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Black Women's Perceptions of the Experiences, Challenges and Barriers Leading to Senior-Level Leadership Positions in Higher Education

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Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

by

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my children, Tre'Von and Aubree, my parents, Dennis and Gina, my sisters, Katherine and Denise, my grandmother, Brunilda, a host of aunts, uncles, cousins, and other loved ones who have become family. Thank you, for all of your love and support, during this trying process. I love you more than words can express and I am thankful and grateful for your patience, accountability and encouragement. You all motivate me to be a better person every day.

To Tre'Von and Aubree, I made a promise to myself a long time ago that I would never let you down, and although I am a human and I have done so, so many times, what I hope you learn from my journey is to never give up. Keep fighting and pushing to be the best version of yourselves that you can be. There is nothing in this world that you are not capable of doing, and I hope and pray that this will remain a reminder of what your mother was able to do through all of the storms with the intent of making you proud. I love you both with all of my heart!

The COVID pandemic and life events took a toll on my family; we lost three men in our lives in less than a year that meant a lot to everyone. To my uncles, James Rivers, Herbert Marion, and Anthony Purnell, I dedicate this in your memory. Thank you for the memories and the support throughout the years; you all are truly missed and loved.

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To Black women across the nation who are employed at an institution of higher education, I just want to take a moment to acknowledge and thank you for your hard work and dedication. I know you are working hard to accomplish your career endeavors and through all of the storms you are fighting, just know the world is changing and your day will come. You are there, because you are supposed to be there, so keep fighting!

Abstract

This dissertation explored the lived experiences of Black women as they progressed in their careers to senior-level leadership positions in higher education. Using interpretative phenomenology analysis, this study specifically explored how Black women perceived their experiences, challenges and barriers leading to them obtaining senior-level leadership roles. Prior literature on the advancement of Black women leaders identified that women who fit the category of Black undergo extreme challenges, including the angry Black woman stereotype, concrete and glass ceilings, tokenism, colorism, imposter syndrome, and sexism. The findings from this study validate the literature as many of the themes produced in this study correlated with what has previously been produced through study. Black women remain a double minority in a predominantly White space working in higher education, but the women in this study indicate finding ways to overcome challenges and barriers that have been placed in their way. The results of this study indicate that Black women have repeatedly found ways to overcome adversity that has come in the form of challenges and barriers in order to fulfill their personal career goals and they have provided detailed accounts of what it took to accomplish those goals. Black feminist theory served as the theoretical guide for this study and assisted with exploring the lived experiences of the 15 Black women participants. The current findings grounded in Black feminist theory support Collins (2000) who stated that Black feminist theory allows for a foundation of understanding the unique perspective and identity of Black women as they navigate through life, subjected to oppression and marginalization as a second minority group in this country.

Keywords: Black women, leadership, barriers, challenges, lived experiences, Black feminist theory

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Chapter 1: Introduction

For many, the objective of obtaining a senior-level leadership position in higher education seems to be a challenging task. However, for some people, particularly Black women, that goal might be even more challenging. There is a distinct disparity between the number of White men and women in higher education and the number of Black men and women who serve in the same capacity (Perna et al., 2007). Since advancement for Blacks in leadership roles is seen as a disparity, it leaves one to question why this occurs and what steps are being taken by White Americans not seen in the Black community. Wolfe and Dilworth (2015) pinpointed that in 2012, the United States Department of Education acknowledged that Blacks only accounted for 9.4% of higher education administrators across the nation, while 80% of the college presidents were White American and 26% of that percentage were women.

Women have been struggling with a "glass ceiling" for many years as they advance into leadership roles considered dominated by men. The traditional leadership model assumes that good leadership is essentially masculine (Davis & Maldonado, 2015), creating a ceiling that prevents many women from advancing. For women of color, particularly Black women, obtaining senior-level leadership roles in higher education has been difficult, despite their education level or experience. Davis and Maldonado (2015) suggested that organizations fail to create environments that support the leadership advancement of Black women. Identifying the needs of Black women is essential to their progress and continued growth in higher education administrative leadership roles (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Barriers perceived by others, whether factual or not, can be an obstacle to becoming a leader for a woman of color (Barnes, 2017).

As described by Barnes (2017), a concrete ceiling concept was used as a metaphor. It represented the degree of the difficulty many Black women face in conquering the challenges of becoming leaders. Gamble and Turner (2015) referenced a study of Black women who were college presidents and stated that sexism and racism operated to give the illusion that Black women are making significant progress. Still, Black women typically remain in what are considered to be traditional women's occupations.

Paterson and Chicola (2017) stated that sponsorship, mentorship, and advocacy are recommendations in the literature to support women's advancement in education leadership roles. Guidance and mentorship programs can assist people with achieving their goals. Still, according to research from Paterson and Chicola (2017), it appears that Black women are not receiving the same type of mentoring from other women as their counterparts. According to Butler-Sweet (2017), Black women's success in the white-collar workforce is reflective of their increasing levels of educational attainment. They represent the most significant growth in education within the Black community. There is a divide among Black women that prevent them from working together to help each other accomplish their career goals is not often seen. It is suggested that there is a certain level of competition that prevents these things from occurring (Butler-Sweet, 2017).

Butler-Sweet (2017) provided a cause and stated that differences, including class differences, threaten unity among Black women. One finding identified the socio-economic upbringing of Black women as being a cause for division among Black women (Butler-Sweet (2017). According to Butler-Sweet (2017), it is believed that this could be the reason why many Black women are not mentoring other Black women who are aspiring for senior-level leadership positions in higher education.

These numbers can be surprising, especially considering that by 2010, Black women held 66% of all bachelor's degrees attained by Black Americans (Jones-DeWeever, 2014). With such a high number of Black women obtaining degrees (Butler-Sweet, 2017), there must be a reason why Black women are not receiving senior-level leadership roles at a higher rate not seen in a larger capacity. There are many barriers that Black women face, along with other factors that tend to have been a topic of discussion, particularly mentorship from the same race-identified peers. Mentoring can be seen as an issue due to data suggesting not many Black women are in higher education senior-level leadership roles. However, identifying whether Black women who have obtained leadership roles experienced similar challenges during their journey toward their leadership roles was a topic worth researching.

West (2017) conducted a survey that consisted of 330 Black women over 10 years and their experiences with a student affairs preconference program. The study's findings indicated that Black women appreciated the preconference as professional development in a professional counter space, which left them with a form of mentoring, which led to significant career development milestones for many participants. Curtis (2017) discussed factors associated with Black women's advancement and their accents, how they dress, and the hairstyles they chose, which affected Black women in leadership based on interviews with eight Black women. Curtis (2017) also discussed several race theories associated with the lack of Black women advancing in their professional careers.

These race theories include cultural insight and community leadership that supports cultural capital. Curtis (2017) stated that Black women leaders display positive cultural consciousness of values and behaviors that promote Black people's survival. Black women who lack these attributes also lack mentorship from their peers or mentorship from other Black

women who have made it to where they strive to be. In the context of preparation, practice, and research, a few cornerstones of leadership (e.g., power, control, authority, and influence) have been used historically to display a negative light to marginalize, silence, and erase the accomplishments of traditionally underrepresented groups such as women, Blacks, Latinos, Native Americans, to include gays and lesbians (Alston, 2012). These things leave to question, do Black women support the continued growth of other Black women, or is there a fear of competition or the idea that too many Black women at the top are not possible? Would we refer to this possibility or lack of acceptance and encouragement to form academic cannibalism? This chapter presented the statement of the problem, and the purpose of the study, which led to the research questions. Also provided were the essential definitions which are significant to this study.

Statement of Problem

Capturing the voices of Black women on their experiences leading to senior-level leadership positions in higher education warranted research. University leaders are challenged to ensure that units across their campuses implement fair and equitable hiring practices to promote diversity and leadership from all backgrounds. Therefore, this study intended to take an in-depth look into Black women's trajectory in higher education. For this study, I proposed to interview Black women who have acquired senior-level leadership positions in higher education. The senior-level leadership positions will include deans of student affairs, vice-presidents of enrollment management, vice-presidents of student affairs, college or university presidents, and other senior leadership roles that tend to be commonly filled by White men or women.

Furthermore, the Black feminist theory (BFT) served as the theoretical guide to explore the lived perceptions of what barriers may have affected Black women's relationships and

influenced their career advancement to senior-level leadership positions in higher education. The interviews from the voices of these purposefully selected Black women generated themes to understanding how barriers may have altered their career paths within higher education. Black women are a disadvantaged group whose powerlessness reverberates in every sector of their lives (Davis, 2012); discovering if these disadvantages hinder their advancement into senior-level leadership roles in higher education will be the focal point of this research.

Research indicates that women have struggled with an imaginary glass ceiling when advancing in their professional careers. Although several different theories surround this phenomenon, few identify how it affects groups of women. Howard and Gagliardi (2018) and Stripling (2017) stated that when female Black higher education educators do move up to the executive ranks, they are most likely to find placement in women's colleges, community colleges, and historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs). It is unclear the steps needed to help women advance. Several opinions have surrounded the idea that barriers can be detrimental to women's growth in their career endeavors. Should this be true, then finding out what leads to those barriers would be the start of a conversation that can drive more women into their desired fields. Specifically, Black women who seem to be considered a double minority may have more trouble breaking through that ceiling.

Positionality Statement

As a higher education professional staff member for nearly 20 years who has worked at several institutions, ranging from two and four-year public and proprietary, I have had the opportunity to become familiar with trends in hiring practices. I have witnessed the lack of Black women being hired to fill positions within senior-level leadership despite experience and their ability to produce the needed results. As a Black woman myself, I have been privy to the strain

of not obtaining positions in senior-level leadership despite my own experience and educational background. I have sought within this study to understand the experiences with barriers and challenges from the viewpoints of other Black women as they advanced into senior-level leadership positions within higher education.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the experiences, challenges, and barriers of Black women leading to senior-level positions in higher education. This study also aimed to identify commonalities within the lived experiences of Black women who have obtained senior-level leadership positions at institutions of higher education. This study utilized the following research questions to uncover any systemic barriers that may provide insight into these lived experiences of Black women seeking advancement in higher education.

Research Questions

The following research questions were used to guide this study:

RQ1: How do Black women in senior-level leadership positions perceive their experiences in higher education?

RQ2: What do Black women in senior-level leadership positions perceive as the challenges leading to senior-level positions in higher education?

RQ3: What do Black women in senior-level leadership positions perceive as the barriers leading to senior-level positions in higher education?

Significance of the Study

The results of this study will help Black women to identify challenges and barriers associated with advancement to senior-level leadership positions in higher education. The study results could also benefit in implementing hiring practices and policies when hiring and

promoting Black women in higher education. The results of this study could potentially open the door for conversations about the challenges and barriers many Black women encounter when aspiring to seek senior-level positions in higher education. Institutions of higher education, along with Black women, will benefit from this study's findings to assist in breaking barriers and glass ceilings to create diverse and equitable environments for all employees.

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited to Black women in higher education who currently hold positions in senior-level leadership; therefore, this study did not explore the experiences, challenges, and barriers of White women or other women of color in higher education. This study was also limited to only Black women members of the LinkedIn group "Black Women in Higher Education."

Definition of Key Terms

Barriers. Unintentional biases and outmoded institutional structures that are hindering the access and advancement of women (Shalala et al., 2006).

Black women. Defined as females belonging to or associated with African descent.

Concrete ceiling. The barriers that women of color face, which more accurately describe the hindering of career advancement for women of color (Barnes, 2017).

Glass ceiling. The invisible barrier that many women face as they advance through the ranks of their chosen professions but can progress only so far before being limited in their efforts to reach higher levels (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017).

Mentoring. A relationship in which a more experienced or more knowledgeable person helps guide a less professional or knowledgeable person.

Senior-level leadership positions. They are defined as dean of students, vice president of enrollment, vice president of student affairs, college/university president, provost, and other similar positions.

Summary

This chapter introduced the study, provided a problem and purpose statement, and revealed the research questions. The next chapter will review research literature and will discuss the current research on women in higher education, specifically Black women. It includes the theoretical framework, Black feminist theory, Black women advancement in higher education, the Angry Black Woman, and other ideas that present difficulty for Black women advancement and the conceptual framework.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review includes research and related information that displays the barriers to upward mobility that might hinder Black women in higher education. Certain barriers prevent Black women's career advancement in higher education associated with the lack of administrative roles Black women tend to fill. The collection of information provides a solid basis for the need for more research in this category. It portrays the real-life experiences of Black women in higher education and their struggle to obtain senior-level leadership positions. This leads to the assumption that without career barriers, there would be a reason to believe that Black women would have more senior-level leadership opportunities in higher education than are currently seen.

Theoretical Framework

This research's theoretical framework is a qualitative BFT approach, which was used to facilitate understanding and help guide this investigation. Utilizing BFT allowed for Black women's perspectives in the American higher education system to provide their truths through descriptions of experiences throughout their journey to senior-level leadership positions. The theory of BFT (Collins, 2000) is a poststructural approach to a feminist standpoint that aims to examine the systemic and critical relations of power that exist specifically as they relate to Black women in America. Collins (2000) stated that BFT allows for a foundation of understanding the unique perspective and identity of Black women as they navigate through life, subjected to oppression and marginalization as a second minority group in this country.

Black feminist theory provides an experience that can only be explained or told from Black women's mouths. Their experiences allow for clarification that is objective to the ideals portrayed through mediums produced by the dominant culture. Concerning higher education,

BFT will allow a microscope into how Black women intellectuals are treated in academia, which tends to be areas that patriarchal ideals and influences have traditionally dominated. BFT aims to give Black women a platform to speak their truth by using their voices in every aspect of their daily lives (Collins, 2000). BFT aligns with the goals of this research, which seeks to allow Black women administrators in higher education the opportunity to reveal their lived experiences as they progress into senior-level leadership positions.

Pinpointing data that directly affects Black women's lives in higher education leadership roles was limited. However, several research articles related to Black women in higher education, BFT, critical race theory, the angry Black woman, and colorism define its level of racism or inequity concerning Black women. Although these are all vastly different topics, they explain Black women's experiences in a sense that makes it understandable and puts away any myth that they do not limit Black women's success. As pinpointed by Davis and Maldonado (2015), articulating how racial and gendered identities inform the leadership development experiences for Black women in academia is needed to challenge any traditional discourse. Such information is also useful to understand the leadership experiences of Black women (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). However, the question remains, why are these things happening, and how can we prevent them from minimizing the advancement of Black women in higher education administrative leadership roles?

This study visualizes all the barriers that impact Black women's lives and demonstrates a monopoly of issues that occur that have the potential to hinder their growth into leadership roles in higher education. When the different experiences discussed are viewed through higher education administration, Black women's expertise can be assumed to be actual barriers, or lack thereof, to their professional success in higher education. This study's findings could guide Black

women and higher education institutions to ensure equality among this group of women. This study will also provide much-needed guidance on fostering professional development programs to assist Black women's career advancement in their professions. The data collected and used will help draw inferences that provide a clearer understanding of the collective experiences and the meanings derived from Black women administrators' interactions.

This literature review begins with detailed information about the concept of Black feminist theory. Secondly, the review includes women's history in the workplace and history detailing Black women in higher education. Also included are concepts from the literature on theories of why Black women may not be advancing in their careers in higher education. Last, the review discusses the challenges that affect Black women regarding their journeys to becoming an administrator in higher education. Due to the lack of information on Black women administrators in higher education, this literature review regarding the various areas is limited.

Black Feminist Theory

BFT was formed to meet Black American women's needs during racial oppression in the Women's Movement and sexual oppression in the Black Liberation Movement. Collins (1986, 1991) insisted that *Black* was equated with Black men, and *women* were equated with White women. As a result, Black women became what is known as a double minority in that they were racially discriminated against and discriminated against due to gender. The purpose of the movement was to develop a theory that adequately addressed how race, gender, and class interconnected throughout their lives and stop racist, sexist, and classist discrimination (Hooks, 1990).

> Assertion speaks to the point that simply because a black woman’s body is present in a white-dominated space, does not mean she has power, voice, or access to the same

> knowledge-making opportunities as the White counterparts she shares the space. (Collins, 2015, p. 137).

BFT was characterized by some ideologies related to the justice movements for Blacks and women (Davis & Brown, 2017). The civil rights movement, which was led predominately by men, effectively and tirelessly fought for Black rights as a racial minority while mainly ignoring the need for change among the women who were a part of the same movement (Davis & Brown, 2017). Chief among these opportunities mandated by federal legislation was equal employment opportunities in higher education institutions, businesses, industries, and other federal funds recipients yielded to the federal mandates and gradually increased Blacks within their organizations (Gappa & Uehling, 1979).

BFT will help guide this qualitative study to determine if there is a genuine problem among Black women's progression into higher education senior-level leadership positions. Collins (2015) suggested that BFT identifies all women of African descent who identify as Black women, including Afro-Caribbean women, Nigerian American women, Black British women, Afro-Brazilian women, and all women that claim blackness in combination with other racial identifications and constitutes a critical intellectual goal.

Black feminist theory, as a specialized thought, reflects the thematic content of Black women's experiences. However, due to Black American women having to struggle against White male interpretations of the world to express a self-defined standpoint, Black feminist thought can be seen as subjugated knowledge (Collins, 1990). Taylor (1998) stated that Black women strove to construct strategies for power and liberation during the civil rights movement but often fell short or were isolated from both Black male and White female activists, in other words, silenced.

The articles presented in this literature review provide a clear indication of an issue that needs addressing. Black women undergo a certain stigma that makes it more difficult for them to persist than their counterparts. Black feminist theory, as specialized thought, reflects the thematic content of Black American women's experiences.

A popular Black woman who was one of the first to take on Black Feminism was Maria Stewart. Stewart urged women to refuse the dominant, domestic images and thoughts of Black women; she understood the intersectional position of Black women in America and blamed racism, classism, and sexism as the main culprits of their oppression (Soogrim, 2015). Stewart and Richardson (1987) described Stewart as championing Black women's relationships with one another by providing a community for Black women's activism and self-determination. Stewart was an activist for Black women's rights and took the initiative to ensure that equality for Black women would be possible. Stewart knew that stereotypical events and issues would diminish by providing the same respect to Black women as White men and White women (Bailey, 2008). As described by literature, Black feminism states it is a source of strength and opportunity for Black women who could not find their voices and experiences in others' scholarship (Hooks, 1990).

Black feminism needs the support of all kinds of people. This mistake of misrecognizing Black feminism as synonymous with either end of this spectrum significantly dismantled Black women's intellectual communities, spanning many centuries, and nurtured Black feminism itself (Collins, 2016). A Black feminist analysis has allowed us to understand that Black women are not hated and abused due to something wrong with them, but instead because of their status and treatment that has been prescribed by the racist, misogynist system under which they live (Smith, 1985). Black feminism deals in home truths, both analysis and action. These issues focus on touching the essential core of this community's survival (Smith, 1985).

> Basically, in white culture, Black women get to play two roles, either the bad girls, the 'bitches,' the madwoman (how many times have you heard folks say a particularly assertive Black woman is 'crazy?'). Black women are often seen as threatening and mistreated, or as the super mamas, telling it like it is and taking care of everybody, spreading special magic wherever we go. (Hooks, 1990, p. 60)

Women in the Workplace

Women entered the workforce in the early 1900s but held jobs described as fitting their gender. Cullen and Luna (1993) stated that as educational and legal reforms occurred, the women's movement picked up speed, and the economic conditions took form in the 1960s. The woman's position in the workplace not only flourished, but the roles that women were taking on began to be roles traditionally done by men. As the years progressed, women began to fill more positions and began to leave home. In fact, by 2008, more than half of women in the United States were working outside of their homes (U.S. Department of Labor, 2009). According to statistics from the U.S. Department of Labor (2009), women in the United States only made up 17% of managerial and professional roles in 2009. By 2014, women in management, professional and related occupations made up over 50% of the U.S. workforce (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014).

A tactic that is also later addressed to prevent women's advancement into leadership roles is the notion of the "glass ceiling." The glass ceiling is known as an invisible barrier used in the prevention of allowing women to advance into senior-level leadership positions (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). The prevention of women being able to obtain senior-level leadership roles also prevented higher pay within organizations. In higher education, as an example, the gender gap in senior-level leadership positions is evident. According to the American Council on

Education (2017), only 30% of college and university presidents were women. Hamilton (2004) stated that only 40% of faculty and administrative positions on college campuses were held by women (Hamilton, 2004).

There is limited information that focuses strictly on women in higher education senior-level leadership positions. However, there are several articles and studies that provide insight into this population's difficulties navigating career progression across institutions and businesses worldwide (Bates, 2007; Jones & Taylor, 2013; Wallace & Marchant, 2011). Wallace and Marchant (2011) discussed that universities should be developing female middle-managers for reasons such as gender balance, and skills shortage, and future mass retirements. In addition, Wallace and Marchant (2011) said that development for some women had been taken to heart, especially in the field of technology, but there seems to be a large number of universities doing very little to fix the issue of women advancing into leadership roles.

The History of Black Women in Higher Education

Catherine Ferguson, an ex-slave who purchased her freedom, opened the Kathy Ferguson's School for the Poor in New York City in 1773 and became the first known Black female teacher and administrator (Mosely, 1980). In 1890, 64 Black colleges enrolled students (Key events in Black Higher Education, 2014). In 1921, Dr. Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander became the first Black woman to obtain a Ph.D. in economics from the University of Pennsylvania (Battle & Doswell, 2004). This was 44 years after the first White woman Helen Magill White obtained a Ph.D. in 1877 (Gutenberg, n.d.). Benjamin (1997) stated that Black women had entered the academy in more significant numbers over the years yet remain primarily invisible.

Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune became the founding president of Bethune-Cookman College in 1903, making her the first Black woman president of a higher education institution (Jackson & Harris, 2005). Dr. Bethune was a scholar who served as an advisor to 15 U.S. Presidents, including Franklin D. Roosevelt, who also founded the United Council of Negro Women (Jackson & Harris, 2005).

Black Woman Advancement in Higher Education

Black women tend not to have the same advantages in higher education as their white counterparts. This disenfranchisement is not to say that White women do not suffer from prejudices against gender because they do, but this is to point out the double minority stance Black women face. As indicated by Gardner et al. (2014), higher education institutions receive a failing grade in commitment to diversity at many predominantly white institutions.

According to Gamble and Turner (2015), Black women face significant barriers, such as racism and sexism that hinder their ability to advance in their careers. Unfortunately, barriers hinder career advancement for Black women, even though since the late 1970s, minority staff has increased at higher education institutions (Harvey, 2014). Hodges and Isaac-Savage (2016) stated that Black women are more likely to experience adverse outcomes and higher stress levels due to racial and gender discrimination and stereotypical beliefs that tend to affect the hiring practices and result in their exclusion. The stereotypes associated with Black women have caused them to use methods such as "code-switching" while at work to fight against what is expected of them. Davis (2018) defined code-switching or role flex as a way for Black women to appear nonthreatening by adapting their speech style to the environment. This involves shifting from Black vernacular to Standard English, or “intellectual talk” when surrounded by business associates (Davis, 2018).

Sandler (1991) stated that Black American women administrators are often placed in positions considered dead-end. These positions are usually working with minority students, such as multicultural affairs, minority affairs, equity, and inclusion. According to a study conducted by Konrad and Pfeffer (1991), women and minorities in educational institutions were more likely to be in positions previously held by members of their groups in the past. Holmes (2003) stated that their race and gender shaped many women's experiences. Despite the challenges of racism and sexism in the workplace, these women were courageous and continued to fight racism and sexism and hoped to help other Black women professionals and faculty in academia.

Black women tend to feel a need to shift to acceptable styles of communication in the workplace, allowing some women to avoid the unfair judgment of nonnormative, culturally specific demeanors (Davis, 2018). There is also the stereotype that surrounds the idea of the "Angry Black Woman." Jones and Norwood (2016) suggested that Black women face the stigma surrounding the Angry Black Woman concept. This comes when a Black woman, who is just going about their business, gets put into the Angry Black Woman category. Black women experience this because they are Black and female and tend to suffer at the hands of White men, Black men, and White women (Jones & Norwood, 2016), and any conflict that may cause tension places them under this description.

Sturnick et al. (1991) found that women have been mistreated due to gender and strongly patriarchal institutions, have worked in unsupportive systems, and have been required to perform at higher levels instead of their male counterparts to achieve the same level of success. According to Moses (1997), most Black female administrators are often employed at historically Black colleges and universities in positions below the dean level, in student affairs and other

specialized positions, or most often at 2-year institutions rather than 4-year. Their salaries are generally 15% less than those of their counterparts.

It is crucial for Black women in higher education to maintain self-confidence and self-esteem (Snearl, 1997). Having this type of approach helps build confidence in Black woman's ability and help them feel more comfortable in settings that often make them feel unwelcome. According to Bailey (2008), doing so will help Black women be more comfortable acquiring the credentials needed for a promotion, becoming assertive about strengths and weaknesses, and networking with other underrepresented groups. Many factors contribute to the low number of women hired in administration, which according to Schmidt (1992), include a lack of female role models, increases in the number of men in education, and society's misconceptions. Ottinger and Sikula (1993) pointed out that even women discriminate against other women out of fear of competition and promotion.

One could say how Black women deal with these types of oppression and yet still do not assist each other in higher-level administrative leadership roles in higher education. One theory on why this phenomenon exists is due to colorism within the Black community. According to Hunter (2007), colorism has a more substantial effect on Black women's lives than Black men and refers to this as gendered colorism. Therefore, depending on skin tone, it is safe to say that the odds may be higher against a darker-skinned woman than a lighter-skinned woman. Race, class, gender, and dark skin can lead to mutually intersecting oppressions shaping dark-skinned women (Hall & Whipple, 2017).

Racial Realism

Race has played a role in society, but race has not always been a concept as it currently is in the United States. Smedley and Smedley (2005) noted a shift from cultural attributes to the

concept of race. In a sense, race was primarily made an issue of the topic through literature and practice. By the Revolutionary era, race was widely used, and the differences had solidified as a reference for social categories of Indians, Blacks, and Whites (Smedley & Smedley, 2005, p. 19). Race became a new concept guiding how society should be categorized and structured in many aspects. This is seen in addition to slavery as a form of control.

Thus, making race concepts a constructed response to the measures and tactics that Europeans used to further their political, economic, and social growth (Barnard, 2015). This development of racial identity caused a hierarchal system based on physical attributes and what was referred to by DuBois (1897) as "the differences of color, hair, and bone" (p. 816), was detrimental to White expansion and their justification for how they treated people of color.

Looking back in history, Black people's mistreatment is a direct influence of a country that wanted to solidify and accept the mistreatment of people of color. Hooks (1990) stated that the notion that cultural criticism by Black folks must either be confined to the question of positive or negative representation or function in a self-serving manner must be continually challenged. The history of Black people in the United States and their mission for the right and opportunity to obtain an education, voting rights, equal pay, and housing opportunities depict racism's realism. It is undeniable and evident that due to racism and other means of discrimination that Black people, in general, were not given the same opportunities as their White counterparts. Is it odd to think that racism exists in institutions of higher education? According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES; n.d.), 64% of Blacks who obtained a degree were Black women, instead of 56% of White women and 60% of Hispanic women. Black women are obtaining degrees at a higher rate than women of any other race, yet

still are not adequately represented in leadership roles in the same manner as their counterparts. This is a racial equity issue that needs to be addressed.

As defined by Barnard (2015), racial realism accepts that racism is an actual lived experience in American society. Bell (1992) suggested

> that Black people will never be able to gain full equality in this country, even those Herculean efforts we hail as successful will produce no more than temporary 'peaks of progress,' short-lived victories that slide into irrelevance as racial patterns adapt in ways that maintain white dominance. (p. 373)

Even though Black people are continuously growing in education and finances, Barnard (2015) states that Black people can see the country's progression. However, when it is linked to society collectively, Black people continue to lag. Their progress will never adequately challenge or overturn White dominance.

The Black Identity

The term 'Black' is used in relation to African diaspora (those of the Caribbean and African descent), including mixed heritage, who often find themselves a minority in society (Maynard, 2018). Erikson (1968) described “identity as being what the “I” reflects on when contemplating the body, the personality, and the roles to which it is attached” (p. 217). As discussed by Kincaid (1969), the dominant white majority identity defines the Black community's identity and existence, and the illusion of superiority has depended on its belief in Black inferiority. Mbembe (2017) stated that blackness has become an assigned identity by the oppressors to relegate Black people from Africa to become the subaltern, the marginalized with a voice, the item to be traded for profit.

Due to having to live a life defined by identity, it is often found that Black women play a different role when in the presence of their counterparts. This concept of playing a role or altering themselves avoids fitting the criteria of many stereotypes faced by Black women. Landy (1993) suggested that playing roles comes from one's need to assert oneself. This type of "role-playing" is often seen in the black community when entering a professional or atmosphere where the natural nature, which is often stereotypical, is not deemed acceptable and altered.

Colorism

Slavery was the mastermind behind the idea of colorism, which is based on the lightness of a Black person's skin tone to determine a specific stance in society. The creation of slavery and colonialism led to the emergence of a social hierarchy and an oppressive system that ranked Blacks as being lower than Whites, which has directly connected to an effort to control other racial groups that were considered less than by the dominant White society (Lake, 2003; Wilder, 2008). This same system was also used to create division among Black slaves by categorizing them based on their skin's complexion and considered light-skinned (mixed race) or dark-skinned (Hunter, 1998; Wilder, 2008). Hunter (1998) discussed the sexual abuse of African women at the hands of their White owners, which often resulted in racially mixed offspring resulting in the systemic privilege of lighter-skinned Blacks. The form of colorism portrayed in many slave-related movies indicates that lighter-skinned slaves were placed to do work in the homes of slave owners, while darker-skinned slaves were forced to work in the fields. In the 1950s, colorism took the form of the "Brown Paper Bag Test," which distinguished light-skinned Blacks from darker-skinned Blacks to protest a more "high class and high yellow" society (Russell, 2013).

Often referred to as "the last taboo among Blacks," colorism has never been formally identified and acknowledged by the Black community (Russell et al., 1993). According to Wilder (2008), "Instead, what is seen is that it has found its way into the familiar names and practices used among family, friends, and in social situations that perpetuate and reinforce the discourse of discrimination attached to skin tone" (p. 15). Hunter (2007) stated the existing literature indicates that even with the progressions realized by Black people in more recent U.S. history, colorism remains an issue of debate and significance. Skin tone plays a role in shaping opportunities and life experiences in the Black community (Hannon & DeFina, 2014). Advantages come to those considered a light-skinned Black person in the United States (Hunter, 2007). Keith and Herring (1991) stated that "Whites placed a higher economic value on slaves of mixed parentage and used skin tone or degree of visible white ancestry as a basis for the differential treatment of bondsmen" (p. 762).

Research released from Villanova University (Hannon & DeFina, 2014), the breadth of quantitative studies examining colorism, which is discrimination based on the color of one's skin tone, continues to increase. Racist ideology, in turn, has caused internalized divisions among Black people. This can be seen in the belief during slavery times that dark-skinned Blacks were considered not to be as smart as and were less superior than light-skinned Blacks due to their partial White heritage. Due to the stereotype that light-skinned people were superior to darker-skinned people, Graham (1999) stated that many light-skinned Blacks began to internalize the same racist principles within the Black community, believing the idea that they were better than their darker counterparts and acted in that manner. It is possible to discuss how colorism plays a role in Black women not assisting one another with crossing barriers towards senior-level leadership positions in the administration. Walker (1983) identified the term colorism in her

book, *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens*. Walker discusses the division that can be seen among Black women stating:

> What Black women would be interested in, I think is a consciously heightened awareness on the part of light black women that they are capable, often quite consciously, of inflicting pain upon them; and that unless the question of colorism- in my definition, prejudicial or preferential treatment of same-race people based solely on their color- is addressed in our communities and definitely in our Black "sisterhoods" we cannot, as a people, progress. For colorism, like colonialism, sexism, and racism, impedes us. (pp. 290–291)

A study conducted by Keith and Herring (1991) stated that, on average, lighter-skinned blacks made 65% more and earned two more years of education than darker-skinned Blacks. Gullickson (2005) conducted a re-analysis of data compiled from the National Survey of Black Americans found a decline in light skin privilege related to education and occupation and that it was not a relevant factor for younger cohorts born after 1963. Gullickson (2005) stated that lighter skin remained a factor in providing access to high-quality spouses. Is colorism an issue in higher education administration amongst Black women and others?

Tokenism

Cook and Glass (2014) defined tokenism as the practice of doing no more than necessary to act by the law or casually show how everyone is being treated the same. Lewis (2016) pointed out that at predominately White institutions, Black faculty and staff struggled to overcome the effects of tokenism by using their human agency to advance administrative roles to change the organizational culture. Niemann (2016) stated that a persons' tokenism status in an educational

context is not a new issue. At the height of the Civil Rights Movement, Martin Luther King Jr. (1966) addressed tokenism in multiple speeches.

> Massive resistance has given way in the South to a kind of sophisticated kind of resistance embodied in tokenism. If we are to have a truly integrated society, it will never develop through tokenism. We get a few Negroes in formerly all-white schools and say we have integrated schools. The fact is that this kind of tokenism is much more subtle and can be much more depressing to the victims of tokenism than all-out resistance. Thus, we have a long, long way to go in dealing with this problem, but it is not only a Southern problem that we face, but it is also a national problem. (p. 452)

To put tokenism into terms, it is to feel like a quota has been met because there is a representation for a particular group present. Tokenism is a disrupted identity and a psychological state imposed on people of color (Niemann, 2016). Niemann (2016) explained that irrespective of individuals' personal, racial identity, political ideologies, expertise, credentials, character, and so on, people of color in higher education become caught up in the needs and perceptions of others' context. Women of color serve as examples of how the complexity and consequences of marginality are increased when race, ethnicity, and gender intersect (Niemann, 2016). Attempting diversity among institutions can also cause or create tokenism without purposely doing so. As stated by Beckwith, Friedman, and Conroy (2016), functional inclusion provides individuals from marginalized communities the opportunity to have a voice and influence. However, this can result in tokenism if its only purpose is to satisfy arbitrary benchmarks for diversity. Niemann (2016) placed university leaders' task to diffuse the negative impacts of tokenism by facilitating context that places meaningful value on people of color by

rewarding them for race and diversity-related service with merit increases, tenure, and promotion, and celebrating their presence.

Sexism

Women of color in higher education tend to experience the intersection of racism and sexism, resulting in increased marginalization and isolation (Ahmed, 2012; Sule, 2011; Turner et al., 2011). Based on the definition by Edwards (1997), sexism is the overt or covert practice of discrimination against an individual based on gender-related differences. As pinpointed by Bourabain (2021), academia is profiled as the institution of knowledge, rationality, and truth reached through merit, however, critical scholars have identified it as an inequality regime. It is also seen that the White male body was and is still considered to be the knowledge holder in many academic settings (Puwar, 2004).

Women who have experienced sexism in the workplace have reported more negative job perceptions and poorer health outcomes than women who have not had those experiences (Manuel et al., 2017). These negative experiences can be detrimental to the growth of a woman's career projection and cause fear that would keep them in positions in which they have outgrown out of fear-based on past experiences. Sexism relates negatively to women's mental health and job satisfaction, according to Ruben et al. (2017), and women who have been exposed to sexism internalize it, undermining their own job performance (Koch et al., 2014).

Imposter Syndrome

Clance and Imes (1978) described the imposter syndrome as feeling like an academic or professional fraud. Clance and Imes (1978) stated that women who suffer from imposter syndrome do not experience an internal sense of success despite their earned degrees. According to Collins et al. (2020), "I would proclaim that one consequence of imposter syndrome and

stereotype threat for women of color is feeling as if they are living a double life, and not wholly true or belonging to either" (p. 4). Imposter syndrome causes women of color in higher education environments to feel as though it is unnatural for them to perform at the levels that they do, through a feeling of self-discouragement as if they are doing something wrong when they are just displaying their true abilities.

The concept of the imposter syndrome is disappointing. Collins et al. (2020) explained that eliminating stereotype threat and imposter syndrome is an impossible task as a human factor in pursuing scholarship. Where does this leave Black women in higher education who rely on self-motivation to strive to obtain positions in which they are more than capable of successfully fulfilling? Clance and Imes (1978) stated that there are four different types of behaviors performed by women who exhibit imposter syndrome. They are as follows: (a) diligence and hard work- driven by a fear that they will be "found out." These women work very hard to prevent discovery through the use of cover-up tactics; (b) a sense of phoniness – women who engage in intellectual inauthenticity in one way or another. Holding back their real ideas or opinions; (c) the use of charm and perceptiveness to win superiors' approval – the woman aims to be liked and be recognized as intellectually special; and (d) dodging being confident or conscious of society's rejection of successful women and purposely seeming timid.

Women who display imposter syndrome tend to work harder than their counterparts and, in turn, may suffer from burnout or loss of interest in their positions. An article in the Journal of General Internal Medicine (Bravata et al., 2020) highlighted that imposter syndrome is widespread among ethnic minorities. This leaves one to question if imposter syndrome is worth being considered a barrier for Black women attempting to obtain senior-level leadership positions in higher education.

Glass and Concrete Ceilings

Barnes (2017) identified the concrete ceiling as a metaphor and represented the degree of difficulty that many Black women face when attempting to conquer the challenges of becoming a leader. The term “glass ceiling” was first used by Loden (n.d.) in 1978 during a discussion panel. Women have been struggling with a “glass ceiling” for many years as they advance into leadership roles that tend to be considered dominated by men. This happens often because a traditional leadership model assumes that a good leader must essentially be masculine (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). There has been an acknowledgment of the federal government's glass ceiling concept, as they have recognized the presence of the effects that disallows the advancement of women and people of color in the workplace (AHE report, 2009).

Morrison and von Glinow (1990) stated that minority women face a "glass ceiling" or barrier that has restricted their progression to obtain senior-level roles in organizations throughout American society that are not encountered by White men and other groups. In turn, Gaskell and Willinsky (1995) speak about the glass ceiling concept betraying American's most cherished principles; unseen, yet unreachable, barriers that keep minorities and females from rising up the corporate ladder, regardless of their qualifications and abilities. Denying that there are indeed glass and concrete ceilings ignores a shortage of minority women in senior-level leadership positions.

As time has progressed, improvements have been made in the barriers related to these ceilings, but these barriers still are causing harm in areas that need to be addressed. Black women have experienced restrictions by these invisible barriers for the glass ceiling during their journeys towards leadership advancement (Branche, 2014). These barriers are pay gap discrepancies, with men seen as having higher salaries than women at all hierarchical levels in organizations and

being disproportionately represented in senior-level leadership positions. In 1989, Schwartz described the glass ceiling as a barrier to women's leadership, which occurs when counterproductive layers of influence are met with management strata pervaded by unconscious perceptions, stereotypes, and expectations of men. Black female executives' limited progress in academia and business can be attributed to a glass ceiling (Davis, 2012). Davis and Maldonado (2015) identified that organizations are ignorant of the glass ceiling's harmful effects. This is also the case for many higher education institutions not understanding the consequences of the glass ceilings that may not be intentionally in place. Using the term concrete stresses, the impassable nature of limits that have been put into place before Black women attempted to progress in their careers (Beckwith, Carter, & Peters, 2016).

In comparing the glass ceiling and the concrete ceiling, the glass ceiling can be shattered. In contrast, the concrete ceiling is believed to be nearly impossible to break through. However, the glass ceiling is a barrier seen as a factor in the difficulty that Black women face when attempting to obtain senior-level leadership roles in higher education. Being a Black woman can be seen as problematic in higher education and breaking through barriers such as the glass ceiling can be seen as impossible. However, another stereotype may also hinder Black women, which is the concept of the "Angry Black Woman."

The Angry Black Woman

“The ‘angry Black woman’ mythology presumes all Black women to be irate, irrational, hostile, and negative despite the circumstances” (Ashley, 2014, p. 28). Characteristics that make up the myth of the angry Black women stereotype, which include hostility, rage, aggressiveness, and bitterness, may all be reflective of survival skills that have been developed by Black women in the face of social, economic, and political oppression (Ashley, 2014). Angry Black women are

characteristically described as aggressive, undesirable, unfeminine, bitter, overbearing, mean, attitudinal, and hell-raising (Malveaux, 1989; Morgan & Bennett, 2006). White fragility can be a barrier for Black women pursuing senior-level leadership positions, and the angry Black woman stereotype could lead to this barrier. Aggressive encounters with White fragility have two distinguishing traits. The aggressor acts based upon negative stereotypes or biases about Black women (Jones & Norwood, 2016). Second, "when a Black woman pushes back against this treatment, she is viewed as being 'out of line' and becomes the source of blame for the encounter rather than the negative stereotypes and biases that initially fueled it" (Jones & Norwood, 2016, p. 2069). According to DiAngelo (2018), "White fragility is the phenomenon in which White people are unable or unwilling to remain productively engaged in dialogue that would bring them to a deeper understanding of racism and a more significant commitment to it" (p. 54).

Assumptions

In conducting this research, some of the key assumptions related to respondent participation will guide the reporting of findings. I assumed that the respondents who voluntarily participated in this study willingly answer all questions honestly and with their best recollection. Also, the assumption is that the regions targeted for the Black women interviewed provide enough variation. The respondents' individual experiences can display similarities or commonalities among or between those regions of the country. Last, it is assumed that Black women's use as the focus of this research will provide new information on the barriers preventing Black women from advancing into senior-level leadership roles within higher education.

Summary

The career advancement for Black women in higher education is not the same as their counterparts. There is limited literature regarding this topic; therefore, further research is needed

to determine the many reasons why this may occur. To leave one reason as the right answer would be an injustice to this group of women who continue to break beyond barriers to pursue their educational endeavors and leadership capabilities. When the Black woman is the topic of discrimination in an area surrounded by sexism and racism, the proper means of research theory needed is BFT. Black feminist theory helps to identify Black women's issues that are not comparable to the experiences of Black men, White men, or White women. The issues presented are concerns only seen by Black women or women of color in a system that demonstrates the struggle of being what is referred to as a double minority. Black feminist theory is a theoretical perspective derived from the feminist movement and brings Black women's issues to the forefront. While critical race theory is also a theory that can help explain racism in American society and the lived experiences of people of color that hold to their idea of race and racism, it is not a valid theory for this study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This qualitative study aimed to identify Black women's experiences, challenges, and barriers toward progression to senior-level leadership in higher education. There is limited research conducted discussing the obstacles that many Black women experience during their journey to senior-level leadership positions in higher education. Therefore, several phenomenal encounters cause significant barriers and career derailments that inhibit their ability to progress toward their career mobility in higher education institutions (Gamble & Turner, 2015). Through the process of personal interviews with Black women who have obtained senior-level leadership positions, this research was able to examine their lived experiences becoming and serving in a senior-level leadership position in higher education. This study identified the barriers and challenges Black women in senior-level leadership positions experience in higher education. The following research questions were used to guide this study:

RQ1: How do Black women in senior-level leadership positions perceive their experiences in higher education?

RQ2: What do Black women in senior-level leadership positions perceive as the challenges leading to senior-level positions in higher education?

RQ3: What do Black women in senior-level leadership positions perceive as the barriers leading to senior-level positions in higher education?

Research Design and Methodology

This qualitative study used an interpretive phenomenological approach (IPA) and was viewed through the lens of the BFT, which best defines the need for a unique worldview that encapsulates the knowledge and experiences of Black women (Collins, 2000). Qualitative research aims to generate awareness through a "collaboration within a social structure and with

its people" (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 4) and the thorough description and attention to processes in place. Using a qualitative methodology, I was able to gain an in-depth investigation, yielding extensive data on this topic that is scarce in the research.

The theoretical approach of using phenomenology was utilized for this study because it allowed me to approach this phenomenon with a nonbiased perspective through the participants who have direct, immediate experiences with it (Hays & Singh, 2012). Using this definition helped to align this study's intent, which aimed to understand Black women's barriers as they progressed in their careers and the challenges they encountered to gain senior-level administrator leadership roles in higher education.

IPA was selected as the research approach to be used for this investigation. IPA allows qualitative researchers to investigate how others make meaning of their significant life experiences (Smith et al., 2009, p. 1). Smith et al. (2009) stated that interpretative phenomenological analysis is committed to the detailed examination. Using IPA allows for the existence of a double hermeneutic, with the understanding that the participants in the research are attempting to make sense of their world; the researcher is knowingly trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world (Smith et al., 2009, p. 53). Using the IPA concept allowed me as the researcher to understand what Black women in higher education have faced regarding barriers in their career advancement opportunities and struggles. One of the concepts that surround the idea of BFT is the belief that race has a direct impact on Black women's everyday life experiences and opportunities.

Through semistructured interviews, I examined the lived experiences of Black women that currently serve in positions that are related to senior-level administrators with the hope of gaining more insight into the barriers faced in their journey to their respective roles.

Semistructured interviews are a combination of structured and unstructured interviewing (Merriam, 2002). Using semistructured interviews conducted via video conferencing, I was able to thoroughly and effectively ask a series of questions that prompted responses from these Black women and identified commonalities within the barriers that each faced during their career progression.

Population

Using the LinkedIn social media platform, I identified 15 Black women from the Association of Black Women in Higher Education (ABWHE) group. By utilizing the LinkedIn group, Association of Black Women in Higher Education, Black women administrators were selected who fit the description needed for my participants. The mission of this group that currently has 1,802 members, as posted on their LinkedIn page, is to:

> promote the intellectual growth and educational development of Black women in higher education; strive to eliminate racism, sexism, classism, and other social barriers that hinder Black women in higher education from achieving their full potential; communicate the history of personal and professional achievements of Black women in higher education to preserve and increase the presence and place of Black women and men in higher education; Provide academic and social mentoring for Black youth to ensure the participation and success of future generations of Blacks in higher education; and utilize our talents, strengths, and expertise to advance our vision of social justice. ABWHE seeks to fulfill its mission of celebrating Black women's historical and present achievements by providing various services to its members. ABWHE members seek “To lift as we climb.”

Selection Criteria

Black women selected for this study have been in the higher education field for a minimum of 10 years with proof of progression into their current senior-level leadership positions. These participants hold senior-level leadership positions at two or four-year public or private institutions. Using the LinkedIn platform was appropriate for this study because I was able to identify candidates based on work history and position by reviewing their user profiles. A contact made by email to identify qualified candidates was used to recruit women interested in participating in the study using the LinkedIn platform. Of the women that showed interest in participating, 15 women were selected to participate in the study. The participants were selected and invited to participate in the study based on the selected criteria to create a homogenous sample.

Sample

Using purposive sampling, 15 Black women who currently hold senior-level leadership positions in higher education were purposefully selected. Using 15 women's lived experiences allowed for a better sample of knowledge and helped determine any similarities within the participants' career journeys. IPA studies focus more on the detailed account of individual experiences, meaning that quality is celebrated more than quantity (Smith et al., 2009, p. 51). This explains the small sample size of participants for this study.

I made sure the sample selected matched the recommendations as prescribed for IPA studies by ensuring all individuals selected to participate meet the following criteria: A Black woman, is currently serving in a senior-level leadership role, currently employed at a two- or four-year public or private institution of higher education, holds a Master's or terminal degree, and has at least 10 years of full-time work experience in higher education.

Qualitative Sampling

To ensure the study's integrity, I targeted a sample using a purposive sampling method from the LinkedIn group titled “Association of Black women Administrators in Higher Education,” who currently serve in senior-level leadership positions in higher education. Purposive sampling is where participants are deliberately selected because they are most likely to provide insight into the phenomenon being investigated due to their position, experiences, and identity markers (Saldana & Omasta, 2018). The population of women identifying as Black will have attained a senior-level leadership position such as dean, vice-president, provost, president, and chancellor. The participants were selected and invited to participate in the study based on the described selection criteria.

Instrumentation/Interview Protocol

Due to the various locations of participants and Abilene Christian University COVID protocols, interviews were conducted via the Zoom platform. As Chenail (2011) stated, the researcher is the critical person in obtaining data from respondents. Therefore, through the researcher's facilitative interaction, a context is created where respondents share rich data regarding their experiences and life. Thus, the investigator becomes the instrument through which data for their study is collected and generated (Poggenpoel & Myburgh, 2003). As the instrument for this study, I used open-ended questions to explore Black women's lived experiences in higher education senior-level administrative leadership positions.

To ensure the interview's accuracy and the information delivered from the participants to me, video recordings and transcriptions were used to identify the commonalities and recurring themes from their interview responses. The participants were provided with a transcript of the conversation with me to ensure accuracy in the comments recorded as being made by them. This

is referred to as member checking. The participants had the option to approve or disapprove of any of the comments they felt were not within the scope of their belief.

Interview Protocol

Demographic Information

1. What is your highest level of education?
2. How long have you been working in higher education?
3. What positions have you obtained while working in higher education?
4. What is your current position, and how long have you been employed in your current role?
5. What was your age when you received your first leadership position in higher education?

Interview Questions

1. Describe your definition of a leader in higher education.
2. From your experience, what do you identify as barriers for Black women's progression as a senior-level leader in higher education?
3. In your opinion, in what ways has race impacted your experience while working in higher education?
4. What barriers and challenges have you experienced working in higher education?
5. How did you overcome those barriers or challenges throughout your career in higher education?
6. What type of professional development or training have you participated in to help you advance in your career?
7. What challenges do you perceive influenced your career advancement?
8. How many Black women are in senior-level leadership positions at your institution?

9. Based on your experience, what advice do you have for Black women seeking senior-level leadership positions and overcoming barriers?
10. What was your career path, and what barriers did you encounter along that career path as you worked your way into leadership roles?
11. What challenges did you face along your career journey that you noticed were different from your White counterparts?

Qualitative Data Collection and Data Analysis Procedures

For this study, I collected data by conducting semistructured interviews, which lasted approximately 60 minutes to focus on Black women's experiences, perceptions, feelings, and interpretations of their journey into their senior-level leadership roles—allowing for the specified allotted time frame assisted with the freedom to be candid with the open-ended questions, at times, prompting the need to ask additional questions related to the responses of the original items being requested. The Zoom platform was utilized to collect the narrative data from the participants.

Semistructured interviews were conducted and included a structured component that involved questions about specific information I wanted to explore. These questions were developed before the interview (Merriam, 2002). The semistructured interview allows the interview to be guided by the questions, allowing the researcher to explore issues and experiences derived from the answers to the structured questions (Merriam, 2002).

Analyzing data was done by compiling interview transcripts that were completed derived from the video recordings and field notes taken during the interviewing processes. Field notes and video recording helped ensure that the participants' statements were documented and correctly coded based on identifying comments that may have been considered similar. Through

note-taking during the interviews, I asked follow-up and probing questions, which had its advantages in finding barriers or issues that may not have been found through structured interview questions. Video recordings and written transcripts were coded using a third-party service known as NoNotes.

Methods for Establishing Trustworthiness

Yin (2016) stated that trustworthiness in qualitative research equates to building the credibility of the study. One method used to determine trustworthiness is triangulation, which involves considering data from at least three sources to ensure more dimension (Saldana & Omasta, 2018). To build credibility in this study, I first utilized a method to establish trustworthiness.

To establish trustworthiness for this study, I used three strategies: field notes, member checking, and methodological triangulation. Hays and Singh (2012) stated that member checking is a way to maximize trustworthiness. During the semistructured interviews, I probed the participants to seek clarification of their lived experiences. Upon completion of the interviews, I sent the participants transcriptions of the interviews conducted to ensure accuracy. Also, during the interviews, I took field notes to identify common themes amongst the participants. I used methodological triangulation, which involves multiple data collection methods (Denzin, 1978).

Researchers Role

Peshkin (1988) stated that it is essential to maintain your subjectivity as a qualitative researcher consciously. Being meaningfully attentive to one's subjectivity allows the researcher to learn about the particular subset of personal qualities connected with their research phenomenon. These qualities can share, transform or misconstrue the research (Peshkin, 1988).

A large part of my attraction to this research was personal experiences both lived and seen as I have witnessed many Black women's challenging experiences in higher education. The appeal to the theory of BFT drew attention as it is specific to Black women but assists as a guide that pinpoints the shortcomings experienced by Black women and other women of color as they tackle discrimination during their life journeys. I have felt that the themes connected to BFT validated my own experiences and felt that other Black women could relate to this empowering theory.

Ethical Considerations

I took the necessary steps to ensure this study was highly ethical. I did not begin to collect data from my research participants until I received approval from the Abilene Christian University IRB committee. I submitted an application that described my research details and ensured that all participants signed an IRB approved consent form. Being ethical also required that I treated each participant with respect and operated with integrity within each step of the study. Participants' data were stored via Google Drive, which is not accessible to anyone but me. The information collected does not self-identify, and no personal data were collected or stored. All digital files to include videos after transcription will be destroyed using a digital shredding service. Participants were recruited for this study using the LinkedIn social media platform and identified as qualified participants based on their membership in the LinkedIn group titled "Association of Black Women in Higher Education." The consent form signed by the participants also included the details of the study and expectations. This informed them of the one-time interview, which was conducted using the Zoom platform.

Assumptions

For this study, assumptions were out of my control; however, if premises are not present, the research could be deemed irrelevant (Simon, 2011). One assumption within this study was that higher education institutions promote Black women in a way that does not discriminate against their skin color or gender and that everyone is treated fairly when pursuing their career aspirations. Another assumption was that Black women do not have a more challenging time gaining access to senior-level leadership roles in higher education. Also, that there is no struggle for Black women when attempting to prove themselves capable or worthy of said positions. Finally, for this study, I assumed that the participants were honest and truthful during the data collection process stages.

Limitations

As defined by Creswell (2013), limitations in research are those factors that are out of the researcher's control and could cause potential weaknesses in the study. For this study, I depended upon the availability and access of the participants chosen to participate in interviews describing their experiences moving toward senior-level leadership positions in higher education. As I served as the primary instrument in data collection for this study, it was essential that I remain well organized and informed in the data that I planned to collect and understand the personal experiences of the participants that I interviewed. I continued to stay open to guidance and feedback from my dissertation chair and committee members to decrease researcher bias throughout this process (Sarniak, 2015).

Delimitations

Creswell (2013) stated that delimitations are the study's boundaries that reflect aspects I could control as the researcher. One delimitation for this study was selecting Black women who

participated who currently serve in senior-level leadership roles in higher education. I also asked each participant the same set of structured interview questions. I also coded the conversations from each participant in the same manner.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the barriers that have been witnessed by Black women in higher education senior-level leadership positions as they progressed during their careers. This chapter has detailed the research design and methodology of an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA), informed by the critical social theory, Black feminist theory (BFT). The literature review assisted with identifying possible barriers that Black women may experience as they progress in their career endeavors to include racism, classism, and negative stereotypes that can alter the views of Black women in their everyday lives. Participants for this study were well informed of the procedures used to collect data and analysis. They were required to sign a consent form. Interviews were conducted using the researcher-identified tools, which allowed data to be triangulated to determine the consistency of the findings among the data collection methods (Patton, 1999). I intended to take the necessary measures to ensure this study was valid and reliable. As a researcher, I remained transparent and acted ethically at all times.

Chapter 4: Results

In this chapter, I present the findings for the study *Black Women's Perceptions of the Experiences, Challenges, and Barriers Leading to Senior-Level Leadership Positions in Higher Education.* The purpose of this qualitative, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was to identify the lived experiences, challenges, and barriers of Black women leading to senior-level leadership positions in higher education. Additionally, this study also aimed to identify commonalities within the lived experiences of Black women who have obtained senior-level leadership positions at institutions of higher education. Within this chapter, I provide an overview of the participants involved in this study. Following the participant overviews, I provide emergent themes from the data found based on the interviews presented in the words of the participants with paragraph summaries and introductory quotations. Based on previous literature, which is found consistent with the responses of these 15 Black women, it is found that these women experienced similarities in their career progression such as imposter syndrome, racism, sexism, colorism, the idea of the angry Black woman, and other topics previously discussed within the literature review in Chapter 2.

The women in this study represent senior-level leaders in roles encompassing academics, financial aid, advancement, equity and inclusion, wellness, student affairs, and workforce development. To explore the lived experiences shared as Black women in senior-level leadership positions, semistructured interviews were conducted with each woman to answer the following three research questions:

RQ1: How do senior-level Black women perceive their experiences in higher education?

RQ2: What do Black women perceive as the challenges leading to senior-level positions in higher education?

RQ3: What do Black women perceive as the barriers leading to senior-level positions in higher education?

It was important that I set aside personal biases, experiences, and preconceived notions about the research topic to complete the interview process. I conducted the interviews by asking the participants 5 demographic questions and 11 semistructured questions (See Appendix B). Additional probing questions were utilized within the discussions for clarification. Upon completion of each interview, I conducted member checks with all participants to verify the accuracy of the transcribed interviews.

Participants responded regarding member checking, stating that the information transcribed was accurate to the best of their recollection and provided changes to transcriptions as needed. The next section of this chapter includes participant profiles, data collection procedures, coding strategies, common themes, and how the research conducted uncovered the findings addressed within the research questions for the study. Within this chapter, participants' quotations illustrate the personal experiences with career progression to senior-level leadership positions experienced by these Black women in most higher education groups. The results are the findings based on the perspectives of the participants in this study.

Participants

A sample of 15 Black women who held senior-level leadership positions was identified using the LinkedIn group "Association of Black Women in Higher Education." All participants were either selected based on their membership in the LinkedIn group or were referred by a group member who also participated in the study. Demographic information for all participants is shown in Table 1. The table includes information referencing years working in higher education, age at the time of entering senior-level leadership, current position held, and level of education

obtained. To protect the privacy of the participants, pseudonyms have been used to replace their actual names.

Meet the Participants

The following descriptions provide each participant's background based on the information provided within the interview based on what has been provided regarding their demographic information and LinkedIn profiles.

Evelyn (1). Evelyn is the associate vice president of health and well being at Institution 1. She has been employed with the university for four months, but her experience in higher education has expanded for over more than 10 years. Evelyn holds a Doctor of Education in Leadership and Management. Evelyn was 35 years old when she obtained her first senior-level leadership position in higher education.

Yolanda (2). Yolanda is the director of transitional education at Institution 2. She has held her current position for one year but has worked in higher education for 31 years. She holds a Doctor of Education in Higher Education Administration. Yolanda was 35 years old when she obtained her first senior-level leadership role in higher education.

Victoria (3). Victoria is the director of academic support at Institution 3. She has been in her current position for 10 years but has worked in higher education for 25 years. She holds a Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies. Victoria was in her 40's when she obtained her first senior-level leadership position at an institution of higher education.

LaToya (4). Angela is the dean of students and associate dean for diversity and inclusion at Institution 4. She has been in her current position for a little under a year but has worked in higher education for 15 years. LaToya is a doctoral candidate and will be receiving her Doctor of

Education degree in Education Policy. LaToya was 35 when she first obtained a senior-level leadership position in higher education.

Melynda (5). Melynda is the dean of student development and enrollment at Institution 5. She has been in her current position for six months but has worked in higher education for ten years. She has a master's degree in higher education administration. Melynda was 31 years old when she obtained her first senior-level leadership position in higher education.

Stacy (6). Stacy is the dean of business and industrial technologies at Institution 6. She has a Master's in Business Administration and is currently pursuing her Ph.D. in Business. Stacy has held her current position for just under two years but has worked in higher education for 13 years. She was 42 years old when she obtained her first senior-level leadership role in higher education.

Dasia (7). Dasia currently serves as the dean of academic services at Institution 7. She holds a Doctor of Education in Higher Education and Organizational Change. Dasia has been in her current position for approximately a year and a half but has worked in higher education for 20 years. She obtained her first senior-level leadership position in higher education at 28 years old.

Briana (8). Briana holds the director of student success position at Institution 8 and has been in this position for six years. Briana has a Master's of Education in Higher Education Administration. She has worked in higher education for 18 years and obtained her first senior-level leadership position at 34.

Marilyn (9). Marilyn is the chief diversity and community officer at Institution 9. She holds a Ph.D. in Educational Leadership. She worked in higher education for 28 years and

obtained her first senior-level leadership role at 42. She has been in her current position for 16 years.

Melissa (10). Melissa is the senior assistant dean of admissions at Institution 10. She has worked in higher education for 24 years and has served in her current position for 17 years. She has a Master's of Education degree and was 44 years old when she obtained her first senior-level leadership role in higher education.

Katherine (11). Katherine holds the position of vice chancellor for diversity, equity, and inclusion at Institution 11. She has a Ph.D. in Communication Studies and has been in her current position for seven and a half years. She has 31 years of experience in higher education and obtained her first senior-level leadership position in higher education at 39.

Andrea (12). Andrea has held the position of dean of students at Institution 12 for a year and a half. She has worked in higher education for 16 years, obtaining her first senior-level leadership role in higher education at 33. She has a Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership.

Carolyn (13). Carolyn has a Master's of Education in Higher Education. She has worked in higher education for the last 10 years and currently serves as the associate dean of student affairs at Institution 13. She has been in her current position for one year and obtained her first senior-level leadership position in higher education at 25.

Jennifer (14). Jennifer currently serves as the associate vice president of health and wellbeing at Institution 14. She holds a Ph.D. in Psychology and has worked in higher education for the last 22 years. She obtained her first senior-level leadership position at the age of 55.

Tiffany (15). Tiffany serves as the director of financial aid at Institution 15. She has worked in higher education for 23 years and holds a master's degree in counseling. Tiffany has

been in her current position for two and a half years and obtained her first senior-level leadership position at 42.

Table 1

Meet the Participants

Name (Pseudonym)	Institution	Position	Years in field	Degree obtained	Age entering senior-level leadership
Evelyn	1	Associate Vice President of Health & Wellbeing	10 Years	Doctorate of Education	35
Yolanda	2	Director of Transitional Education	31 Years	Doctorate of Education	35
Victoria	3	Director of Academic Support	25 Years	Doctorate of Education	40
Latoya	4	Dean of Students/Associate Dean of DEI	15 Years	Doctorate of Education-Candidate	35
Melynda	5	Dean of Student Development and Enrollment	10 Years	Masters of Education	31
Stacy	6	Dean of Business and Industrial Technologies	13 Years	Masters of Business	42
Dasia	7	Dean of Academic Services	20 Years	Doctorate of Education	28
Briana	8	Director of Student Success	18 Years	Masters of Education	34
Marilyn	9	Chief Diversity & Community Relations Officer	28 Years	PhD – Educational Leadership	42
Melissa	10	Sr. Assistant Dean of Admissions	24 Years	Masters of Education	44
Katherine	11	Vice Chancellor DEI	31 Years	PhD- Communication Studies	39
Andrea	12	Dean of Students/Associate Dean DEI	16 Years	Doctorate of Education	33
Carolyn	13	Associate Dean of Student Affairs	10 Years	Masters of Education	25
Jennifer	14	Associate Vice President Health & Wellbeing	22 Years	PhD – Psychology	55
Tiffany	15	Director of Financial Aid	23 Years	Masters in Counseling	42

Note. Information is from participant demographic information obtained from the interview protocol.

Interview Process

The 15 participants in this study shared their lived experiences in a confidential, semistructured interview using the Zoom conferencing platform. The interview protocol contained five demographic questions and 11 open-ended interview questions that aligned with the research questions. The interviews were recorded, one-on-one, private zoom conferencing sessions, which consisted of only the participant and myself in each session. Once completed, the audio from the zoom interviews was transcribed into textual data utilizing NoNotes transcription services, then coded and analyzed for recurring patterns and themes. Upon completing the textual data, the I emailed the participants their responses to the interview questions to check for accuracy in interpretation, known as member checking.

During the interview process, each participant was open and honest regarding their situations and, at times, was brought to tears due to the emotional heartache brought upon them during their transition to obtaining senior-level leadership positions in higher education. One woman had just experienced a situation where she was being stereotyped and scrutinized just hours before the interview, which brought out her true feelings about her senior-level leadership experience. During the interview, none of the women acknowledged that I was also a viable candidate for the research, and I remained nonbiased during the process.

Data Analysis and Themes

Themes were created based on the responses to the questions of the participants during the interviews. Some participant responses are not included in the findings, and not all were used to determine recurring themes; any responses not included were omitted and considered outliers. Participants shared their lived experiences based on their career progression into senior-level leadership roles in higher education. The information gathered was used to answer the research

questions previously discussed in this chapter. The following topics presented represent recurring themes that emerged because of the interview responses of the study participants. The first of 11 interview questions presented to the participants was related to leadership in higher education. The question asked each participant to describe their definition of a leader in higher education. The results of that question are below.

Definition of Leadership in Higher Education

Defining what leadership in higher education looks like was different for each participant. This may be due to the diverse experiences of each woman that participated in the study as they progressed into their senior-level leadership roles. As a result, their accounts of what leadership should look like maybe their way of leading their teams or what they would have liked to see in a leader as they progressed in their careers.

Evelyn:

> Evelyn is the associate vice president at a University in Ohio and has been in her senior-level leadership role for more than two years. She stated that her definition of a leader in higher education serves others. She felt that a good leader is transformative and authentic. Evelyn also felt that leaders should be honest and transparent.

Yolanda:

> Yolanda currently serves as director of transitional education in the state of Colorado. She has worked in her current position for a little over a year but has nearly 30 years of higher education experience. She states that a leader in higher education should be able to influence others and be a visionary.

Victoria:

Victoria, the director of tutoring services in New York, has been in leadership for the majority of her 25-year career in higher education. She has defined a leader in higher education as someone who does not have a top-down philosophy and understands that to lead, you must be open to being led. In addition, she believes that a leader should be seen as a role model to others and maintain professionalism and have a certain level of understanding.

LaToya:

LaToya is the dean of students and associate dean for diversity and inclusion in the state of Illinois. She has served in her current capacity for two of the 15 years of her higher education career. She defines a leader in higher education as one who is empathetic, compassionate, and caring. In addition, she states that the leader should also be able to leverage partnerships to best support students.

Melynda:

Melynda is the dean of student development and enrollment within the state of Missouri. She has held her position for six months but has worked in higher education for three years. She describes a leader in higher education as one that can motivate their counterparts and those that report to them. She believes that they should provide mentorship and opportunities for advancement. Qualities that a leader in higher education based on Melynda's definition should be compassionate and unafraid to lead through their ability to make tough decisions and being strategic.

Stacy:

Stacy is the dean of business and industrial technologies at an institution in South Carolina. She has been in higher education for 13 years, and all of the positions she has

held have been considered leadership roles. She has defined a leader in higher education as a lifetime learner, flexible and embraces diversity, a systems thinker, and possesses the characteristics of a servant and transformational leader.

Dasia:

Dasia is the dean of academic services at an institution in Illinois. She has been in leadership for the majority of her 20-year career in higher education. Her definition of a leader in higher education is a person who can build consensus in political settings and higher education. In addition, she believes that a leader should be a visionary, able to choose the right team or make the right team.

Briana:

Briana serves as the director of student success at an institution in North Carolina. She has been in her leadership role for the last six years. She defines a leader in higher education as one that can motivate others and work together towards a common goal. She also believes that a leader should be able to help develop people to meet their full potential.

Marilyn:

Marilyn is the chief diversity and community relations officer at an institution in Pennsylvania. She has been in her senior-level leadership role for seven years. She defines a leader in higher education as someone who leads with good intentions and is open to collaboration. Marilyn also believes that a leader should value diversity and possess an inclusive leadership style.

Melissa:

Melissa, the senior assistant dean of admissions in Virginia and has been in leadership for over 17 years, believes that a leader in higher education should possess a vision. She also believes that the leaders should keep students the focal point of everything they do within higher education. Melissa states that a leader does not necessarily have to be a mentor but a sponsor to those that they lead in helping them to obtain their career goals.

Katherine:

Katherine serves as the vice-chancellor for diversity, equity, and inclusion in the state of Indiana. She has been a senior leader for more than 10 years. She defines a leader in higher education as someone who has knowledge in a specific discipline and helps build those around them. They prepare those around them to be successful, especially those that report directly to them so that they can move on and do more.

Andrea:

Andrea serves as the dean of students and associate dean for diversity and inclusion at an institution in Tennessee. She has held her current leadership position for two years but has been in several other leadership roles in higher education. She defines a leader as someone who can be innovative, has integrity, and is adaptable and flexible. She also believes that a leader should have a vision but can also show that they are strategic. Andrea includes in her definition that the leader should invoke energy from others and keep the team energized.

Carolyn:

Carolyn holds the position of associate dean of student affairs in the state of Utah. She has been in her role for just over a year but has held other senior-level leadership positions. Carolyn defines a leader in higher education as student-centered, equity-

minded, and engaged in adaptive leadership. She believes that the leader should mobilize people to change systems as needed and have a vision for the department or division they are leading.

Jennifer:

Jennifer is the associate vice president of health and well being at an institution in New York. She has worked in leadership roles entire 22-year career in higher education. She states that a leader in higher education should have a vision, motivates, makes callous decisions, and have integrity.

Tiffany:

Tiffany is the director of financial aid in the state of Texas. She has been in leadership for more than ten years. Tiffany describes a leader in higher education as one who is unbiased and leads by example. She believes that a leader should consider everyone's feelings, especially concerning the success of students.

The second interview question asked the participants to identify barriers for Black women's progression as senior-level leaders in higher education. The participants identified the barriers they encountered to their progression as senior-level leaders in higher education. Several stated having experienced feelings of negativity and a lack of mentoring and access as leading barriers they have experienced on their journey to a senior-level position in higher education. However, a few stated that Black women in higher education tend not to have those mentors to guide them and represent them in their absence. Based on their responses, imposter syndrome and unconscious biases were identified as the recurring themes.

Imposter Syndrome

Most of the participants experienced imitating someone they were not to be accepted and respected in higher education. They reported being viewed as aggressive, angry, and stand-offish, as opposing viewpoints from their colleagues. When attending meetings, many felt that they had to impersonate to dispel the myths of Black women to be heard.

Melynda:

> One barrier I would say is a misconception. There are so many perceived things that happen that we do not know from our non-verbals. Whether it be me talking with my hands, that could be a cultural thing; it could not. For me, it is, but that can be seen as aggressive. Not being jovial and smiling is seen as unfavorable even if there is nothing to be excited about. I can't walk into a room and not put on a happy face. I always have to do that. So, I think it is an issue. And depending on how many people are in your organization, you may not have time to be everything to everybody. I think that's also an issue. And just making it to this level in general. Like I can say when I received this role, I felt like, “Oh, dang, okay, I am in the role that works.” But I could not figure out how I got here. So that imposter syndrome was there. Am I good enough? Am I smart enough? I do not have my doctorate yet. At the same time, I do not see that with many of my white counterparts.

Carolyn:

> According to the majority, I think there is this expectation for Black women to conform to be worthy of a particular position. So, there are all these high expectations for Black women that are potential barriers. And there are opportunities created to help folks advance. So, yeah, I think those are also barriers.

Andrea:

> A barrier is always going to be our race and our gender when we walk into a room. We can never change who we are and what we look like. So, unfortunately, what presents itself in front of us and we must remember that constantly—I was talking to a colleague the other day. Every day I wake up, I must remember and choose how to enter a space because I know that I am a Black woman when I come into a space. And those continue to be barriers for us. We also have our colleagues and how we must continue to manage their white fragility when we walk into a space. Whether that is a man or woman when we come into a space, we must manage how we help you with your white fragility today. How can I help you today? So, I think those are our constant barriers, and when you walk into a room, we must bury it constantly—we always must be over-prepared when we come into the room continually. But we better not ever be underprepared. So, the moment that we are underprepared, we are challenged.

Stacy:

> Other than the melatonin in my skin? I think what I've learned is that I feel a lot of it has to do with stereotypes. For example, I found that I had a Caucasian co-worker who would jump up in meetings, yell and scream at people, slam her hands down on the desk, and they said, “Oh, well, that's just Amy.” I do not raise my voice. I'm generally happy. I tell people how I feel. I'm pretty direct. But when I was aggressive, I was literally called a bull in a China shop.

Unconscious Biases

A significant number of the participants in this study indicated unconscious biases as a substantial barrier for Black women aspiring senior-level leadership roles. They mentioned that

these unconscious biases toward Black women were used against them and could be a leading factor causing them not to be promoted or advanced earlier in their careers.

Evelyn:

> Access, visibility is probably the top two: access and the ability to be tapped on the shoulder. When I was looking at AVP, most of the people who were tapped on the shoulder and made aware of the position did not look like me. All of us apply for our positions. That is what I mean by access, the ability to be in place in town when the opportunity comes is usually not there, and then to be seen for what we bring to the table so we can have access.

Katherine:

> Unfortunately, because there are so few of us, sometimes our names do not come up. I think that hinders advancement; if people do not look like you, they might not think of you. So, I think that's part of it. Then I think the other thing that works against us is that that old trope that if we speak up, even if we do not, most of us do not raise our voices, but if we call things to focus attention that they may have missed, like bias suddenly, we are angry Black women. So, I think that this is a negative stereotype, and all it takes is for one person to say that about a Black woman, and it's true, even though it's not true.

Dasia:

> Okay, if I am candid, I would say, and this is not to just generalize but my experience with white men. The second thing I will say, and then I will elaborate on Black men or men in general. I have been in many positions that I would have only, and I will say not to discredit my own experience and knowledge because I think it takes a lot to move up the ladder in higher ed as a Black woman. But it is because of other Black women or

women because my experience has been with both. So many white women have mentored Black women, so I am where I am today because of both women. If you even look at the number of female presidents, it's that trajectory for us, and that path is always harder. Someone must give you the opportunity even if you deserve to be there. It must be someone at the table. Even with this current job, I just found out last week that a Black woman was on the committee advocating for me to be hired because they wanted someone else, but that person had less experience. So that was right before the person who said, ":Just because this person is external…." Because it's a cultural thing, like she has way more experience. She has checked all the boxes. So why would you not give her a chance, and I work at a predominantly white institution? And hire internally, just because you say this is one of our own. And she was only one of two Black women on the committee of about nine.

Briana:

In my experience, progressing through my career has been a matter of, so cliché, but about whom you know, and I think for some Black women, that is a barrier. They do not have some of the relationships already built. There are so many barriers to the way that people want to build relationships. For example, a lot of it happens in social gatherings or more informal gatherings, and my experience has been that many Black women do not want to engage in that way. They want to keep their relationships more professional, and they have that boundary. They have to figure out how to maintain that boundary but also build those essential relationships. How do I draw the line and still be true to myself? Indeed, it has been a barrier for me. Someone called it out for me and helped me see that it was a barrier. But I took it upon myself to address it. The institutions and the culture

have not addressed it, and they still have that expectation. I also think there are just some cultural barriers. I believe that people make assumptions about Black women and sometimes show up and misunderstand our demeanor. That has certainly been my experience too. I know a lot of Black women who are very outgoing, very personable, but I also see a lot of Black women who want to check things out first, make sure it's safe, try to figure out who the players are, and do not jump in and engage right away. Sometimes that is misunderstood. That you are quiet or stand-offish is one of the things I hear a lot, especially on the search committees. Are the students going to relate well to this person? As if to say, students only connect to outgoing people and the loudest voice in the room, these assumptions that certain personality types were more successful. I think that some of what I know is my institution, in particular, is small, and just like everywhere, culture defeats everything. On a small campus, you feel that this obvious set of expectations shapes the culture, and if you do not jive with those expectations, it is hard to advance. Of course, they are not always explicitly stated. Sometimes you do not figure it out until you get in there. You are like, “This is how we play the game. This is how this is going to work.” It is not always explicit.

Marilyn:

I think it has a lot to do with what I've seen and experienced is there are not as broad pathways for us as they are for white women. So as an example, I was just talking to a sorority sister of mine. We try to walk every Sunday. So, we walked yesterday. She is a retired provost in an HBCU. We find ourselves talking about these kinds of conversations. So yesterday, we were talking about the absence of Black women in leadership advancement. There could be opportunities, I am assuming, for Black women

to occupy, but I have seen very few unless you are at an HBCU if you were at a PWI, very few African Americans in advancement or senior-level positions. I have noticed that. Similarly, she and I were talking about CFOs. I have yet to see an African American chief financial officer. There are a few women. Suppose you are female and have been a chief financial officer for an institution; that says a lot because it's a male-dominated field similar to IT. If you look at IT at my school, there is only one African American, and she is at the administrative level. She is the administrative assistant to the chief information officer. So, I think there are not many opportunities, and maybe there are just not many mentorships. The women of color that you see in leadership tend to be in Student Affairs or student officers or on the academic side of the house. So, you will see them as deans.

Yolanda:

The barriers that I thought were like, well no one's going to take me seriously, or they may not want to follow my lead, I thought I was coming out, like I felt that they wouldn't want to follow what I was saying, because of my race. So, I thought epic, not only under me but also with peers, other people in my area, and other administrators; I also thought they would not want to be respectful of my opinions and things like that. So, as far as various, you can have all the education in the world, you can have five doctorate degrees, people still see you as a Black person. We just talked about all the education, all the experience, almost 30 years of experience in education. Some people will still not poll your opinion on the same level as someone saying the same thing you were saying, who's not African American or who's not Black. Another barrier, sometimes if you are outspoken, could be considered an angry Black woman if I talk a certain way or am

passionate about something. It is like, you have to communicate a certain way was my feeling. If you do not, you are considered angry, and Wow, what is wrong with her?

Someone else can go off in a meeting, and, oh, that person needs help. Maybe they need to go to HR to see a counselor. They need medication, and with me, there is that stereotype. So, I do not want to go on too long, but I think those are some barriers perceived by my peers and people who report to me and that stereotype of being an angry Black woman. So, I think those were some concerns.

LaToya:

So, I have only worked at predominantly white institutions, elite ones for the most part, and that is a very different experience from someone like you who has worked at an HBCU and our community college. So, you have to think about the space, your environment, the history of that environment, the culture of that environment, which is very different from wanting to be a firefighter. This profession is challenging because even though they work the same, the environment can be drastically different. The atmosphere does impact how you do the work. I think that is challenging for anyone.

Perhaps it is extra challenging for Black women because not many of us are doing the work, so it is hard to find mentors who look like you. So then, if you are uncomfortable with having mentors who do not look like you, you may or may not reach out and get connections in that regard.

Andrea:

A barrier is also our education. We walk into the room. You are pursuing your doctorate right now because you have probably been in spaces where your educational attainment has been a barrier for you. So, you are pursuing your doctorate. I pursued mine because

> of my educational attainment, not my experience, not my experience. I had the experience when I came into the room, but for some reason, my educational attainment was a barrier for me when I walked into the spaces. So unfortunately for us, our race, our gender, our educational attainment, you probably work with faculty right now. But, still, because you do not have your doctorate, you are not recognized as an expert in the room or even valuable when you come into the room and like, oh is it Andrea?

I attempted to find ways the participants felt that race impacted their experiences while working in higher education within the third interview question. The participants in this study identified multiple ways in which they believed race influenced their career experiences. Several stated that they had experienced such as being the only female or Black person in the room. Feeling inadequate based on treatments from colleagues, being labeled as an angry Black woman when they did not agree with decisions or have an opinion. Others indicated that they were included in meetings only because they were Black, and a "Black" viewpoint was needed to make certain decisions. In addition, quite a few participants indicated that their voices were not heard or overlooked at times, and their counterparts questioned their expertise. The participants' responses identified tokenism, the Angry Black Woman, and push back as recurring themes for interview question 3.

Tokenism

The participants in this study identified being one of a few of the only Black or Black woman in their position. These participants expressed that they were viewed as essential in their daily tasks or assignments based on their race, gender, or both. Based on the participants' responses, they were the consensus for Black people or stand-in as a Black person in decision-making to even the score.

Melynda:

I think it has had a positive impact and a negative impact. Positively, it has impacted my experience due to people's ignorance, thinking that because I am Black, I can be the best person at the TRIO program, for example. Or you are Black, and so we are going to hire you as an academic advisor at an all-white campus because you can be that person that can bridge that gap. So, I have gotten opportunities from my blackness, but at the same time, it is ignorance, if that makes sense, like, so that has happened. So, I think that you cannot be your best self if you are not authentic. That is usually how I have broken through many spaces as the token. And, until I received this role that I am in now, that is how it has been. I got an opportunity; I am not saying that I am not talented or cannot do the role. But I question if I was doing this as a white woman, would I have been extended that opportunity? I think the answer would be no, in a lot of those cases.

Dasia:

I would say positively and negatively. When you may work at institutions that serve minority students, you are valued, especially in a place where most of the faculty or staff are not the minority. So, they see you as a voice, right? You are the person who may understand the students most. However, in places where you are not the minority and other minorities work with you, which I would say is the bulk of my experience, ethnicity comes into play, especially when you have leaders, your seniors, staff who are above you, who have been White men or women.

Victoria:

It is prevalent. I find the double bind of being Black and female; I think you can walk into a room, and immediately others can see that you are Black and female. So, you have

had this persona of, okay. Are they scrutinizing everything I am saying, or do they hang on to my every word simply because I am a Black woman? They want to see how I will say certain things or how I will respond in situations? And I think that even at schools where there is a large population of students of color. I feel that they will look at ethnicity more than at the fact that you are a woman. So, it is just something you really cannot remove yourself from.

Carolyn:

It is exhausting, to be honest because I have held positions that are DEI specific. I think that this added to the exhaustion because, as a Black woman, trying to navigate this predominantly white space can often be challenging at the end of it. So, I will advocate for a student trying to do the same thing and be the primary voice or resource for people trying to understand the experience. So, there are these layers that have honestly led to burnout for me.

LaToya:

I do not know that it has impacted my work necessarily. I will say it affects the way that I show up for work. But, perhaps more so, I think it influences me probably more than outward, external impacts. I constantly interact with presidents and vice presidents and all that institutional brass perspective per se. I am always conscious about how I show up in a space, what that means to be the only one there, and I must represent that space at that time. I always want to make sure that another Black person can be in this space when I leave it or if I leave it, right? So, I am constantly thinking about maintaining a professional demeanor. Even when I disagree or do not support a decision that my dean

> or someone is making, I mean now we are at a point where we are super comfortable with each other.

The Angry Black Woman

When asked the third question, some of the women in this study indicated that they had experiences where they were presumed to be angry due to demeanor, hand gestures, and speaking passionately. They expressed feeling as though this stereotyping shaped how their colleagues perceived them and at times thought that they could not be as passionate about specific topics in the same manner as their counterparts with the fear that they would be deemed angry or lacking self-control.

Evelyn:

> Usually, I am the only person of color, a Black person, a Black woman, and it has impacted me because my natural work ethic is better than most. And so, I have been accused of having a takeover spirit because I just naturally run circles around folk. But my other colleague who did great work was never accused of being an overachiever. She was considered an overachiever, but I had very taken over the years. You can see the language differences and how they describe this. In health and wellness, you do not know a lot of influencers who are people of color. When you think about health and wellness, typing in Google shows white-skinned primary women. And so, being Black, me being plus size has not been easy for me in these spaces because I am an outlier; being Black in higher education overall means that we take on the extra burden of becoming mentors, coaches, the aunties to our students. So, we have two jobs we are hired for, and we embraced because they need us. But this lovely melanin skin also requires me to do additional uncompensated labor. When I walked into this space, I was five feet eight plus

size, so I carried myself very heavy and well, as we say in the south, and I am from North Carolina. So, when I walk into a space, I am confident, know what I am talking about, and come off very strong in those spaces. So, the students are like, “Oh, my God! You are a breath of fresh air.” The colleague who is not doing their job is like, “Let me get my shit together.” I constantly have to think about what I say and how I say it, and my passion is often misconstrued for anger. I am like, “Why can't I be passionate? Why can't I be highly engaged or an overachiever like you all described to other folks, but you all go to authenticate and tone it down.” I have also been told I do not talk well enough. Two people on two different campuses tell me that I did not speak well enough, which is triggering.

Dasia:

A lot of times, I feel like even personally, I have intimidated people. When I have asked people for feedback, like, “Oh, I think so and so,” maybe I said something wrong, they are like, no, do not worry about it. The person is just intimidated. So, many times, my experience has been that I was kept out of positions because others perceived me as not knowing the information. But, still, because you are a threat to their ego or threat to their position, even if you do not have any eye set on wanting that position, the person will see you as a threat. And so, I tend to see that most, and I have seen it most and even here where I am now with white men.

Andrea:

So especially being from the south and when I moved up to the Midwest, they were not—they were like, “What?” It is unacceptable. Do not do that. Then when you layer, even though we are from the same race, we have cultural barriers. I am from below the Bible

> belt. So, they think that it is not acceptable. So, you have to respect those cultural boundaries. So, also being from the south, when I spoke and may have been passionate about something, my passion was often construed for aggression. I am not aggressive. I am just telling you my point until being told, "Well, your neck started moving, and we just thought…." I was like, "No, I am passionate, and this is how I express myself. Unfortunately, you perceive that as aggressive, and I am not aggressive, I am just getting my point across, and you may choose to cry, and I choose to become more affirmed in my voice and change my inflection." And you said she is aggressive, and I did not know what to do because she got aggressive.

Marilyn:

> We must be very careful how we show up, and often, as people of color, when it comes to talking about race, equity, inclusion, we tend to become very passionate about it, but often, that passion is perceived as being angry. So, it is okay for a white woman to express a particular viewpoint, but when we do it, we have to be very careful and guarding.

Push-Back

Another recurring theme emerged among the participants in this study. It indicated that even though they had a seat at the table, their colleagues were not taken seriously and often would make overlooked suggestions. The women indicated that they would have to prove themselves worthy of making decisions and at times found themselves being questioned regarding their level of experience or expertise. This action left the women with a sense of not feeling worthy or not wanted in the spaces they earned.

Tiffany:

It played a big part in everything because sometimes you are judged by your color, especially by people of color. They will grade you the hardest. In addition, instead of trying to help you move up along and show you what you need to do, they are the ones holding you down instead of trying to inspire and be that mentor.

Katherine:

Sometimes I am effective in doing that, and sometimes I may not be. Sometimes I think I am, and then I hear, I find out, they didn't say anything. But later on, they complain. But I believe that it is the kind of work that I do, particularly diversity. Some people would say that they favor it, but they have no idea what it means. So, when they bump up against it, right, when they hire you, and then you say so, here is what you did wrong. Here is what we—here are these policies that need to change, here are all these misconceptions, sometimes folks resent that and really what they meant was we were all about diversity, but not if it meant we had to change.

Dasia:

So, when you are in meetings, you are on mute, but if you could be a fly on a wall and hear my button going mute, unmute, unmute, unmute, I mean because every time I go to say something, someone talks over you. It was more recently; I think so you can see when people mute and I mean another Black woman said, “I think you were getting ready to say something because they could get a word in,” and that is sometimes what it takes in specific places that white men and women dominate. So, sometimes we must look out and say, “Hey, I think you were getting ready to say something.” That is an excellent point; I could say the same thing many times, which has happened to me so many times, too many to count. I am learning not to get upset about it where I just said the same thing,

but a white man will say the exact words I just said in the same meeting, and the other white man will say that is a good point. That happened to me this week. That happens too often.

Briana:

Well, I am at a predominantly white institution, predominantly and historically white. All our senior leaders are white except for one person who was recently hired. I think there is this assumption that this is who our leaders are. They are white, and I cannot say it has never been explicitly said, but you see the bias. I think it is a preference for specific experiences; it is a preference for certain educational experiences typically reserved for white people. I can give you an example; I remember being on a search committee for a leadership development position. This one candidate had a lot of experience working at summer camps. Coming up working like you must go to college and this association where this particular camp. I thought, well, only certain people can either, one, even know what that is and two, can even afford such a camp, such an experience. Why are we putting so much emphasis on that experience? It is just this bias or this assumption that what I know and am familiar with is best. I will lean on what I know that I have heard of and not be open to other experiences.

Yolanda:

You have as much knowledge as anyone else many times, and you may not be taken as seriously as someone. As I said, you could be saying the same thing as someone else, but you may not be taken as seriously because of your race, and I am not just talking. I am going back over the years, and I just talked about this specific college. I am just reflecting on working at different colleges, so many colleges, even part-time adjunct, at night

working at various colleges. So, you could be saying the same thing in a meeting, and someone else will say the same something you say, and then it would be taken more seriously, and no one just said, well, that person just said those types of things.

Stacy:

One of the biggest things is that the color of our skin pays us, but we are expected to do more, and we are not given the same opportunities. We are not promoted. Yeah, and when I talk to African American women, you know, I have friends across the country and in higher education, and we all have these same or similar experiences. I currently have more experience than any of the deans. However, I make the least money; I have the most programs and three divisions that I oversee.

LaToya:

Then there is also a sense that you must show that you are fully capable of handling your position. So, I always feel like I must outwork everyone in the room, and perhaps that is a function of race and gender. But I would say that that is how it impacts me.

Jennifer:

Oh goodness. Microaggressions being the thing that comes to mind most when people might talk to me on the phone, and they might not necessarily know that I am African American and sometimes being surprised when they meet me and making assumptions about who I am. When I first got hired as a clinician within the first week, someone who became a mentor to me, a white man, was the first to test me. So, we were in a meeting, and I asked a question. It was not a silly question, but he used this opportunity to test my knowledge in a meeting. I held my own, but I thought, okay, would you do this, and I worked with him for over 20 years. I never saw him do that to anybody else, but he did it

> to me. I think I passed the test, but why did I have to go through that? So, I guess yeah, people making assumptions and comments about appearance have always made a point of dressing beyond my current role. I always dress for the part. I tend to dress up for the role. I recall when I came into the position as a clinician, one of my supervisors said, "You do not have to dress the way you do."

With interview question number four, I attempted to identify what the participants who participated in this study felt were barriers and challenges for them as they progressed in their careers in higher education. The participants in this study indicated that the barriers and challenges they faced significantly affected how they progressed in their careers. For example, there was an indication that the participants were not taken seriously and often found that their colleagues did not work as hard as they were. In addition, the recurring themes presented by the participants when answering this question were access to opportunities for advancement, lack of mentorship, and gaining trust as a leader.

Access to Opportunities for Advancement

The responses to the question related to barriers and challenges allowed the participants to freely express their experiences as they progressed in their careers toward senior-level leadership positions. Many participants expressed frustration with access, saying they were not offered opportunities to advance their careers or knowledge base. Many participants also expressed that they were not provided the same opportunities they felt were given to their counterparts.

Evelyn:

> I could not get an interview as an internal candidate because of my white colleague, who did not like me. A white colleague I was working with had a search firm do what they

call “off-the-record” reference checks, and out of all people, they called “My bully,” and she gave me bad references, and I almost missed the job that I had at Y University because of that. But luckily, my boss was a Black woman who gave me a chance to explain what she probably did or what she said. So, I have dealt with bullying. I have dealt with concrete ceilings. One of the things that came out from my dissertation is that it is not a glass ceiling for many of us. It is a concrete ceiling.

Melynda:

I think, see, I want to say moving up has been a challenge. But I struggle to say that as a 31-year-old in a dean's role, this is the first time they have had Black women in leadership at this college and this institution.

Victoria:

Lack of promotion opportunities and career advancement, as well as lack of mentoring, as well-. It is just not there. And I think that if those opportunities were more prevalent or more available to us, it would not be such a challenge to navigate campus culture and campus climates. I definitely- it still somewhat gets me a little emotional because this came about when I was also doing my study. You often feel like I am coming to this campus or coming to this profession, giving it my all. And yet I am feeling like I am watching others get promoted, and you are wondering, okay, well, why are they being promoted just based on who they know, or somebody puts their name for it. It just does not seem to happen or evolve quickly for women of color.

Briana:

I think one is just access to opportunities, and again, the most challenging thing is most of the barriers are never explicitly stated. No one ever says, “I am going to let this person

have that experience and not that one, and this is why," it is never explicit. But I would say one of the barriers is just access to opportunities.

Andrea:

So, the barriers were when specific opportunities came up; people did not know who I was. I did not hit the social scene like I needed to. So those are barriers for opportunities because sometimes I feel like our community, we talk, stay out of drama, stay out of the mess.

Stacy:

I feel what I have experienced a lot of the time is a lack of opportunity because sometimes people do not want you to look better than some white woman or bless you.

And it is generally white women. White men tend to have different attitudes because they already feel they are at the top. So, I have found that white men are more helpful than white women. But, unfortunately, often outside of the presidency, many of those positions are held by white women.

Mentorship

Throughout the interviews, many of the participants felt that mentorship was important. However, the Black women in this study expressed that mentoring was a barrier toward their career progression. Based on the responses, these women felt that if they received proper mentorship, opportunities would have been available to them or would have progressed at a higher rate based on their responses.

Victoria:

Lack of promotion opportunities and career advancement, as well as lack of mentoring, as well. It is just not there. And I think that if those opportunities were more prevalent or

> more available to us, it would not be such a challenge to navigate campus culture and campus climates. And I definitely- still somewhat gets to be a little emotional because this came about when I was also doing my study. But, I constantly feel like I am coming to this campus or this profession, giving it my all.

Melissa: "Again, one of the challenges that I have experienced in higher education almost comes down to; it is not what you know but who you know."

Briana: "She was always doing stuff. She was always on committees that did not have anything to do with our job, just doing stuff. So I was thinking, nobody offered me. What if I want to be on the committee?"

Marilyn:

> So, not having very few other African American women or men in senior-level positions just to have conversations about our experiences. Having just another confidant who can walk out of the meeting and say, "Did you hear that?" Or "What did you think about that?" So, being the only one. I know it is cliché, but it is lonely at the top.

Stacy:

> I think honestly, the lack of mentors. In my experience, because I worked at a PWI and a predominantly Black Institute, I can see the vast difference in my experiences in the two different environments. When I talk about these barriers, some are only related explicitly to those institutions, but at PWI, I have found a lack of mentorship. When there are other Black women in positions, they generally do not serve as mentors to you. They can sometimes be your biggest foes because it is like crabs in the barrel mentality.

Gaining Trust as a Leader

The participants in this study indicated that they were often rejected buy-in from colleagues on projects, their ideas went unnoticed until mentioned by a White counterpart, or often were questioned about their expertise on subjects. The institutional partners that these participants worked with did not allow them the same platforms as other partners and often doubted their ability to perform their jobs or would not buy into the projects that they were promoting. The participants expressed that they felt they were given a hard time because of who they were.

Tiffany:

> You lose good people because some of the schools rather hire new people to replace the people who have been there and pay them more money instead of just paying the people who are already doing the job and are dedicated.

Katherine:

> So, there were some petty barriers from folks who were beneath him, lower level. I am not even going to say they were administrators, but they were in a place where they could put up roadblocks. Like when I first started, I remember checking my email, and I said to somebody my email from yesterday is gone. This is like my first week. My email from yesterday is not there like it is gone. I do not understand that. It is like I am starting all over again. And the guy in the IT Department said, well, that is because I set you up for a one-day account every day. And so, okay, I will need you to set me up because I am not going anywhere, so I will require you to fix that. But, I mean, you know that I just started, it was brand new, this position had not existed, and this diversity role was brand

new for the campus. And it was clear that there were folks who did not think that was something that should happen.

Carolyn:

Just the lack of institutional support. I think it is only stated, but there is no action behind that. I have consistently seen leadership say, “Oh, yeah. We support the work you are doing right on,” but there is no movement or shared responsibility. It is still, “Okay, you go ahead and make that happen,” which made me end up by myself, and the institution cannot say to everybody else that this is what you are required to do. So, how do I continue to do the work and ensure there is transformation here when there is no campus-wide variant and support.

Yolanda:

Getting people to know and respect you, and for the most part, overcoming that. Once people got to know me and know that my heart is in the right place, the passion instead analogies that experience there. I will say, like, I have not had a chance to make this. I do not know if this will come up and if not, I will mention this at the end, that when I first came out here to Colorado, as I said, it was a challenge, and like I said, yes, it is a cultural thing. Still, as I said, I have lived in several states and traveled. I love traveling outside the United States. The participants indicated that even though they experienced barriers and challenges, they found methods to overcome them. The participants drew on different ways of overcoming the barriers and challenges they faced, and from those methods, recurring themes were identified. Although each woman described another way of dealing with the barriers and challenges, there were more recurring themes for this question. The responses were equal in the number of similar answers. The recurring

themes for overcoming obstacles and challenges were faith, having mentors, self-advocacy, and being strategic.

Faith

Many participants indicated that they relied on their faith and belief in God to get them through challenges. This may have been displayed through prayer or just a firm belief that God would not allow for the difficult times to define them or last too long. Their responses made it evident that their faith keeps them grounded and going even when they are being tested in their environments.

Evelyn: "I talked about my faith. I drew upon what I was grounded in before I even knew what it was, what my faith in God was."

Tiffany: "I pray a lot because some things you learn that are just not in your control get out of your control quickly, and sometimes you just must sit and listen."

Andrea: "Faith has probably been the number one thing that has kept me grounded and returning to that and staying rooted and grounded in my faith and figuring out what my purpose was, was to help people."

Jennifer: "My faith. My faith is important to me. I am finding other ways to stay connected to students because I do not feel like an imposter."

Mentors

The second recurring theme was having a mentor to lean on for questions and suggestions. Many participants indicated that mentors help them get through difficult times or uncertainty by offering advice or help through uncomfortable situations. In addition, mentors played a crucial role in helping these participants learn other ways to understand problems and spaces invited.

Evelyn:

So, for me, it was the women on my campus at ECU who rallied around me and was like, “Come on.” Just so that I met with the dean of my undergrad program in the department chair, “Little ol' me,” and it was a reminder of the beginning and the end.

Melynda:

Mentorship has probably been the top thing that I have always tried to stay connected to a mentor. But, unfortunately, there were two years when my mentor and I had life stuff going on, so we did not talk as much. And so that was a gap for me, and I felt it.

So, having that mentor, being able to kind of say, like, “Am I tripping or what is just happening in the situation?” So, last week, I had a situation where we talked and brainstormed about how we would approach all the deans across the district.

Andrea:

Mentors and excellent mentors, I realized that some people I thought were my mentors was not my mentors. They say, “Go to this conference, let this person be your mentor,” and then you are like, “Oh wait, this person is not for me.” My mentor list got minimal because those people were not my mentors and figuring out this person can mentor me in this, this person can mentor me in this, and this is the person I need to see at a conference and say it is excellent, great to see you. If I can talk to you about this subject matter, you can connect.

Marilyn:

Men have been my mentors, white men, and white women. So, that is how I have managed, dealing with some of the barriers and challenges. Like I said, not having somebody you could have a conversation with, like another Black girlfriend that needs

outside of that. Fortunately, because the college president is committed to diversity, equity, inclusion, he did hire. I cannot believe she has been there a year, but he did hire an African American chief admissions officer. So, we have developed a close relationship.

Briana:

I credit that to some mentors, some other Black women in my life who helped me navigate the terrain. But that is one of my strategies. I also try to be clear about what I want and what is most important to me, which helps me know what to ask for.

Self-Advocacy

Based on responses from the participants, it was found that to overcome specific barriers and challenges that had the potential to stunt professional growth, many of the women found themselves having to advocate for themselves. This was described in ways such as standing up for themselves, finding ways to maneuver in difficult spaces, and gaining the confidence to feel included in certain areas despite pushback.

Katherine:

I just did what I needed to do. Every situation might have been different. I confronted them head-on. I could not allow any time to—probably the longest was waiting for communication. Some folks are busy, and they will get back to me, and then they did not.

But for most of the time, you must address it immediately because, in the end, I will be the one who they are looking to say, "Okay, well we hired you, and what did you do?" And I cannot go back and say, "Well, they did not," you have to handle it and not let it slide. Then you figured out how to work around people. We do a lot of working around, and then I have this other philosophy of asking for forgiveness instead of permission.

Melissa:

> I do not stop with one answer or one group, or one angle. I am a lot more focal, and I am starting to gain more confidence and understanding that my voice and my opinion matter. And at the end of the day, we do not all have to agree to disagree.

Briana:

> I think one of them is I had to learn how to advocate for myself. It was not something that I thought much about before or even thought I would have to do. I thought my work would just speak for itself, and it did speak. It needed some help. I had to learn how to advocate for myself. I had to ask for what I wanted.

Stacy:

> I have overcome it by making sure that I am well informed, not to say I am the most intelligent person in the room. But, still, I do not get liberty; I guess liberty is not the correct word, but I will say liberty, but I am not allowed to know everything. And, it can be a curse, and it can be a benefit because then people feel like you think you know everything. But if I do not, you say I do not know what I am doing, and I do not know my job.

Strategy

The last recurring theme for the fifth interview question was being strategic. Many participants indicated that advancing or feeling a sense of acceptance was strategic as they maneuvered through their day or career. This meant being intentional with their words, what schools they worked for, or even the positions they chose to apply for. They had to be very specific with their goals and the path they took to accomplish them.

Melynda:

Everything I do, I try to be strategic about it. I knew I wanted to be a dean when I was 23. So, I was like, “Okay, what does that look like? I need some advice.” I did not just come in and say, “Okay, I am going to see what this is like.” I came in like, :Okay, how can I make this work for me.” I think that it has paid off. I mean, now I can say it indeed has paid off by just trying to make sure I do not stay in one position too long, network with the right people, and get the proper connection. So that way, if I ever get in a spot, like let's say if this interim job ends tomorrow, I know okay, I can call such and such over at this organization, and they will have a spot for me. Or I can go here or go there. So, I think that the networking piece has been huge too.

Dasia:

I have been more intentional about the jobs I take. So, lately, and I think this comes with experience, you are eager to get those positions. So, when you complete and you get a position as your first senior-level position or administrative position, you are just happy to be there. You are delighted to be able to be seen to do the work. You do a great job, you put in the hours, and then there is burnout. And so, one of the things that I have started to be more intentional about is the positions, the jobs I go out for. And I am asking questions in the interview like what are your intense periods throughout the year? What are your expectations? What does work-life balance look like? That was one of my questions about this job. Tell me what work-life balance looks like. And they were like, “Oh, we do not answer emails, like when we turn off at 5:30, we are off. But, unless it is an emergency, and if it is, I will text you.”

Carolyn:

> I really had to adjust my expectations and then toss them out the window. But, still, I had to think about what it looked like to be effective and be mindful about the context in the culture that I was working with because I came in very idealistic like change this, change that. But when you are not like that, it is easy to get discouraged when things are not happening as rapidly as anticipated. And when others do not have the same urgency level as you, I had to slow down and reassess my approach to seeing change happen.

Andrea:

> If I could not help them in the way I thought, I figured out another way to help people. So sometimes changing jobs or sitting in that position and saying, "Okay, let me just do some assessment and learn a new skill while I am in this job." Maybe it was not time for me to leave yet, but it was time to gain some new skills while I was in that position.

The majority of the participants in this study have had some form of professional development training that they have participated in to help advance their careers. Due to the variety in each participant's positions, there were no recurring themes based on training. Instead, each one participated in professional development training specific to the areas in which they work. One commonality amongst a few of the participants was their participation in different leadership training opportunities. The participant responses are as follows:

Evelyn:

> We have a couple of certifications in health promotion, but I have got what they call the CHES, the Certified Health Education Specialist. Then they created the MCHES, the Master Certified Health Education Specialist. Right when I finished undergrad, I sat for the CHES. Thanks to those same mentors. I sat for the CHES, got my CHES, and then when the MCHES came around, I got that in 2015. My boss, a Black woman, paid for me

to sit for that exam. I have those two. I went through tobacco treatment training, so I was a tobacco cessation specialist. I am a certified health and wellness coach. So, these were tied to the jobs that I had before I became an administrator. Then the last one that I finished in December of 2020 was the Certified Health and Wellness Professional through the American College Health Association. That is their certification for those who are administrators in College Health. So, I sat for that exam in, December and that is going to be my last one as far as certifications go. As far as training, all those are tied to training. Aside from the CHES, you could not do any of those other certifications, tobacco coaching or the professional one, without going through training first and getting the continuing education credits to sit for that exam, so they were both tied together. Now and then, I do webinars and listen in, and I still do that. But as far as dedicated training, that is about it. I finished it up in December. I go to conferences too. American College Health Association is one of our national organizations, and I am also a NASPA member.

Tiffany:

Here, they did not believe in us going to NASFAA. Now I can go to it. They will network with their peers and learn about stuff coming down the pipe before the FSA conference in November. They learned about stuff that will happen next week than finding out that they are already in the process after the fact.

Melynda:

The best one was the Situational Leadership Conference. So, we learned how to do Situational Leadership that was huge for me coming into the role. But, once I got into the position, some of the strategies were not working as well in this position as the level prior.

So, we have a Kansas City professional development opportunity through our HR, but it is through an outside organization. And so, each month, we do different professional development experiences to get us ready to lead in the workplace. I was a little skeptical because it seemed like a kind of cookie-cutter box said, come and do this. But that has been extremely helpful in understanding, so just those leadership training trying to see where you are and how you move has been beneficial. And then I am trying to think that, yeah, I want to do more. And that is what I am going to say; I am going to pause there and just say that is something I want to document in your interview is that the opportunities and this could have been a barrier. I did not get a lot of opportunities for professional development. So, I have those two, where I am like, ooh, those are strong. I probably could have more. But I am not being selected to get scholarships for things to go places. Like NAFSA, if I say, "Well, I want to go to NAFSA, I want to do this, or I want to do that." Okay, well, it's $2,000. So how are you going to pay for it? I work at a community college. So, we are a resource board, so we are not sending people across the country. So yeah, that is a barrier and a gap.

Katherine:

I was thinking about that. I have gone to ACE meetings—I went to an excellent ACE meeting to prepare women of color for the presidency even though I do not want to be a president. But I went, and it was very informative, and I did take the stuff away from that event. I mean, it was still an excellent meeting. I was nominated for the program, but I did not get in. But then I would not talk there. But, yeah, I go to conferences, and I learn a lot of different information. My favorite is Encore. I try not ever to miss Encore. But I have not done any of those. I did not do-I have not been an ACE fellow or ACE; that is

what they want you to say. I have not done any of those things. I have had lots of mentors, outstanding mentors.

Dasia:

So recently, we have been just doing a lot of free webinars here and there. But, more frequently, we see a lot about equity in higher education. So, I have been doing a lot of training and special workshops for equity trying—And I have led an equity project at my previous institution. It was really for community college students and making sure that we provide programs and services that look at students not as equals but provide additional support to students who may need more than another student. Right, and helping the faculty to understand that. So, I have been doing many workshops and training on that, and I have been doing many program reviews and just making sure that our curriculum is culturally appropriate. That curriculum allows students to move quickly through programs to get into the workforce. So, a lot of curriculum development. More recently, ironically, this just has not been a whole lot on leadership. Still, before this pandemic year, I would focus on leadership and some specific things like accreditation because I oversaw accreditation. I am still involved in accreditation, which without accreditation, you cannot get funding for the institutions. So, it is a pretty big deal.

And then assessment. Assessment of student learning. Currently, I oversee the departments for assessment, curriculum development, scheduling of classes, and facilities. I am over faculty evaluations where the students evaluate the faculty. Then I do many special projects as needed for the vice president, whether it is, “Hey, we need a new platform. Can you take the lead on putting together a committee and exploring that?” So, my professional development is sometimes just hands-on. It is really like, “I need you

to do this," and you are like, "Okay, I think I know how to do that. Let me figure this out." Just immerse yourself into what you need to learn to complete projects. So, I have recently discovered a lot about different evaluation platforms because I had to leave that entire process for college. I have been learning more about some more technology internally because we do many things to save money. So, we use things like SharePoint, which we pay for, but you can do some creative things to create flow processes, and I am also over at the academic dishonesty process where if students cheat and things like that.

I would say that it has been very technical professional development. I have also been more intentional about joining African American leadership organizations focused on higher ed in the last two years. Those are important because I can be with like-minded people and understand the barriers we face in higher education and the support we need that we may not get at our institutions. Some of those organizations allow for those smaller boot camps for writing or smaller mentoring programs where if you do want to be a President, you have another person who has maybe walked in your shoes five years ahead of you who can say these are some of the things you should be doing to develop yourself further. The skills that you may get, you have a gap in that I know for a fact that a board of trustees or search firm is looking for you to have if this is what you are trying to achieve. So those have been some recent things, and luckily my current employer pays for those fees. So that is always a plus.

Victoria:

I belong to a few organizations with different conferences for women that speak to how to be a leader in higher education, embrace diversity, equity, and inclusion, and make it-subscribe to yourself. So, it is different. It is not an actual workshop that I attended, but

conferences with workshops and seminars embedded in them. And that has been a span of over so many years now that I have gone to them.

Melissa:

I have and continue to participate in various organizations primarily geared or focused on admission work. And I mentioned, I was recommended for the middle manager institute, and I participated through TCU. I think that was back in 2015. In addition, I have become more involved in leadership roles and community chair positions for our region and our local administration through the state department of education or higher education here in Virginia. So, networking and working closely with different organizations, I have also been asked to participate in two separate nonprofit organizations on their board.

Briana:

I have never been a person who loves going to conferences. I know that is a big thing in higher ed, and that is one of those things that people use to meet people and network. I have never loved it. I have always found that there is usually more information that I do not want than I do want. It has just never been a good use of my time. That is how I have always known about them because I do it sometimes, but I do not love it. It is not a tool that I use very often. I like to do webinars or certifications that way. Things that I can say this is what I want, and it will be just that. One of the things that I did was I got a strength coaching certification. Because our college uses the strength assessment, somebody must be certified. This is one of those things that I asked for because I wanted to do this. That has been helpful in my work inside and outside the institution; I have been able to leverage that credential to do some freelancing and some consulting on the side. I have

done that, and I have done a couple of other strength certifications. I like to read, so I do a lot of professional development and control things when it happens. My life is busy.

Carolyn: "So, attending conferences has been helpful, going to the NASRO and the in-course and many training programs and just reading. Be consistent about keeping up with current research that is out there."

Andrea:

> I had the opportunity to go to different conferences, including the Southeastern Association of College Administrators, with people attending from Texas to Tennessee, West Virginia, and Florida. The conference rotates between the states. So those conversations and then they will sometimes have pre-conferences. So, I went to Mississippi State to a legal conference that convenes about 2 or 3 days that focus on different legal issues, whether across accessibility, free speech, Title IX, fraternity and sorority life, risk management. So, I have had a mixture of opportunities to go to topical areas and very general lists that support the overall development of the professional as well. So, I have been really blessed and fortunate in that area to be at institutions that supported that type of training and development. I know some of my colleagues have not been at those types of institutions where they supported that. So, I think that it is imperative, a conference just for women. I was fortunate to have supervisors who supported professional organizations like ACUHO-I, CIHO, SACSA when I started. So, one of the first ones I went to was through SACSA was NPI, New Professionals Institute. I had a great time when I was there and enjoyed making connections with good folks there. Then I went to the AVP, Assistant Vice Presidents Institute. That one was beneficial in the last 3 to 5 years as I transitioned to my last two roles. So, I have had

some excellent institutional supervisors and have been very supportive of institutes like that. They were focused on the kind of role where you are and then training. I have been able to go to; I would say, topical training like Garen Academy was essential in conducting training that I had not had before. Cleary training is critical in my conduct world with legal proceedings. As institutions have faced budget cuts, people have tried to create spaces on social media to support growth and development in different places. Like I have seen something on Facebook where there are different groups that support each other for professional development. So hopefully, they continue, but hopefully, institutions can bounce back and get behind more professional spaces as well.

Marilyn:

As I mentioned, the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education, NADOHE, I joined, has been such a great resource. But, most recently, in the past year, they were focused really on the undergraduate experience. So, like myself, most chief diversity officers four years ago were leading the work in traditional undergraduate schools. But now, since many of us are working in allied health and health professions, there is enough of us where we have our chapter that is part of the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education. So, they have been my thought partners, people to who I can reach out. I am trying to figure out, "Is your president going to write a statement?" acknowledging the one-year anniversary of the death of George Floyd.

Those are the people that I can reach out to so I can get some insights into practice. So, a lot of it has been on becoming familiar with Medicine and DEI, so I am blessed that I am at an institution where there is lots of money for professional development if you want it. So, I have been able to take advantage of going to all kinds of

conferences focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion in Higher Ed and diversity, equity, and inclusion in Medicine. It is a blessing.

Yolanda:

So, conference meetings are being signed up at my job for leaders. What is it for trainees two months training, six months training on leadership development? What are the types? Student Engagement, professional development? I have done so much professional development. I have written a book because I was thriving in high education careers. So, I have written a book about how to succeed in higher education.

Stacy:

I am working on my doctorate. I am finding mentors. NCBAA is one of the ways that I found mentors. One of my closest mentors, I reached out to on LinkedIn. I did not know him. And I am like, "Hey, we kind of have had the same career. Can we talk?" And we have been friends since then. That was probably six years ago. Yeah, we are good friends now. But I lean on him a lot for the advice. And, you know, and like I say, it is, you know, he is a man, and he deals with the same things. He is a Black man and deals with some of the same things. So yeah, the things that I have done that I found most helpful to me are the mentorship, you know, kind of telling you what to expect. And it is like, okay, you know, this happened, and I felt this way now, is it just me being, you know, overly sensitive? He was like, no. So it is like, just trying to make sure you have a sounding board to talk about those lived experiences.

LaToya:

Well, and I do have, you know, two degrees in higher administration is, so that has been helpful. I have been a member of NASPA for a while now, and financial aid has its

professional organization, but I was a part of it when I was there. I have yet to go to a NASPA conference, but I go to some regional conferences. But mostly maintaining an informal professional network is training, right? I like getting to hear people and their stories, understanding their challenges, sharing my own, and thinking creatively about solutions. It is your personal training experience.

Jennifer:

I did leadership training. I have done two leadership courses. So, one was a leadership course that I found myself in, and our State University New York System sponsors it. But I had to push for it. So, it was not like someone tapped me on the shoulder and said, "Oh, you should go to this." I wanted more leadership experience, and so I would ask my supervisor, "Are there books I can read or are there other things I can do?" and she would always say, you have everything you need, which was not enough for me. So, when I found out about this leadership institute, I applied for it, and I had her support once I brought it to her. Then coming into this position as the AVP, my supervisor suggested attending the AVP Leadership Institute. So, he is the one who told me about it, and he said yes, I would support you. I think this would be good for you. So, it was. The participants described what they perceived influenced their career advancement. Based on the responses to this question, many of the women were tired of seeing certain things occur. For example, they were tired of not being included in conversations or receiving poor leadership. During the interviews, it was discovered that many women were motivated to advance their careers to influence change or be the change that was needed. In addition, some women discussed that the lack of being able to gain access to opportunities made them fight harder to gain access to those areas where they did not see

representation from minority groups. The recurring themes identified in response to this interview question include wanting to be a change agent and the lack of opportunities.

Change Agent

Of the 15 women who participated in this study, eight respondents identified that their career advancement was influenced by the need to see change. Some indicated that they did not see other women who looked like them in certain places; others identified poor leadership as an influence to obtain senior-level leadership to influence change. There were very different reasons they felt a change was needed; nevertheless, change was a driving force in helping them accomplish their goals.

Evelyn:

> I think again because most of the administrators in the college field are white, predominantly men. When you look at nursing, it is predominantly women, but they are men when you look at nurse administrators. And so, the field of health and wellness is predominantly white, and then you look at influencers on social media. Black folks are influencers in the health and wellness space, not to the degree of white folks. One of the barriers throughout my career is that the experts are all white, even in college health. Everybody is still white. Some of them are known for their bullying tactics. My mentor, who is at Tulane, grew up with that same group, and she is like, "Forget y'all. You are stupid." They just had access. They did not have to fight for their wishes, and they did not have to bully folks. They bully people who challenge them. When I was interviewed at Charlotte, my colleague was on a committee, and she texted me on Facebook and she said, "Baby, I pray you get the job, but I am also scared for you because I know you will shake everything up here." Every time I have done an interview, I have gotten those same

messages of being the change agent, so the bullying came because I have been tasked and going to do. I always tell my mentees, some pastors and missionaries, some are doing pulpit, some going to travel to other places to monitor the campus. So, the bullying comes with the territory. I get it now.

Melynda:

So, if you are coming to the table, as the leader, at least be aware enough to know where people are coming from, their experiences, their background, and how that can impact you. So, I think that that has been something that has pushed me forward. Are people overall consistently doubt that I can do something. I am a single mother as well. So, being Black, being a single mother, being young, people put you in a box and tell you that you cannot do something. And so, I have kind of used that as fuel, I guess, just to keep going.

Katherine:

Well, I will say that one of the challenges was just one that I placed in there myself. It was never my intention to be an administrator. But, like many faculty members, when I started as a faculty member, most faculty learned that you could not trust administrators.

Dasia:

So, what challenges do I perceive that influence? Well, I would say the challenge of change. Change usually challenges that. So, whether it is a change in leadership probably has influenced where I am in any job. You know you get a new chancellor, provost; the higher you go, these things impact you. Down here, I am like, "Oh, we got a new chancellor, I did not even know, okay," but when you start to go further and higher up, it matters because now you are just another level up and closer to the person that is no

longer there. So, leadership has always influenced where I am and may sometimes force me to move up into another leadership position. I would say that is the sole push for me is the change from just staff. I mean because strategic plans are in place. They stay like that. The pandemic forces all to change. But everything else is sort of planned in higher ed. It changes when it is some sort of law, money. Something happened to enrollment declines that forced changes in this environment. Otherwise, the direct impact is permanently changed in a board or leadership or direction at the highest level, and it starts to trickle down.

Andrea:

So those challenges influenced me in my career to say I want to be a part of changing policy and procedure to help students have a better collegiate experience. So, what do I have to do to get to the level where somebody will hear me at the table?

Yolanda:

One of the challenges that I face, and I will just be quite honest; I do not have that mentality. I do not know if it is my Christianity not to backstab, but I have had things done to me that were hurtful. So, I will say, I do not have that in me, and I do not know if you need that I am. I see people who get ahead in higher education.

Stacy:

Watching horrible leadership. Honestly, that has really been my motivator; I am not saying I am the best leader, but I watch people who lead poorly; it lets me know that this is not the kind of leader I want to imitate.

LaToya: “When I feel like I have done what I can for an organization, I should always leave by saying there are always key signs when it is time to go or look for something else.”

Access to Opportunities

Access to opportunities was also seen as a major contributing factor to the advancement of the women interviewed. They were driven to success based on the lack of opportunities granted to them, a lack of a terminal degree, not having a seat at the table, and often identifying that their counterparts were chosen for opportunities in which they were not given a second look. In addition, the participants identified the lack of access provoked them to find ways to enter spaces in which they felt they might not have been welcomed to join.

Tiffany: “Someone was taking the chance on me, trusting and believing in me because financial aid was not the field that I saw for myself growing up. But, unfortunately, I do not think any of us do.”

Victoria:

> Challenges. One of the challenges that led me to pursue the terminal degree was not having the terminal degree. You will hear people say yes, you have your masters. And yes, you have these years in higher education, and yes, you have this position, but go on and get your doctorate because your doctorate will be the pinnacle, it is the terminal degree, it is something that no one can take away from you. And it should pretty much help you to position yourself for more significant leadership positions.

Briana:

> We have not talked about this yet, but I finished my master's degree many years ago, started a doctoral program, and decided not to continue. Some people had expectations like, “You are smart, and you should go and get a Ph.D.” I did it because I thought it was a thing that I was supposed to do. Once I got into that program, it was not healthy; it just was not what I needed at the time. I made the decision I was not going to do it anymore. I

have not closed the door entirely for the rest of my life. Just that point in time and in that program was not right for me. That has been a challenge, I would say to progress, I think, within higher education, and you know there is a value placed on that formal credential. Almost as if to say the credential is more important than your lived experience, like there is formal education, and then there is lived experience, both are forms of education. They both have their place. One is not more important than the other, but higher education certainly values that credential. That has been a challenge, been a challenge to advancing. I am at the point now where I am ready to do something different and just put my toe in the water to see what is out there. Many of the positions would be the logical next step for me to have that requirement or preference. Some are flat-out requirements; some are just preferences. I think when they say preference, they need requirements instead.

Andrea:

I think the challenge of being in places where I was not recognized in the room was because I did not have a terminal degree. So, having that challenge right there. Another challenge was not realizing that my title, my job title, which was so elementary, my job title did not allow me to be in the room to be a part of the catalyst for change. Ironically, as soon as my title changed, I magically had the experience. Really? Now that I am the assistant director or the associate dean, I have the credentials to change policy. Oh, Alicia, go; what procedures have you been using? It was mind-blowing that I now can write policy and procedure and get those changes approved by senior administration because of the doctorate. The same stuff I was doing years ago and feeding it to someone else. I was like the same stuff I was writing to change the alcohol policy and the drug

> sanctions and looking at risk management. So those challenges right there, I was like, "Oh, I do not have a voice at the table."

Stacy: "Watching people who look like me get overlooked and dismissed just because of their skin color when they are often one of the most innovative people in the room."

Jennifer:

> I was never really interested in that, not that I was not enough, but I wanted more. So, I was influenced by what I saw outside of caps. My director also influenced my career because it is a very flat system, so four people were in leadership positions. Still, there was not much room for growth aside from when I took the coordinator for sexual assault position. So, in that case, someone got fired, and then they asked me to take the role. I did not want the job, but I took it at that point. So that also influenced my position because she had a lot of control over people's careers.

Based on the responses from the participants regarding the number of Black women in senior-level leadership roles at each institution that the participants represent, it was clear that the purpose of this study was sufficient. Although the number of Black women who hold senior-level leadership positions at each institution was low, at some institutions, the participants were the only representations of Black women at the senior level. Since the number of Black women varied, there were not enough recurring themes for this question, so each participant's response is included.

Evelyn: "My boss is Dr. Melissa. She is the Senior VP of Student Affairs. She hired a brand-new team, so she hired me, Cara, Talinda. She brought in three. So now, there are five in total."

Tiffany:

I was trying to count that off the top of my head and looking at everything. It is up to five. Like my boss, the dean of students, she is Black. The registrar is Black, and the person who assists the institution of research is also lack. The one who helps with the nursing program is Black, and Dr. Alexander has just recently got put over that program. So, it is about five people. So, I think they deal with everything. But, of course, why this type of person is hired, they do not look at the skin color. They look more at the status of their degree backgrounds. I did give somebody an interview who had a degree and a background in financial assistance. They did not understand why I did not pick the other person over that person. But in interviews, if you cannot sell yourself, how can I be confident in you doing the job?

Melynda:

Okay. The chancellor is a Black woman, Dr. B. So that is one. Our director of HR is another one. We have a vice-president of my campus. So now we are at three. We have me, the director of stimulation, the interim dean of instruction at Blue River. And then Miss G. So, we have eight.

Katherine: “Four. I am sorry, four. So, there are two deans, an Associate Vice Chancellor and me, four.”

Dasia:

I am just thinking because there are not many. So, I am counting on one hand right now. I want to say four Black women; I am thinking about our student development side, the academic side. So, there are five of us, and I am probably the youngest.

Victoria: “Zero.”

Melissa: “I would say we probably have at this point maybe a quote of about ten or more, which is remarkable, considering we are an institution that probably has close to 1500 faculty and staff people on campus.”

Briana:

> We have one vice president. She has been there for four months. At our institution, we have the senior leadership, and then we have this committee of folks who are the next level beneath them, so all the people who report to the senior leaders. So that is where I sit. In that group, there are three Black women. A woman works in the marketing department and a woman who works in institutional advancement, a fundraising unit.

Carolyn: “Zero. Literally just me.”

Andrea:

> So, it is funny that you had that question because had you asked me two years ago, I would have told you none. But in the last two years, we have hired a vice president for strategic initiatives, who is also chief diversity officer. She is a Black woman, and our vice president for academic affairs, our provost, is a Black woman.

Marilyn:

> Three. So, the chief admissions officer who joined us a year ago and the chief student affairs officer. So, there are three of us out of 15 leaders because we meet with them once a month. We meet with the senior leadership team once a month. So, three of us, three women and one Black male, pharmacist, is the only Black male.

Yolanda:

> I first moved out here, and I lived three blocks from the college because I wanted to because I was not familiar with the area. So, I found a house to rent three blocks away

> from the council. Okay, now, we used to walk with those people, and I remember there was a bus stop on my way there, and there was a Black girl who was like, "Oh, my God, you're Black." I say yes, Black all day. She said I do not see any black people around here. She said it is just nice to see another Black face that lives out here. So yes, so if you ever need anything, I am at the college.

Stacy: "Other than myself? Not one."

LaToya: "I have no idea. We are so decentralized at my school. I have no idea. But it is sprinkling."

Jennifer: "I am it; I am it right now. So, there would have been two of us who were a part of the president's executive council because she was at a VP level; however, she was demoted a year ago."

Providing advice to other Black women seeking senior-level leadership positions and overcoming the barriers along the way lead to very interesting conversations with the participants during the interview process. Many women had similar responses and often stated that the advice was either utilized or wished they had utilized during their career journeys. There were topics discussed such as self-advocacy, the need to have a terminal degree, networking, and even collaborating with other people or departments. However, there were very specific recurring themes mentioned in many of the responses. Those recurring themes were mentorship and self-awareness.

Mentorship

Of the 15 Black women who participated in this study, nine indicated that finding a mentor was important advice for Black women trying to advance their careers into senior-level leadership in higher education. Although many stated that they had many mentors who helped

them get into certain positions, they indicated that it is essential to have a mentor to help you prepare or even advocate for you. Some of the women went as far as to describe an ideal mentor and why specific mentors were helpful or essential.

Evelyn:

> One, get a mentor. You have got to have somebody prepping you to get to where you want to go because the paths were not made for us. These positions were not created with us in mind, so you need somebody behind closed doors to help you.

Melynda:

> Network, get a mentor that does not look like you would be another piece of advice. I have a mentor who looks like me, but then I also have another mentor who I saw, and I was like, I do not think we are going to get along; that made me want to talk to her.

Dasia:

> Try to find a mentor, even if it is informal. I would say all the individuals I think of as mentors, even a Black man that is a mentor, are all informal. They were naturally formed because we worked together in jobs, we were peers at one point, then they may have become my superior, and then they would suggest I step into their role. So, it has been a lot of lifting as I go. But, I think without that, it is a challenge; imagine a Black woman who is being mentored and groomed for a role instead of a Black woman who is not.

Victoria:

> Also, getting the terminal degree if you do not have one, definitely pursuing that, and finding a mentor. And by finding a mentor, I do not just mean somebody you could call and just say, oh, will you mentor me? It is like, mentoring goes beyond just asking somebody to mentor you. You also want to ask them point two questions. It is kind of

like they are your mentor, but you are guiding them because you ultimately know where you want to be. So, you are asking them to help you maneuver and make those steps. What is it about me? How can I better polish myself? Or what kind of things do I need to do to strengthen my professionalism or my knowledge? What types of things do you see?

Briana: “I would say find a mentor or someone you trust, someone who has been where you are trying to go, and someone who will hold you accountable and listen to her. That has been big for me.”

Andrea:

I would say surround yourself with good people and go to those who would keep you grounded when challenging situations arise. So I will talk you through that and call them and have that conversation or the Zoom meeting now and talk through that because I think we all face many challenging situations.

Marilyn:

Finding mentors. My mentors have not looked like me. Most recently, I have heard several women talk about how their mentors have been white men. That is true for me. So, finding mentors and does not have to be within your institution. It can be outside out of the institution who can guide you. I will tell you this. I had two mentors when I started at my current institution. One was a white woman, and one was a Black man. Both of them retired. She retired last year, and we still stay in touch. She was the chief admissions officer. So, the person who is in that role now is an African American woman. But, still, before that, she was such a great mentor. as I am dealing with different roadblocks and barriers, really guiding me because she had been there 15 years, really giving me some excellent advice so that I wouldn't step into any landmines. My other

> mentor was the chief information officer, and he was African American, and infrequent you see them in those roles, leading 30 something years, maybe 40. So, he evolved in that role, and he was a good mentor as well. I sought them out, and I thought, "If I am going to survive this new environment, I would like to find folks who I could trust, who have been here for a while, who can give me the guidance that I need so I do not be stepping in these landmines and walking around like a double amputee."

Stacy: "They only need a reason to say, well, she done this, know your worth, find a mentor, and mentor someone else."

Jennifer:

> So, having and finding mentors and finding support, one of the things I learned was to find support outside of your institution, and I went to a NASPA conference about a year ago, January 2019. So, in January 2020, I was so frustrated, and I went to a program at NASPA for women, well for people. But, still, I think it was women, there were only women in the room interested in leadership positions, and it was by Black women. So I went to this and found a community that I never really experienced in the workplace because I am always the only one. So here were all these women who were offering me support and some advice about things going on. So, I thought, goodness, this is so important, so valuable.

When discussing career paths and barriers encountered along a career path progressing to leadership roles, the participants had various experiences. Some participants elected not to respond to this question, stating they had nothing else to add based on previously asked questions about challenges and barriers. For the participants that did respond to this question, it was found that the recurring themes were lack of credentials and perception.

Lack of Credentials

A barrier found by participants within this study has been a lack of terminal degrees or other credentials that would assist a professional from moving into leadership positions. Participants who identified a lack of credentials as a barrier indicated that they thought the degree helped with providing proof of credibility or gained their respect. Throughout this study, lack of credentials has come up as a barrier for leadership progression, but it was not until interview question ten was asked that it was seen as a recurring theme.

Evelyn:

> I am not a clinician. Most AVPs of health and wellness and chief wellness officers, health officers have a clinical background, either counseling or nurse practitioner, MD and I am a health educator. I am a prevention practitioner. So, I had to get my doctorate. My mentor sat me down at the ACHA conference. She was like, "What are you waiting for?" My twin had already got her Ph.D. "I have got mine; why do not you get yours?" So, I did not have a choice. I had to get my doctorate.

Marilyn:

> So, I started at Student Affairs. The only barrier that comes to the top of my mind is not having a terminal degree. It does matter. I am so grateful I have it now because medical school is such a formal environment. It is like walking around in a hospital, where you automatically call any position doctor. It was like that where I am. Well, I had to adjust. But, for me, I am grateful that I am called that like everybody else. So, we are meeting, and the majority are White men. I am referred to as a doctor just like they are. It does not matter that mine is not a medical degree, but I get the same respect as everybody else in

those meetings. So, I think not having it would have created some challenges and barriers in terms of credibility.

LaToya:

You must find a way to do more to expand your network because once you get to the point where you are applying to an associate or dean jobs, director jobs, not only are they looking for ten years of progressive professional experience with a degree requirement, whether there will be masters or Ph.D.

Perception

The second recurring theme for question #10 was perception. Perception sums up the responses related to how others may have perceived participants in the study or how they perceived their environment related to potential barriers. The barriers provided by the participants were barriers that may have been based on assumptions or stereotypes of others.

Andrea:

Then when you look at my resume, you see all these years of experience. Then when I walk in the room, I do not look like who they thought I should look like, and I am like, yeah. So perception barriers, I still deal with that today, perception barriers. I walked into a sustainability meeting yesterday, so they did not think I would roll off some sustainability language. I was like, “Yeah, I got your phantom energy. I know all of it. Yeah, I got you.”

Yolanda:

Yes, you must earn automatically because you are Black; you have to work twice as hard. So I worked twice as hard, many more hours a night on weekends. So I am working twice as hard, and I will be emailing someone three or four in the morning because I am like,

> oh my God. So then sometimes you have ten meetings in one day. What are you doing in your email? To be Black, you must hit. Are you still up to it is like, we all go crazy, but yes, I would just say you still have to when you feel those barriers you have at work. Do not give up; it is hard, and sometimes it can be isolating.

Stacy:

> Before you open your mouth and say a word, you are a Black woman, and you are young; why do you think you can tell me what to do? Unfortunately, this is not just white people. I have dealt with it with Black people also. It is automatic. Is it who you are? Who do you think you are to tell me what to do? I do not have to listen to you. You do not tell me what to do.

In the final interview question, the participants were asked to identify how they felt their White counterparts experienced career advancement differently than they did. Again, the responses were honest and seemed to describe the opposite of the barriers and challenges they faced along the way. Several topics emerged from this question, but two recurring themes identified were access to opportunities and White fragility.

Access to Opportunities

According to the responses to the final interview question, it was found that a few of the participants were not given the same access to opportunities that their White counterparts were. It was expressed that they felt the White counterparts were often "tapped on the shoulder" for certain positions or even given the opportunity over them despite the experience or education. This led participants to believe that their White counterparts were given opportunities due to their race and who they knew.

Evelyn: “I am still waiting for a tap on the shoulder. I am waiting for somebody to say, ‘Can we promote you?’ I want to get a glimpse of what it is like to be recruited.”

Tiffany:

> I noticed that the white counterpart usually if they are up against a job that they are applying for that, they are the ones who typically get the job. So even if it is an HBCU or PWI or another, they always seem to defer to the White candidate because they think the White candidate is more knowledgeable than the Black one.

Melynda:

> And just the opportunities, there are more opportunities. I can work; I explained this to somebody else; if I were White, I would have more workplaces. Or I was telling somebody the other day, if I leave here before I get my doctorate, I do not know if I will get another senior-level position. That is not just a given. Whereas somebody else will say, “Oh, no, I am quitting. Now I am about to go work and be a dean over at this place.” So that may not be the case for me because I do not know how that will look.

Dasia:

> I had to be qualified for everything. So, I would see my white counterparts who did not even meet the job description requirements get hired. But when it came to me, even this one time, I was sitting in a position for about a year, and I was like, okay, well, maybe you could ask for a title change and more money. They were like, “Oh, we are not doing that anymore unless you have this particular certification for PMP for project management certification.” But I looked at other people who did not have that; they did not look like me, who were getting those positions.

Melissa:

Even right now, there is, this is a prime example. There is the Virginia network or the manager program. We have a conference every year. Every institution can nominate two women from their university to participate in the leadership institute component of this organization. I have asked for two years. I have asked and planted the seed of being nominated or recommended to participate in the institute. It is up again now. I think the application is due about the 15th. But I have to self-advocate for myself. First to someone, or I have been told, oh well, we have some people on the list. But we add you to the list for subsequent opportunities, subsequent years. And I am like, "how long does this take? It's' an institute." You know what I am saying. Whereas I have watched other counterparts just get out, they get nominated and do not have to self-advocate in any way. We are forced to sit in silence, or we cannot talk a certain way, or we are perceived as aggressive. Also, those little things, such as having to repeatedly ask for something as little as a diversity brochure or a video showing our campus's diversity, are distracting.

Stacy:

There was a playbook, and the rules have been blacked out for us, and they changed. Even the other African American female left and is an assistant VP of academic affairs at another college not too far from here. But we watched our VP strategically put Caucasians in situations where they would learn skills so she could then turn around and justify giving them promotions and raises.

Jennifer:

Let me just tell you about what happened for me to get into this role. My competition for this position, as I said, I have 22 years of experience as a higher ed clinician clinical director, all of that. My competition was a White woman from a very privileged

background who had seven years of experience, and I had to fight for this job; it was awful. And my White counterparts get tapped on the shoulder for jobs. You have this opportunity, and why do not you apply. So not even applying, but they just get appointed into those roles and positions.

White Fragility

Being under tight restrictions or expectations that were not expected of their White counterparts was another recurring theme for this final interview question. Throughout the interview process, many of the participants expressed that they had to work harder or that they were not given the same respect as their counterparts. Often, having to obtain credentials that were only required of some or presenting themselves in a certain way, not to alarm or frighten anyone.

Victoria:

White women that I noticed would have an easier time congregating to discuss issues. For instance, and this did happen, myself and three other Black women on campus, who were faculty, I was an administrator, and it just so happens that I have more of a relationship with the Black faculty at my school than the administrators because we all seem to be- because we are just one, we are in like, these silos. So, we do not have opportunities to get together with faculty; they come together in small cohorts, socialize, and do things.

Briana:

One specific example comes to mind. I cannot remember when strong points were first coming along with the program that I run. We were piloting it, and we did some assessment. Then, I had to present the information to the head of the faculty meeting and

all the college faculty. I am co-presenting with the director of research, a White woman. She and I are just presenting, and there comes a time when we open the floor for questions. A White male professor stands out, directs his comment to me. He directs the comment to me, and he says, “How do we even know that this even works?” Even though the question he was asking really should have been directed towards the research professional because she was the one who had already answered that question. But it should have been directed at her, but it was not. It was directed at me. He goes on and on. He is like, how do we even know this works? We are going to spend all this money and blah, blah, blah. At that moment, I am standing there beside my White counterpart, and this White man is addressing this to me, and I am thinking; I did not say anything right away. I thought to myself, “Now, what am I going to do? Am I going to point that out to her? Answer the question, do I address him directly?” I decided to address him directly, and I answered his question. But at that moment, it just felt like he was just clearly coming for me, even though I was not the one. It just seemed silly. It is like a basketball player and a football player standing there and someone asking the question about basketball to the football player when the basketball player is right there. Why would you ask me that?

Carolyn:

I have never been in an institution where I have heard white counterparts share the same frustrations or challenges that I have had. I always get those who try to be empathetic and try to understand, who try to be, “I am here for you.” I can appreciate those kind-hearted folks, but it is just like I do not understand what it means to exist in this body every day and show up here and out there. So then bring all of that into this.

Andrea:

> They could show up in meetings unprepared and are not held accountable. They could not follow through on assignments and tasks, and it was, “Oh. It is okay,” like they can say, “Oh, I forgot,” and they were, “No, it is okay,” but if I forgot it was an issue, “Are you not able to manage your task or you are not able to do your work?”

Marilyn:

> White folks do not have to worry about walking into a room and having to adjust, but we do. Unless you are at a historically Black university or Hispanic serving institution, for the most part, if you are in a predominately White institution. We are the ones who have to adjust our behavior, adjust how we present, adjust how we show up in work very, very different from them. They can come in with jeans. Unless it is Friday, I am not doing that.

Yolanda:

> We think it is because of color you are treating no one else like that. So, we talked about the white counterparts. We have never seen that happen. I have been at this college for years. We never see anyone treated like that, and so it was, because what happens if I continue to stay out here, and just so I may end up staying out here, I met someone and got married out here in Colorado.

LaToya:

> I think that there is a sense sometimes that, like my White counterparts, get away with more stuff than I would be able to get away with just because there is more of them and less of me. I am not sure if that is true or not if I just felt that way. But, on the other hand, I have also had supervisory experiences that were not the friendliest, but they were Black

people, right? So, I do not know that I have experienced anything different from my White counterparts so far.

Summary

Chapter 4 has summarized the questions and responses from all 15 participants' interviews. Based on the responses from the participants, I intended to provide a better understanding of the lived experiences of Black women as they progressed into senior-level leadership positions in higher education. As an extension of the responses, I aimed to shed light on the challenges and barriers faced by Black women as they attempted to gain access to senior-level leadership positions. Upon completing the coding procedure, it was found that Black women across the nation who hold senior-level leadership positions have similar experiences and views of their transition into leadership in higher education.

In Chapter 5, you will find the summary of the findings of this study, the implications for institutions, and recommendations to institutions of higher education for career advancement initiatives for Black women. Chapter 5 will also discuss the purpose of this study and how it was met and suggestions for further research to expand on this topic by identifying other barriers and challenges for women of color and White women.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Black women striving to obtain senior-level leadership positions in higher education continue to face challenges and barriers throughout their career progression. It has been stated that the challenges that Black women leaders face at higher education institutions have led to difficulty in recruiting and retaining women who can fill the gap at institutions lacking this specific type of diversity in leadership (Holder et al., 2015). Knowing that these challenges exist, Black women have had to find ways to self-advocate, find mentors, and other methods to obtain the positions they strive to get.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to capture the lived experiences of Black women holding senior-level leadership positions at institutions of higher education to gain insight into their perceptions of the experiences, challenges, and barriers that led to them obtaining their positions. Additionally, the purpose of this study is also to provide higher education institutions a glimpse into the lived experiences of Black women as they progressed in their careers as a tool to recognize unfair practices and policies regarding equity and inclusion within their hiring practices.

This chapter summarizes the findings, implications, and future research recommendations related to this topic. The research findings will be aligned with the literature review by acknowledging the use of Black feminist theory and how it connects with this study. The topics to be discussed in this chapter are: (a) study overview, (b) summary of findings, (c) interpretation of participant responses, (d) conclusion, (e) implications for change, and (f) recommendations for future research.

Study Overview

This study was conducted using an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) methodology to examine the lived experiences of Black women as they progressed in their careers leading up to their senior-level leadership roles at institutions of higher education. IPA was the selected methodology because the data analysis framework used required that I engage in a "close, line-by-line analysis of the experiential claims, concerns, and understandings of each participant" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 79). Due to the detailed examination of the data collected, a more comprehensive narrative has been developed to assist with a full understanding of the difficulties faced by Black women in higher education. Additional information about the data analysis process will be detailed further within this chapter.

Study Procedures

The data for this study were obtained from interviews conducted with 15 Black women working in senior-level leadership positions at higher education institutions. The participants were also either members of the LinkedIn group "Association of Black Women in Higher Education" or were referred by a group member. Interviews were conducted using a semistructured interview protocol. The participants were invited to share how they progressed within their careers leading up to senior-level leadership and what they experienced along their journey. The interviews were recorded and sent to the transcription service NoNotes to be transcribed. I reviewed the transcriptions of each participant recorded interview to ensure the validity of the study. This involved reading the transcriptions multiple times along with the interview recordings of each participant. Transcribed conversations were also sent to each member for an accuracy review as part of member checking. I also took detailed notes during the interviews and asked additional probing questions as needed to understand each participant's

lived experience fully. Lastly, the responses were coded to identify reoccurring themes that would provide answers to the research questions this study hoped to answer.

Participants

The participants in this study served as senior-level leaders at their institutions and have worked in higher education for a minimum of 10 years. The participants were also members of the LinkedIn group "Association of Black Women in Higher Education" or were referred to the study by a group member. Participants in this study were from all over the United States, and the institutions they work for range in type from private, public, and Ivy League colleges and universities.

Research Questions and Corresponding Themes

The following research questions guided this study; these questions are followed by the corresponding reoccurring themes identified based on participants' responses.

RQ1: How do senior-level Black women perceive their experiences in higher education? Based on coding using participant responses from the semistructured interviews, the following themes emerged: (a) tokenism, (b) imposter syndrome, (c) self-advocacy, and (d) perception.

RQ2: What do Black women perceive as the challenges leading to senior-level positions in higher education? Based on participant responses, the following themes emerged: (a) push back, (b) lack of access to opportunities, (c) white fragility, (d) unconscious bias, (e) gaining trust as a leader, and (f) lack of mentors.

RQ3: What do Black women perceive as the barriers leading to a senior-level position in higher education? Based on the participants' responses, the following themes emerged: (a) access to opportunities for advancement, (b) lack of credentials, (c) tokenism, and (d) the angry Black woman.

Summary of Findings

Black Feminist Thought

From the interviews conducted with the 15 participants, there were many reoccurring themes presented. Within those themes, it was seen that a connection between Black women's experiences could be identified and considered a heterogeneous collective. Collins (2015) stated that Black women have identified that complexities of intersecting power systems tend to complicate everything in their lives, including love relations, the jobs they can get, and the dreams they are allowed to dream. The connections between the Black Feminist Thought to the interpretative phenomenological analysis of this study, Collins, identified as one of the features of the theory.

Collins (2000) stated that she conceptualized the notion that the many systems of oppression are interlocked instead of additive. Collins (2000) mentioned that African American women pursuing a career must contend with possible racism that their White counterparts do not experience and sexism that their male counterparts will not argue with. The findings of this study indicate that all participants believed that they dealt with challenges and barriers throughout their career journeys leading into their senior-level leadership positions. Black feminist theory, whether known or unknown, is displayed within the responses of all of the participants collectively. Davis and Brown (2017) identified Black feminist theory as being characterized by specific ideologies in the justice movement for African Americans and women.

The final chapter of this study discusses Black women’s lived experiences as they maneuvered their way to senior-level leadership positions and the barriers and challenges they faced along the way. Collins (2015) pointed out that simply because a Black woman's body is present in a White-dominated space does not mean she has power, voice, or access to the same

knowledge-making opportunities as her White counterparts with whom she shares the space. The findings from this study will provide support to higher education institutions regarding the career advancement of Black women looking to obtain senior-level leadership roles at their institutions. Using the data collected as a guide, higher education institution leadership will identify possible areas for support and find ways to make hiring practices more equitable and improve the overall professional development experiences for Black women.

Interpretation of Participant Responses

Black women currently in senior-level leadership positions at higher education institutions and who are members or referred by a member of the LinkedIn group "Association of Black Women in Higher Education" shared their lived experiences of their career progression into senior leadership. Based on the responses of these 15 women, reoccurring themes emerged, which provided answers to the three research questions for this study. Themes that were discussed throughout this section were: (a) imposter syndrome, (b) tokenism, (c) the angry Black woman, (d) self-advocacy, (e) access to opportunity, (f) mentorship, (g) unconscious bias, (h) push back, (i) gaining trust as a leader, (j) faith, (k) strategy, (l) change agent, (m) lack of credential, (n) perception, and (o) White fragility.

Imposter Syndrome

Throughout the interviews with the participants, one commonality among many women was a feeling of not belonging. They had finally accomplished their goals of obtaining a senior-level leadership position, yet many of them expressed a feeling of being out of place. Clance and Imes (1978) identified imposter syndrome as a phenomenon used to designate an internal experience of intellectual phoniness, which appears to be particularly prevalent and intense among a select sample of high achieving women.

Although the women identified a sense of feeling as though they did not belong, they knew they had worked hard to obtain their positions. Having the ability to break through barriers and challenges did not eliminate the mental self-doubt based on the obstacles put in the way of many women within their career progression. It was found that the women who expressed a sense of imposter syndrome developed those feelings through the treatment given to them by their peers or counterparts. One participant discussed identifying what it felt like to know that she was suffering from imposter syndrome and indicated that it took a toll on her mental health.

Not feeling accepted in places for who you are can make any individual feel unwelcomed or wonder why or how they got to a particular point. Imposter syndrome is no different. The women expressed different ways in which imposter syndrome negatively affected their experiences in the workplace, whether that was walking into a room and not being acknowledged or just being lost about how they were able to gain access to their positions. The Black women who participated in this study, who face a double minority stance and do not feel accepted, can give off the mental illusion of imposter syndrome.

Tokenism

The responses from many of the participants indicated a sense of tokenism based on their roles at their institutions. According to Niemann (2016),

> tokenism is a function of the needs of the organization and dominants' expectations and perceptions of the appropriateness of faculty of color to fulfill these needs and related roles, coupled with dominants' power to impose their will along with these expectations. (p. 456)

A few of the participants indicated they were put into or selected for specific positions due to their race and the idea that they would relate or provide insight on the Black perspective by being in those positions.

Tokenism, as one of the participants indicated, caused her to have to be cognizant about how she showed up to spaces and that when she was the only Black present, she knew that she had to be the representative for all Black people at that time. Niemann (2016) went on to add that tokenism results in identity disruptions that impact tokens' institutional role, job description, career success, and career path, as well as their psycho-social realities. University leaders can diffuse the negative impacts of tokenism by facilitating a context that places meaningful value on faculty of color by doing things such as rewarding them for their diversity-related service with merit increases, tenure, and promotion, and celebrating their presence (Niemann, 2016). Smith (2009) warned of the practice of tokenism, where individuals may be visible representatives of an organizational leadership structure but functionally invisible.

The Angry Black Woman

The "Angry Black Woman" stereotype depicts Black women as aggressive and hostile in their interactions with others (Motro et al., 2021). Geddes and Stickney (2011) argued that the angry Black woman stereotype could negatively impact Black women's employment status and career progress. The barriers Black women face in the workplace are a complex issue. When conducting the interviews, it was relayed by a few of the participants that things such as walking into a meeting without a smile, expressing concern about a topic, or even using hand gestures while talking could be taken as signs of anger or aggression. One participant expressed that when their White counterparts did similar things, it was taken as "just how they are," or passion.

This apparent description of a clearly stated stereotype can damage the careers of Black women and mislabel their passion. For example, in a study conducted by Donovan (2011), participants were to select 5 out of 92 traits to describe Black women and White women, traits chosen to identify Black women were associated with the angry Black woman stereotype (e.g., loud, tough, strong) compared to White women (e.g., sensitive, independent, family-oriented). In addition, Collins (1990) stated that oppressed groups are frequently placed in the situation of being listened to only if they frame their ideas in the language that is familiar to and comfortable for a dominant group, which in turn often changes the meaning of their ideas and works to elevate the ideas of the dominant group.

One participant stated that being considered an angry Black woman was a barrier. If you are outspoken, talk a certain way, passionate about something, communicate that something needs to be done, or want to do something, the label would present itself. Hence, she had to be careful with how she would explain certain things. Motro et al. (2021) stated that based on two studies, they found support for their hypotheses that participants attributed Black women's anger to internal factors due to stereotype activation, which led to poorer performance evaluations assessments of leadership capabilities.

Self-Advocacy

Having the ability to advocate for self was discussed in many conversations during interviews with the participants. In many instances, as described by the participants, self-advocacy was a mechanism used to self-promote, display abilities, ask for opportunities, and engage. For women in this study who felt that they could not gain access to the same opportunities as their counterparts, it was essential to find ways to help themselves gain opportunities for advancement and promotion.

One participant stated,

> I think one of them is I had to learn how to advocate for myself. It was not something that I thought much about before or even thought I would have to do. I thought my work would speak for itself, and it did speak. It needed some help. I had to learn how to advocate for myself. I had to ask for what I wanted.

Battle (2008) conceptualized self-advocacy as engaging in behaviors that promote or protect a person's rights or worth as an individual. This would include self-promoting, negotiating for better outcomes, asking to be rewarded for performance, complaining about inequitable treatment and conditions, and confronting any disrespectful behaviors aimed towards that person (Battle, 2008). For many Black women, self-advocating may be the only way to gain access to promotions, training, membership in committees, and other things within higher education, as described by the participants of this study.

Access to Opportunities – Glass and Concrete Ceilings

Having a lack of access to opportunities for advancement was a reoccurring theme seen as a response to a few of the questions presented to the participants. Many described seeing positions at their institutions be quasi-offered to counterparts in the form of a "tap on the shoulder." The responses indicated that the same opportunities were not presented to the participants as their White counterparts, creating the glass or concrete ceiling illusion. Morrison and von Glinow (1990) developed the theoretical concept of the glass ceiling. They referred to it as "a set of impediments and barriers" that prevents women and persons of color from advancing in their careers within an organization (Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009).

Several qualitative studies support the claim that a lack of opportunities for career mentoring and leadership development do exist, along with frequent gender and ethnic

stereotypes and high levels of racism and sexism (Bartman, 2015; Davis, 2018; Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Wheat & Hill, 2016; Yakaboski & Donahoo, 2015). For example, one participant described stated that "because there are so few of us, sometimes our names do not come up. I think that hinders advancement; if people do not look like you, they might not think of you." Another participant stated that she experienced a lack of opportunity because sometimes people do not want you to look better than some White woman or bless you.

Jackson et al. (2014) provided evidence to support that qualitative research indicates that the glass ceiling effect does indeed hinder career advancement opportunities for Black women who held administrative positions. Having a lack of access to the same opportunities as others does add to the glass ceiling concept, which at times for Black women can be viewed as a concrete ceiling. Within this study, it is displayed that not having access to the same opportunities as their White counterparts, Black women advanced later in their careers or had to withstand multiple challenges and barriers that stood in their way.

Mentorship

Mentorship or having a mentor was related to several themes within this study. The mentorship was discussed as a barrier and as a benefit amongst the participants. Some participants indicated that not having a mentor or having the wrong mentor was a barrier. In contrast, others mentioned that having a mentor helped them problem solve or obtain access to their current or past positions. Taub and McEwen (2006) referenced the field of higher education as "hidden," where potential professionals needed to be engaged in a pursuit of discovery by their current professionals. In addition, Kutchner and Kleschick (2016) stated that mentoring enables a seasoned professional to pass knowledge to another through a formal or informal

process to benefit the mentee and the mentor by providing a fresh perspective through their work and network relationships.

When participants were asked what suggestions they had for Black women looking to obtain senior-level leadership positions, many of them insisted that finding a mentor was one of the first things they should do. Even discussions within the interviews suggested that Black women find White men to mentor them since the White men were more likely to be in the positions they were pursuing and would not find them a threat. The experiences with mentors varied among the women. Based on the responses, many were in favor but mentioned situations where a particular mentor may not have been beneficial. Programming to support the needs of Black women would be beneficial at institutions of higher education to provide advanced mentoring options for professional career growth. This reoccurring theme relates to the mentorship research conducted in the literature review. It provides evidence that mentorship is essential for Black women seeking senior-level leadership positions in higher education.

Unconscious Bias

The Black women who participated in this study based on reoccurring themes identified unconscious biases as a hindrance to their progression in higher education. Statements provided by the participants indicated that there were not many other Black women or Black people who held senior-level leadership positions due to their White counterparts hiring people with who they were more relatable. The stereotypes are given to Black women often contribute to the unconscious biases displayed toward them.

One of the study participants stated,

> because there are so few of us, sometimes our names do not come up. I think that hinders advancement, and if people do not look like you, they might not think of you. So, I think that is part of it.

The statement made by the participant acknowledges a feeling of not being chosen for certain things because she is not familiar with the majority. Collins (1986) highlighted that the limited and very damaging "controlling images" ingrained in popular culture have impacted how others view Black women both independently and as a group, regardless of their behavior and professional accomplishments. This unconscious bias can be a barrier and challenge for Black women and only be resolved by implementing equitable processes.

Pushback/ Gaining Trust as a Leader

Things such as not being taken seriously or not having the proper backing of the institution were discussed with the participants during the interview process. Many of the participants had experienced providing a suggestion to a group only to be overlooked or overtalked only later to have their idea presented by another group member and accepted. For example, Moses (1997) stated that Black women are doubly oppressed. In turn, this has made them invisible in the academy (Zamani, 2003), creating a burden in their career success in higher education.

As described by this participant, offering her opinion on topics or even trying to speak can be difficult.

> So, when you are in meetings, you are on mute, but if you could be a fly on a wall and hear my button going mute, unmute, unmute, unmute, I mean because every time I go to say something, someone talks over you.

In this situation, it was not until another Black woman in the group brought to everyone's attention that she was trying to speak that she could finally say what she needed to say. A participant in the study shared that a lack of institutional support was a barrier as a leader; she went on to say,

> I think it is only stated, but there is no action behind that I have consistently seen where leadership will say, “Oh, yeah. We support the work that you are doing right on,” but there is no movement or shared responsibility.

Pushback or lack of trust as a leader can cause turmoil in an institution and, if deliberately done, can damage a person's career.

Faith

Participants discussed how they overcame challenges and barriers in their way, and the answer for many was prayer and faith. When speaking about overcoming challenges and barriers, one participant stated, "I talked about my faith. I drew upon what I was grounded in before I even know what it was, what my faith in God was." Bacchus and Holley (2005) highlighted that the experiences of Christian Black women tend to utilize prayer and faith to cope with difficult situations. It was found that statistics show that the majority of U.S.-born Black women identify with Christianity (Masci, 2020).

The ability to understand that things around them are out of their control is identified through praying about it. Another respondent indicated that prayer assists with things that are not within their control with the following statement: "I pray a lot because some things you learn that are just not in your control get out of your control quickly, and sometimes you just have to sit and listen." The term "sit and listen" in this statement refers to the guidance provided by God based on the situation being prayed for. In a study conducted by Bacchus and Holley (2005), 10

professional Black women were examined on how they handle work-related stress and found that professional Black women often turn to spirituality, mediation, and prayer to cope with work-related stress. In their study, West and Greer (2019) acknowledged that Black women identified their commitment to their faith, family's community, and their other Black colleagues as a coping mechanism in dealing with the betrayal of working in public institutions of higher education.

Strategy

With so many challenges and barriers standing between Black women and their career goals, it was not surprising that many of the participants found that they had to strategize to help them gain access to their chosen positions. For example, one participant stated,

> I really had to adjust my expectations and then toss them out of the window, but I had to think about what it looked like to be effective, but also mindful about the context in the culture that I was working with because I came in very idealistic like change this, change that.

Banner (2003) stated that Black women administrators identified key strategies as survival tactics in higher education as being true to oneself, integrity, honesty, faith, and "do the right thing" even if wrong has been done to you. In addition, it was pointed out that it is just as important to have confidence, knowledge, and the skills needed to carry out one's responsibility (Banner, 2003). Tarmy (2013) acknowledged that Black women faced challenges and stated that Black women have had to craft strategies to navigate discriminatory practices in the workplace. White women have not been exposed to such discrimination in their daily lives upon entrance into the workforce. As stated by another participant related to strategy, "everything I do, I try to be strategic about it. I knew I wanted to be a dean when I was 23. So, I was like, okay, what does

that look like?" Having a plan for career trajectory for Black women has to be more intentional and purposeful. This is important because of access to opportunities and other challenges and barriers that Black women face.

Change Agent

Taking on the role of being a change agent helped mold some of the participants in the study. One participant stated,

> every time I have done an interview, I have gotten those same messages of being the change agent, so the bullying came because that is what I have been tasked and going to do, so I am meant to go disrupt the norm. The bullying comes with the territory. I get it now.

Change agents need to transform internal business-as-usual, the anchoring of transitions involving communication, bargaining, commitment, problem-solving, and other forms of persuasion activities to make this role known as a disruptive force against established structures (Remneland Wikhamn, 2020).

Many of the participants discussed being the one to enforce change or the one to drive change. One participant described how changes in the environment have caused her to be moved, "leadership always has influenced where I am and may even force me sometimes to have to move up into another leadership position." It is not clear if the Black women in this study are change agents because they can enforce necessary changes or if they are placed in positions that complement their professional attributions.

Lack of Credential

Several occasions within the interviews with the participants who have terminal degrees were said to make a difference. This was seen when participants were asked to provide advice to

other Black women pursuing senior-level leadership positions and when asked about barriers and challenges. One participant stated, "I think the only barriers that come to the top of my mind is not having a terminal degree." The same participants described how she works at a medical school but is given the same respect as those with medical degrees by stating," it does not matter that mine is not a medical degree, but the fact that I get the same respect as everybody else in those meetings."

Wolfe and Dilworth (2015) acknowledged that the lack of institutional support, the shortage of African American women in entry and mid-level positions, and Black women who leave higher education after gaining their doctoral degrees have all been identified as factors that contribute to their absence from academia at a variety of levels. Within the study, we hear from Black women in higher education who feel that attaining a doctoral degree may benefit Black women seeking senior-level leadership roles. However, there still may be barriers even after the terminal degree is received.

Perception

Being viewed as less than by peers was a concern displayed by a few participants based on how they were treated in certain instances. One participant described an occasion when this occurred by stating,

> before you open your mouth and say a word, you are a Black woman, and you are young, why do you think you can tell me what to do? Unfortunately, this is not just white people; I have dealt with it with Black people also.

Participant interviews indicated that concerns were surrounding the views of others, and that impacted the respect given to the women in this study.

The comments indicate that a lack of support or respect was displayed to these women based on skin tone and gender. Theoretically, race and gender intersection interlocks dominance and oppression systems (McCormick-Huhn et al., 2019) which creates double jeopardy of disadvantage (Crenshaw, 1991), making Black women feel invisible or ignored (Coles & Pasek, 2020). It is clearly stated by Hodson et al. (2021) in their findings that Black women tend to perceive both racism and sexism at play on the receiving end from dominant groups.

White Fragility

Experiences for Black women in higher education are quite different from those of their White counterparts. Mathew et al. (2021) outlined that even those that claim to be White identified allies, people of color observe tendencies of these White colleagues to have a lower tolerance for racial stress and expectations of comfort. The authors state that White discomfort often results in the centering of White feelings and comfort in situations where equity issues are being spoken about (Mathew et al., 2021).

One of the participants speaks on the discomfort of her White colleagues, stating, "We also have our colleagues and how we have to continue to manage their White fragility. When we walk into a space and have to manage how we are going to help you with your White fragility today." Black women recognize that some are allies and in partnership of equity, diversity, and inclusion, but that allyship goes only as far as White fragility allows one without getting uncomfortable or being on the defense about the topics being discussed.

Conclusion

Each participant in this study expressed a different but similar level of perceived experiences, challenges, and barriers leading to their senior-level leadership roles in higher education. Most of the participants' lived experiences displayed feelings of exclusion, racism,

tokenism, glass ceilings, and stereotyping that have caused challenges and barriers in their career progression. Although these participants dealt with challenges and barriers within their careers, they could navigate systems designed for them to fail and obtain senior-level leadership positions.

It was found within the study that the importance of mentorship relationships, being a self-advocate, taking on additional duties, and many times having to relocate is essential for the progression of Black women who are seeking senior-level leadership positions in higher education. The lived experiences for each participant were significant in themselves. Still, one thing that remained consistent among them was that being a Black woman in higher education was a reminder to them daily in their places of employment. More often than not, that was because, in meetings, they were overlooked, or they felt that their access to opportunities was limited compared to their White counterparts.

The suggestions from the participants to other Black women seeking senior-level leadership roles were also similar. Participants suggested that Black women seek the help of a mentor, some mentioning that White men were better options for mentors due to the lack of competition that White men feel towards Black women. Participants also suggested that Black women seeking senior-level leadership positions obtain a terminal degree and self-advocate for positions and opportunities. However, it was clear that all participants understood the importance of mentorship and the help that one can gain from having someone who can "mention" their name in a meeting. And due to that explaining that a lack of mentorship can cause difficulty navigating places where Black women are not typically seen. Higher education is a field that is ever-changing and evolving, and Black women must have a presence; however, based on the information gathered in this study, it may be difficult but not impossible.

Implications for Change

Equity, diversity, and inclusion tend to be a hot topic in higher education; however, Black women are still oppressed in their careers many times without anyone beyond themselves noticing. The research of this study indicates that there is a genuine need for better equity hiring practices that include the talents of everyone at institutions. Due to the findings in this study which suggest that Black women are oppressed within their duties in higher education and are only noticed when certain boxes need to be checked, institutions of higher education must develop practices that provide equal opportunities for everyone, but especially Black women who are hindered by a double minority stance.

I recommend the following implications for change: Institutions of higher education should develop intentional and deliberate ways for development amongst faculty and staff members to pave the way for all candidates who display the ability to successfully complete job duties. This would include providing professional development opportunities, which are a requirement and available to all employees of the institutions. In addition, higher education institutions should develop mentorship programs that allow employees to be matched with mentors who have gained access to the positions in which the mentee is seeking to obtain.

To mitigate the stereotypes Black women experience, it is important for purposeful diversity, equity, and inclusion training to be embedded in the everyday practices at higher education institutions. This recommendation includes and is not limited to training related to culture, communication, and identifying ways to alleviate the stereotypes such as "angry Black women" and tokenism due to the need for a Black person to be involved. In addition, providing training related to critical race theory and white fragility will assist with breaking racial barriers

and eliminating stereotypes that are already formed in the minds of many higher education administrators.

Lastly, it is recommended that higher education institutions pave avenues for Black women that identify their need for advancement and their experiences and contributions so that they are not required to find ways to self-advocate or be seen. This may include focus groups for creativity, paying for memberships for groups dedicated to the professional development of Black women, or participation in conferences that are geared towards the advancement of Black women. The support displayed by institutions to help Black women successfully fulfill their career endeavors will assist in advancing within higher education and beyond.

Recommendations for Future Research

This IPA study was limited to only Black women in higher education. I recommend that future research be conducted on all women of color in higher education to get a better idea of the lived experiences faced on their career journeys to senior-level leadership in higher education. In addition, I would recommend utilizing another methodology to broaden the research. Since this study spoke on the experiences of Black women in comparison to what they witnessed the experiences were of their White counterparts, it is suggested that an investigation be completed comparing the lived experiences of Black women compared to the lived experiences of White women as they progressed to senior-level leadership positions in higher education. Lastly, I would recommend research geared toward finding the connection between Black women's faith and spirituality as it pertains to the advancement and influences of their career advancement.

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Appendix A: Solicitation Email

Dear [*insert name*],

My name is Latisha L. Marion and I am an EdD candidate at Abilene Christian University. I am requesting your participation in my doctoral research study titled: ***Black Women's Perceptions of Experiences, Challenges, and Barriers Leading to Senior-Level Leadership Positions in Higher Education***. You are eligible to participate in this study due to you being a Black woman that currently holds a senior-level leadership position in higher education. I obtained your contact information from the LinkedIn group Association of Black Women in Higher Education.

The intention of this study is to gather the lived experiences of participants as they reference their career journeys as they progressed into senior-level leadership positions as a Black woman. Providing lived experiences will allow me to determine any commonalities experienced by Black women who currently serve in senior-level leadership positions, and allow access to similar experiences, challenges and barriers that were faced. The information gathered will be used to assist other Black women looking to pursue senior-level leadership positions with ways to conquer challenges along their career journeys. In addition, assist institutions of higher education to review barriers that Black women are facing and identify ways to help assist this group with achieving their career goals. Participants for this study must meet the requirements listed below:

- Currently employed in a senior-level leadership position at a two or four-year public or private institution of higher education (Dean, Vice President, President or other senior-level roles)
- Must have obtained a masters or terminal degree
- Must have at least 10 years' experience working in higher education
- Must be a member of the LinkedIn group Association of Black Women in Higher Education

Participants in this study will be asked to complete a 1-hour virtual interview via Zoom web conferencing and that will be scheduled for a mutually agreed upon time. Interviews will be recorded to accurately account for the lived experiences of each participant. However, pseudonyms will be used to disguise the true identity of each participant. The interview will consist of five demographic questions and eleven open-ended questions. Your responses to these questions will be confidential, and pseudonyms will be used in place of personal identifiers to maintain anonymity. If you would like to participate in this study, please read and sign the attached Informed Consent letter. Once completed, please email the letter and your availability for interviews to xxxxxxxxxxx.

Participation is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Thank you for your time and participation.

Sincerely,

Latisha L. Marion
EdD Candidate
Abilene Christian University
xxxxxxxxxx
xxxxxxxxxxxx

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Demographic Questions

a. What is your highest level of education?
b. How long have you been working in higher education?
c. What positions have you obtained while working in higher education?
d. What is your current position, and how long have you been employed in your current role?
e. What was your age when you received your first senior-level leadership in higher education?

Open-Ended Questions

1. Describe your definition of a leader in higher education.
2. From your experience, what do you identify as barriers for Black women's progression as a senior-level leader in higher education?
3. In your opinion, in what ways has race impacted your experience while working in higher education?
4. What barriers and challenges have you experienced working in higher education?
5. How did you overcome those barriers or challenges throughout your career in higher education?
6. What type of professional development or trainings have you participated in to help you advance in your career?
7. What challenges do you perceive influenced your career advancement?
8. How many Black women are in senior-level leadership positions at your institution?

9. Based on your experience, what advice do you have for Black women seeking senior-level leadership position and overcoming barriers?
10. What was your career path, and what barriers did you encounter along that career path as you worked your way into leadership roles?
11. What challenges did you face along your career journey that you noticed were different from your White counterparts?

Appendix C: IRB Approval

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

Dear Latisha,

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board, I am pleased to inform you that your project titled

(IRB# 21-049)is exempt from review under Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects.

If at any time the details of this project change, please resubmit to the IRB so the committee can determine whether or not the exempt status is still applicable.

I wish you well with your work.

Sincerely,

Megan Roth

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