, who continues to supply all my needs according to his riches in glory.

Second, I would like to acknowledge my deceased parents for their hard work and relentless sacrifices of their time, energy, and love. To my siblings, who stood by me in every stage of my educational endeavors, I acknowledge you and your patience during my academic journey. The journey has not always been easy; I have lost loved ones during my time completing my dissertation and have gained new loved ones. Through this experience, I have persevered and overcome various trials and tribulations, but I kept my faith and remembered my deceased mothers' pearls of wisdom to pursue whatever my heart desired.

Third, I would like to acknowledge my numerous nieces and nephews, great-nieces and nephews, and great-great nieces and nephews; I now leave this legacy of completing a doctoral program, and determination does pay-off in the end. I now pass the academic baton to them to excel in their academic endeavors.

Last, I certainly would like to thank my dissertation committee: Dr. Wilson-Jones, Dr. Elias, and Dr. Ramos, for their acceptance to join and actively participate in this study. A special note to Dr. Wilson-Jones for her voice, leadership insight, knowledge, and continued support throughout this process. Thank you all for your time, feedback, and diligence in working with me to complete this study.

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the voices, experiences, and factors promoting the leadership career paths of senior-level women of color in higher education and to capture the voices of senior-level women of color on how they were able to overcome the barriers and challenges to breaking the glass ceiling on their leadership career paths to senior-level administration in higher education. A phenomenological research method was employed to capture the participants' voices, experiences, and leadership career paths of their roles in higher education. Results show that the women of color in the study confirmed the perceived challenges and barriers, perceptions of establishing a career path, and factors to overcome barriers and challenges to breaking the glass ceiling. Twelve themes emerged from the 15 participants. Participants in the study were from community colleges, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, and predominately White institutions. The interview process consisted of semistructured, open-ended interview questions to capture their voices about their lived career path experiences. Through adversity, these women of color persevered with a single-minded determination to overcome the barriers and challenges faced as a woman of color in higher education.

Keywords: Glass ceiling, senior-level, women of color, career paths

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Demographic Landscape of Women in Leadership

The demographics of women in the workforce have changed and are continuing to change, especially for minority women. An article by Warner et al. (2018) presented remarkable data that as of 2017, women constituted a 51% majority of the U.S. population. Women will outnumber men by gender and undergraduate and master's degrees by 57% to 59%, and 49% of specialized post degrees. Women account for 47% of the working labor force, and within that workforce, 53% are college-educated (Warner et al., 2018).

Conversely, in the American College President Study (American Council on Education [ACE], 2017), the percentage of minority college presidents has slowly increased over the last 30 years. However, women of color are the most underrepresented in a presidency role (ACE, 2017). The study was important to address, especially because of demographic changes that played a major role in colleges and universities. Also, women of color were vastly underrepresented in the college presidency in 2016. They were also more likely than other college presidents to be serving in their first presidency.

Women of color, especially Black women in leadership roles, have had to navigate their various identities as they serve in executive leadership roles (Beckwith et al., 2016). Women of color continued to make strides in management roles and positions; however, women of color have the aspiration to move past middle-level positions to senior-level roles and face an invisible barrier called the glass ceiling. Women of color used the glass ceiling metaphor to describe obstacles or barriers that obstruct the advancement of women and minorities in leadership and decision-making positions. The overrepresentation of women in the workforce is in mid-level positions that carry some form of leadership and decision-making processes. Ultimately, barriers

still prevented the upward mobility to prestigious leadership and decision-making roles such as president, provost, or chancellor.

Introduction

According to a statement by former First Lady Michelle Obama, “men still, run the world, and they are not always doing a great job at it” (Giorgi, 2019, para. 7). Men in leadership roles must begin or continue to have a seat at the table with minority women who are seeking senior-level positions in higher education (Giorgi, 2019). The importance of hearing and understanding the voices of minority women regarding their lived experiences in their leadership career paths and the barriers they faced at institutions in higher education was important to know, recognize, and understand. Johnson (2016) pointed out that women earned 50% of all doctoral degrees since 2006, women earned more than 50% of all bachelor’s degrees since 1982, women earned more than 50% of all master’s degrees since 1987, and 32% of women held full professor positions at degree-granting postsecondary institutions. In other words, by the year 2024, approximately 107,000 women will earn their doctoral degrees, outnumbering men by a 10% increase. During the year 2016, presidential positions were held by 30% of women; whereas, men still held 70% of the presidential positions at institutions of higher learning (Johnson, 2016). The data pointed out that women are outperforming men with conferred degrees, yet women are still not represented at the presidency level at predominately White universities (PWIs) and community colleges.

The typical pathway for a presidency position has been a full-time faculty member, department chair, dean, or vice president of instruction or academic affairs. However, according to former Spelman College president Johnnetta Cole, for minorities, the pipeline is different (Gray et al., 2017). Minorities and women experience the glass ceiling metaphor, especially

women of color, who experienced additional barriers such as lack of a strategic pathway to leadership roles, recruitment, retention, and promotion, which were less forthcoming and where seasoned leaders were given preference.

Data from Carey (2017) showed that 80% of university presidents were White males, and 70% were males. Therefore, to address, understand, and resolve the problem at the institutions of higher learning, the internal infrastructure of the presidential office and the senior staff at PWIs and community colleges should want to address the barriers and glass ceiling effect that continued to be a roadblock for minority women.

When senior-level leaders begin to have transformational conversations and put into practice measurable goals for women of color, the landscape of diverse leaders will shift. By the year 2024, more women will hold a conferred doctoral degree (ACE, 2017) and perhaps hold more presidency positions in academia. Having embraced conversations with women of color at the table matters in 2020. According to Carey (2017), the student body is becoming more diverse. While 30% of college presidents are women, female students have outnumbered male students since 1979. That compares to 17% of presidents with an enrollment of 44% nonwhite students. This qualitative study explored the voices, experiences, and leadership career paths of senior-level women of color in higher education.

Statement of the Problem

The United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (2010) African American report listed numerous obstacles to solidify the issues of not hearing the voices or exploring women of color's journeys. However, this study focused on the following four obstacles: unconscious biases and perceptions about African Americans that still play a significant role in employment, African Americans lack adequate mentoring and networking

opportunities for higher level and management positions, insufficient training and development assignments perpetuate inequalities in skills and opportunities for African Americans, and the narrowed recruitment methods negatively impacting African Americans.

The traditional leadership mindset at a community college or a university has prevented significant changes in higher education for Black women and other minorities (Turner, 2007). White male presidents' perceptions continue to be a barrier for women of color seeking a presidential role (Jackson & Harris, 2007). Despite social movements and evolving laws and practices, various factors that supported and, in some cases, strengthened the glass ceiling ultimately contributed to underrepresentation by women in leadership roles (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017). The glass ceiling is defined as the invisible barrier that prevents women from reaching senior levels of management (Boseman, 2008). The glass ceiling slowed the upward mobility for women of color who seek senior leadership roles. Leadership such as presidents and governing boards do not see this as a problem, yet the invisible barriers are not well documented for minority women to use to help navigate to the top. As cited in Gray et al. (2017), according to Montana State University President Waded Cruzado said,

If we want more women leaders, we need to open our arms and open those doors to many other individuals. I have always felt that one of the big hurdles [is that] we can have all these wonderful women being highly educated and highly successful, but we don't have key individuals in positions of authority as trustees or regents. (p. 6)

However, with barriers such as not being considered for administrative positions and having their scholarly work dismissed and devalued, seeing such women in presidential roles remains a rarity compared to their White male counterparts, yet there is some growth for Black women in leadership roles (Smith, 2017).

Researcher's Positionality

As the youngest of eight children growing up in Detroit, Michigan, I benefited from attending both a private and public school, which provided tremendous insight into different cultures and races. My parents and siblings shaped my foundation, which provided a platform for me to demonstrate my commitment to faith, family, community, and setting goals.

In my prior work experience as associate dean of educational affairs at a community college in Detroit, I had the pleasure of working with full-time and part-time faculty. I analyzed course-taken reports and assigned classes; I became deeply engaged in pursuing my professional career in higher education. Having been groomed and stretched by my vice-chancellor, the spark ignited by my pursuit of staying in higher education became necessary even though the grooming hurt. Still, it was essential to becoming the best. I am now pursuing an EdD. I am committed and focused on using my voice, journey, and experiences to educate and inspire my nieces and nephews, great-nieces and nephews, friends, and students to continue to soar.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the voices, experiences, and factors promoting the leadership career paths of senior-level women of color in higher education. The purpose of this study was also to capture the voices of senior-level women of color on how they were able to overcome the barriers and challenges to breaking the glass ceiling in their roles as a senior-level administrator.

Research Questions

Q1. What do senior-level women of color perceive to be the challenges of breaking the glass ceiling in higher education?

Q2. What are senior-level women of color's perceptions of establishing a career path in higher education?

Q3. What do senior-level women of color perceive as the factors to overcoming barriers and challenges in breaking the glass ceiling?

Theoretical Lens

Josselson

Josselson's (1987) research focused on identity development, specifically with women, and when faced with adversity, these women assimilated crisis into their identity. This documented discovery by Josselson portrayed women in similar ways to the identity theory seen in Marcia's (1966) theoretical framework. The work of Josselson provided a different perspective to view the process of identity development specifically for women. The structured identity development of Josselson's four identity groups as they apply to women are as follows.

- **Foreclosures: Purveyors of Heritage.** These women were strongly committed but had not explored much on their own. These women highly valued following family traditions and meeting familial expectations. They pursued their goals with a single-minded determination without doubt or hesitation.
- **Identity Achievers: Pavers of the Way.** These women formed separate, distinct identities from their childhood. They took pride in themselves and believed their occupations to be an expression of themselves.
- **Moratoriums: Daughters of Crisis.** They were women who were always searching and experimenting, seeking an "idealized perfection" (Evans et al., 1998, p. 61), and seeming always to need more time to sort through things.

- Identity Diffusions: Lost–Sometimes. This category found women who were lowest in ego development, had the most difficulty establishing relationships, had high anxiety, and tended to withdraw from situations. These women also experienced feelings of powerlessness.

Josselson's (1987) work centered on women's identity and the four stages that women assumed. The study concentrated primarily on foreclosures and how minority women were determined to achieve their senior-level leadership goals with determination using their family tradition as a catalyst for leadership. Also, Josselson's theory created a safe place for women to have the ability to speak freely and confidently about careers, family, and personal lives.

Black Feminist Framework

Patricia Hill Collins's (2000) Black feminist framework was applied to this research. Collins is a sociologist known for her research and theory on the intersection of race, gender, class, sexuality, and nationality. According to Collins (2000), Black feminists believe that sexism and racism are bound together. This is called intersectionality. Black feminism exists because the racism that Black women experience is not adequately addressed by the mainstream feminist movement, which is led by White, middle-class women.

Black feminist thought indicated the unique viewpoints that African American women can offer due to their experiences. Black feminist thought, which gave African American women a voice through which their experiences can be shared (Collins, 2000). African American women have encountered challenges simply because of their race and gender, which magnifies their difficulty obtaining employment (Dubois & Dumenil, 2009). According to Collins (2000), "Once inside [an organization], many Black women realize much more than getting hired is required for

change” (p. 281). There is still much work to be done for African American women to rise to senior-level positions in higher education.

The theoretical framework of Josselson’s (1987) foreclosure theory and Collins’s Black feminist theory (2000) are applied to the journeys, voices, and experiences of minority women in leadership. As previously mentioned, women will obtain their doctoral degrees at higher numbers than men by 2024, and 36% of minority presidents will lead associate colleges (ACE, 2017). The Black feminist theory identified the significance of empowerment, and foreclosures-purveyors of heritage recognized the importance of family traditions, pursuing goals, and determination that is uninhabited by doubt or hesitation. The importance of African American women being able to speak about their experiences in places of safety can create an opportunity for other African American women and women of color to have a voice (Collins, 2000).

Significance of the Study

Barriers to advancement for minority women have been researched and have addressed the negative impact hindering their professional advancement efforts (Cook & Glass, 2013). The benefit of selecting this study provided authentic and transformational conversation from the voices of women of color who participated in this study. The study will help institutions of higher learning administer techniques and strategies to help human resource (HR) committees create an open-door policy that is intentional on hiring, recruiting, and retaining a diverse leadership population of women of color. Also, the study addressed information and provided data for future minority women seeking a leadership role. The results of this study will help all women with strategies to help navigate their journeys and career-paths to senior-level leadership positions in higher education.

Limitations of the Study

According to Maxwell (2013), evaluating the trustworthiness of data collected and analyzed as a part of the research study is to reflect upon and identify limitations. This study was limited to women of color who held a senior-level administrator's rank in higher education institutions.

Definition of Key Terms

Career paths. Refers to an employee's growth in an organization; basically, the various positions an employee moves to and grows to within an organization. The employee may move vertically most of the time or move laterally or cross-functionally to move to a different job role, including short- and long-term goals that lead an individual on a path or strategic steps toward their ideal position.

Glass ceiling. The invisible barrier that prevents women from reaching their full potential due to societal roadblocks.

Senior-level. For this study, senior-level refers to those women of color who are in leadership positions of a chancellor, president, associate vice-chancellor, vice president, or provost in higher education.

Women of color. A phrase used to describe a female who is not considered White. A woman of color would fall into the categories of African American, Asian American, Black, Hispanic American, Latina American, or a person who is mixed race.

Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 provided the introduction, problem statement, purpose, research questions, and limitations of the study. Chapter 2 will report the current and relevant research on women in senior-level leadership, especially women of color, and the challenges experienced in their

leadership career paths. Chapter 3 will address the methodology, research design, description of the participants, data collection procedures, and data analysis. Chapter 4 provides the study results based on the participants' responses, and Chapter 5 provides the conclusions, summary, implications for change, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The goal of this research was to explore what scholars have not addressed the deficit women of color encounter in leadership roles in higher education. Bell et al. (1994) pointed out that research on women in management and women of color is mostly ignored. Barriers to leadership opportunities are a global phenomenon where women, when compared to men, are disproportionately concentrated in lower-level and lower-authoritative leadership positions (Northouse, 2010). The historical literature by theorists such as Chickering and Reisser (1972), Josselson (1987), and Patricia Hill Collins's Black feminist theory (1986) provided a unique perspective and insight on women of color's experiences at institutions of higher learning. Much has been written, and questions have been asked; however, what is limited in research are their voices, their journeys, and their leadership career-paths in higher education.

Exploring numerous scholarly journals, peer-reviewed articles, and books on women and women of color in higher administration leadership, I found that the research in the 21st-century workforce has made strides. However, women of color in the workplace still experience challenges and face barriers that can hinder upward mobility. A woman who is of color that aspires to be promoted to a senior-level position in a community college, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), or a predominately White institution (PWI), face barriers that at times seem insurmountable because of the glass ceiling metaphor and barriers. The American Council on Education (2017) reported, "the percentage of minority college presidents has slowly increased over the last 30 years. Women of color, however, are the most underrepresented in the presidency" (p. 25). The absence of women in leadership throughout higher education is problematized in the literature. The explored data from the American Council

on Education (2017) said seven out of 10 college presidents in 2016 were men, and fewer than one in five college presidents were a racial minority.

As a result, the goal was to identify central issues that related to legitimate research questions: what were the central theories used to explain the flaws of senior-level women of color perceived to be the challenges to breaking the glass ceiling in higher education, and what did senior-level women of color see that were the challenges toward their leadership career-path in higher education in obtaining a senior role. In summation, the explored voices, journeys, and leadership career paths of senior-level women of color in higher education reflected the central theories that explained the absence of these women in a presidential role at a community college, HBCUs, and a PWI.

Theoretical Lens

This section includes the theoretical framework of Chickering and Reisser's (1996) three vectors (managing emotions, developing competence, and establishing identity), Josselson's (1987) purveyors of heritage, and Patricia Hill Collins's Black feminist thought (1986). All of these provide the background necessary to understand women of color's leadership career paths.

Chickering and Reisser

Chickering and Reisser's theory (1972) primarily dealt with students. However, the three vectors highlighted in the study for women of color are as follows:

- managing emotions: a person becomes aware of their emotions and how to manage them,
- developing competence: includes intellectual, manual skills, and interpersonal competence, and
- establishing identity: discover what kinds of experience and at what levels of intensity and frequency; see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Chickering's Seven Vectors of Student Development



As a woman of color, managing emotions, developing competence, and establishing identity are exhausting. Patton and Catching (2009) capture and speak to Chickering's three vectors.

My White colleagues do not deal with these types of situations nearly as much. They do not have to prove anything because their script says that they are credible before they even speak one word. I sometimes feel as if I spend most of my time explaining my credentials when instead it could be spent disseminating knowledge about the subject matter at hand. I must work twice as hard on my teaching, all the while knowing that few extrinsic rewards will follow. The result is that on many occasions, I feel frustrated, exhausted, and drained mentally, physically, spiritually, and emotionally. (p. 720)

Chickering's and Reisser's (1972) three out of the seven vectors are broad, but the viewed senior-leadership lens addressed the plethora of challenges women of color faced in higher education as they pursued their leadership career path. In the journal article *Pipeline to*

Presidencies Carries Lots of Women, Few Members of Minority Groups (2008), Audrey Williams June made the following statement,

According to a new survey by a leading higher education group, women represent a significant share of the senior campus administrators whose jobs are most likely to lead to a college presidency. However, when it comes to members of racial minority groups, the supply of such potential leaders is much smaller. The survey, conducted by the American Council on Education, revealed that women—most of them White—made up fully 45% of senior administrators. (para. 1)

Josselson

Josselson's (1987) research focused on identity development, specifically with women, and upon discovery, Josselson documented that women portrayed similar ways to the identity theory seen in Marcia's (1966) theoretical framework. The work of Josselson provided a different perspective that viewed the process of identity development specifically for women. This structured identity development, specifically for women, was generated by Josselson using Marcia's (1966) framework stages that were assumed by women. Although the theory has four stages, foreclosures will be the stage used for this study. Foreclosures: Purveyors of Heritage were women who were strongly committed but had not explored much on their own. These women highly valued following family traditions and meeting familial expectations. They pursued their goals with a single-minded determination without doubt or hesitation.

Josselson's work centered on women's identity and the four stages that are assumed by women. The theoretical and conceptual frameworks listed above focus on identity development; therefore, Chickering and Reisser (1996) and Josselson (1987) build upon each other's

framework and develop a different approach or perspective to view identity development at various stages in a person's life.

Background

In the introductory summation of the journal articles, references were made about masculinity, gender biases, sexism, glass ceiling, race, stereotypes, leadership styles, and a lack of access to a leadership pipeline at community colleges and PWIs (Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Gaetane, 2013; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). The perception of a masculine environment created unfair expectations of women who have managed to secure a mid-level position at an institution and to behave like their male counterparts. The lack of women in leadership across higher education was problematized in the literature. Often contemporary discourses promote 'fixing the women' as a solution. Consequently, interventions aimed at helping women break through the glass ceiling abound (Davis & Maldonado, 2015).

The status of women leaders is a continued battle for gender parity and biases, glass ceiling, stereotypes, and access to the pipeline in higher education. Historically speaking, women were not permitted to attend Harvard when founded in 1636; therefore, enrollment for women began in the 1800s (Gordon, 1997). These pioneering women were dedicated and serious about their studies. Many people opposed women attending higher education, arguing it was bad for women's health; others felt women should be educated to help educate and raise their sons, thus contributed to ensuring a pool of gentlemen who would sustain the male-dominated Anglo culture in colonial America (Solomon, 1985).

The perception of this school of thought that helped women educate and raise their sons is part of the mindset that continued to be barriers and stereotypes for women leaders. According to Nguyen (2013), the "think manager-think male" attitude quote is entrenched, especially

among males versus women (p. 125). Those traditional mindsets are barriers and stereotypes that women of color, especially African American women, continued to face in higher education. According to Woods-Fouche (1982), African American women are more underrepresented in leadership positions than any other group, especially in areas that lead to university presidential appointments. In 1980, only 2.9% of those holding titles of an assistant, associate dean, director, dean, vice president, or president in universities were African American women (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 1983).

The problem today is not that much different from the colonial past, with the average president being 61.7 years old, up from 60.7 years in 2011, and 59.9 years in 2006, and they still tend to be aging White men (Seltzer, 2017). Women held only 30.1% of presidencies in 2016, up from 26.4% in 2011 and 23% in 2006. The rate of increase has slowed considerably in recent years; it grew from 9.5% in 1986 to 21.1% in 2001. The American Council on Education (2017) discovered and reported that women continue to be “least likely to serve as president of doctorate-granting universities, representing 22% of all presidents of those institutions” (p. 30). Few African American women held the highest administrative position in White colleges and universities (Smith, 1987). Still, they do have a higher percentage of those positions in traditionally Black colleges and universities (Woods-Fouche, 1982).

Historical Perspective

Brief Overview of United States Higher Education Institutions

The United States’ higher education system significantly impacted the institution of higher learning with extraordinary strides during the colonial years of 1636–1789. With the founding of the New England states, Harvard University became the first institution of higher learning to open its doors in 1636. After Harvard University, several other institutions were

founded, such as William and Mary (1693), Yale (1701), Princeton (1746), Columbia (1754), and University of Penn (1755). These universities and others were considered the colonial colleges. After the colonial period, the higher education system went into an era of massive building from 1790–1869, and the creation of policies and laws helped shape and govern this system. Higher education is an elite activity for much of its history, excluding individuals based on gender, religion, race or ethnicity, and social class. In 1848, the Seneca Falls Convention was held to gain support for education and suffrage, and the impact of the convention provided a foundation toward equal education for women. Also, the Morrill Land-Grant Colleges Act of 1862 helped create universities to educate both men and women and helped create HBCUs for Blacks to attend college. By 1870, 30% of colleges were coeducational due to the Morrill Land Grant (Loo, 2018).

From 1870–1944, the United States had indispensable growth and development and an unprecedented surge in immigration and urbanization after the Civil War, and American society was in transition. During the 20th century, economic and social changes transformed higher education into a primary gateway to the middle-class, and women and minorities made inroads against longstanding exclusion from mainstream higher education. Immigrants were arriving from southern and Eastern Europe and from Asia, Mexico, and Central America, which created a new American mosaic. During these years, there was an impact on the higher education system with students enrolling and attending.

Reflecting on the years 1945 through 1975, African Americans united and organized, and celebrated the triumph of the Civil Rights Movement that ended Jim Crow segregation. Now, Blacks were able to attend any college or university they desired. Also, during this timeframe, foreign policy was pursued to help Western Europe and Asia from the devastation of World War

II. The United States economy experienced prosperity and overall optimism, and Americans felt that it was an excellent time to bring children into the world. So, a considerable baby boom resulted during the decade following 1945 (the baby boom climaxed during the mid-1950s). The U.S. educational system experienced a higher proportion of young people graduating from high schools and universities than elsewhere in the world (Loo, 2018).

Leadership in Higher Education

Burns (2004) defined leadership as a structure for action that engages people, to varying degrees, throughout the levels and among the interstices of society. Only the inert, the alienated, and the powerless are unengaged. Leadership is also intrinsically linked to morality. Leadership is an objective; however, the types of leadership have various meanings depending on the industry in which one works. For example, Stogdill (1974) concluded that leadership had been defined in terms of traits, behaviors, influence, interaction patterns, role relationships, and occupation of an administrative position.

Traditional higher education in the United States was designed to serve the young, rich, White, and able-bodied sons of aristocrats (Wenniger & Conroy, 2001). Women were not considered for early college or university leadership. In her opening speech at a national summit for executive women of color in 2006, Johnnetta Cole, president of Bennett College and president emeritus of Spelman College, stated there are three *W*'s that defined American higher education: Western, White, and Womanless (Gray et al., 2017). Women were not allowed to attend a male college until 1933. The intention for higher education provided opportunities to educate the sons of affluent White families to carry on the family business or to practice politics, law, medicine, or commerce (Goodchild & Wechsler, 1997). For the first two centuries of

American higher education, higher learning was only afforded to men (Goodchild & Wechsler, 1997).

Leadership: Women and Women of Color

There are many written works about leadership and the skills needed to lead an organization or institution effectively. John Maxwell, who has written such books as *Developing The Leader Within You 2.0* (2018), and *Leadership: The 11 Essential Changes Every Leader Must Embrace* (2019), speaks to principles of leadership, fostering integrity, wisdom, self-discipline, how one sees themselves in an organization, the laws of awareness, and the laws of contribution to an organization. Stephen Covey wrote *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (2013) and *Principle-Centered Leadership* (2009). Both books communicated to center oneself on integrity, respect, hard work, fairness, and how to balance personal and professional lives effectively. Edgar H. Schein and Peter Schein have written books on *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (2016) and *Humble Leadership* (2018) that provided the readers with a viewpoint on communication in an organization and stated that without a trusting environment, organizations would continue to face the productivity and quality problems that result from reward systems that emphasize individual competition and climbing the corporate ladder.

The organizational culture structure is important to decipher how culture begins, thrives, or dies with leadership. Managing cultural change effectively and appropriately will help the leader in their role in managing disparate groups. In searching for leadership information, there was numerous research on leadership from a male perspective, such as John Maxwell, Stephen Covey, Edgar H. Schein, and Peter Schein, which perpetuated the underrepresentation of women. Women continued to be underrepresented in leadership positions in business, politics, and military organizations in the United States and across cultures (Soares & Combopiano, 2009;

United Nations Development Program, 2010). One reason for this disparity lies in cultural stereotypes of gender and leadership (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Stereotypes of females and leaders can result in lower performance evaluations of female leaders (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman et al., 2004). Research showed that women often received lower evaluations than men in leadership positions (Eagly & Karau, 1992), and these lower evaluations reduced the likelihood of their promotion and advancement through an organization, resulting in lower salaries (Lyness & Heilman, 2006). In the 21st century, with all our technological advancement and laws to protect the rights of race, gender, and discrimination, the question remains why women continue to be underrepresented in leadership in various organizations and industries. Other literature was examined on stereotypes, biases, perceptions, the glass-ceiling metaphor and barriers, males' opinions on evaluations of women and women of color and the voices that persist as a problem from women of color in leadership. Family status and how it impedes their professional leadership growth is another barrier that women and women of color face.

According to Eagan and Garvey (2015), racism, discrimination, gender, and fighting for the right for equal pay, career advancement based on your family structure should not impede a women's progress if you are a woman of color. The study used a multilevel model approach to research the connection between faculty's work and stress as it pertains to their duties and requirements at a four-year institution. Specifically, the researchers analyzed the connection between race, gender, sources of stress, and productivity in the areas of research, teaching, and service. The study authors also examined how the salience of stress due to discrimination and family commitments may affect a faculty's ability to exhibit excellence in student-centered teaching, researching, and civic-minded practices. Due to discrimination at the four-year university, the impact was stressful and negatively impacted faculty of color. On the other hand,

another type of stress due to family obligations showed a positive correlation between faculty and their response to teaching practices and civic-minded activities.

Lammers and Gast (2017) stated that women in leadership are not represented at top-ranking positions and that men hold most management positions. Lammers and Gast asked the poignant questions that female leadership had advantages that affect, support, and influence additional women to assume leadership roles. Also, media has played a part in perpetuating the idea that women in leadership use empathy and communication skills and have an advantage in leadership more than men and will use these skills to take over men's management positions. However, the study maintained a claim that gender inequality undermined affirmative action that reduced female underrepresentation in leadership. In contrast, previous research stated that positive stereotypes could hurt women by making accusations that women are unqualified for leadership. The authors' research findings drew attention to the positive stereotypes that women are suited for leadership but can also hurt other women's claims to leadership positions. This school of thought continued to perpetuate gender inequality. A further consideration for future research should look at the advantages of female leadership and how women in leadership roles should inspire hiring decision-makers to make changes for future positions.

Davis and Maldonado (2015) focused on discovering the implications of the intersectionality of race and gender for African American women in academia. Their research was important to understand because it provided insight into leadership development for African American women in higher education. Researchers have not looked at how race and gender intermingle to enhance African American women's leadership development. The purpose of conducting this qualitative phenomenological research exposed the experiences of African American women in high-level academia and uncovered that race and gender do intertwine and

played a critical role that shaped and developed their leadership skills in academia. Furthermore, African American women faced more significant obstacles than any other gender or race in pursuing high-level administrative positions in a PWI. The study's five themes (predestined for success, sponsorship from the unexpected, double jeopardy of race and gender, learned how to play the game, and pay it forward) are the focus of analysis, which revealed that race and gender in concert with the intersection of race and gender influenced the subjects' leadership development and career growth. Much work is needed in higher education to promote women of color to higher-level positions.

Macrow-Vongalis (2016) identified in their study how women responded to gender leadership styles and how women responded to women's and men's leadership roles and what makes an effective leader. Two key terms are apparent in the research, communal and agentic, and if these terms created barriers and stereotypes for women. Based on the findings, leadership is gender-neutral, and women preferred to address leadership goals rather than focusing on being led by a man or a woman. The implications and recommendations revealed that women were less likely to embrace a communal leadership style.

Ngunjiri and Hernandez's (2017) autoethnography research examined social identities with immigrant women of color leaders at PWIs and how they created a supportive environment to help develop and prepare authentic leaders. The collaborative approach investigated the complexity of authentic leadership as an immigrant woman of color and focused on the voices of these women. Furthermore, they used lived experiences from immigrant Black feminist women of color who struggled with social identities while remaining true to their heritage and culture without compromising their career goals. However, these immigrant women of color were challenged and often viewed as an outsider within the organization. Some implications would be

to increase diversity leadership in higher education, be intentional on diversity and inclusion at the institution's human resources department, and focus on leadership development.

Mohr and Purdie-Vaughns (2015) posited the importance and benefits of examining subgroups individually. They reviewed stereotypes of subgroups and intersectionality such as gender, race, and perceptions on how women of color are perceived in the workplace and highlighted intersectional invisibility as another form of felt discrimination. Shirley Chisholm's presidential run was met with discrimination from Black males rather than what would be the obvious White Americans. An understanding of how barriers and stereotype threats and how women of color responded to these implications were key to understanding how to overcome, just as Chisholm did when faced with adversity. As a result, how women of color, such as African Americans, Hispanics, and Asian Americans, responded to discrimination was worthy of being explored. Intersectionality referred to the general notion that social identities served as organizing features of social relations [and] mutually constitute, reinforce, and naturalize one another (Shields, 2008, p. 302). Women faced barriers of gender and race, sexism and ethnicity, and other barriers such as lower pay, lack of experience, and identity. Women of color must continue to prove themselves in the workplace, manage feminine attributes, and face motherhood challenges. Intersectionality and the experiences of women of color were important to understand in the workplace.

Owuamalam and Zagefka (2014) analyzed social identity, stereotype threats, employability, and cultural diversity that affected a certain group in the workplace. The groups that are generally affected by these terms are the less dominant group and, to some degree, have a disposition of low self-esteem because these barriers prevented women and ethnic minorities from advancing in the workplace. Perceptions were viewed from the power group versus the less

powerful group and how this affected an individual's employability. Belonging to or categorized in a less dominant group, the perceptions, thoughts, experiences, and self-worth shaped the conversation contained in a group. The negative comments and resistance felt by this group created barriers to finding and securing a job. Conversely, if a person is part of a dominant group or a majority group, the conversation tends to be different, with positive thoughts and a different outlook and experiences that create less of a barrier in the majority group. The limitations identified in the study were the single-item measure of self-esteem and patterns of relationships versus the single-item measure of self-esteem.

Race and ethnicity in the workplace and spotlighting the perspectives of historically stigmatized groups written by Plaut et al. (2014) focused on workplace atmosphere where people spend the majority of their time. The authors did not address issues that pertained to minorities in the workplace that created an unstable atmosphere. The authors further explored the perspective of the minority rather than the majority on how the minority experiences were not highlighted or were mentioned even less in the workplace. Additionally, from the researchers' perspective, little attention was given to the issue of race or ethnicity and gender in the workplace from the footsteps of the minority. Consequently, stereotype threats obstructed the views of corporate thinkers and should look at the psychology of race to better address these concerns in the workplace. To understand the intricacy of workplace tokenism, support networks and how to cope with discrimination steps are necessary to understand racial and ethnic minorities in the workplace better.

Rice and Barth's (2016) article highlighted that decision-makers who are hired should be balanced in the workplace with men and women, so that male and female biases do not come into play. The peer-reviewed article on how gender and gender stereotype characteristics of an

interviewer provided credence on imaginary hiring decisions was important to analyze. The study considered the characteristics of an evaluator influenced by stereotypes that affect gender. In the study, gender stereotype-congruent or stereotype-incongruent was a type of manipulated training found in job applicants. Applicants were interviewed by male-to-male and female-to-female, and what was apparent in the study was that stereotype-congruent men's masculinity related to less favorable ratings and women were less affected by the priming and revealed more egalitarian evaluations. The implications suggested the importance of having a gender-balanced hiring committee to counteract the same-gender bias effect rather than a single individual and group dynamics that could result in different biases and outcomes.

Carli and Eagly (2016) focused on using the conventional metaphors for women's leadership, like the glass ceiling used on numerous occasions or using another term such as the sticky floor and labyrinth to shape perceptions. The authors highlighted how the stability of these metaphors shaped and influenced women's social judgment. The perception of women leaders had a major impact in the workplace, and if an individual is a person of color, they are faced with being a woman and also faced with how race plays a role in shaping workplace perceptions. The glass ceiling or sticky floor concept implies that women can only achieve certain levels of leadership. However, in this article, the authors addressed another metaphor, the labyrinth, which was useful for women leaders. Although improvement to women in leadership has risen, it has been a slow and steady climb. Women continue to face challenges that men do not face, like gender stereotypes, which portray women as unsuited for leadership. Consequently, discrimination in pay and promotion, lack of access to mentors and networks, and other domestic responsibilities are barriers. Viable implications would be to assess social change in the

workplace and how it continues to dominate women's ascension to top leadership positions and consider new perspectives on leadership that has not been addressed.

Remedios and Snyder (2015) examined how women of color detected and responded to racism, sexism, and intersectional bias. However, psychologists must begin to build a psychology of stigma that considers how stigmatized class, sexual orientation, religious and other identities intersect to shape the experiences of targets of prejudice (Cole, 2009; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008).

Women and women of color faced various workplace obstacles; however, as a woman of color, detecting and responding to stigmatization adds additional layers for working women of color in the workplace. Additionally, from a psychologically social viewpoint, women of color detected and responded to many forms of prejudice, which affected work performance. For instance, women of color encountered various forms of covert discrimination like lower pay, occupational segregation, identity issues, socialization obstacles, and maintaining a positive self-image. Women of color were denounced in the workplace, and responses to these barriers looked vastly different from the perspective of White women and men, thus perpetuating the stigmatization.

Major and O'Brien (2005) examined the literature on stigmatizing women of color who became targets of prejudice in the workplace. Prior research suggested that a White woman's perspective on stigma was taken into account, and therefore, provided a different account and perspective on how women of all races faced racism and sexism obstacles. Other authors, such as Babbitt (2011), discussed the need for more women of color to be active participants in psychology research and captured their perceptions and experiences in their study. Their study

showed that having a feeling of confidence and certainty provided the individual with a feeling of determination and good performance.

Additional research is needed in intersectional stigma spanning across a range of stigmatized identities. Other areas that need exploring are when the individual is cognizant of the stereotype threats, which are reinforced by the targeted individual, and perception, which leads to poor performance. These are deficiencies in the research evidence.

Policymakers will benefit from the research, especially focusing on and understanding intersectional stigma. In addition to policymakers, social, economic, and political groups will benefit from understanding how the targets of intersectional stigma stigmatize women of color.

Chapter Summary

Even though women of color have made strides in leadership at community colleges, HBCUs, and PWIs, there is a lack of women, specifically women of color, serving in senior-level leadership roles in academia. Staggering statistics of the gender gap reinforced how barriers impacted women of color in higher education and understanding of women in leadership and the sticky-floor, which serves as an invisible barrier to the upward mobility of women. However, the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019) shows increasing numbers of women in leadership roles in the workforce. Contradictory, key decision-makers in hiring or advancement did not demonstrate that women of color assume the roles and ranks of senior-level positions. I aimed to address gaps in the literature that sought to explore the voices, journeys, and leadership career paths of women of color in higher education. Chapter 3 will provide significant detail regarding this study's methodology.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The study examined the voices, journeys, and leadership career paths of women of color at community colleges, HBCUs, and PWIs. This chapter addresses the methodology of how these women navigated their path to success amid the barriers and glass ceiling they experienced. I organized the study into the following sections, research and design method, phenomenology, population, setting, sample, participant protection, data collection, interview protocol, data analysis, ethical procedures, and research questions. The goal of most social science studies is to contribute to a cumulative body of verifiable information (Frankfort-Nachmias et al., 2015). The chapter concludes with the ethical procedures and a summation of the study methods used.

Purpose of the Study

With this framework, the study's goal was to focus on the voices, journeys, and leadership career paths of the participants. Additionally, the study showed how these women's determination to pursue a senior-level position in academia by managing their emotions, developing their competency, establishing an identity with single-minded stamina. Therefore, the participants' voices expounded on the barriers they encountered within their environment and the journeys they took on their leadership career path. Creswell (2017) asserted that qualitative researchers embrace the numerous realities of participants and practice transparency of their biases related to the topic.

Research Design and Method

The study's qualitative research method focused on the phenomenology research approach that described the participant(s) experiences in a setting while trying to understand a phenomenon (Terrell, 2016). Researchers should emphasize developing a research environment

that is trusting, balanced, and ethical, with all parties respecting the opinions and participation of others (Terrell, 2016).

Phenomenological

Phenomenological research examines the experiences of consciousness from a first-person perspective (Creswell, 2017; Merleau-Ponty, 2012; Smith, 2013). This research type goes beyond the surface to gain a deeper depth of a person's lived experiences. Phenomenology (Creswell, 2017; Maxwell, 2013) permits researchers to ask open-ended, semistructured questions to ensure the same foundational questions are being asked while allowing latitude for the participant's experiences on their rise to success to be untainted by the researcher's ideas. Ultimately, phenomenology aims to obtain the underlying meaning of the experience (Creswell, 2017), then categorize the experiences of the participants with the phenomenon-defined topics that are identified and coded as the structures develop.

Population, Setting, and Sample

The setting, population, and sample size criteria are explicitly based on women who identified themselves as women of color. This study's women of color held senior-level leadership positions at selected universities, community colleges, HBCUs, and PWIs in the various regions of the United States. According to Terrell (2016), purposive sampling, also called intentional sampling, is, as the name implies, gathering a sample on purpose because those sampled meet specific criteria. The research allowed me to identify small groups of women of color.

A purposeful, selected number of women who identified themselves as women of color and held a leadership position in higher education for at least three years were invited to participate in the study. The sampling size consisted of 15 women of color who were suitable

and met the study's criteria. The following process explained the sampling selection. Five participants were selected from community colleges, five from HBCUs, and five from PWIs. The sample size remained relatively small to accommodate the integrity and analysis of the study. I recruited members from the National Association of Professional Women on LinkedIn. The interview process consisted of semistructured, open-ended interview questions to capture their voices about their lived experiences on their career paths. The qualitative research data used technology software to record and transcribe the telephone interviews.

Protection of Participants

The most crucial aspect of protecting the participants, the selected women of color received an informed consent form explaining no identifying information would be disclosed to anyone other than the institutional review board (IRB), who may seek an inquiry and inspection of the research documents. Given the nature of identity protection, the study sought to use pseudonyms for the participants.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection in the qualitative research generally involved observation, probing interviews, document review, or a combination of these methods to ascertain an understanding of the experiences of those individuals participating or the processes reviewed as a part of a study (Creswell, 2017; Roberts, 2010). Interviews are a means by which another person can share their viewpoint (Patton, 2002). Note, due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, face-to-face interviews were not a viable option.

The study utilized a qualitative research design. I obtained permission from Abilene Christian University's IRB (see Appendix A). The criteria for the data collection of the participants were as follows:

- I emailed approximately 50 women of color in senior-level leadership positions who are members of the National Association of Professional Women on LinkedIn and invited them to participate in the study.
- After accepting the invitation to participate in the study, I emailed the consent letter, which explained the study's purpose.
- I contacted each participant to schedule a time that was convenient for conducting the telephone interview. Once the interview was scheduled, I emailed the interview questions (see Appendix B) for the participant's convenience.
- Participants were asked to respond to open-ended questions. Before the interview, I communicated to each participant that at any time during the interview, they could refuse to answer any questions that made them uncomfortable, or they could withdraw from the interview session without any threat to their relationship with Abilene Christian University.
- Each Zoom interview was confidential, and I was the only individual present in the room when the interview was conducted.
- The participants' narrative responses were transcribed into textual data using the digital computer transcription service, NoNotes, and were coded and analyzed for recurring patterns and themes.
- After completing the textual data, I emailed participants their responses to check for accuracy in interpretation. This process was referred to as member checking and was utilized to increase accuracy, credibility, and validity.

Research Questions

The research questions were

Q1. What do senior-level women of color perceive to be the challenges of breaking the glass ceiling in higher education?

Q2. What are senior-level women of color's perceptions of establishing a career path in higher education?

Q3. What do senior-level women of color perceive as the factors to overcoming barriers and challenges in breaking the glass ceiling?

Interview Protocol

The interview questions collected the demographic information on each participant (see Appendix C), such as educational background (see Appendix D), years of leadership experience (see Appendices E & F), positions held (see Appendix G), family background, marital status (see Appendices H & I), and professional development.

1. What positions have you held in higher education?
2. Who has impacted your success?
3. What factors impacted your career success?
4. Describe an event or share a story of women who have mentored you toward success?
5. Have you ever reported to a minority woman in higher education? If not, did you experience any type of barrier? If so, what were those barriers?
6. What professional development have you participated in?
7. Tell me about your higher education and career journey?
8. How many women of color are represented at your college or university who are in a mid-level or senior-level position?
9. What are some of the professional challenges you experienced in your leadership career path?

10. How do you overcome challenges in your professional career?
11. Have you ever experienced institutional challenges and barriers? If so, what are they?
12. What are some personal challenges you experienced in your leadership career path?
13. Describe the culture of your institution? Is diversity apparent?
14. What are the strengths and weaknesses of your greatest success or disappointments in your professional career in higher education?

The first 11 questions were demographic information of identity and described the participants. These questions were sent to them as a presurvey questionnaire (see Appendix J). The interview questions above were used to explore participants' voices, journeys, and leadership career paths. Chapter 2 is used to develop the questions based on the peer-reviewed literature. The interview questions are aligned with four research questions. Chapter 2 literature information provided an understanding of gender and racial gaps in higher education leadership with the theoretical framework related to race, gender, leadership, barriers, and the glass ceiling and sticky floor concepts.

Recruitment and Participant Selection

The potential participants were recruited through a social network of professional women of color. I sent an invitation through their email, inviting them to participate in the study. Senior-level women of color were selected to participate who held a leadership position in higher education for at least three years. The participants held leadership positions as associate vice presidents, associate vice-chancellors, and vice presidents at two-year colleges and four-year HBCUs and PWIs.

The research study participants received a pseudonym, and their demographic information is based on the presurvey questionnaire.

Alpha is the provost and senior vice president of academic affairs at an HBCU. She has a Doctor of Philosophy in Industrial Engineering and a Master of Science in Industrial Engineering. She is also the director of the center for advancing faculty excellence. Alpha has over 15 years of experience in higher education and is single and has a child.

Chi is vice-chancellor of student affairs at an HBCU. She has a Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership. Chi has served in several leadership roles as assistant principal, acting principal, and curriculum coordinator. She is married, has a grown child, and over 10 years of experience in higher education.

Delta is a director at a PWI and has a Doctor of Philosophy in Interdisciplinary Human Development-Higher Education Administration Specialization. Also, she has a Master's of Education. Delta is married and does not have any children. She has 15 years of experience in leadership in higher education.

Epsilon is a vice president of enrollment management and has earned a Master of Arts degree and an EdD in the field of education. She is married with over 10 years of leadership experience in education and 10 years in the private sector.

Gamma has a dual role at her PWI; she is the dean and an educational leadership professor. She has a Doctor of Philosophy and a postbaccalaureate certificate in women's studies, educational leadership, and cultural studies, and a Master's in Criminal Justice/Law Enforcement Administration. Gamma is currently single and has no children. As a higher education influencer, she has over 10 years of experience in leadership.

Iota is the chief of staff at a community college. She has a Doctor of Education in Leadership and Management and a Master's in Organizational Leadership and General

Management and has been in her current role for over three years. Iota is married with two children and has served in different leadership roles at the community college.

Kappa is the provost of health sciences at a community college. She has a Doctor of Philosophy in Management Preparation of Academic Leadership. She has a Master's of Science in Health/Health Care Administration/Management. Kappa is married and has a child. She has over 15 years of experience in leadership.

Lambda is a dean at a PWI. She has her Doctorate in Educational Leadership and a Master's in Counseling Psychology. Lambda is married with children and has 20 years of experience in secondary and postsecondary leadership.

Mu is a director at PWI. She has a Master's in Organizational Leadership and a Bachelor's in Communication and Media Studies. Mu is married with no children and has been working in her role for over 10 years and has 25 years of leadership experience.

Omicron is a vice president of finance and operations at a community college. Omicron has a Master's in Public Policy and a certificate from Harvard University, John F. Kennedy School of Government. Omicron is married with a child and has three years of experience in higher education.

Phi is an associate vice president for academic affairs at an HBCU. She has a Doctor of Philosophy in anthropology and a Master's degree in Liberal Studies African American/Black Studies, Black Feminist studies. Phi is single with children and has over 10 years of leadership experience in higher education.

Pi is the associate vice-chancellor for health sciences diversity at a PWI. She is currently pursuing her Doctor of Education in Higher Education Management, and she has a Master of

Arts in Communication. Pi is married and has a child. She has over 15 years of leadership experience in higher education.

Sigma is the executive associate vice-chancellor of educational affairs at a community college. She has a Master of Education in Instructional Technology and a second Master in Library and Information Sciences. She is single and has a child. Sigma has over 13 years of leadership experience in higher education.

Tau is the district director of development education at a community college. She has her Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Administration and a Master's in Education. Tau is married with children. Tau has over 20 years of leadership experience in secondary and postsecondary education.

Theta is the vice president of development at an HBCU and is a certified fundraising executive. She has a Bachelor of Science in Business Management with a minor in finance. Theta is currently single with no children and has three years of experience in higher education.

Limitations of the Study

The study was limited to women of color who hold the helm as senior-level administrators in an institution of higher education. I interviewed 15 women of color who were in leadership roles to explore their voices, journeys, and leadership career paths. The women in the study expressed the challenges experienced by women of color in higher education. A semistructured interview with a small number of participants is suggested to obtain meaning from African American women in leadership (Glesne, 2011; Maxwell, 2013). A larger sample size could have presented a problem that was not addressed in this study as the invitation was not sent to all women of color in leadership roles in every higher educational institution in the United States. Therefore, the findings should not be generalized to include all members of this

population. A different type of study focusing on a longitudinal study would generate a different set of challenges faced by women of color in higher education.

Data Analysis

Patton's (2002) data analysis in a phenomenological study started the data collection with the research practicing epoché (i.e., bracketing), the idea that data must be collected with an open mind so as not to contaminate the data with personal opinions or preconceptions (Terrell, 2016). Using the combined bracketing and thematic analysis allowed me to discover recurring themes that arose by grouping information based on related concepts or ideas (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

Using the bracketing and thematic approach, I followed certain steps to interpret the data collected in the study. I organized and prepared the data for analysis using NoNotes to transcribe the responses and sort the data. Also, I coded the data, and during the process, I organized the data by bracketing chunks and writing categories in the margins. After the process, the data was generated into categories or themes for analysis. I created a narrative to describe the themes, identify themes, and interpret the data to answer the research questions. Finally, the textual data was maintained to protect the confidentiality of the participants.

Ethical Procedures

To maintain ethical standards and to adhere to the IRB, pseudonyms were used to protect each participant in the study. Also, extremely sensitive information such as personal information of each participant will only be seen by me. By these means, I aimed to minimize the risk to participants and maintain the study's validity. The data will be stored securely using a password-protected Excel or Word document accessible only to me. Trustworthiness was established by allowing the participants to review their transcribed interviews. Credibility and trustworthiness

affirmed the data's reliability from participants sharing their interpretation of their lived experiences (Glesne, 2011).

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the voices, experiences, and factors promoting the leadership career paths of senior-level women of color in higher education. The study also captured the voices of senior-level women of color on how they were able to overcome the barriers and challenges to breaking the glass ceiling on their leadership career paths to senior-level administration in higher education. Zoom recorded interviews were conducted with 15 women of color in senior-level positions at selected community colleges, HBCUs, and PWIs. Preferred questions were used to guide this study to accomplish optimal results of this qualitative phenomenology study.

The research questions below directed this study:

Q1. What do senior-level women of color perceive to be the challenges of breaking the glass ceiling in higher education? Based on their responses, the following recurring themes emerged: (a) institutional perceptions, (b) unresponsive to change, (c) women of color “fix it,” and (d) lack of communication.

Q2. What are senior-level women of color’s perceptions of establishing a career path in higher education? The following themes emerged from their responses: (a) work-life balance, (b) self-awareness, (c) implementing a vocational and strategic plan, and (d) flexibility and mobility.

Q3. What do senior-level women of color perceive as the factors to overcoming barriers and challenges in breaking the glass ceiling? Based on their responses, (a) supportive family unit, (b) involvement in social groups, (c) leadership selectivity, and (d) having a voice and presence emerged as the overarching themes.

This study provided a confidential and safe environment for the senior-level women of color (WOC) to express and provide their verbal accounts, experiences, and journeys regarding

their leadership career paths. It is necessary to mention in this chapter that all WOC responses may not be included in the findings or responses and may not be reflected as a recurring theme. The WOC varied in their replies on their experiences, journeys, and leadership career paths in higher education from promising to undesirable. The participants provided several responses regarding how their community colleges, HBCUs, and PWIs provided opportunities for them to participate in professional development, advancement, and academic relationships. Conversely, it was the opposite for others in facing different types of barriers and some hostile environments.

Description of Women of Color

The women of color provided data that was coded for recurring themes and the framework for their lived experiences. The WOC were from the following states: California, Maryland, Michigan, New Mexico, New Orleans, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Texas.

Nine had earned a doctoral degree, and six earned graduate degrees (see Table 1). Their degree areas were from various disciplines, such as business, finance, criminal justice, psychology, library science, early childhood education, and social work.

Table 1

Participants' Responses by Degree Differences

	<i>n</i>
Master's Degree	6
Doctoral Degree	9
Total	15

Given the diverse background in disciplines, it provided a variety of viewpoints from the different disciplines and backgrounds in higher education. Some of the women of color had teaching experience that ranged from five years to over 10 plus years of teaching. Other

experiences ranged from social work, finance, psychology, criminal justice, and early childhood. Based on the interview questions, the women of color's responses varied based on their voices, experiences, journeys, and leadership career paths in higher education.

Demographic Questionnaire

The demographic questionnaire was sent out to the participants prior to the Zoom interview. The reasoning for the presurvey questionnaire was to capture data such as their age, degree level, marital status, years in leadership, and the number of years in their current position.

Results of the Study

The participants were asked to elaborate on the individuals who had the most significant impact on their career successes. Based on their responses, the family unit and social groups emerged as the recurring theme. Several stated how their families supported and encouraged them to reach their highest potentials. Many expressed growing up in homes where parents might not have been educated but instilled those values in obtaining an education. Others stated that social groups such as mentors, professional organizations, and or former educators helped shape and define their pathway into leadership in higher education.

The women of color were asked to describe the persons or individuals who had the greatest impact on their career success. Several mentioned that their families and close friends had the greatest impact and influence on their journeys to becoming senior-level leaders in higher education. They felt that the family unit and their social groups were key to them achieving their success. For instance, a participant stated, "Without them I would not have been able to achieve my success."

Family Unit

Women of Color: Epsilon

Epsilon is a dean of the college of education with an earned master's and doctoral degree in the field of psychology. She is married with over 20 years of leadership experience and reported being in her current position for five years. She stated about her family,

I mean, it sounds crazy or generic, but my parents, my mom and dad are the number one influence in my life. My dad was a K–12 administrator, so historically speaking, he started out wanting to be an elementary school teacher. My dad is biracial, and that was not an option in 1967. So, he decided to become a history teacher and taught middle school. Over his 32-year career, he moved up the ranks and retired as an assistant superintendent. He really instilled in me the desire and the interest in education. To be 100% sure, my mom is one of 13 children. My dad is one of six. I am one of two, and my parents adopted two kids, and I am the oldest, just to put it in context. This idea of servant leadership and this idea of doing the right thing even when it does not feel good to do the right thing are lessons that they gave me throughout life.

Women of Color: Kappa. When asked about her family, Kappa stated,

It would be my family because my family is my greatest support, and without them, I would not have ever been able to achieve my success. I have so much support from my family that I would have never been able to do anything.

Women of Color: Delta. Delta commented,

My husband. Yeah. That ongoing support. I followed him to Texas for him to work on his PhD, but at the time, it was a lot of opportunity for me. I finished my master's in education. And then I followed him to Pennsylvania, which was great for me because I started my career as a career services coordinator at an educational opportunity program. And I started working on my doctorate. That journey went on for 10 years after we

moved back here to Texas. It has just been ongoing support. In my acknowledgments for my dissertation is largely about thanking him for all the support.

Women of Color: Iota. Iota stated,

There is probably an array. Oh, gosh. I would have to say ... I would rather do it in little chunks if you would. My family: grandparents on both sides were limitedly educated. But they valued education, and they were adamant that their children were going to go to college and therefore change the trajectory of our family tree, which did happen. So that was critical. They were very encouraging. I had one of my colleagues ask before, like, how did you decide that you were going to go to college? And I said it was not if, it was where. My sister was just much better at planning at that juncture in her life as a high school graduate. I was going from 12th to 13th grade. It was just so, that is what you were going to do.

Women of Color: Lambda. When asked about who had an impact, Lambda said,

A lot of people have. Like in every individual's life, your family plays a major role. I come from a family of educators. My mother was a schoolteacher. My grandmother was a school principal. My family, they have been the reason why I have always tried to excel. Then, I think I have been able to do well in my career.

Women of Color: Mu. Mu said, "It has been different people at different times throughout my career. Mostly family."

Women of Color: Omicron. Omicron said,

My mother. She was a single working parent with a focus on her kids and her education. And so, while she never completed her degree, she worked hard and took classes for many years while raising me and my brother on her own. Friends, as well.

Women of Color: Chi. Chi replied,

Several people. I would say my mother probably has been my biggest influence. She is a retired educator, just growing up in her presence and her leadership skills and how she taught me to treat people and to be respectful to all people and value people at every level. I have to say her guidance and influence impacted me throughout my life.

Many of the participants mentioned that their social groups and organizations were instrumental in helping them reach their career goals. They also stated that having mentors and someone who could relate to their struggles was also important to their success. Their individual responses are as follows.

Women of Color: Gamma. Gamma said,

I was fortunate to have great models along the way: colleagues, peer colleagues, mentors. Some of my professors were instrumental. Relationships were critical to those mentorship opportunities that I have had. Then I have also had formal opportunities in terms of mentorship. I participated in the Millennial Leadership Institute, which is through the American College of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) for aspiring presidents, university leaders. Was nominated by my previous provost and president at Northern Iowa, and was assigned a sitting president for a year, and a sitting president and a retired president as a mentor. So, I have had the opportunity throughout my educational career, just the mentorship, whether it is a former department chair, committee member, just different people along the way, building relationships and staying connected. And then also building my own mentor and support network with colleagues, sisters of ... Women of color, started a group, Advancing Women of Color in Academia (AWOCA).

Women of Color: Theta. Theta replied,

I have several mentors that I have pulled upon as resources, as well as an organization that has been extremely instrumental in my fundraising success. And that is the Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP). It is an international organization ... I think I kind of cut my teeth. My first boss, when I transitioned from corporate to nonprofit, was for an ecumenical nongovernmental organization (NGO), and the executive director at that time said, “You need to get involved with AFP.” And I was like, “AFP, what is that?” And so, as I began to learn about the Association of Fundraising Professionals, as well as the Planned Giving Society, those were two organizations that I joined because I was initially coming into higher ed when I was transitioned to the nonprofit space, I was in a social services organization, Church World Service. It was an ecumenical organization that was made up of 36 mainstream denominations.

Women of Color: Alpha. Alpha stated,

Well, there are a plethora of people who have impacted, I think, my success, and I have had some great mentors over the years. I have had some great sponsors, and I think you know the difference between the two. And then I also had, I would say encouragements from, of course, my mother, and family, and friends, but I have also had significant encouragement for my students.

Women of Color: Phi. When asked about social groups or organizations, Phi said,

I have several mentors who have dedicated their time both while I was working with them or alongside them in my work career. One of the primary people I would point to is a woman I know. She was my first boss in my first professional job. Her name is [xxx]. What is interesting is she got out of the career path directly as it stands and became a

practicing minister, but she is still one of my greatest advisors. I would also say that I have a host of supporters and thought partners in my career, many of the people who I met in my own educational endeavors, especially a group of women who I graduated with from high school.

The participants responded to factors that impacted their career success. As a result, (a) supportive family unit, (b) leadership selectivity, (c) flexibility and mobility, and (d) implementing a vocational and strategic plan were communicated from the participants as recurring themes. Throughout their college and professional occupations, the ability to have flexible mobility and a vision and strategic plan made the difference in the participants' vocation.

Supportive Family Unit

Most of the women stated that having the support of their family was an important factor impacting their careers. Five participants referenced how family encouraged them to pursue their leadership aspirations, whereas the other 10 participants referred to leadership selectivity.

Women of Color: Epsilon. Epsilon said,

I would say that I should add a layer on that you marry your father, like most people go out and marry their father. My husband is not 100% my father. I think I swapped out some things that I was not necessarily looking for, but I did end up marrying a very stable person. I grew up in a very stable home. My husband was in the army for 24 years. When I met him, he was in the army 12 years. I am going to make it an inappropriate joke, he had benefits. He had a government ID. I knew his government name. This is the 90s, when I was dating him, you know? The 90s, early 2000s. To be an educated woman in America, looking for a partner. Frankly, my dad being biracial ... I grew up in the era of the Huxtables. Yes. Success was to marry another person of the same color. I chose that, I

was looking for someone who was the same race as me, who was African American. For me, again, looking back at it now, he was stable. I knew his name. I knew his government ID. I could walk over to the office. His stability has impacted my career success because when I said to him, seven, eight, nine years into our marriage, let us do this. “If you want to go do something else, go do something else. I will support you.” I wasn’t quite sure what that would mean, I support you, but I will try to do my best to take care of you so that you can go hit your dream, you can ascertain what you want to ascertain.

Women of Color: Tau. Tau had this to say about support,

I think I had, and I know this, a lot of community support. Family support also. So from the church that I was raised in to the grandparents and the parents who raised me and prayed for me, to mentors that I met in the community who were along my path and still are from the earlier ages when I was working under really strong, prominent African-Americans to now, when I’m working alongside with many of them. So just grateful for the mentorship. I cannot say enough positive things about that. But having a community that was behind me of different people, some who were related, some were not.

Women of Color: Lambda. Lambda commented, “It has been my family and my husband and people who have mentored me and coached me along the way.”

Women of Color: Mu. Mu commented, “It has been different people at different times throughout my career. Mostly family. I am originally from Flint. I am one of six children raised by a single mother who was a Baptist minister, so just several influences.”

Women of Color: Omicron. Omicron stated,

I would say the work ethic and value placed on education by my mom. That was one of the major things that I think has really helped me along my way. And, as I mentioned,

some key friends that I met in high school really encouraged me to seek higher education, even though no one in my family had attained a college degree.

Leadership Selectivity

The women of color spoke about the process of having leaders and mentors that were keenly aware of their potential, their skill set, their mindset to build sustainable relationships, and actively having the potential to be mobile within an institution or relocating to a different institution.

Women of Color: Sigma. Sigma said,

I think that a lot of it has to do with the leadership that I work with, because they see the potential and they see my drive, and so it actually adds more responsibilities to what I initially started doing.

Women of Color: Delta. When asked, Delta commented,

What factors? Well, people have helped me along the way, of course, which I was excited to be able to talk about in this study. Instructors along the way. Female instructors along the way. Starting when I was an undergraduate. For example, when I was an undergraduate at Texas Tech, I was a teacher assistant for a counseling doctoral student. So, while she was working on her PhD, I got started as her teaching assistant. But she was a mentor to me as well. And then, when I got into my master's program, I remember a faculty member who was a higher education professional. She was a mentor for me. Then when I moved on to one of my first jobs at Penn State as an academic intrusive counselor, Dr. B., who is a dean now at the community college in Philadelphia, she was a mentor. She was a counseling graduate, and she was the Act 101 coordinator director. She mentored me. I stayed in touch with her and had her as one of my recommendations.

Well, I still have her, and this is 20 years later. Wow. So, people along the way have been guiding forces for me. Great, great. And they happen to be women. Awesome. Except for my husband, yeah.

Women of Color: Iota. Iota stated,

Next, I would say professionally, I had a mentor and probably the first impactful supervisor when I worked in social services. She put me on a bigger thinking pathway. And that was pivotal in my career path and helped me to start analyzing the work that I was doing, which led me to higher education. So then, once I got here, then I would say probably the most impactful person I would use internally would probably be Dr. P., and she is now the vice-chancellor of workforce and advancement.

Women of Color: Lambda. Lambda said, “It has been my family and my husband and people who have mentored me and coached me along the way.”

Women of Color: Pi. Pi’s comment included,

If I were going to pick one, I would say relationships. I never burn a bridge. And I like to keep in touch with the people that I have worked with before. I am still in touch with the woman who was my work-study supervisor here on campus when I was 17 years old; we are still in touch. I never burn a bridge. I think that when you are authentic, and you develop relationships with people, they remember that. When opportunities come up, they will think about you because they know you well and know what you can do. So, relationships, absolutely. My husband, he told me once, he’s like, “I can’t stand you. You never have to apply for a job, people just offer them to you.” That is kind of the situation that you want to be in. You know? You want people to know you and what you are

capable of so that then opportunities will be presented. You still must apply for them, and the whole nine yards. But that is how those offers come.

Women of Color: Gamma. Gamma stated,

Being mobile was one of them. Mobility, I will say. I am from New Jersey, born in the Caribbean. I was born in Haiti, spent the first 19 years of my life in the States when I migrated. And when I moved to North Carolina to work on my doctorate, I was gone for 20-something years. I just got back last year. But mobility. From North Carolina, I went to Oklahoma for my assistantship, my associate assistant professor, excuse me, position. I left, went to Florida, came back to Oklahoma, then went to Kentucky, Iowa. Now, New Jersey. So, mobility was one of the areas, but also having a sense of what I wanted to do. I wanted to become an assistant professor, and I did reach a point where, “Do I go stay in higher ed student affairs, or go academe, then administration?” So, I followed the path of academe then administration. So really those opportunities to make those connections, having a sense of what I wanted to do, the networking and mobility.

Implementing a Vocational and Strategic Plan

Embracing their calling, vision, and purpose has proved beneficial for the participants to create a plan, analyze the information, and employ their career calling in higher education. Also, these women saw fit to put into practice their long-term strategic plan.

Women of Color: Epsilon. When asked about her plan, Epsilon said,

The idea of my mom telling me not to be poor, I really had to thoughtfully think about what my long-term strategy was if I was going to change careers or do something different. So, vision. I have a young lady that I mentor, and she said, “Oh my god, you

blew my mind yesterday.” I said, “You have to see the end before you see the beginning.” All these things that we are doing have to be intentional.

Women of Color: Gamma. Gamma stated,

Also having a sense of what I wanted to do. I wanted to become an assistant professor, and I did reach a point where, “Do I go stay in higher ed student affairs, or go academics, then administration?” So, I followed the path of academe then administration.

Women of Color: Mu. Mu commented, “I always knew just from an early age that education was the way out of poverty and out of the community that I came from.”

Women of Color: Omicron. Omicron said,

I think, most importantly, I discovered a graduate fellowship. You may have heard of it. It is called The Public Policy and International Affairs (PPIA) Fellowship. It is for people of color interested in policy. That helped set me on that path, and it also helped pay for my graduate school. To me, that was one of the major changing points in my life.

The participants were asked to describe an event or share a story of women who had mentored them toward success. The storytelling and disclosing an experience from a first-person point of view was essential to this study. The women of color expounded and shared the stories and events of those individuals who mentored them toward success. Guidance in the workplace proved to be beneficial for them and their trajectory to leadership.

Guidance in the Workplace

Leaders were conscious of the participants and were given opportunities based on their skills, knowledge, and experience. Also, it was being mentored and having a seasoned colleague, whether it was in their field or not, that exposed their potential and helped guide them toward the success of where they are now.

Women of Color: Epsilon. When asked, Epsilon said,

She gave me a job when there was not somebody to give me an opportunity. She could see the value. Although she was two years younger than me, she could see the value in what I brought to the table.

Women of Color: Sigma. Sigma stated,

I had some awesome faculty instructors that encouraged me to do a little more because they could see that I was doing just what I needed to do. They encouraged me to do a little more. I think ultimately, again, it is the leadership. I was in a really great place to meet Dr. B. because it was just like a whole weird experience, almost, because I introduced myself to her as a faculty and everybody was like, "Oh, you can't talk to her." "Because she's the vice-chancellor? I am going to talk to her." I did. It was like from that initial meeting, she contacted me to get certified for distance learning. I did that. After that, she offered me a position doing course development. After that, I was at home, not doing anything, and she offered me the job that I wanted in my lifetime, dean of the library. I was like, "Wow." Then everything just went fast after that. We had a good rapport, she respected me, I respected her, so therefore I think we were able to accomplish more.

Women of Color: Pi. Pi had this to say,

A friend of mine was another colleague in admissions and financial aid. We would recruit together a lot when we were in undergraduate admissions. Of course, our paths diverged. But we stayed in touch, of course. I had just had my son, and I was on maternity leave. She called me and said, "I had an opportunity to rewrite this position in the diversity office." She said, "And I wrote it for everything you were able to do, and I want you to

have this position.” And I told her, “I am on maternity leave. First, I am not fit for human beings to see me.” You know? You are on maternity leave, job one, feed that baby. So, she said, “You can pull yourself together for this one day.” It was like, okay, okay, if it is important to you, I will. I pulled myself together and went and interviewed for the position and got it. But it was flattering to me that she wrote that position, knowing everything that I could do and could infuse into that position.

Women of Color: Lambda. Lambda said,

She has impacted my career, a lady. I feel like once I met her, I elevated my learning so much. She just elevated my learning in such a way. That is one. That is one significant woman, to this day, that has impacted. I gave her credit on my dissertation because I said, “Because you introduced me to Twitter, I did a dissertation on the use of Twitter for professional development and its impact on educators.”

Women of Color: Mu said, “The director of marketing was the person that I could always bounce things off, and she would give good advice. And that was probably one of the first and few female influences that I had.”

Women of Color: Kappa commented, “And that has proved to be beneficial the mentor? Yes, because it helped me to understand the system that I worked in and how to maneuver through it.”

Women of Color: Gamma. Gamma said,

I mentioned the AWOCA group as one core group of women. These are all women from different walks of life: Native American, African American, Asian American, [and] Latina. So, we were a group of eight, I believe, from across the country. And this came out of my second set of edited books, *Woman of Color in Higher Ed*. So, these

individuals, had contributed chapters. I did not know them personally, but from that project, my colleague and I developed this group. A group of us developed the AWOCA group. We were strong for a good six years, and then I moved into administration, people took different paths. But we were really a strong force of scholars dedicated to the work, the support, the mentorship we provided.

Women of Color: Delta. When asked, Delta said,

Well, along the way ... I will tell you something that I never did realize. One day I was meeting her in her office, and she had pulled out ... She showed me a drawer of drafts that she had written for different journals and things like that. And she told me something that has resonated. I still think of it today. She showed me a draft, and she said, "This draft was turned down by a peer review board." She told me one of the differences between male candidates and female candidates, to be mindful of, is a lot of times female candidates, when they get a declination, they may just kind of shelve it, put it away for a while, and take it a little more internally. Whereas men normally will take that, rebadge it, change it, and just send it out to another journal because someone is going to take it eventually. That really resonated with me.

Women of Color: Theta. Theta said,

So, I can think of a colleague that I met while I was at a PWI, and she had previously worked at the institution where I am now. She was a huge mentor in just navigating the waters. Another one, a colleague, just talking through different scenarios and situations; these were individuals that helped to keep me motivated to continue in this space.

Women of Color: Chi. Chi stated,

Now, my mentor, who again moved up through the ranks, was a counselor and then a director of counseling. So again, watching her network was a success, and she hired me and gave me each promotion that I have ever had.

Women of Color: Alpha. When asked, Alpha stated,

Well, I think my biggest story, I mean, I have had several of them, but I think my biggest story was the person who mentored me in graduate school and encouraged me to pursue ... I believe I was the first African American female to earn a PhD in engineering in the history of Texas A & M University. So that person mentored me to successfully complete my degree. And that to me set me on a totally different trajectory from others by having that PhD. And then I would say that she was a great influence. And then recently, the president at Tennessee State University, the first female president, has helped in mentoring me to take this provost position and for helping to prepare me for the position of president.

Women of Color: Phi. Phi said,

Okay. I would say there is a person I worked with in my prior role who pushed me forward to pursue another opportunity. I was quite happy. I had been in my role prior to this one for 10 years. There was a woman who was a little further along in her career, Miss S., who one day, just at some point in my tenure, stopped me and said, "I was able to achieve a lot in the role I'm in here, and I have stayed in this position for 30 years, even though somewhere 20 years into my career, I was offered an opportunity to do something that was scary, was in a new industry, and I did not want to take the risk." She started really mentoring me about learning when it is the moment to move out because she had missed an opportunity to move into another role and giving me the confidence to

venture into an opportunity that presented itself and not being afraid of what I had never done.

In this study, the women of color vocalized how ethnic barriers (within the same culture) and psychological and emotional barriers seemed to have dampened the rise to prominent leadership, but these women persisted.

Ethnic Barriers

Women of Color: Phi. When asked about ethnic barriers, Phi said,

Yes, and yes. I think it is unfortunate ... I would say that that goes beyond into other industries as well. In my personal experience, I have been more successful in roles that were not reporting to another minority woman, unfortunately. Probably, I would say that if you were to tier the most challenging ... I have had a lot of jobs, so I have had the opportunity to work for a lot of people. If you were to tier the most challenging to the least challenging, the most challenging work experiences have been women of color followed by Caucasian women, followed by African American men or men of color, followed by White men, for some reason.

Women of Color: Lambda. Lambda commented,

Have I experienced barriers in higher ed? It is funny that you asked me that. I have been experiencing barriers from people of my same race. But other people of my race are trying to knock me down because I have been going very fast. But I do not ask for any of these things. I have just come in and worked. I really love what I do. That is it. As the director of the educator preparation program, I am just so thrilled that I can do all these trainings with the supervisors and do all these things. I do not know. But, yes, I have experienced some barriers coming from them. From people of my own race.

Emotional and Psychological Barriers

In this study, the women discussed emotional and psychological barriers. Their comments are as follows.

Women of Color: Kappa. Kappa stated,

This woman, she was extremely condescending. So, she was the greatest barrier that I had because she was condescending. She would go, “What, sweetie? What do you want, sweetie? Yes, dear. What do you need now?” She was not helpful at all. She was not somebody that was a mentor to me, nor was she ever helpful, allow me to get my job done.

Women of Color: Epsilon. Epsilon said,

Horrible. The person did not like that I was aspirational. I was where you are at, I was writing my dissertation. The day our relationship fell apart, I can remember it like it was yesterday. We were sitting in the office, and she was telling me that she thought I could, essentially, become the vice president since the vice president might be leaving. To be frank, in that institution, I did not want her job. I did not want that vice president job. There was a lot of disorder at that school, a lot of things that were not right.

Ownership of craftsmanship is critical to building a personal brand and setting oneself apart from other colleagues and professionals. The women in this study are life-long learners; therefore, the recurring theme that was constructed from their answers is strategic workmanship, including attending leadership forums and using the information to benefit their professional goals.

Strategic Workmanship

The participants discussed building a personal brand and strategic workmanship during their interviews.

Women of Color: Sigma. Sigma said,

Well, I attended a leadership academy for distance learning in Minneapolis, and it was a weeklong training, a sponsor to the instructional technology council. I finished that. I am an active member of the Michigan Library Association, the Michigan ALA association.

Women of Color: Tau. Tau commented,

I sought out more knowledge, and I wanted to go and work alongside Ronald Ferguson, who is one of the lecturers at Harvard Kennedy School. That experience was very good for me. I did that in 2008 and went for a summer and learned a lot, grew a lot.

Women of Color: Pi. When asked about strategic workmanship, Pi stated,

One that has been pivotal for me is the NAMME (National Association of Medical Minority Educators). It is a collection of people who are diversity officers, or they are tasked in some way, shape, or form working with underrepresented students in health profession schools.

Women of Color: Lambda said, “In higher education, I have gone to the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) conference.”

Women of Color: Chi replied, “I also have attended many national conferences, the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges accreditation.”

Women of Color: Alpha. Alpha reported,

The ASSCUE Millennium Leadership Institute. That is for individuals that are preparing for roles as presidents or senior leaders. So, I have been in that program. I have also been in the Harvard leadership development program. And I go to leadership development programs every year.

Women of Color: Phi. Phi said,

I have attended one of the American Council on Education (ACE) women leadership conferences for administrators of higher ed. I had the amazing opportunity last summer to spend about two months at Harvard in the leadership development programs for executives and education, immersive certificate program.

Regarding their higher education and career journey, there were a variety of responses, and several participants mentioned that their career paths were nontraditional while others reported following the traditional career path common in higher education leadership.

Career Paths

The participants discussed their traditional and nontraditional career paths. Their responses are as follows.

Nontraditional Journey

Women of Color: Epsilon. Epsilon stated,

I will just say I came in, in 2010. Initially, I thought I wanted to become a teacher.

Teaching meaning the faculty side of the house. What happened was, I did some research about careers in higher education and where there would be retirements. They have a 60% retirement rate in the next 20 years, which means there was going to be availability and efficacy; they handle a large minority population, and they are state-funded, where everyone else in the country is shrinking, educationally.

Traditional Journey

Women of Color: Sigma. Sigma said,

I decided to complete my undergraduate and go into library science, I do not know, it was like a perfect fit because I was like, “Oh my God, can I get paid to do this?” Because library science was always something that was close and dear to my heart. Then having the ability to not have just library, but information science, that was like the ultimate fit for me. From there, I was able to land positions where I could use my skills. I have a second master’s in instructional technology. While I was doing that, I was working at Lansing Community College, and one of the responsibilities was to develop a training for the whole college. So, we developed a training, and we trained the whole college on the implementation.

Women of Color: Kappa. Kappa stated,

Well, I first started as an instructor and then I became the program director. So I got to oversee two different sites. And then during that time, I was working on my PhD, then I was offered the night dean, associate dean position. And then, I was up for the dean position, but I relocated and went to another place. So, when I went to the new school, I was offered the director of education position at that school. And I stayed in that position for a few years. And then when I came back to Detroit, that is when I came to Wayne County, and I was the assistant to the vice-chancellor and then assistant vice-chancellor and then provost and district provost.

Women of Color: Gamma. Gamma replied,

So, my undergrad is in political science. I have a master’s in criminal justice. I worked in precollege programs many years while in college, after that, and did work on ... And I did

not want to work with young people after they were in the system. That became really clear to me. I am going to impact lives; I want it before they were impacted by the criminal justice system. So, through that experience, I decided to go back to school, get up and work on a master's towards higher ed, and I took enough credits for the master's but transitioned that to a PhD program at UNC Greensboro. That is how I ended up in North Carolina. I was in the dean's office, the assistant director teaching fellows, student advising, and recruitment center, and I got an academic position at the University of Oklahoma, where I started my assistantship as my first academic position. Not assistantship, assistant professor.

Women of Color: Delta. Delta said,

So, at 19, in the spring of 1988, I believe, I started at a liberal arts college. So that is where I started my services career. I was an adjunct for about five years until I got my career services coordinator position. I did that for almost four years, and then I transferred over to ... I missed being on a university campus. I really missed that. So, then I am a director of the career office for the college of business.

Women of Color: Tau. Tau said,

I went through a leadership mentoring institute through the American Association of Blacks in Higher Ed. So everything we learned was all about really how to move through the culture of higher ed, how to advance in a different way about emotional behavioral pieces and how that impacts your path overall.

Women of Color: Iota. Iota stated,

I started doing some part-time work for K–12. I was doing a position called parent educator and then I went over to Penn Valley Community College. Got my first faculty position, case manager, and then moved from there to the program director.

Women of Color: Pi. Pi said,

I took the position in admissions and financial aid but was also a teacher's assistant. I went from there to the program position at Carnegie Mellon, working with our minority student organizations, engaging alumni in our recruitment events. Or as sort of recruitment ambassadors, I was assistant dean. So, I was director of admissions, financial aid, and diversity programs. Then went from that position into the one that I have now, the assistant vice-chancellorship.

Women of Color: Omicron. Omicron said,

I started my career at the Federal Reserve Bank of New York. And then from there, I moved back home and worked in state finances, including in the state legislature and in the executive branch of state government running the state board of finance for five years, then I transitioned to local government. And so I just decided that I wanted to make a move out of that high-level arena and into something new. And that is when this higher education opportunity came to me, and I decided I wanted to try something different and be home in my home city. So, I have not looked back. I have been in this role since June, and obviously, I have a ton to learn about higher education, but the actual fundamentals of finance and planning and management and operations are all very similar.

Women of Color: Alpha. Alpha commented,

I have been in higher ed now for more than 25 years, and I started as a young faculty member, tenure track faculty member, first female tenure track faculty member in the history of Mississippi State University's College of Engineering. And then, I also started as the first African American female on the tenure track as well. So I became an associate dean for research and graduate studies, and I became a department head at the University of Seminole Florida, which is a very large institution and it was the eighth largest institution effectiveness department in the nation a program officer at the National Science Foundation. Then I moved from being a program officer to being associate provost, associate provost to associate vice president, and I was associate vice president for academic affairs there for two years. And then, I became vice president there. And then, after three years serving as vice president, I was now a great candidate for the provost and senior vice president role.

The numbers that the participants shared represented women of color varied from less than five to approximately 10 women of color at a community college and a PWI. Those numbers are different at an HBCU where there was greater than 10 women of color in a leadership role.

Women of Color: Epsilon. Epsilon reported,

The institution has a 30% minority, but I will tell you that they are suffering at the administrative level, to the extent that we are trying to get a grant to hire faculty and staff.

I tried to count it, but I think we are just three. I am the only senior level.

Women of Color: Sigma said, "For senior-level position, I consider those like the vice-chancellors and the campus president. We have three. Now, mid-level, I guess that will be more considered like our dean-level positions, and I say it is about at least 10."

Women of Color: Chi. Chi said,

I would say at least 24, 25, if not more, since we work at an HBCU, but our chancellors are African American. Two of our vice-chancellors are African American. Two of the deans, we have three or four associate vice-chancellors or assistants, and then several directors throughout the university, and I probably missed some, but I would say when I just tried to think about it, at least 25 that are serving as directors, assistant or associate vice-chancellors, or a dean or vice-chancellor and the interim chancellor.

Women of Color: Lambda said, “Fewer than 75% are Hispanic, yet the representation of Hispanic leaders is not there. All our deans are White. All our top manager positions are White.”

Women of Color: Pi reported, “We have our acting dean of our honors college, who is a Black woman. Our dean of our school of education, secretary of the board of trustees, and senior vice-chancellor is a Black woman.”

Women of Color: Theta. Theta stated,

I was the only female [vice president] VP at my institution. And then we hired another VP, which I was grateful to have that. And then we have our deans, I will not say it is 50/50, but I do think that my president, which is a female and the first female president of a 144-year-old institution, is cognizant of that.

The professional workplace can present many challenges that an employee faces on any given day. When it comes to professional challenges, these participants experienced balancing personal life with professional, network groups, and different types of preconceived isms that are attached to the professional environment.

Women of Color: Kappa. Kappa reported,

Personal challenges. Well, I guess probably trying to make sure to squeezing everything in, having balance, make sure to take time to do things for myself, and take time to do things for my parents, my daughter, and other loved ones in my life too. So that is the greatest thing. It is to always make sure to have some balance.

Women of Color: Mu. Mu said,

A challenge is finding those mentors and having ... After a certain age, people do not look at you as someone who needs to be mentored or even someone who needs to be included. And so, I call them my isms, racism, sexism, weight ism, lack of PhD ism, even color ism. I am probably missing a few. And so, when you look at me, I represent all the isms, and everybody always has a reason. "Oh, she is too old" or "oh, she is a female," there is always something. So even amongst our people, "I do not like her because she is fat," or "I do not like her because she's old" or "I just want to work with the young people."

Women of Color: Epsilon. Epsilon said,

I think that is the hugest professional challenge, is that I cannot. It was not any manager. I feel like I had decent managers, good people trying to do good work, but everywhere I went ... Some of that is institutional choice. I am not working at Princeton. But just general lack of support, this idea of throw me to the wolves and saying do not let them eat you.

Women of Color: Omicron. Omicron replied,

I would say that you probably run into this a lot with the women that you are interviewing, but the difference, I think it is the perception of how ambitious women are perceived relative to their male counterparts. And so that is just a, it is a continuous challenge that I have noticed, notice more and more as I get, as I move up in my career,

didn't notice it as much when I started or even mid-level. But now that I am in higher levels, I have noticed men and women are treated differently, and I do not just mean from their bosses, but I mean from their peers as well. So that is something that you must appreciate and acknowledge and look back and say, "Okay, all right, that is how that is perceived." You must find the balance because we are ambitious women, and we are just going to push, push, push, and that sometimes can be looked at in a negative light.

Women of Color: Phi. Phi said,

Gosh, there is a myriad. I have worked long enough in professional jobs to have experienced being asked to get coffee as a Black woman who looks like I am, like I do. Okay? I mean, you have seen my skin tone, inside White organizations. I have walked in on conversations regarding coworkers with things being said when people did not realize who I was and had to make the choice in my life whether I was going to say, "Excuse me, but you're making me uncomfortable, and oh, by the way, I am Black in case you did not know," and I have done that. I have absolutely experienced misogyny and misogynoir, where Black men I work saying things to me like, "Ooh, you are talking in the town. Is it your time of the month?" I have been asked that. I have been told, especially in my younger days and before I gave up makeup and hair brushing pat on the head, I guess by White men I work with, some of them who I outranked. But you are young. You are pretty, and I knew exactly what they meant. I am okay, for I am an acceptable Black woman. I have been asked if my hair is straightened with a perm, with chemicals or other ways. When I go to work like this and save you, nobody really cares. Nobody. I walked into some days with my head still wrapped, and people would be like, "Hey, what is up?"

Women of Color: Alpha. Alpha said,

Well, most of the time I overcome my challenges with transparency in my communication style. I like to be very transparent. And when we are encountering a problem, I usually discuss exactly what it is. For example, if my president and I were still getting to know each other and if I sense that there's a tone or concern in his voice, I usually respond by saying, "Listen, it is not my goal to frustrate you. It is simply my goal to get the task completed." So, I am very much a transparent communicator. And I think that individuals have grown to respect that about me because I start every sentence by saying, "In the spirit of full transparency." And then I share with them what I am thinking. But that is my biggest approach to challenges. I also must tell myself, "Every challenge is not worth addressing." So, I must make sure that I do not spend my energy just ... Because there are several microaggressions in our environment, and they are not just because of race or gender. There are microaggressions for so many reasons and so you must decide, I think, as to which ones you are going to allow to command your attention.

Below, the responses from the women of color ranged from evoking their faith, using mind over matter to push forward, thinking strategically, and increasing knowledge. These were the ways in which these women overcame their barriers.

Women of Color: Delta. Delta replied,

Through grit and persistence. I mean, I do. I have a lot of grit and persistence. I mean, I am a sensitive person as well. So, if I have a program that is not successful, I will be kind of glum about it for 30 seconds. And then I will approach it in a different way. I will approach it in a different way. Sometimes that means reevaluating what I think success is for it. So, grit and persistence.

Women of Color: Omicron. Omicron said,

So, I think getting back to that, I think I just must make sure that my desire to get things done and see results in my high expectations is not perceived as being too pushy or stepping on too many toes. So, I think just trying to find that balance is really key to overcoming that challenge, because obviously, you are not going to stop becoming who you are and being who you are. So, it is just a matter of having self-awareness and trying to hold back when you must.

Women of Color: Chi. Chi reported,

I think my challenge is just keep ... Keep getting up, and you keep coming back, and I always stepped back and tried to say, what happened here? What could I have done differently? How did I get here? How did I miss that step? And then I try to analyze it and try to make sure that I do not put myself in that situation again. And I always think it is important to be able to say, "Hey, I am sorry, my bad, I missed that one." I do not ... I think I always try to live my life that I think people know I am going to give a thousand percent, but I am human perfect, not perfect. So, when I dropped the ball, I would hope people would say, "Hey, that is not like her, but you know..." I guess I just try to keep up, and I try to learn from it, and I try to say, "What could I have done and try to improve on that."

Women of Color: Lambda. Lambda said,

By being knowledgeable, knowing my stuff, and the first opportunity I have, I will show you what I can do and what I know. I stay informed. I keep up, I keep up with things because I always feel like I must work extra hard, double hard. I must show more than other people do just to be on the same playing field with you.

Women of Color: Pi. Pi said,

I always figure that if there is a roadblock, if the door is closed, I am going to look for a window. I will try to dig a tunnel underneath. Again, for me, it becomes relationships, right? Because other people have resources. Who else can you talk to who can help you with a thing so that you can get done what you need to get done? For example, there was a program that I wanted to put in place, and it was going to cost a chunk of money. It was like, can I have this chunk of money? No, you can have this little bit of money. Okay, well, I got people.

Institutional challenges and barriers have varied depending on what institution a person has worked; however, these women faced challenges from race, gender, education, resistance to change, and budgeting, which all played a factor for these women at their institutions.

Women of Color: Lambda. Lambda reported,

Yes. Because this university still has that philosophy or mentality that White people are the only ones that rule here. But Dr. Steve Bain, which is our dean, he is ... He said to me, "Top administration, provost, president is freaking out." They're looking at him like, "You're not a regular gringo. You are not a regular White person. Why are you advocating so much for minorities?" There are institutional challenges, yes, because you are not accepted into that top club, elite club. They do not tell you it is because of your race, but you just feel that it is. That is it. Thank you for saying that because that is exactly ... We will have to talk more, but yeah, in my dissertation. It is not readily verbalized. No. But as a minority, you feel it. It is unexplainable.

Women of Color: Gamma. Gamma said,

Institutional in terms of ... Change is hard. People and organizations, we often speak we want change, and then when it is time to walk this work of change, people are not always willing to go for that walk. Walk the talk is what I say. So, you confront that in your leadership role, where you are going to be tested. You are ready to move, people are not ready to move, or it is this back and forth. It is a dance. And that is from an institutional level that can be ... And then as a woman of color, the workaround sometimes people will attempt to do, the back-channel communication. How do you respond to that? Or how do you respond when your integrity is being attacked? This gets to who are you? How do you stand still? Stand still during the storm? And the storm is here. How do you stand still in it? Right. So, the institutional barriers sometimes will be people, the reluctance to change, to move the organization. It is the ideal, "Let us talk about it," but then it is time to act on it, that is hard. Right now, in this moment, we will see what happens in terms of all this racial unrest, and then coupled with the COVID pandemic, it is creating all sorts of anxieties and stress.

Women of Color: Delta. Delta replied,

As an 18-year professional, let us see. But keeping in mind we have 45 minutes, right? Well, I would say most of it has been ... What I have seen is budget changes. Every time I go to an institution, we rise and fall by enrollment, and that is so true. I have been through a couple of ... This happened at a couple of institutions where I was, where we got really lean, and we had to give money back to like Penn State, for example. At one time, we were told, filters down that we have got to give back like 2.5 million. So, where is that going to come from? I was in a student affairs department that had like six departments under it, and everybody was like, "Is it going to be mine? Is it going to be

my department? What are the cuts going to be?" So, there would maybe be a couple of thousand to 40,000 for some. We all had different budgets. We were under one umbrella, but all had different budgets. So, through cobbling through the different things, each department was able to give back. That happened. That happened most recently last year at where I am now, and it is happening again this year. Where is the money going to come from? Yeah. So, hiring freezes, right? So, I have been through a couple of hiring freezes.

Women of Color: Tau. Tau stated,

Yes, I have. I think that that is the work that we all experience, depending on what lane you are in. But yes, I have. I think for the most part, it is about doing a lot of listening and seeing what that individual institution wants. Even though they may not want what you want, which might look like a barrier. I just find it as another way to either learn who I am dealing with, that institution, or learn ways around the barrier so I can get whatever I need to get accomplished. So, I do not stay there long, in other words. When I know who you are, thank you for sharing with me who you are, and I appreciate that. I know how to use you. I know how to talk to you. I know how to report out to you. And then, I find ways to get it done.

Women of Color: Omicron. Omicron said,

I have been very lucky in my career and I have had such great opportunities. So, I really, and I think part of it is generational too. I really cannot complain about challenges and barriers only because I feel like I have gotten, I have progressed well. And so, I felt thankful for that. So, yeah, I cannot really think of anything related to the glass ceiling that people talk about. I feel like, for me, I was able to, like I mentioned, I got appointed

to my dream job in 2019, and I really feel like I brokered through the glass ceiling. I will say that the person that, the governor that appointed me to that position was a Latina. So that was interesting, getting to your questions above. I did not know her before she appointed me. But yeah, it was a great experience, and I feel good about that in my career that I was able to get to that highest level in my field.

Women of Color: Alpha. Alpha said,

Well, certainly when you change organizations as frequently as I have ... This is my fifth institution, but my sixth job. So, when you are new, I think you naturally have organizational challenges. Those where individuals say, “Well, she is new. She does not know” or just a number of things like that. So, I call it inertia, the inertia within a system. You are certainly going to encounter that as an institutional barrier. I think other than that, it may be just not being in the communication loop within an institution. Sometimes conversations are happening, and things are occurring, and you are saying, “Wait a minute, I wasn’t aware of that.” I call that an institutional barrier because that is just how higher ed is. And communication sometimes is not the best.

The women of color varied about challenges in their leadership career path such as perception and work-life balance demands. These demands had these women trying to piece together the demands of being a professional individual and the demands of being a wife or mother.

Work-Life Balance

Women of Color: Omicron. When asked about the work-life balance, Omicron said,

Yeah, I am sure you are going to hear this one quite a bit, but the family-work-life balance is something that is a constant struggle. So, I have two young teenagers. And so,

it has eased up a bit because they are a little more independent, but I do not know if you have a family, you are young. But the demands of running a family household and wanting to be there for your kids and then maintaining a high-level career is just a constant challenge.

Women of Color: Gamma stated, “Personal. Sometimes I think I give too much in terms of not better balancing my personal and professional life.”

Perceptions

Women of Color: Lambda. Lambda said about perceptions and challenges,

Personal challenges, just the personal challenge is feeling like I am not good enough, but not because of what I do not know, but because of my race. Absolutely. Like Dr. Bain told me, he said, “Remember this. You are here. Whenever you ...” And I knew this, and I know this. He told me, “Remember, if you ever question yourself, ‘Why am I here,’ you are here for a reason. We did not pick you off from the street. You are here. You are sitting at this leadership team table for a reason.” They did not pick me from the street. I am here because they know I can do this job but, I do not know, you just cannot act on it. I am thinking, “Wow, it is weird.” You are right. You cannot explain it. You cannot explain this feeling. Nobody is telling you, and nobody’s laughing at you, nobody is saying anything to you, but you just feel it. But you know what is helping me. He is White, so he gives me that power. This is interesting. Whenever a Mexican or a minority woman is married to a White guy, it feels like they have elevated you. It is weird.

Women of Color: Pi. Pi said,

I have always worked for predominately White institutions, and challenges are going to come. They are people who do not think that you know what you are doing, or they do

not think that you know what you are talking about. I have had a boss or two that were unsupportive, especially in the diversity space. It is like they do it because they know they must, but they do not necessarily believe in it. So that was a challenge for sure.

Yeah. Yeah. I had a bully boss at one point. It was the same unsupportive guy.

Women of Color: Chi. Chi stated,

I would say yes. There have been some institutional challenges and barriers. I think as an administrator at an HBCU, again, we are expected to wear multiple hats. And I do not think our salaries are always comparable to what some of our colleagues at our other similar sister institution sizes are. But I think that has been some of an institutional barrier, just not getting the necessary resources and where ... that we should get, but still having to respond and provide all the programs and services that other universities are providing.

Describe the Culture of Your Institution: Is Diversity Apparent?

Academia culture was viewed in different ways from the women of color. Culture was expressed from these women that had to deal with skin complexion, gender, wealth, or the elites, and dealing with antiracism at the campuses. When looking at diversity, some of these women shared that the institution did not focus on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) or Black Lives Matter.

Women of Color: Lambda. Lambda said,

No, the culture is an unspoken, discriminatory culture, unspoken. It is like the elephant in the room. We all know it is there, but no one talks about it. The minority of people here have not yet gotten up in arms and said, "Enough." They have not. I feel that I am one of

those that are saying, “Let us change the narrative here” by just my presence, by just being here. I want a seat at the table. I want to be part of the decision making here.

Women of Color: Sigma. Sigma responded,

Diversity is apparent with the staff and faculty, they make sure of that, but as far as the culture of our institution, it is so hard to describe. I find a lot of people in leadership that I would not necessarily put in leadership because it is just so much good talent at our university that I just feel like it is not being tapped into. Sometimes I feel like we are upside down in some of the roles that we have.

Women of Color: Epsilon. Epsilon stated,

We will say 20% of that is Latinx, and 10% is African American, which is still a totally different world situation because Latinx students do not respond or act the same as African American students. We also are considered a leading school in LGBTQ, which is not my strength area. I will just put it out there. If I put those letters in the wrong order, I apologize. There is a lot of comfort here, which is odd, as a woman in college that was traditionally Caucasian. It is very comfortable for LGBTQ women, Caucasian women. We are trying to work through all of that. Black Lives Matter and the board of trustees just started an institutional racism and integrity board, or something like that, literally like three weeks ago, because we have got some real problems. From my standpoint as an employee of the institution, the biggest problem to me, selfishly, because for me, it is about the business of the institution, is that we do not have a culturally inclusive curriculum. You cannot lead a women’s institution that sells on private women’s ... Not even hoity-totty, but our special sauce is that we make women leaders, and you do not have any of the brown leaders in the curriculum. We need some.

Women of Color: Tau. Tau commented,

It is very elite, very wealthy. What else would I tell you? It is predominantly White. The average age of a student is, somewhere I think, around 20 years old. So, we get a lot of high school graduates. So, I think the mean might be ... It might be between 20 and 26 years old. Young. So that is like the main ones. What else can I share? To get things done, it really must come from the state level. Since I am a state person, I come with a state perspective, and I have worked with the coordinating board for years and still work with them now in different work—Texas Higher Education Board? We still partner up to do lots of work related to guided pathways and math pathways and just different things around that realm. In the environment that I am in, it is really, to me, it has helped me to influence change because I have been a changemaker at the state level. I could see how it would have been more challenging for someone who did not come with that set of skills.

Women of Color: Pi. Pi said,

Yeah, it is interesting because I think all our institutions are going through some stuff right now. Between COVID-19 and George Floyd's murder, and now everybody wants to look at antiracism. Which is wonderful. But there are people who, they might have a little bit of vocabulary, but that is all they have, and they are trying to mount initiatives. So, trying to keep them from harming people with good intentions. And other people who, I have got one that wants a comprehensive plan for his students right now. It is just like, you know what? I have just come out of a legit depression behind all this stuff. You need to give me a minute. Just step off.

Women of Color: Theta. Theta responded,

Diversity is apparent at my current institution. And it is something that we talk about. It is something that we have talked about on a leadership level. And we began talking about it last year, on diversity and inclusion. And we were talking about it from a perspective of what would that look like if an HBCU is moving the needle with conversation around diversity and inclusion because it is normally an organization that does not look like us, that is talking about it. But if we are talking about it internally, what does that mean exactly? And how do we implement it across the institution that someone would come in and say, “Yes, this is an HBCU, but this is a very diverse HBCU.” And I think that is extremely important when leadership can lead it and implement it. So often I think of Richard Wright, “I hear what you say, but I see what you do.” And they are two different things.

Women of Color: Alpha. Alpha commented,

My culture, my institution is great. This is the best culture. We operate like a family. We talk about family. We have family values of respect and diversity. At the same time, we have an environment where everyone is comfortable with high expectations. And everyone understands that it truly takes a sustained effort to get things done and keep things going. So, I love the fact that truly we are a family. One of the things that we ... [college name] is described as a national treasure because of its architecture and just several things. But I think it is a national treasure because of its culture.

These women shared their strengths and weaknesses as professionals and focused on areas that needed improvement in their professional career as a leader. Some expressed building a strong relationship, thinking strategically, and becoming stagnate at an institution.

Women of Color: Theta. Theta said,

My strength, I think, are my interpersonal skills, is my ability to speak with someone that has a billion dollars to someone that is rubbing two nickels together to make it work. The ability to relate along that spectrum, I think helps me in my work with building relationships. I think that is a strength of mine and being strategic and in engagement with that. So, the critical thinking of moving forward for securing philanthropy at the different mediums, whether it is a widow or if it is the CEO. It is meeting them where they are, have the conversation. I really think that is my strength. Working with individuals. What I think is a weakness, which is a strong weakness, is that when we are sitting around the table, when leadership is sitting around the table, I do not feel like I must constantly talk. I do not feel like I must always share my opinion. And I know through conversations with my boss, who is a woman. She is like, "You need to speak up." And I was like, "But so many people speak up, and they're not saying anything. I am okay with not speaking up." And she is like, "But you need to because you do have something to say." And I said, "I hear you. When I feel it is appropriate."

Women of Color: Kappa. Kappa commented,

Well, my biggest disappointment really was that in having a Black woman supervisor that was not a positive role model or mentor. That was really a big disappointment, especially to be ... Yeah, I was the only other Black woman. And I was the dean of education or director of education, and the other directors of education for other campuses always noticed how she was with me, like, "Why is she that way with you?" "I don't know." So that was disappointing and kind of hurtful. And then what was the other thing you asked about? Yeah. So, she was the biggest disappointment because when I moved down there to go to work in Florida, I thought I was going to live down here for the rest of my life,

and this was it. And I was never coming back to cold Detroit, but I could not wait to get out of there, away from her. And so, your greatest successes ... I mean, your greatest strengths. Greatest strengths. My personal strength?

Women of Color: Omicron. Omicron said,

So, I would say that my strengths and my successes have really stemmed from my ability to help organizations think strategically and long term as it relates to their finances. To me, I think that is one of the strengths in my career and that I bring to organizations. And major disappointments, I am pleased with my career and where it has led me. And so, I feel really blessed. I do not have any major disappointments. I am just, I am really pleased with where I am and what I am bringing to my current institution. I look forward to learning more about higher ed and staying here for a while.

Women of Color: Chi. Chi said,

I think my strength and it is probably my weak ... could be my weakness too, but my strength has been that I have really grown and blossomed in one place. Most of my professional career has been at this university. And so, whether I was looking for an opportunity to grow or not, I guess I was not challenged to just interview or go somewhere else. At home, my mother's here, my family's here so comfortable for me. And I was able to kind of go up the ranks. I think that is a strength. Some people might ... I sometimes I wonder what you could ... What else could you have accomplished? Or what could you have done? Had you gone to other universities or done other things, but then it is also my strength because I know the culture, I know the people. And I think that has been instrumental in my ability to sustain. And so that would be, I guess you kind of look at it. Like I said, in my faith, you are where God wants you to be those doors. I think

if I were supposed to be somewhere else, those doors would open, like the opportunities I have grown. I have learned stuff. I have been places and done things that I probably could not have envisioned 30 years ago when my mentor called and said, “Hey, we just got a grant, I think you would be great for this position, interview for it.”

Women of Color: Alpha. Alpha said,

I think my strengths are certainly in strategic thinking. And what I mean by that is, I think it is important to have a strategy for everything. That whole, “How do you get to yes?” “How do you negotiate?” These are all strategic thoughts. “What’s the best way to say this to influence someone?” I mean, strategy, to me, is just the art of ensuring that you can efficiently and effectively reach an outcome. So, I think strategic thinking is one. I also think I am a transformational leader. I use a transformational leadership style, which allows people to become excited and engaged in making change. And I am happy about that because that allows us to do what I call achieve unprecedented successes at an accelerated pace. So, be more successful than we have ever been in a shorter period. And so, I think those are my strengths. I am very relationship-centric. I care about people. I take the time to establish relationships with people. And that matters in the workplace because everyone does not do that. And so, it helps you to stand out when you do.

Women of Color: Phi. Phi said,

I think my greatest strength is the inherent ability to see the big picture and look at the impact across any institution I have served, coupled with the absolute ability to articulate ideas and programs in a succinct and engaging way. I mean, those are my strengths. I can write, I know that. I think my biggest weakness is my impatience. I want to move things right now. That is something I have learned to control. I want to do it right now, right

now, right now, and needing to step back and know that inherent ability to see the big picture and articulate ideas needs to be tempered with the opinions of others, and the considerations that while this may be the right thing to do, it might not be the right time. I will tell you the thing ... I will tell you both. My greatest success, and people laugh when I say I still feel like this is my greatest success. Early on in my career, I was working for American Red Cross and the city had broken relationships with the Red Cross and New Orleans as well as before Katrina and Hurricane George were coming and nobody believed in the evacuation. We had a mayor who was saying, "Fill your tub with water, and the big storm was coming," which turned out not to be the big storm. It came much later in Katrina.

Women of Color: Sigma. Sigma commented,

Well, I can honestly say I love what I do, and I feel like the libraries are so much further than they were when I first got there and everything. I am proud of the fact that now I have established this relationship with the staff. A lot of times different staff members would do things that they probably would not do for someone else, but I think we work so much better as a team now. And that is huge for us to move forward.

Women of Color: Iota. Iota said,

I would say my greatest strengths would be being nimble and tenacious. My mother, with not using a wide vocabulary, would say I am a jack-of-all-trades, but I do not limit myself. So that has been a strength because I have ... My resume for just being at [college name] now includes workforce development, executive leadership, a dean, resource development, instruction, student services, institutional advancement, academic program development, and innovating programs that this district had never seen that I was an

integral part of being able to implement here. And that is because of those strengths, I believe. I would say my greatest weakness is not calling it done when it is done. And I will say probably my biggest failure in this district is because of that. I had a program and linked to the economy and the lack of knowledge of that industry, I held onto a project that the bottom ended up falling out because the economy could not sustain it. From that, I learned, like I told you even on the position where I just had ... At first, I was pushing. Giving all these proposals, and this is the kind of leader I am going to be, and this is how we can work together. And then it was a light bulb. Remember, some stuff, not that often, you have just got to cut it, package it, call it what it is, and move on. I would say that is probably the strongest weakness that I have. And the strength that I use to offset that is collaboration with other strong personalities that are going to tell me the truth.

Chapter 5: Summary, Implications, and Recommendations

This chapter concludes the research by providing a summation of the study, implications for change, and future research recommendations. Furthermore, this chapter reviews the study's purpose and presents the connections between the findings and literature review. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the voices, experiences, and factors promoting the leadership career paths of senior-level women of color in higher education. Also, to capture senior-level women of color's voices on how they overcame the barriers and challenges to breaking the glass ceiling to their leadership career paths in higher education.

This last chapter of the dissertation synthesizes the women of color's viewpoints of the barriers and challenges they face working at senior-level higher education. The study's 15 participants shared their lived experiences about establishing a career path, breaking the glass ceiling, and overcoming those challenges. The data gathered from this research will help assist higher-learning institutions in administering techniques and strategies to help HR committees create an open-door policy that is intentional on hiring, recruiting, and retaining a diverse leadership population of women of color. Also, the study addressed information and provided data for future minority women seeking a leadership role. This study's results will help all women strategize their journeys and career path to senior-level leadership positions in higher education.

Study Overview

Phenomenological research examines consciousness experiences from a first-person perspective (Creswell, 2017; Merleau-Ponty, 2012; Smith, 2013). This research type goes beyond the surface to gain a deeper depth of a person's lived experiences. Phenomenology (Creswell, 2017; Maxwell, 2013) permits researchers to ask open-ended, semistructured

questions to ensure the same foundational questions are being asked while allowing latitude for the participant's experiences on their rise to success to be untainted by the researcher's ideas. Ultimately, phenomenology obtains the underlying meaning of experience (Creswell, 2017). It categorizes the participants' experiences with the phenomenon to best define the topics identified and code as structures develop.

Study Procedures

I collected data using a qualitative research method that generally involves observation, probing interviews, document review, or a combination of these methods to ascertain an understanding of the experiences of those individuals participating or processes reviewed as a part of a study (Creswell, 2017; Roberts, 2010). Note, due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, face-to-face interviews were not a viable option. Therefore, Zoom technology was used to record 15 interviews with women of color in mid- and senior-level positions at community colleges, HBCUs, and PWIs. The 15 women of color shared their experiences and challenges in higher education.

Participants

The women of color were from the following states: California, Louisiana, Maryland, Michigan, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Texas. Nine held doctoral degrees, five held graduate degrees, and one held an undergraduate degree. Their degrees were from various disciplines, such as business administration, criminal justice, education, early childhood, engineering, finance, health sciences, library science, and psychology. The diverse disciplines provided an array of perspectives across higher education. The women of color's teaching experience ranged from three to 10 years of secondary and postsecondary education.

Research Questions and Alignment with Recurring Themes

The following research questions guided this study. The reoccurring themes to answer the research questions are also included.

Q1. What do senior-level women of color perceive to be the challenges of breaking the glass ceiling in higher education? Based on their responses, the following recurring themes emerged: (a) institutional perceptions, (b) unresponsive to change, (c) women of color “fix it,” and (d) lack of communication.

Q2. What are senior-level women of color perceptions of establishing a career path in higher education? The following themes emerged from their responses: (a) work-life balance, (b) self-awareness, (c) implementing a vocational and strategic plan, and (d) flexibility and mobility.

Q3. What do senior-level women of color perceive as the factors to overcoming barriers and challenges in breaking the glass ceiling? Based on their responses, the following were identified: (a) supportive family unit, (b) leadership selectivity, and (c) implementing vocation and strategic plan.

Summary of the Research Findings

Foreclosures: Purveyors of Heritage

An analysis of the data generated several recurring themes; however, Josselson’s (1987) identity theory, foreclosures: purveyors of heritage, emerged as the all-encompassing theme. Josselson’s (1987) emergent theory research focused on identity development, specifically with women, and when faced with adversity, they assimilate crisis into their identity. Upon discovery, Josselson documented that women portrayed similar ways to the identity theory seen in Marcia’s (1966) theoretical framework. The work of Josselson provides a different perspective to view the process of identity development specifically for women. This theory is congruent with women of

color in this study; they are highly valued, follow family traditions, and meet familial expectations. They pursued their goals with a single-minded determination without doubt or hesitation. Also, the women of color's responses were in line with family traditions and meeting familial expectations.

Black Feminist Framework

Another emergent theme that was congruent with the research study was Patricia Hill Collins's Black feminist framework. According to Collins (2002), "Once inside [an organization], many Black women realize much more than getting hired is required to change" (p. 281). Other themes that emerged from the study were institutional perceptions, unresponsiveness to change, women of color "fix it," and lack of communication. Josselson's foreclosure theory and Collins's Black feminist theory are compatible with the data gathered from this research.

Interpretation of Women of Color Responses

The women of color who have participated in the study shared their voices and lived experiences on senior-leadership in higher education. Based on their responses, reoccurring themes emerged, supporting answers to this study's three research questions. Themes that were mentioned throughout this section are (a) institutional perceptions, (b) unresponsive to change, (c) women of color "fit it" (d) lack of communication, (e) work-life balance, (f) self-awareness, (g) implementing a vocational and strategic plan, (h) flexibility and mobility, (i) supportive family unit, and (j) leadership selectivity.

Institutional Perceptions

The women of color conveyed that institutional perceptions were barriers and challenges to their leadership career path in higher education. These women expressed their emotions during the interview, especially for the women of color who work at a PWI.

All the participants discussed institutional perceptions. According to the responses, some women of color are still experiencing institution perception from various colleagues at their perspective institution.

Chickering and Reisser (1972) discussed the importance of managing emotions as one of their vectors. Managing emotions is when a person becomes aware of their feelings and how to manage their feelings. As a woman of color, managing emotions, developing competence, and establishing identity are exhausting. Patton and Catching (2009) capture and speak to Chickering's three vectors. My White colleagues do not deal with these types of situations nearly as much. They do not have to prove anything because their script says they are credible before speaking one word. I sometimes feel as if I spend much of my time explaining my credentials when instead, it could be spent disseminating knowledge about the subject matter at hand. I must work twice as hard on my teaching, all the while knowing that few extrinsic rewards will follow. The result is that, on many occasions, I feel frustrated, exhausted, and drained mentally, physically, spiritually, and emotionally.

Unresponsive to Change

According to participants, they shared that administrators respond to women of color, which impacts changes that these women are trying to achieve. When administrators continue to respond negatively to the fear of change or loss of control, the women of color experience negative feedback or derogatory remarks, depending on what department or division within the

institution can also become a barrier and impede a leadership career path. One administrator expressed that the senior-level team did not see value in her department, making it harder for change.

Women of Color “Fix It”

The idea or concept of “fix it” was a response that the women stated as one reason for being in specific roles or hired. For instance, a participant said that they think they hire Black women to “fix it” and give them arduous, insurmountable tasks to fix, and if the task or project is not completed to the satisfaction of the status quo, then the response is “Oh, we hired a woman of color.” Also, the women of color must find another way to resolve the problem when confronting barriers. African American women have encountered challenges simply because of their race and gender that have magnified their difficulty obtaining employment (Dubois & Dumenil, 2009).

Lack of Communication

In this study, the women of color found that communication was withheld from them and made for barriers and challenges at work. Conversely, to duplicate the lack of communication, the women of color found creating a transparent atmosphere could alleviate the workplace’s obstacles. Another caveat that the participants spoke about was when to address something and knowing when not to handle something. The lack of communication was seen when communicating data about salary or promotions. A participant stated that when she asked about more money, the negative communication was that she was already getting more.

Work-Life Balance

Ngunjiri and Hernandez’s (2017) autoethnography research examined social identities with immigrant women of color leaders at PWIs and created a supportive environment to help

develop and prepare authentic leaders. The women of color in this study expressed that it is a constant battle for a work-life balance. According to a Harvard Business Review article written by Washington and Roberts (2019), the authors stated these include microaggressions, double standards, and unconscious bias, to name a few. A 2006 survey of employees from five large U.S. companies found that women of color are most likely to experience workplace harassment among all groups (Washington & Roberts, 2019). They are often held to a much higher standard than their White and male peers and presumed to be less qualified despite their credentials, work product, or business results. Finding the right balance between personal and work-life is harder for women of color to balance those worlds and leaves women of color sometimes at a disadvantage instead of advancement.

Self-Awareness

Each participant provided their perspective on self-awareness, but self-awareness for women of color in the study understood their skill sets and what they can bring to the table. Their degree and work experiences made them more aware of themselves. Also, having a sense of self-awareness provides a foundation for the participants to embrace the emotions or feelings. The participant stated, “trying to hold back your emotions and feelings is a must.” So, self-awareness can be a challenge but also an advantage to overcomes those barriers.

Implementing a Vocational and Strategic Plan and Flexibility and Mobility

Lammers and Gast (2017) stated that women in leadership are not represented at top-ranking positions, and men hold most management positions. Lammers and Gast asked the poignant questions that female leadership had advantages that affect, support, and influence additional women to assume leadership roles. The benefits of having a strategic plan and knowing one’s vocation was critical for these women of color in senior-level positions in

academia. It was clearly stated and understood by the participants that one has to embrace their vision and calling. Once the participants embraced their vocation, having the plan implemented proved beneficial for this study's women of color. Part of the strategic plan was to ensure that a person was open, flexible, and mobile in academia. Being flexible is having an open mindset to work in a different department or perhaps work on a project that is not in their wheelhouse. Being mobile to transfer to an opening in another institution in another state is critical to fulfilling the strategic plan.

Supportive Family Unit

In this study, the women interviewed had an overwhelming response when they stated that having a supportive family unit that included parents, aunts, mentors, a previous leader, and an organization helped propel them to senior positions. The supporting family unit helped with household activities, making a phone call, or sending an email to gain a different perspective from mentors, previous leaders, or organization members to provide reliable and trustworthy feedback.

Leadership Selectivity

In this study, women of color stated that leadership selectivity had to do with being in the right place and being present. Their leaders and mentors were intensely aware of their leadership career paths. Macrow-Vongalis (2016) identified how women responded to gender leadership styles and how women responded to other women's and men's leadership roles and what makes an effective leader. According to the women in this study, when referring to leadership selectivity, they stated that mentors, former supervisors, and having supportable relationships with their female leaders proved favorable.

Conclusion

All women of color expressed having the experiences, insight, skills, degrees, and knowledge to effectively be a woman of color in a senior-level position in higher education. They established professional relationships and attended different leadership development types, such as Kennedy Harvard Business School, American Council on Education, and the American Association of State Colleges and Universities. A supportive family unit and professional connections were shared across the spectrum to obtain a senior-level position in higher education. The participants offered their shared and lived experiences in what they believed contributed to the barriers and challenges that contributed to a lack of communication, perceptions, and unresponsiveness to change by academia administrators and colleagues. These professional women of color brought their skills and expertise to their prospective roles as a senior-level leader.

According to the women of color leaders, a supportive family unit, self-awareness, vocation, and strategic plan are essential for success. Knowing their skillset and participating in professional development to enhance their knowledge and skills are individually based. Regardless of what professional development a person joins or what mentors a person can readily access is contingent upon the person as an individual. Collectively, these attributes proved vital for these women. This study's results could guide starting an open dialogue and having a seat at the table for women of color among university administrators, HR departments, and trustee boards. More discussion from other senior-level leaders, HR members, and trustees could be held to develop more insight into what is needed for academics to be accountable to academic professionals.

Implications for Change

As a result of the literature review, theoretical framework, and study findings, I suggest the following implications for higher education administrators, HR departments, trustee boards, and public school administrators. Higher education administrators who are in a position of authority should undergo targeted cultural relevance training.

1. The training should include a woman of color who is a chancellor, trustee member, dean, department chair, HR director, provost, president, and vice-chancellor. The training should be ongoing, and stakeholders should be tasked with assignments that reflect personal biases and cultural sensitivity training. Provide virtual and alternative settings to engage top-level leaders' locations to engage administrators across the university.
2. Establish a leadership peer-review administrator program that will allow shadowing from community colleges, HBCUs, and PWI senior-level administrators to provide feedback that will enable the institutions to be aware of the barriers and challenges that these institutions present to women of color. These leaders would have to be willing and flexible and have an open-mind to receiving critical feedback from other senior-level outsiders. A panel of nonstakeholders will provide input to the institution to not comprise relationships and partnerships with institutions.
3. Schedule regular professional development activities to include regular meetings to discuss the vision and mission of the institutions. All stakeholders should be involved in the creation of the vision and mission to ensure buy-in. Ongoing assessment should be conducted to determine if the goals are being met. A stipend should be included to

pay for senior-level administrators who actively participate in instructional strategies beneficial to the academic environment.

Recommendations for Future Research

Enumerated below are future research that can assist in creating a study that is focused on senior-level administrators, HR members, and trustee board members that can provide additional support to community colleges, HBCUs, and PWI administrators.

1. It is recommended that future studies focus solely on governing boards, chancellors, and presidents on their expectations about women of color in senior-level positions and how it is not congruent with the institution's mission and vision statement.
2. Future studies are also encouraged to do a comparative study of similar institutions close to the same number of women of color in leadership positions. Establish a campus broad climate survey that focuses on how the community and partnerships embrace change and incorporate cultural sensitivity training.
3. To conclude, it is recommended to use a mixed-method approach, and it is recommended that a future study be conducted utilizing men of color in a senior-level position. It is further recommended that a prospective study showed using a motivation theory like the self-determination model by Deci and Ryan (2012) to measure the experience of caring for others and the psychological needs of men and women of color in a senior-level position.

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Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter

ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

Educating Students for Christian Service and Leadership Throughout the World

Office of Research and Sponsored Programs

320 Hardin Administration Building, ACU Box 29103, Abilene, Texas 79699-9103
325-674-2885



June 9, 2020

Tonya Cooper
Department of Educational Leadership
Abilene Christian University

Dear Tonya,

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board, I am pleased to inform you that your project titled "Exploring the Voices, Experiences, and Leader Career Paths of Women of Color in Higher Education",

was approved by expedited review (Category 6 & 7) on 6/9/2020 (IRB # 20-080). Upon completion of this study, please submit the Inactivation Request Form within 30 days of study completion.

If you wish to make any changes to this study, including but not limited to changes in study personnel, number of participants recruited, changes to the consent form or process, and/or changes in overall methodology, please complete the Study Amendment Request Form.

If any problems develop with the study, including any unanticipated events that may change the risk profile of your study or if there were any unapproved changes in your protocol, please inform the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs and the IRB promptly using the Unanticipated Events/Noncompliance Form.

I wish you well with your work.

Sincerely,

Megan Roth

Megan Roth, Ph.D.
Director of Research and Sponsored Programs

Appendix B: Interview Questions

Interview Protocol

Q1. What do senior-level women of color perceive to be the challenges of breaking the glass ceiling in higher education?

Q2. What do senior-level women of color perceive as being the challenges toward their path in higher education to obtaining a career path in higher education?

Q3. How were you able to overcome barriers and challenges to breaking the glass ceiling on your leadership path?

Q4. Were their organizational programs implemented, which influenced the advancement opportunities of African American females into leadership positions.

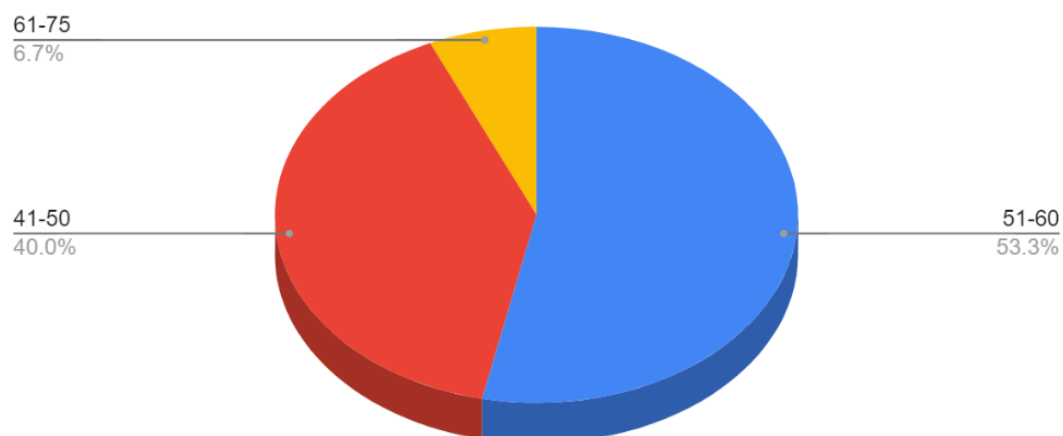
Interview questions:

1. What positions have you held in higher education?
2. Who has impacted your success?
3. What factors impacted your career success?
4. Describe an event or share a story of women who have mentored you toward success?
5. Have you ever reported to a minority woman in higher education? If not, did you experience any type of barrier? If so, what were those barriers?
6. What professional developments have you participated in?
7. Tell me about your higher education and career journey?
8. How many women of color are represented at your college or university who are in a mid-level or senior-level position?
9. What are some of the professional challenges you experienced in your leadership career path?

10. How do you overcome challenges in your professional career?
11. Have you ever experienced institutional challenges and barriers? If so, what are or were they?
12. What are some personal challenges you experienced in your leadership career path?
13. Describe the culture of your institution? Is diversity apparent?
14. What are the strengths and weaknesses of your greatest successes or disappointments in your professional career in higher education?

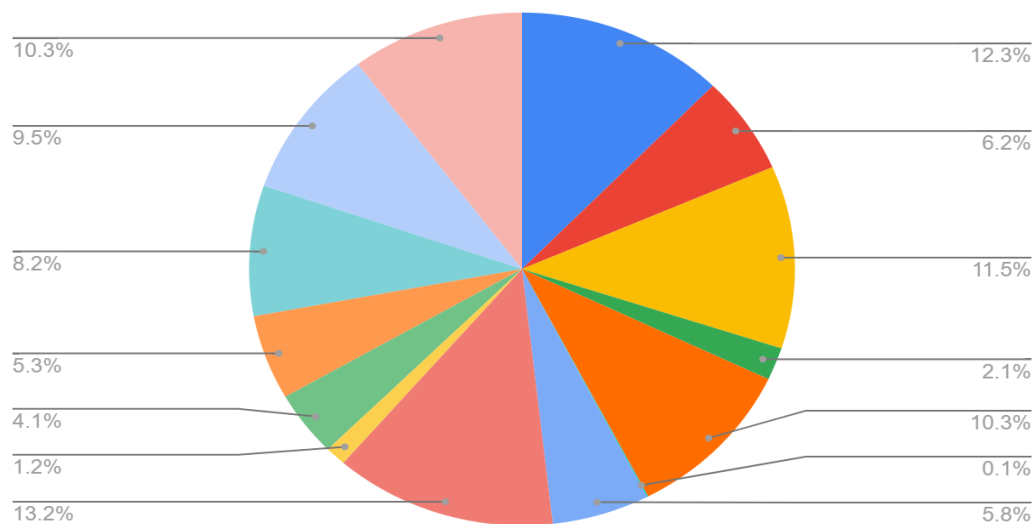
Appendix C: Participant Demographics

Count of 5. What age bracket do you fall into? 20-30, 31-40?
41-50? 51-60? 61-75? [Row 1]



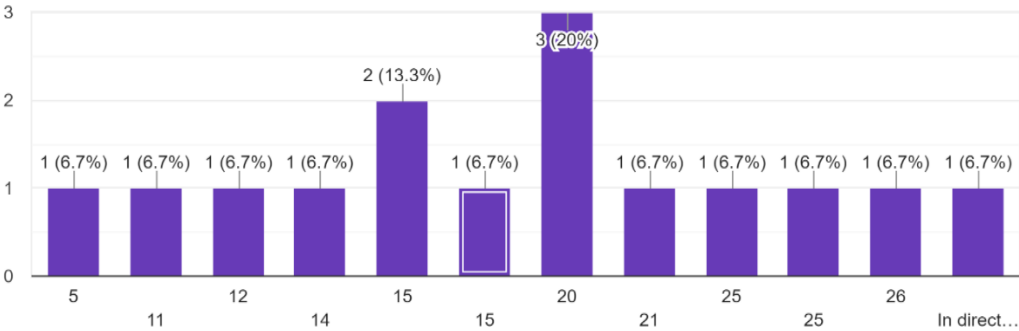
Appendix D: Participant Higher Education Experience

9. How many years have you worked in higher education



Appendix E: Participant Years of Work Experience

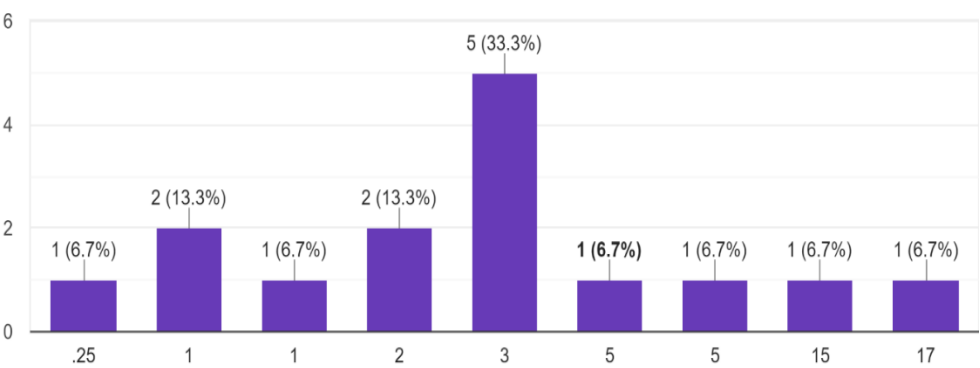
7. How many years of experience have you had as a leader
15 responses



Appendix F: Participant Years of Experience in Current Position

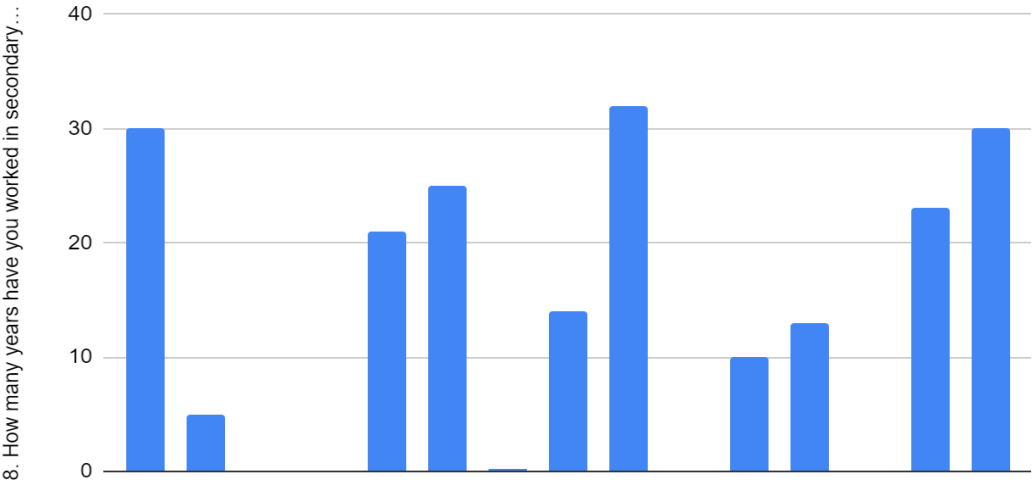
10. How many years have you worked in your current position?

15 responses



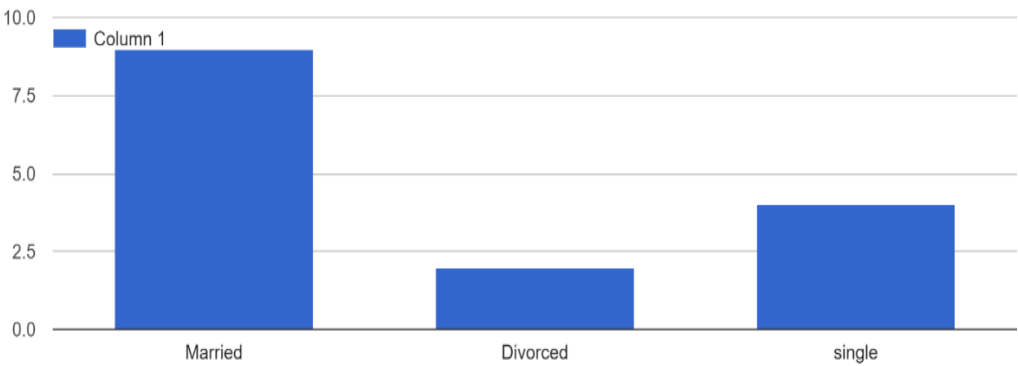
Appendix G: Participant Years in Secondary and Postsecondary

8. How many years have you worked in secondary and post-secondary



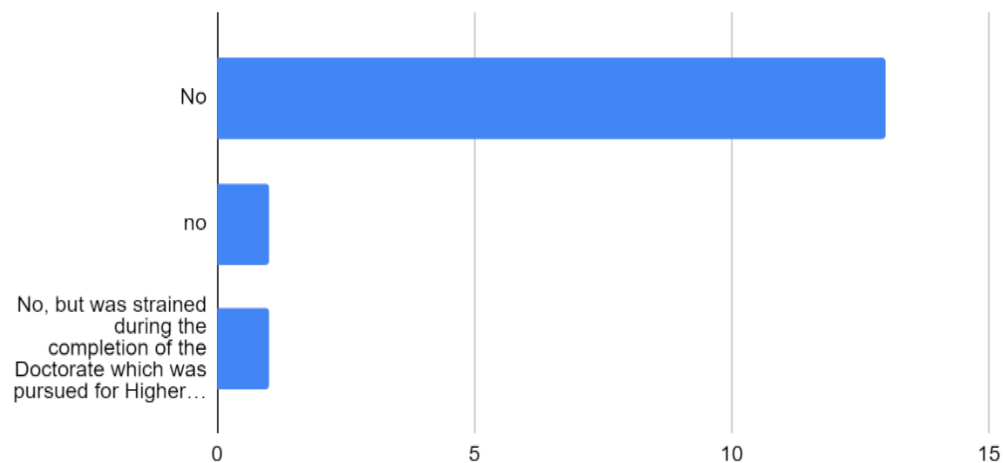
Appendix H: Participant Status

4. Are you married, divorced, single, or widow



Appendix I: Participant Change in Status

Count of 6. Has your marital status changed due to the demands of your positions



Count of 6. Has your marital status changed due to the demands of your positions

Appendix J: Presurvey Demographic Questionnaire

1. What is your professional title?
2. Where did you attend college?
3. What is your major undergrad and graduate, terminal degree?
4. Are you married, divorced, single, or widowed?
5. What age bracket do you fall into? 20–30, 31–40? 41–50? 51–60? 61–75?
6. Has your marital status changed due to the demands of your position?
7. How many years of experience have you had as a leader?
8. How many years have you worked in secondary and postsecondary positions?
9. How many years have you worked in higher education?
10. How many years have you worked in your current position?
11. What positions have you held in higher education?