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An Examination of the Lived Experiences of Black Women in Senior Leadership Roles at CCCU Member Institutions

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Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

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School of Educational Leadership

An Examination of the Lived Experiences of Black Women in Senior Leadership Roles at CCCU Member Institutions

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction

of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

by

Tuccoa S. Polk

July 2024

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my husband and best friend Damon Ramone Polk. I would not have completed this dissertation without your unwavering support, encouragement, and prayers. For the past 29 years it has been you and me against the world. You believed in me when I did not believe in myself. You helped me dream bigger dreams. I love you more than words can express. I thank God that I have been blessed to do life with you. Thank you for the sacrifices you made so I could complete this program. No matter what titles I have earned, my greatest will always be *Damon's wife*. I love you, forever.

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Abstract

This narrative inquiry qualitative research study explored the lived experiences of Black women in senior leadership roles at Council for Christian Colleges & Universities (CCCU) member institutions. Using Black feminist thought as the theoretical framework, this research study centered on the voices of 10 current or recently retired Black female senior-level leaders at CCCU campuses. The research study focused on one central research question and three subquestions that examined the challenges and barriers experienced by the participants, the role of mentorship in their leadership journey, and the impact of the participants' Christian faith in their career trajectory to senior leadership positions in CCCU member institutions. Ten themes emerged from the three research questions: (a) lack of mentors/mentorship opportunities, (b) racial and gender discrimination, (c)microaggressions, (d) lack of support in role, (e) served as mentors, (f) leadership development, (g) kinship, (h) faith identity, (i) calling from God, and (j) leadership style/approach. The results presented provided insight into why there is a dearth of Black women serving in senior-level leadership at CCCU member institutions and offer recommendations on how to increase the percentage of Black women senior leaders at CCCU member institutions based on the lived experiences of the research participants.

Keywords: senior leadership, Black women, barriers, Council of Christian Colleges and Universities

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU) member institutions have a lower percentage of women serving in senior leadership roles than their secular counterparts (Dahlvig & Longman, 2020). Many CCCU member institutions subscribe to a conservative theology that is patriarchal in nature and views women more as helpmates than leaders (Longman & Anderson, 2016). This conservative theology can be a contributor to the low percentage of women and women of color serving in senior leadership roles at CCCU institutions. The CCCU is a higher education association of more than 180 Christian institutions around the world, of which more than 150 are in the United States (CCCU, 2023a).

Since 1976, the CCCU has served as the leading national voice of evangelical Christian higher education (CCCU, 2023d). The mission of the CCCU is to advance the cause of Christ-centered higher education and to help its member institutions transform lives by faithfully relating scholarship and service to biblical truth (CCCU, 2023d). In the last decade, the matter of increasing student diversity at faith-based colleges and universities across the country has been a top trending priority for most institutions.

The CCCU has prioritized increasing campus diversity among its member institutions by providing training, resources, and support to its member institutions. The CCCU prioritized educating its membership on understanding how racism has affected and shaped the work of Christian higher education through its Commission on Diversity and Inclusion (CCCU, 2023b). Having an accurate and complete understanding of the impact that racism has had in the formation and operation of Christian higher education aids institutions in their ability to reverse and remove policies and programs that inherently serve to discriminate against women, African Americans, and people of color (Perez, 2013). CCCU member campuses that have taken

advantage of the training and resources that have been offered by the CCCU Commission on Diversity and Inclusion have experienced a consistent increase in the percentages of female students, Black students, and students of color on their campuses (CCCU, 2023b). Existing research suggest that ethnic and gender diversity can cultivate a campus culture that allows students to gain a greater understanding of communities of color (Perez, 2013). Since the early 2000s, women have accounted for more than 60% of the total student body of CCCU member institutions (Longman & Anderson, 2011).

As of 2018–19, nearly half of all CCCU member institutions reported that more than 30% of their student population was made up of students of color (CCCU, 2021). While CCCU member institutions have experienced an increase in the diversity of their student populations, this has not translated to an increase in the diversity of those serving in senior leadership roles at these institutions. CCCU member intuitions have not demonstrated a similar commitment to ethnic and gender diversity amongst its senior leadership teams as they have their student body (Longman et al., 2019). As a result, the percentage of women and people of color in senior leadership roles have not kept pace with the diversity of the student population (CCCU, 2021).

To fully represent the body of Christ on CCCU campuses, these institutions must prioritize gender and racial diversity in their campus leadership. Christian universities are required to go beyond creating programs to address diversity and must connect their mission and theology to their commitment to diversity to see lasting changes (Clayton-Pedersen et al., 2007). Further, an ethnically diverse campus administration can lead to CCCU member institutions actively engaging in efforts to dismantle institutional systems that are inherently biased and discriminatory towards students, faculty, and staff of color (Ash et al., 2017).

Statement of the Problem

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES; 2019), more women earn bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees than men in the United States. This trend has continued for the past two decades in both secular and faith-based institutions of higher education (Longman et al., 2019). While women are acquiring the education and skills to prepare them to lead, they are still experiencing barriers that prevent them from obtaining senior leadership roles in higher education (Longman & Anderson, 2016). The problem of underrepresentation of women in leadership positions is particularly acute at colleges and universities that are members of the CCCU.

The percentage of women in senior leadership roles has been slow to increase at CCCU member institutions (CCCU, 2023c). In 2008, 13% of senior leadership roles at CCCU campuses were held by women (Longman & Anderson, 2016). As of 2015, 19% of senior leadership roles at CCCU campuses were held by women (Curry & Willeman, 2018). At an average rate of .86% per year, this data provides evidence that the trajectory of women advancing to senior leadership positions at CCCU campuses has been narrow.

Although many CCCU institutions articulate a theological mandate for diversity and proclaim a commitment to diversity and inclusiveness, only 5.2% of senior-level administrators at CCCU campuses are Black/African American (CCCU, 2021). While the CCCU has not published data indicating how many of that 5.2% are women, if one assumes that the low percentage of women serving in these senior leadership roles also holds true for Black women, as evidenced by a lack of published data on this subgroup, this will mean exceptionally low representation on these campuses (CCCU, 2021). This reality may lessen the creditability of

CCCU member institutions' professed commitment to creating diverse and inclusive campuses that reflect the body of Christ (Perez, 2013).

Existing research has prioritized the experiences of women as a collective, excluding race and ethnicity, which often focuses on the experiences of White women at CCCU institutions (Perez, 2013). As of 2021, of the more than 150 North American CCCU member institutions, only 18 were led by women presidents, all of whom were White women (CCCU, 2023c). Additionally, as of 2021, only three of the more than 150 North American CCCU member institutions had been led by African American presidents, all of whom were African American men.

Significant history was made in October 2023 when Multnomah University appointed Dr. Jessica Taylor as their eighth university president. Dr. Taylor's appointment was celebrated within the CCCU because her appointment made her the first Black woman to serve as president of a CCCU member institution in the history of the CCCU (CCCU, 2024).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research study was to explore the lived experiences of Black women currently serving in senior leadership positions at CCCU institutions. Systemic racism and gender discrimination are barriers that Black women are faced with in their quest to ascend to senior leadership roles in higher education (Oikelome, 2017). This qualitative research study used narrative inquiry methodology to gain an understanding of the journey of Black women senior leaders at CCCU institutions in their own words, through storytelling, interviews, and artifacts.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this research study is Black feminist thought (BFT). As the target population for this research study is Black women in senior leadership roles at CCCU institutions, careful consideration was given to frame this research in an apt theory. Harris and Leonardo (2018) stated that selecting appropriate theories for understanding the needs of African American women should be based on their cultural, personal, and social contexts, which differ significantly from those of people who have not experienced racial and gender oppression.

BFT was birthed from the belief that the experiences of Black women are different from those of other women and those of Black men (Collins, 2000, 2009). First published in 1990 by Dr. Patricia Collins, BFT centers on the intersectionality of race and gender. It comprises Black women's communal knowledge that derives from a shared experience of intersecting oppression (Johnson, 2015). A distinctive feature of BFT is its recognition of how the link between experience and consciousness impact the everyday lives of individual Black women and Black women as a collective. BFT demonstrates Black women's emerging power as agents of knowledge (Collins, 2000, 2009). Collins (2000) stated that by portraying Black women as self-defined, self-reliant individuals confronting race, gender, and class oppression, BFT speaks to the importance that knowledge plays in empowering oppressed people.

BFT suggests that marginal positions in higher education settings have been occupied by Black women and this marginality is viewed as the *outsider within* status, in which Black women have been invited into places where the dominant group has assembled, but they remain outsiders (Patton & Harper, 2004). BFT postulates the importance of ideas "produced by Black women that clarify a standpoint of and for Black women" (Collins, 2000, p. 13).

BFT is the realization of how what Black women do and think shapes their lives, and in turn pervades their work and careers (Collins, 2009). As such, BFT was an ideal framework for this study because this research study is centered on the lived experiences of Black women. Self-definition is a core component of BFT (Collins, 2000, 2009). Collins (2000, p. 36) defined self-definition as "the power to name one's own reality" and explains that self-definition includes the process of Black women rejecting the dominant group's definition of Black women and instead determining their own self-definition signifies a "collective Black women's consciousness" (Collins, 2000, p. 51).

This research study employed a narrative inquiry methodology to ensure that the research study captured the fullness of the lived experiences of the research participants. Narrative inquiry captures the lived experience of an individual or small group primarily through interviews (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004). By using a narrative inquiry methodology for this qualitative research study, I gave the research participants an opportunity to define their own experiences, as they lived them, through storytelling, which fully aligns with the concept of self-definition as applied in BFT.

Research Questions

This research study centered on one overarching question: What is the lived experience of Black women serving in senior leadership roles in the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities' member institutions? The following three research questions guided this study:

RQ1: What barriers do Black women overcome to obtain senior leadership positions at a Council for Christian Colleges and Universities' institution?

RQ2: How do mentorship opportunities aid Black women in their ascension to senior leadership roles on a Council for Christian Colleges and Universities' member campuses?

RQ3: How does Black women's Christian faith influence their leadership journey?

Definition of Key Terms

The following key terms are used in this research study:

Barrier. A hindrance affecting access to a place or in achieving a goal or destination (Anjaline & Priskkillal, 2020).

Black women and/or African American women. Women who self-identify as having a heritage within the African diaspora (Tribble et al., 2019).

Christian faith. Relying completely on who Jesus is and what He has done to be made right with God (Grace Theology Seminary, 2022).

Council of Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU). A higher education association of more than 180 Christian institutions around the world, with more than 150 of its member institutions in North America. Since 1976, the CCCU has served as the leading national voice of Christian higher education (CCCU, 2023a).

Diversity. Individual differences e.g., personality, prior knowledge, and life experiences and group/social differences e.g., race/ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, country of origin, and ability as well as cultural, political, religious, or other affiliations (Watson et al., 2023).

Ethnicity. Defined by perceived common ancestry, history, and cultural practices, which are seen as more fluid and self-asserted rather than assigned by others (Clair & Denis, 2015).

Intersectionality. The study of overlapping or intersecting social identities and related systems of oppression, domination, or discrimination (Crenshaw, 1989).

Microaggressions. The everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative

messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership (Sue et al., 2007).

Race. Distinguished by perceived common physical characteristics, which are thought to be fixed (Clair & Denis, 2015).

Summary and Organization of the Study

This chapter provided insight into the lack of gender and ethnic diversity at the senior leadership level of CCCU member institutions. In Chapter 1, I offered insight into previous research related to women in leadership positions at CCCU member campuses. This chapter also highlighted the need for an examination of the lack of Black women in senior leadership roles at CCCU member institutions.

CCCU member institutions' senior leadership should be reflective of the student body it serves. Diversity in leadership cultivates a campus culture that welcomes inclusiveness. When campus leadership is as ethnically diverse as its student population, it reinforces a commitment to diversity of ideas and experiences to the entire campus community. Furthermore, ethnic and gender diversity within senior leadership more closely aligns member institutions with CCCU's "commitment to racial justice and racial reconciliation . . . to assist us all in better loving God and our neighbor" (CCCU, 2023b).

Chapter 2 provides an overview of published literature that expounds on the need for this research study based on past research that explored the barriers faced by women as a collective, and Black women specifically, in seeking senior leadership positions at CCCU member institutions. The chapter also addresses leadership development and mentorship programs for women seeking senior-level leadership positions in higher education, and ethnic and gender diversity in Christian higher education. Chapter 3 discusses the research study methodology

used, the participant selection process, data collection methods, the instruments used for data analysis, the ethical considerations determined for this research study, as well as the research study limitations, delimitations, and assumptions. Chapter 4 discusses the research study findings gleaned from the stories and life histories that were shared by the research participants during the semistructured interviews. Finally, Chapter 5 provides an in-depth summary of the key findings of this research study, including an interpretation of the research findings, research limitations, implications for practice, and recommendations for practice and future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore the lived experiences of Black women currently serving in senior leadership positions in CCCU institutions. This research study magnifies the barriers experienced, the impact of mentorship, and the importance of faith in the leadership journey of the participants at the intersections of their race and gender at CCCU institutions. Existing research has focused on examining why there is a dearth of women in senior leadership roles at CCCU member institutions. However, existing research has not examined the dual impact of gender and race as it relates to Black women securing senior leadership roles on CCCU campuses.

In the literature review for this study, I focus on an examination of peer-reviewed literature and scholarly books in four key areas: Black women in higher education leadership, women in leadership in Christian higher education, leadership development and mentorship in higher education, and ethnic and gender diversity in Christian higher education. The literature reviewed in this chapter provides the historical context of gender and racial barriers in Christian higher education leadership. The literature also cultivates the foundational basis for seeking an understanding of the lived experiences of Black women in Christian higher education leadership.

Literature Search Methods

There has been limited previous research conducted on the lived experiences of Black women in senior-level leadership positions at CCCU institutions. Because of this fact, it was imperative to use several literature search methods to strengthen the data collected and analyzed for this research study. The Brown Library at Abilene Christian University (ACU) is an online database library that was the primary source used to assemble fundamental literature for this

research study. In addition to accessing ACU's Brown Library, I used scholarly books obtained from previously completed coursework as required in the doctoral program.

Additionally, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) database was accessed to obtain current statistics in higher education for this research study. Finally, I accessed the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) and the EBSCO Information Services, two online digital libraries, to conduct literature searches for this research study.

The following terms used to conduct a search of existing research included, but were not limited to, *Black women in higher education*, *diversity at CCCU*, *diversity in Christian higher education*, *women leaders in Christian colleges and universities*, *servant leadership*, *leadership development in higher education*, *mentoring programs in higher education*, *Black women leaders in Christian higher education*, *women leaders in higher education*, *systemic racism in Christian higher education*, and *diversity in higher education administration*.

Black Women in Higher Education Leadership

Alexander (2010) stated that historically, Black women have been underrepresented in positions of leadership in higher education. I emphasized a review of the literature concerning diversity in higher education leadership in both Christian and secular colleges and universities for this study. Although the literature on the experiences of Black women leaders in Christian higher education is limited, existing research has provided a glimpse of the experiences of Black women in senior leadership positions in non-faith-based institutions of higher education.

A research study conducted by Freeman et al. (2019) revealed that Black women are the least represented group serving in senior-level leadership positions in higher education. However, Black women are acquiring the education that is required to lead. According to the American Association of University Women (AAUW, 2022) among Black college students,

Black women account for 64% of doctoral degrees, 72% of master's degrees, and 66% of bachelor's degrees earned by African Americans in the United States. Additionally, data from the American Association of University Women (AAUW, 2022) indicate that Black women are the second largest group of undergraduate degree earners at 21%, second only to White women. However, existing research conducted by Tevis et al. (2020) noted that, despite the educational attainment of Black women, they continue to endure barriers to career advancement in higher education.

With only 5.8% of African American women holding senior-level leadership positions in higher education, Tevis et al. (2020) concluded that Black women share similar experiences in having to fight racism and sexism in their professional lives and having to combat negative stereotypes and microaggressions in the workplace. Existing literature on Black women faculty and administrators has noted that presenting their authentic selves can be a tricky and delicate act to negotiate on higher education campuses (Alexander, 2010; Tevis et al., 2020). Black women are often stereotyped in leadership positions in higher education and perceived as aggressive, strong-willed, difficult to work with, or too pushy (Lais, 2018). These stereotypes can create unsurmountable barriers for Black women who aspire to serve in senior leadership positions in higher education.

Townsend (2020) stated that Black women in higher education often experience a *Black tax*, the requirement to work doubly hard in comparison to White people. The Black tax also includes Black women experiencing greater scrutiny in their decision-making as well as a constant need to prove that their skills, education, and experiences warrant the role in which they are serving. Further, Townsend stated that Black women are afflicted with experiencing microaggressions while working in higher education. Multicultural scholar and pioneering

researcher Derald Sue (2007) defined microaggressions as "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial, gender, sexual orientation, and religious slights and insults to the target person or group" (p. 271). Experiencing the Black tax and combating racial and gender microaggressions affect the percentage (or lack thereof) of Black women who experience career advancement in higher education (Townsend, 2020).

According to Blakesdale (2006), many institutions systemically position Black women as outsiders within the academy and in leadership roles. These systemic barriers contribute to a lack of representation of Black women's voices in the development of teaching practices, policy development, and student support systems on college campuses and can lead to a belief or feeling of unbelonging for aspiring faculty of color (Freeman et al., 2019). A review of the literature demonstrates a consensus in existing research that denotes that Black women face many challenges in higher education administration. Battle and Doswell (2004) stated that these impede the professional growth of Black women as well as limit their opportunities to earn leadership positions in higher education.

According to Guient (2022), the challenges and barriers faced by Black women aspiring to gain access to leadership roles in higher education have resulted in a concentration of Black women in the lower ranks of higher education and mid-manager level positions. Along with the negative impact that racism and sexism can have on Black women's professional growth and development, Collins (2000) suggested that Black women's views of themselves can be impaired by systemic racism. Collins offered that Black women can have an *invisible perspective* of themselves. This invisible perspective, according to Collins, is a set of conscious and unconscious beliefs and dispositions that can block Black women from achieving and succeeding

in higher education. Additionally, Alexander (2010) stated that an invisible perspective of oneself can negatively influence a person's decision to even consider careers in higher education at all levels including serving in leadership roles at colleges and universities.

A review of research conducted by Breeden (2021) pointed out that for many people who consider a career in senior leadership at a college or university, the career trajectory often starts at the faculty level as many senior leadership roles are frequently filled internally, with current and former faculty members of the institution. Further, Breeden (2021) determined that the typical career trajectory is evidence of a systemic barrier that Black women endure in pursuit of higher education leadership positions because of the underrepresentation of faculty of color at many colleges and universities in the United States.

The CCCU diversity report (CCCU, 2021) indicated that as of 2018, only 4.9% of all CCCU member institutions' faculty were Black and of that 4.9%, 56.7% are Black women faculty members. However, Guient (2021) stated that Black women are disproportionately represented in faculty instructional roles and experience pay inequity in these positions (Guient, 2021). While Black women hold most of the professorships of African Americans at CCCU institutions, the CCCU has published data indicating that only 5.2% of senior leadership positions within CCCU member institutions are held by African Americans (CCCU, 2021). It is unclear what percentage of the 5.2% are Black women advancing into senior leadership roles because these data have not been documented by the CCCU. However, more than 84% of those serving in senior leadership roles at CCCU member institutions are White.

Women in Christian Higher Education Leadership

Research conducted by Johnson and Delmas (2022) provides a historical context of higher education in the United States. This research study found the role of university president,

at both faith-based and secular predominantly White institutions (PWIs), has been held primarily by White men. Existing research conducted by Sesay (2017) indicates that senior leadership trends in higher education have been slow to change even with the increased percentages of women and people of color earning advanced degrees that make them qualified to serve in leadership positions in higher education. According to Sesay, there has been improvement in diversifying those who serve in student support types of senior leadership positions, such as student affairs, but those serving as university or college president continue to be mainly White and male.

Davis and Maldonado (2015) stated that when women are excluded from senior leadership positions, they are denied the opportunity to improve in their organizations and in society. While the research conducted by Davis and Maldonado was focused on secular institutions, the case can be made that their research findings hold true for women at CCCU institutions as well. CCCU member institutions have lower numbers of women serving in senior leadership roles than their secular counterparts (Dahlvig, 2012). Educational data reveal that women are graduating at higher rates than men at all degree levels from associate degree programs to doctoral degree programs (NCES, 2019); Longman et al. (2019) highlighted those serving in senior leadership positions in higher education are still mostly White men.

Existing research by O'Connor (2018) suggested that Christian higher education has a male-normed culture that perceives women as less visionary than men and that this perception may contribute to the underrepresentation of women in senior leadership positions. O'Connor conducted research that examined how women leaders at Christian colleges and universities develop and implement a vision that results in institutional change at their university. O'Connor concluded that the opportunity for women to advance into senior leadership roles will be less

likely if women at Christian colleges and universities are not viewed as visionary leaders in accordance with that institution's adopted male-normed criteria.

Dahlvig's (2012) research revealed that the culture of the campus coupled with the traditional Christian beliefs of many CCCU member institutions can promote a condition that discourages women leaders. The term *stained-glass ceiling* was coined by Mock (2005) to describe the institutional barriers that women experience at CCCU member institutions while aspiring to serve in leadership positions. According to Mock, these barriers impact women on social, theological, and personal levels. Mock further stated that the barriers that help create the stained-glass ceiling in Christian higher education that are rooted in patriarchy include theological beliefs that men are superior to women and thus born to lead, and the exclusion of women in leadership positions outside of the home due to the socialization of women as the primary caregivers of the family.

Most recent data determined that only 19% of senior leadership roles at CCCU campuses are held by women (Curry & Willeman, 2018). A study conducted by Longman et al. (2018) found that despite the stained-glass ceiling that exists in Christian higher education, many women pursue senior-level leadership positions because they believe that God calls them to lead. Longman et al. (2018) stated that in Christian higher education, women who serve in senior leadership positions indicate that they have a keen awareness of how their gifts and talents can help to make a positive impact on the institution they serve and fulfill their calling from God to lead.

Longman and Lafreniere (2012) conducted a study that determined that women are not driven to leadership for personal gain or power. Their research concluded that women generally pursue leadership opportunities because they believe that their service will benefit the institution

for the purpose of improving the institution for the betterment of all stakeholders. Longman and Lafreniere (2012) found that a woman's decision to use her gifts and talents to serve in leadership roles was predicated on her faith, her family, and life circumstances. Findings from this study reinforce the importance of women leaders developing an awareness of their giftedness as part of the process of identifying themselves as leaders and ascending to higher levels of leadership.

Although the CCCU has collected data on the percentage of women serving in senior leadership positions at member institutions, there is no existing research from the CCCU that quantifies the percentage of women serving in senior leadership positions at member institutions by race and ethnicity. At the highest level of senior leadership—university president—only 19 CCCU member institutions are led by women presidents, 18 of whom are White women (CCCU, 2023c). The lone Black woman president of a CCCU member institution in the history of the CCCU was appointed in fall of 2023. Prior to 2023, no CCCU member institution was led by a Black woman since the CCCU was founded in 1976 (CCCU, 2023c).

Faith and Servant Leadership

Women who approach life with a faith perspective reported that discerning a sense of calling through an awareness of talents and strengths enhanced their motivation to lead (Longman et al., 2011). A core requirement for working at a CCCU member institution is professing one's belief in the Christian faith and being a follower of Christ (CCCU, 2023a). Christians serving in leadership positions at Christian colleges and universities often consider it their calling and/or vocation (Burch et al., 2015). Many Christians view leadership as servanthood that is centered on the premise that loving God and loving people with their whole

hearts, minds, and souls is key to effective leadership. Thus, the servant leadership model is often deemed ideal for Christian higher education administrators (Longman et al., 2019).

Servant leadership was developed by Greenleaf (2002) and is defined as leading through serving followers by seeking to fulfill the needs of others, which will motivate others to follow the leader. Greenleaf stated that servant leadership has 10 key characteristics*:* empathy, listening, community building, foresight, healing, conceptualization, awareness, persuasion, stewardship, and growth of people.

One primary motivator identified by Dahlvig and Longman (2014) that contributed to women considering or stepping into leadership was relational responsibility. Relational responsibility is defined as the observed pattern that women accept leadership role(s) in response to a direct petition from a person in a role higher than theirs, from a person at the same career level, or from a person below them on the career ladder. Existing research indicates that a woman's willingness to serve is not related to higher income or prestige; on the contrary, women serve out of responsiveness and a willingness to support the needs and concerns of others (Charmaz, 2014; Dahlvig & Longman, 2014). Relational responsibility is aligned with servant leadership (Charmaz, 2014).

Research conducted by Keith (2015) determined that servant leaders aim to empower their followers through trust and the facilitation of professional development opportunities. In doing so, servant leaders inspire and motivate their followers to work harder and help the organization to be successful. According to Keith, servant leaders also strive to impact the personal growth of their followers and believe that to be an effective leader, service to others must be prioritized over accruing power.

Women who serve in leadership positions at Christian colleges and universities report that they believe God placed them in their respective roles to honor Him through their leadership (Longman & Anderson, 2011). When one considers the gender bias and sexism that women as a collective and the racism, gender bias, and sexism that Black women experience in their quest to obtain senior leadership roles in Christian higher education, a strong faith is necessary (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). These women rely on their faith to keep fighting for their opportunities to serve despite the barriers placed in their way.

Intersectionality of Race and Gender

Grounded in Black feminist and critical race theories, intersectionality is a term that was coined by American legal scholar and civil rights advocate Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 (Harris & Patton, 2019) and emerged from a historical narrative about race and gender in the United States (Dickens & Chavez, 2018). Crenshaw (1989) stated that intersectionality is a conceptual framework grounded in Black feminist scholarship, highlighting Black women's exclusion from research framed through the lens of White women. Crenshaw believed that Black women and women of color's experiences of oppression were interlocked but ignored and made to be invisible by structural systems due to a separate focus on gender and race. Most of the existing research about the intersectionality of leaders' views and experiences is through the viewpoints of White women and Black men leaving out Black women's views (McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017). McDowell and Carter-Francique stressed that Black women "often see themselves not as Black people or as women, but in terms of the intersected identity of Black women" (p. 394).

Black women can have different experiences of power, growth, and development than White women and other women of color. The framework used to explore these experiences needs to provide space for the fullness of experiences of Black women. Davis and Maldonado (2015) stated that Black feminist theory provides African American women the opportunity to

speak from lived experiences unique only to Black women and provides a structure for these lived experiences to be examined. Deemed the founder of the theory, Collins (2000) stated that Black feminist theory encompasses a place of marginalization in which African American women are different from White and other minority women.

A review of the research conducted by Stanley (2009) and Lewis-Strickland (2021), found that there is limited existing research that has prioritized an examination of Black women in leadership positions in higher education. According to Lewis-Strickland, the gap in the existing research of women in higher education leadership has contributed to the lack of understanding of the intersectionality of race and gender, where race and gender cross, on Black women's professional development as university leaders.

In every area of life, Black women are challenged with overcoming barriers because of being both Black and female. Black women understand instinctively how the intersectionality of race and gender can present barriers in their leadership journey. Collins (2000) stated that to empower Black women, there must be an identification of the power structures that limit Black women's ability to gain power themselves and then those power structures need to be eliminated for Black women to successfully lead. Collins argued that Black women cannot separate their race from their gender and therefore Black women's experiences are often characterized by *double barriers*, which led to disadvantages because of multiple marginalized identities. This intersectionality makes it challenging for Black women to break the glass ceiling (Alexander, 2010) and obtain senior leadership positions in higher education.

Since the 19th century, African American women in the academy have faced opposition to lead (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). As a result of racism and discrimination, Black men and women were confined to working at historically Black colleges and universities. Even when

limited to serving at historically Black colleges and universities, sexism further restricted Black women to roles deemed female arts (Benjamin, 1997) that included teaching, home economics, or performing specific duties closely linked to the interest of students. Despite the historical and current racial and gendered barriers that they have faced in the academy, African American women in academia continue to seek open access to the opportunities that their abilities, their interests, and their willingness to work entitle them to (Lewis-Strickland, 2021).

Ethnic and Gender Diversity at CCCU Member Institutions

Harper and Hurtado (2007) stated that the promise of American higher education is to advance social progress, end America's discomfort with race and social difference, and deal directly with many of the issues of inequality present in everyday life. It is reasonable to assert that Christian colleges and universities should not only subscribe to Harper and Hurtado's view of institutions of higher education they should be governed by a moral compass that requires that their campuses facilitate a culture that champions equality and equity for all God's children.

The CCCU has articulated a commitment to diversity and inclusion for its membership via its 6th core standard—Christian distinctions and advocacy—which states the following: "We hold the Christian belief that the Gospel calls us toward reconciliation with one another. We strive for humble and courageous action that honors the unity of the human race, values ethnic and cultural diversity, and addresses the injustices of racism*"* (CCCU, 2023b). While the CCCU should be applauded for this outward commitment to promoting understanding and awareness of others, the majority of CCCU institutions continue to lack an outward commitment to creating a diverse learning community (Paredes-Collins, 2009).

This is apparent in the lack of ethnic and gender diversity among faculty and senior leadership on many CCCU campuses (Longman & Anderson, 2016). Campus initiatives are

needed to recruit and retain faculty and students from marginalized groups, and a greater and bolder vision is necessary to create a diverse and intentionally inclusive campus that has at its root an institutional commitment to diverse leadership (De La Rosa & Jun, 2019).

Existing research on ethnic and gender diversity at CCCU member institutions has focused primarily on examining the diversity of the student body population of member campuses and/or exploring gender diversity or the lack thereof in senior leadership positions. Current research that has examined women in senior leadership positions at CCCU institutions has studied White women's experiences and has not fully explored the experiences of Black women and women of color in senior-level leadership at CCCU institutions (Longman & Anderson, 2011).

Perez (2013) conducted research that concentrated on an examination of four CCCU member institutions that have prioritized increasing diversity on their campuses and if they have embedded diversity in the mission and theology of the institution. Perez' research summarized that a commitment to diversity at Christian universities requires that diversity be integrated into the school's mission to be fully actualized. This research explored how Christian universities are "making progress in the area of diversity and laying the groundwork for change by linking their efforts to their mission, history and more importantly their theology" (p. 25). This research study highlighted Smith's (2020) dimensions of diversity as the framework by which the problem is studied at the four CCCU institutions.

Smith's (2020) dimensions of diversity model reviewed four key areas: (1) Access and success deals with how many students from various backgrounds are included and succeeding in higher education; (2) Climate and intergroup relations deals with how students experience campus and relate to one another across differences are captured in the climate and intergroup

relations dimension, addressing the ways a sense of belonging and community are fostered; (3) Education and scholarship focuses on the presence of diverse perspectives in the curriculum and learning goals; and (4) Institutional viability and vitality focuses on institutional resources and capacity to support a diverse campus community.

There have been several Christian universities that focused on only one area of Smith's dimensions of diversity: access and success (Perez, 2013). However, Christian universities are required to go beyond creating programs to address diversity and must connect their mission and theology to their commitment to diversity to see lasting changes (Clayton-Pedersen & Clayton-Pedersen, 2008). Evidence of the problem included a lack of theological position papers on diversity at the four institutions (Perez, 2013). Theological position papers can articulate the biblical mandate of diversity for CCCU institutions. Creating and publishing theological position papers on diversity could aid in pushing back against oppositional voices that subscribe to the belief that diversity is a tool of political correctness instead of a biblical mandate.

A review of Nussbaum and Chang's research study (2013) determined that strong institutional leadership is needed for Christian colleges and universities to embrace diversity and realize social justice as an integral part of their mission, institutional values, and ethos. Nussbaum and Chang stated that the distinctive mission of Christian colleges and universities are assets that can be cultivated and developed in new ways to address the emerging diversity-related challenges facing these institutions and shift diversity from a programmatic emphasis to a "systemic, institutional agenda" demanding a whole new level of thinking and transformation of our institutions (2013, p. 6).

One of the greatest challenges to increasing ethnic and gender diversity at CCCU institutions is that many White people in the United States view racism as individual acts

perpetrated against other individuals (Ash et al., 2017). As a result, White evangelicals subscribe to treating or fixing racism one relationship at a time, by evangelizing people to be more loving and kinder to one another. This research study determined that viewing racism as an individual problem instead of viewing racism as a systemic issue. This individualistic philosophy directly contradicts the ministry of Jesus Christ as written in the Holy Bible. Biblical scholars contend that the ministry of Jesus Christ as described in the Bible reveals that Jesus was concerned about systemic issues of injustice, in addition to personal sin and salvation (Ash et al., 2017).

In matters of racial injustice, Christianity has been both a perpetrator of racism and a champion in the fight for racial justice (Hendricks, 2007). Although racially distinct evangelical expressions of Christianity may share similar theological doctrines, they have historically approached the issue of race and Christianity in stark contrast to one another (Ash et al., 2017). The juxtaposition of White evangelicals viewing racism from the lens of individualism instead of systemic has greatly hindered CCCU member institutions to implement, adopt, and practice antiracist policies that could increase ethnic and gender diversity on their respective campuses at the student, faculty, staff, and senior leadership levels.

Leadership Development and Mentorship in Higher Education

Leadership development programs are a cornerstone for ascending to senior leadership roles in higher education (Gigliotti & Ruben, 2017). Gigliotti and Ruben examined the role of leadership preparation and leadership development within colleges and universities. The authors conducted a case study on the Center for Organizational Development and Leadership (ODL) at Rutgers University. Gigliotti and Ruben (2017) assessed the leadership framework and programs of the ODL and how effective the programs are in cultivating future higher education leaders. They concluded that the ODL and programs like it have been effective in addressing the general

and specific knowledge and skills needed for effective leadership in senior roles at colleges and universities.

Many leadership development programs are normed on male assumptions (Longman & Anderson, 2016) and therefore do not lend themselves to support the leadership development of women. There are institutional policies that are more supportive of men or unmarried women taking on senior-level roles because the presumption is that men or unmarried women have limitless time to dedicate to their roles. Block and Tietjen-Smith (2016) argued that as more women obtain the education and experience required to secure senior leadership positions in higher education, it is important to have access to gender-based guidance and support for women from other women who have forged the way into higher education administration.

A review of Longman et al.'s (2019) research study that examined how developing relationships impact women's ability to obtain senior leadership roles, summarized that there is a lack of women serving at CCCU institutions. This research study determined that women-based leadership development is limited within CCCU institutions. Further, the study indicated that a combination of structural and attitudinal barriers have systemically blocked or discouraged women from advancement into leadership roles.

Leadership development programs often include mentorship. Many women who have become university presidents point to mentorship as a contributing factor to their success (Brown, 2005). Brown conducted a research study that assessed the impact of mentorship for female college presidents at independent universities. Brown determined that of the 129 female college presidents who participated in the study, more than 70% of them had mentors and served as mentors themselves. The study also found that the presidents felt that having mentors and participating in professional development programs directly impacted their ability to obtain the

skills and knowledge needed to become college presidents. Brown's findings also noted that in many cases, women need to identify their own mentoring needs and seek out their own mentors because of a lack of networking and programs that target women.

Mentorship programs can help Black women gain access to senior leadership positions in Christian higher education. Banerjee-Batist et al. (2019) stated that mentoring can be defined as a one-on-one relationship where someone in a more senior role provides guidance to someone less experienced; this typically occurs within organizations where both mentors and protégés benefit from mentoring (Banerjee-Batist et al., 2019; Ghosh & Reio, 2013). In higher education, mentorship programs aid in the professional growth and development of the mentee. When mentors act as coaches, counselors, role models, and confidants they provide their protégé with psychosocial support and the protégé reap the benefits of their mentor's sponsorship and guidance on how to navigate their organizational career successfully (Banerjee-Batist et al., 2019; Sosik & Godshalk, 2000).

Existing research on mentoring and leadership development indicates that there are two types of mentorship opportunities in higher education—formal and informal mentorship (Quinn, 2012). Formal mentoring programs are sponsored by the university. Formal mentorship programs have outlined meeting times and activities (Bynum, 2015). On the other hand, informal mentorship is not a sponsored program by the university. Informal mentorship generally happens by chance and without any rearranged schedule or agenda. Whether one participates in formal or informal mentoring, the benefits can be significant. Quinn (2012) identified eight benefits of positive mentoring relationships: (a) improved opportunity and success in career advancement, (b) increased institutional loyalty, (c) higher salaries, (d) improved time management and productivity, (e) increased procurement of grants, (f) improved satisfaction with profession and

work-life balance, (g) higher administrative aspirations, and (h) improved networking skills. Dahlvig and Longman's (2014) research found that one primary motivator that influenced leadership aspirations and advancement in women was the influence of role models and/or mentors.

Reis and Grady (2020) examined the importance of mentorship as a tool to for women to gain access to university presidency positions. The research found that the participants credited mentorship with providing them with the administrative support and leadership opportunities that propelled them to their presidencies. Reis and Grady's research also concluded that women presidents value the role that mentoring plays in expanding opportunities for women in senior leadership roles in higher education by now serving as mentors themselves to other women who aspire to gain leadership positions in higher education (2020).

Research conducted by Longman et al. (2019) indicates that as mentoring has been shown to be beneficial to developing higher education leaders, the concept of sponsorship has gained visibility and credibility in leadership development. Coined by Hewlett (2013), a sponsor is defined as a senior person who believes in your potential and is willing to take a bet on you, advocates for your next promotion, encourages you to take risks and has your back, and expects a great deal from you. The function of serving as a sponsor, therefore, includes providing air cover and affirmation to the individual being sponsored, opening opportunities and organizational exposure through special projects and assignments, and expanding opportunities through new roles and responsibilities (Longman et al., 2019).

Davis (2009) examined the benefits of mentoring programs for African American women who are interested in advancing to senior-level leadership roles in higher education. Davis's research study focused on African American women in higher education, the barriers that they

face in career advancement in higher education, and the benefits of mentoring programs for African American women higher education professionals to ascend to senior-level positions. Davis's research concluded that participation in mentoring programs is an essential factor in African American women being able to advance into senior-level leadership roles. Davis found that mentoring was critical to female leadership development in that mentoring provided an opportunity for the mentee to be socialized into the formal and informal norms of the institution, create a network of support for the mentee, and provide a channel for training and feedback (2009).

A review of the literature determined that the African American Women's Summit (AAWS) is the primary national professional development conference for African American female higher education administrators (West, 2017). The AAWS facilitates opportunities to develop mentoring relationships between early career and senior-level administrators (West, 2017). West conducted a research study that explored the experiences of African American women higher education administrators employed at predominately White institutions (PWIs) and who consistently participated in the AAWS. West's findings resulted in three themes: The participants valued being in a culturally homogenous space when attending the AAWS; building a collection of culturally responsive human and material resources had a positive impact on the participants; and the participants benefited from the cultural intentionality of the curriculum.

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the existing literature on the state of women serving in senior leadership roles in higher education and at CCCU member institutions. A review of the literature revealed that while women have steadily obtained postsecondary degrees at a percentage higher than men overall, a lack of women in senior leadership positions at CCCU

institutions specifically and in higher education collectively still afflicts the academy. Existing research has concluded that there are several barriers present that negatively impact opportunities for women seeking to ascend to senior leadership roles in Christian higher education. Existing literature provided sufficient data to analyze the experiences of women in senior leadership positions at CCCU member institutions and offered recommendations and strategies to increase the percentage of women in senior leadership roles in the future.

However, the existing research examines the lack of women in senior leadership roles at CCCU member institutions from the experiences of White women almost exclusively. Existing research specific to Black women in these spaces is insufficient. Existing research does not intentionally and adequately explore how the intersection of race and gender affects the lived experiences of Black women who are striving to achieve senior leadership positions or who are currently serving in senior leadership positions at CCCU member institutions.

Chapter 3 includes a discussion of the research study methodology that was used to conduct this research study. In Chapter 3, I describe the participant selection process, the data collection method, and the instrument I used to conduct data analysis of the research findings. Finally, I outline the ethical considerations determined, the limitations, delimitations, and assumptions.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore the lived experiences of Black women currently serving or recently retired in the last two years from serving in senior leadership positions at CCCU member institutions. It is most appropriate to use qualitative research when there is a problem or issue that you need to explore, or when you need a better and/or detailed understanding of an issue or phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). Chapter 3 provides an in-depth discussion of the methodology used for this research study. To ensure clarity, Chapter 3 provides a restatement of the purpose of this research study and the research questions that have guided this study.

Additionally, I offer a discussion of the target population of this research study and the participant selection process, and I outline the data collection methods as well as the instruments used for data analysis. I detail the ethical considerations addressed in this research study as well as the research study limitations, delimitations, and assumptions. In this qualitative research study, I employed a narrative inquiry methodology to gain a full understanding of the journey of Black women senior leaders at CCCU member institutions in their own words. The results of this qualitative research study can be used to assist in shaping strategies to increase the percentages of Black women serving in senior leadership roles at CCCU member institutions.

Research Design and Methodology

Existing research that has examined the phenomenon of the dearth of women in senior leadership roles at CCCU member institutions has been conducted using a qualitative research design (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014; Longman & Anderson, 2011). A narrative inquiry qualitative research design was the ideal methodology to use as this research study sought to deepen the understanding of the lived experiences of Black women in senior leadership positions at CCCU

member institutions. Using a narrative inquiry methodology was ideal because narrative inquiry successfully captures personal and human dimensions that cannot be quantified into dry facts and numerical data (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004). Narrative inquiry is one of the traditional five approaches to qualitative research (Creswell, 2014) in which the stories themselves become the raw data (Butina, 2015).

Narrative inquiry has been used in many disciplines to learn more about the culture, historical experiences, identity, and lifestyle of the narrator (Butina, 2015). One benefit of using narrative inquiry for this research study is that narrative inquiry provides in-depth detail of the lived experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2014). A secondary benefit of using narrative inquiry is that gathering in-depth data is easily accomplished as narratives usually provide thick descriptions. Yet another benefit of narrative inquiry is the possibility of gathering in-depth meaning as participants usually reveal themselves in their stories.

The primary qualitative form of data collection for narrative inquiry research is interviews (Creswell, 2014), but data collection can also include observations and documents/artifacts provided by the participants. Narrative research involves interpreting stories to understand how people make sense of their experiences and perceptions (Butina, 2015). Creswell (2012) stated that narrative analysis is a powerful qualitative research tool. Narrative research can uncover behaviors, feelings, and motivations that are not expressed explicitly. It also provides rich linguistic data that may shed light on various aspects of cultural or social phenomena and provides researchers with detailed information about their subjects that they could not get through other methods. I collected narratives for this research study through semistructured interviews from the research participants who shared their stories of their experiences on their journey to becoming senior leaders at a CCCU member institution.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore the lived experiences of Black women currently serving or recently retired in the last 2 years from serving in senior leadership positions at CCCU member institutions. This research study centered on one overarching question: What is the lived experiences of Black women serving in senior leadership roles in the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities' member institutions?

These three research questions guided this study:

RQ1: What barriers do Black women overcome to obtain senior leadership positions at a Council for Christian Colleges and Universities' institution?

RQ2: How do mentorship opportunities aid Black women in their ascension to senior leadership roles on a Council for Christian Colleges and Universities' member campuses?

RQ3: How does Black women's Christian faith influence their leadership journey?

Population

The population for this research study was current and recently retired senior-level women leaders serving at CCCU member institutions who self-identified as Black/African American. With over 150 member institutions across North America, CCCU member institutions are located in every region of the country and are situated in urban, rural and suburban communities across the United States. Those appointed to senior leadership positions in Christian higher education are often viewed as the personification of the college or university in the eyes of the public (Frawley, 2014). The percentage of women in senior leadership roles at CCCU member institutions is lower than its secular counterparts (Longman &Anderson, 2016).

Black women were the focus of this research study because of the lack of data and existing research that examined their experiences as senior leaders at CCCU member institutions

(Longman &Anderson, 2016; CCCU, 2021). Based on the data provided from a review of the CCCU membership directory (CCCU, 2023a), 28 Black women were identified as members of this population. I defined senior leadership appointments for this population into three core categories: (1) executive positions (i.e., university president, vice president, provost, vice provost, chancellor, vice chancellor), (2) senior administrative positions (i.e., chief financial officer, diversity, equity and inclusion director, human resources director, etc.), and (3) senior departmental positions (i.e., department chair, college dean, student affairs director, director of sponsored programs, etc.; Longman &Anderson, 2011).

Study Sample

The study sample for this research study included 10 Black women who currently serve or have retired within the last 2 years from serving in a senior leadership position at a CCCU member institution. As the percentage of Black women currently serving in a senior leadership capacity at a CCCU is small (CCCU, 2023b), purposeful sampling was used for this research study. In purposeful sampling, the participants are selected intentionally to provide insight into the phenomena being investigated due to their experiences (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018).

Creswell and Creswell (2017) stated that it is reasonable to have a sample size of 10 to 20 for a narrative inquiry research study. Based on existing research that confirms the dearth of Black women in senior leadership positions at CCCU institutions, a sample size of 10 to 15 participants was anticipated for this research study.

I performed a comprehensive search of the CCCU online member database using the resources made available by the CCCU on their member institutions in the United States (CCCU, 2023a) to determine which member institutions had Black women currently serving in senior leadership appointments. The results of the comprehensive search of the CCCU online member

database resulted in determining 28 potential participants for this research study. I contacted each of the 28 participants via email with an invitation to participate in this research study. I obtained each potential participant's contact information on their respective CCCU campus websites.

The invitation I sent via email included a description of the research study and the time for participation in the study. Upon receiving a response of interest in participating in the research study, potential participants were sent an informed consent form via email (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The informed consent included the required preselection criteria to be eligible to participate in this research study: (1) self-identification as a Black woman, (2) currently serving in a senior leadership role at a CCCU campus for at least 2 years or retired from serving within the last 2 years, and (3) at least 18 years old. I also informed participants of the research problem, the dearth of Black women in senior leadership positions at CCCU member institutions, and the purpose of the research study—to explore the lived experiences of Black women senior leaders at CCCU member institutions.

The request to participate in this research study yielded a response of 60%. A total of 17 women responded to the invitation email and each of the 17 participants affirmed the need for this research study and/or congratulated me on researching this phenomenon. Of the 17 responses, six women expressed fear of retaliation or retribution if they participated in the research study, and ultimately declined. Eleven women accepted the invitation to participate in this research study. Upon completion of the semistructured interviews, one of the participants requested that her response be kept strictly off the record and not included in the results of the research findings. Consequently, this research study had a total of 10 participants.

Materials

Narrative inquiry examines the lived experiences of the participants and seeks to understand how and why participants behaved a certain way, from their perspective (Tenny et al., 2022). In narrative inquiry, the use of semistructured interviews provides the greatest opportunity to understand the participants' lived experiences (Butina, 2015). This research study used online semistructured interviews via Zoom as the primary data collection tool based on the use of the approved guided interview protocol (see Appendix E). The rationale for using semistructured interviews is to facilitate space for the participants to tell their stories, which is the essence of narrative inquiry. The secondary data collection tool used in this research study was field notes. Miles and Huberman (1984) stated that field notes are an important data source in qualitative research, because they keep track of observations that the researcher can forget over time.

Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

The data collected through the semistructured interviews and field notes were transcribed using the Cockatoo transcription software. The data was then coded using the ATLAS.ti qualitative analysis software program. Further, all data collected in the semistructured interviews was recorded through the Zoom platform and back up recordings were made using an external voice recording device. I then stored all data collected on a password-protected external hard drive as required by IRB protocols.

Data Collection

The primary data collection tool implemented for this narrative inquiry research study was semistructured interviews. All interviews were facilitated online, using Zoom, a virtual video conferencing software. Using Zoom permitted concise audio and video recording through

the Zoom software, which resulted in exact interview transcription and proficient reliability methods when it came time to analyze the data collected through the interviews (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018).

A total of 10 interviews were completed. The 10 women who agreed to participate in the research study completed and signed an informed consent form (Appendix D) to be interviewed and to have their interviews recorded before I conducted their interview. Having the consent forms completed and signed before conducting the semistructured interviews ensured that each participant was fully aware of and understood the interview process (Herr & Anderson, 2015). A copy of the signed consent form was provided to each participant. The consent form provided detailed information about the timeline, procedures, purpose of the study, and other relevant information related to the research study.

At the start of the scheduled interview, I verbally asked each participant to confirm that they consented to have the interview recorded. Interview questions were provided to the participants when the scheduled interview was confirmed. Each participant was provided a set of potential interview dates and times to choose from for their semistructured interview. Each interview was scheduled for 1 hour, with the actual interview time ranging from one hour to one hour and 10 minutes.

The focus of the interviews was the central, overarching research question: What is the lived experience of Black women serving in senior leadership roles in CCCU institutions? I followed this with the three specific research questions and subsequent follow-up questions as listed in the interview protocol (Appendix E). Each participant was asked every question as listed in the interview protocol. The order and flow of the semistructured interviews remained consistent for all participants as I strictly followed the order of the questions listed in the

interview protocol while still providing each participant the opportunity to expand on any question asked as they deemed necessary.

In addition to the data collected through the stories shared by the participants during the interviews, I completed field notes during each interview. Field notes are records to confirm what the researcher observed during the interview process (Miles & Huberman, 1984). I kept a detailed notebook of field notes that included the date and time of the interview, including an observation of the space the participant was in during their interview, specific facts as shared by the research participants, key phrases stated by the participants, summaries of the interviews, and participant body language and facial expressions during their interview (Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater, 2011).

Data Analysis

Narrative inquiry data analysis involves examining the raw data, identifying key elements, organizing and sequencing these elements, and then retelling a story that describes the individual's experiences (Creswell, 2012). To ensure precise interview recordings, I doubly recorded each interview through the Zoom software and on a separate handheld digital recording device to ensure the accuracy of the data collected (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). To substantiate a deep understanding of the lived experiences of the participants as shared in their own words, I attempted triangulation of data by conducting semistructured interviews along with recording detailed field notes during each interview. Patton (2015) stated that triangulation is the use of multiple methods or data sources in qualitative research to develop a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena.

The semistructured interviews were transcribed verbatim using Cockatoo transcription services. Cockatoo protected the transcribed data by encrypting and then transferring the data to

their secure server and stored in cloud storage. Cockatoo does not sell data to third parties. I deleted all data from the Cockatoo server once the transcription services were completed. I have stored all interview transcriptions and field notes on an external hard drive that is password-protected and has been stored in a locked office (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

Data collection in narrative research is summarized through the coding process, where the researcher codes large segments of data with short, descriptive labels that can succinctly describe the data thematically (Creswell, 2012). The data collected were coded using the ATLAS.ti qualitative analysis software program. The ATLAS.ti software program provided an in-depth review of each interview transcript using thematic coding by identifying keywords in the context of each participant interview and then comparing keywords used across all 10 participant interviews. Emergent themes were identified based on the number of occurrences of the same keywords across the participant interviews.

The ATLAS.ti software also identified individual participant quotations that were connected to each theme as outlined in the coding matrix qualitative analysis software. I provided each research participant the opportunity to review all data collected and analyzed.

Methods for Establishing Trustworthiness

To establish trustworthiness, I sent a member-check letter that included a copy of their interview transcript to each participant within 30 days from the completion of their recorded interview. Collaboration with the participants throughout the analysis process is essential to narrative research (Creswell, 2012). Participant engagement in the data analysis process provided another layer of assurance that I accurately captured the stories shared by the participants (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). Participants had an opportunity to provide feedback on their interview transcript as well as key findings determined by the data collected.

To ensure compliance with IRB protocols and to protect the identity of the participants and the confidentiality of their responses, all participants were referred to as Participant 1, 2, and so on. I include direct quotes from the participants in the research findings in narrative form in Chapter 4 (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). The names of the participants, their official job title, as well as the location of the CCCU campus where they serve in senior leadership positions were removed to protect the participants' identities. Because of the small number of Black women working in senior leadership positions at CCCU member institutions, coupled with the consideration of the six women who declined to participate in the study for fear of being identified and retaliated against, I needed to protect the identity of the research participants at all costs.

Researcher's Role

A researcher's role in qualitative research is to understand how their values and expectations influence the conduct and conclusions of a research study (Maxwell, 2008). I have worked in higher education research administration at secular universities for more than 10 years. I became familiar with the CCCU when I became a doctoral student at a university that is a member of the CCCU. While I have no professional or personal connections to the target population for this research study, my experiences through my doctoral program have increased my interest in working for a CCCU member institution.

My career aspirations include earning a senior leadership position in Christian higher education. As such, one reason for pursuing this research study was to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of Black women who have achieved senior leadership appointments at a CCCU member institution. I am also interested in conducting research that moves the academy closer to the full inclusiveness of Black women and people of color in

leadership. As a Christian, I have a responsibility to do all I can to dismantle racism in my personal and professional life. I also pursued this research study because I wanted to contribute to the existing body of research on women in senior leadership by centering the experiences of Black women and their contributions to the field for further research and practical application within the CCCU.

Ethical Considerations

I completed the Responsible Conduct of Research and the Protecting Human Research Participants training courses (see Appendix A) to understand how to conduct research with human participants with minimal risks to participants. The training was offered through the Collaborative Institutional Training Institute in Summer 2022 (see Appendix A) as offered by Abilene Christian University (ACU). I took all necessary steps to ensure that I conducted this research study ethically. Data collection for this research study did not start until I gained IRB approval to start data collection (Appendix B). I provided each research participant with a detailed informed consent agreement that included the purpose of the research study and potential risks and/or benefits of participating in the research study.

I also provided the interview protocol (Appendix E) to each participant assuring that each participant completely understood what they would be asked during the interview, including ensuring that each participant understood that they were free to deny or conclude their participation in this research study at any time. A copy of the interview transcription of each participant was provided as part of the member-check letter.

Assumptions

Assumptions are the belief in something without examining whether the belief is true or not (Elder & Paul, 2009). One assumption made of this research study was that the women who

agreed to participate in this study would be honest and forthcoming with information about their lived experiences as Black women working in Christian higher education and senior leadership. Additionally, as the participants are senior leaders at CCCU member institutions, or recent retirees, I also assumed that the participants were Christians, as they lead colleges and universities that have a professed institutional mission statement that is Christ-centered as required for membership in the CCCU (CCCU, 2023d). It was assumed that the participants have either had or have a mentor(s) or have participated in mentorship programs that were aimed to support them in their goals of becoming senior leaders at a CCCU member institution.

Limitations

Limitations represent weaknesses within the study that may influence the outcomes and conclusions of the research (Ross & Bibler, 2019). One limitation of this research study was the low percentage of participants. As there is a dearth of Black women serving in senior leadership roles at CCCU member institutions, the participant pool was limited to 10 participants. A second limitation of this research study was that the participants were exclusively employed by a CCCU member institution. The exclusion of secular colleges and universities reduced the participant pool for this research study.

If both secular and CCCU institutions were included in this research study, it is possible that the participant pool would have been increased, which would have allowed for stronger data and findings. Another limitation of this research study is my proximity to the participants. I am a Black woman who currently works in higher education, and I strive to earn a senior leadership position at a CCCU member institution in the future. I have also experienced racism and sexism in my career. Being objective is an essential aspect of research inquiry, so researchers must examine methods and conclusions for bias (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). I was earnest in my

bracketing process to ensure that no bias or personal judgments were present in this research study.

Delimitations

Delimitations are boundaries set by the researcher regarding what to include and exclude from the research study (Yin, 2013). While there is a lack of women serving in senior leadership positions in Christian higher education, this research study prioritized Black women as the target population. A limited population of 10 participants who serve as senior leaders at or recently retired from a CCCU member institution may lack external validity for study generalization. However, my goal in this research study was to gain a deeper understanding of and provide greater insight into the phenomenon (Yin, 2013), which is the lack of Black women in senior leadership positions at CCCU member institutions. As such, this delimitation is imperative to this research study.

As employment at a CCCU member institution was a requirement of this research study, participants were also required to be serving in a senior leadership position and have served in a senior-level role for at least 2 years at a CCCU campus or be recently retired within the last 2 years from a senior-level appointment. As this research study's purpose was to explore the lived experiences of Black women serving in senior leadership roles at a CCCU member institution, the ability to duplicate this study across other populations may not be feasible.

Summary

Chapter 3 provided an overview of the research methods that I employed to conduct this research study. Using narrative inquiry methodology, this research study explored the lived experiences of Black women currently serving in or recently retired from senior leadership positions at CCCU member institutions. I chose a narrative inquiry research design because it

permitted the research participants to tell their life histories and experiences in their own words (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018).

Narrative inquiry helps researchers not only build a deeper understanding of their subject but also helps them figure out why people act and react as they do (Bunita, 2015). Storytelling is a central feature of narrative research, and it was an interactive conversation with the participants that was very intimate and in some of the participant interviews conducted, brought about powerful emotions from both parties (Bunita, 2015).

The data analysis uncovered 10 major themes associated with the challenges and barriers faced, the value of mentorship, and the role of their Christian faith that impacted the journey of the participants in their roles as senior leaders at CCCU member institutions. I conducted semistructured interviews with the 10 research participants using a guided interview protocol that followed the exact sequence of questioning for all participants, with 11 questions presented to the participants. Chapter 3 also included details of the study sample, selection criteria, data collection and analysis, and limitations and ethical considerations of the study. I implemented all IRB guidelines to ensure the study was ethical and to strengthen the validity of the research findings.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this research study was to examine the lived experiences of Black women in senior leadership positions at CCCU member institutions. This narrative inquiry qualitative research study used semistructured interviews and open-ended questions with current and recently retired Black women who serve in senior leadership roles at CCCU member institutions. The semistructured interviews conducted for this research study provided an opportunity for Black women in senior leadership roles to share their lived experiences as related to their career trajectory and professional leadership journey. They did this by identifying the barriers and challenges that these Black women encountered and overcame in pursuit of senior-level leadership roles at CCCU member institutions, by exploring how mentorship aided their ability to obtain a senior leadership position, and by understanding the role that their Christian faith has had on their leadership journey.

The semistructured interviews also allowed these Black women to offer strategies, recommendations, and encouragement to other Black women who aspire to serve in a senior leadership capacity at a CCCU member institution. The lived experiences of the participants of this research study offer an opportunity for the CCCU and its member institutions to increase their knowledge of the unique experiences of Black women serving as senior leaders at CCCU member campuses as well as deepen their understanding of the systemic barriers that Black women are required to overcome to obtain senior leadership roles at CCCU campuses. This awareness can serve as the launching pad for the CCCU and its members to create targeted programming and policies that intentionally prioritize increasing opportunities for Black women to serve in senior leadership roles at CCCU campuses and thus increase the percentage of Black women who desire to work in senior leadership roles at CCCU member institutions.

The lived experiences of the participants of this research study can assist the CCCU and its membership to identify barriers that exist for Black women in senior leadership positions and aid in creating and cultivating an organizational culture that supports and encourages increasing opportunities for Black women to serve in senior leadership roles and create a pathway to grow a diverse pool of leaders within the CCCU and its member institutions.

Because there is a dearth of Black women serving in senior leadership roles at CCCU member institutions, the percentage of potential participants was low. This chapter provides the results of the semistructured interviews of 10 Black women who serve in a senior leadership role at a CCCU member institution and/or who have retired from serving in a senior leadership role within the last 2 years. Initially, this research study started with a total of 11 participants who consented to participate in the study. However, one participant requested that her responses be off the record only. Therefore, the data from that interview are not included in the findings of this research study.

An extensive search of the more than 150 North American CCCU member institutions' websites yielded a potential participant pool of 28 Black women. I reached out via email to all potential participants with an invitation to be part of this research study. A total of 11 Black women senior leaders agreed to participate in this research study. An additional six Black women who are currently serving in senior leadership roles at a CCCU member institution responded to the request to participate in the research study conveying that, while they supported the need for this research study and that they believe that this research was important, they determined that they could not agree to participate for fear of retribution or retaliation as a result of their participation.

This research study captured the lived experiences of Black women serving in senior leadership roles at CCCU member campuses through semistructured interviews. Participant narratives were formed from their own words as they recalled their experiences, giving an account of their leadership journey in their current appointment. Each participant interview provided a unique perspective of the personal and professional experiences that included triumphs and challenges that participants experienced in their journey towards being a senior-level leader. Despite each participant's individual lived experiences, themes emerged between all the participant responses that indicated some shared experiences for Black women who aspire to serve in a senior leadership capacity at CCCU campuses. The semistructured interviews for the 10 research participants of this research study focused on one overarching research question.

Research Questions

The central research question for this study was: What is the lived experience of Black women serving in senior leadership roles in the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities' Institutions? The following research questions guided the exploration of this phenomenon.

RQ1: What barriers do Black women overcome to obtain senior leadership positions at a Council for Christian colleges and universities institution?

RQ2: How do mentorship opportunities aid Black women in their ascension to senior leadership roles on a Council for Christian Colleges and University members' campus?

RQ3: How does Black women's Christian faith influence their leadership journey?

Participants

Purposeful sampling was used to obtain a sample size of 10 participants. The sample population represented 10 women who self-identified as Black women and who currently work in a senior leadership role at a CCCU member institution for a minimum of 2 years and/or who

have recently retired within the last 2 years from a CCCU member campus. Potential participants were found via a detailed web search of CCCU member websites of the more than 150 North American member institutions to find Black women serving in a senior leadership capacity.

This search yielded a total of 28 Black women currently serving in a senior leadership capacity at a CCCU member institution. Each potential participant was contacted via electronic mail with an invitation to participate in this study (Appendix C). A response was received from 17 potential participants; 11 women agreed to participate in this research study. An additional six women responded affirmatively to the proposed research topic and asserted that they believed that this research study was important. However, each of these six women concluded in their responses that because of the small number of Black women serving in senior leadership across the CCCU, they expressed concerns about potential retaliation and/or retribution from participating in this research study.

Of the 11 Black women who agreed to be participants in this research study, one participant decided that she wanted to participate solely off the record. As a result, the sample size for this research study was 10 participants. I followed up with the 10 participants with additional emails that outlined instructions to complete the informed consent form (see Appendix D). I emailed each participant to set up an interview date and time and provided options to choose from for the interview. The 10 participants have served in various senior leadership roles at CCCU member institutions at the executive, administrative, and departmental levels where their professional experience as senior leaders spanned a range from three years to over 20 years.

The professional backgrounds of each participant were also diverse and included participants who worked outside of Christian higher education at some point in their career and those whose entire professional career has been in Christian higher education. Seven of the 10

participants are first-generation college graduates and were the first in their families to obtain graduate degrees and doctorate degrees. All 10 participants professed to be Christians. Some participants identified as ordained ministers, while other participants identified as children of ordained ministers, and some participants identified as the spouse of a pastor.

Because of the low percentage of Black women serving in a senior leadership capacity at a CCCU member institution, it was imperative to ensure compliance with IRB protocols and protect the confidentiality and identity of each Black woman who agreed to participate in this research study. As such, demographic data including the location of the participants and their CCCU campus were not included in this research study. To further protect the identities of the participants, the specific senior-level leadership position held by the participants was not indicated in this study.

Table 1 provides a breakdown of the types of senior-level positions held by the participants. This research study has defined senior leadership roles as (a) executive level which included university president, provost, vice provost, etc., (b) administrative level which included vice president of research, director of student affairs, vice president of admissions, etc., and (c) departmental level which would include college dean and department chairperson.

Table 1

Number of Participants and Type of Senior leadership Role

Number of participants in role	Type of senior leadership role	%
4	Executive level senior leader	40
4	Administrative senior leader	40
2	Departmental senior leader	20

Data Collection

Ten Black women currently serving in senior leadership roles or having recently retired from serving in a senior leadership capacity at CCCU member institutions participated in this

research study. Each participant was sent an electronic communication that included an overview of the purpose of this research study and an invitation to participate in the research study (see Appendix C). Upon receiving email responses indicating a willingness to participate in this research study, follow-up emails were sent to each participant that included the informed consent form (see Appendix D), as well as potential interview dates and times for each participant to choose from. Participant interviews began once the online interviews were scheduled and consent forms were signed and returned.

I conducted all semistructured interviews individually, online via Zoom, and each lasted approximately one hour and 10 minutes per participant using the guided interview protocol (Appendix E). Prior to the start of each interview, I asked the participants to confirm their consent verbally and I provided them the opportunity to consent to recording the interview. Each participant consented to the interview being recorded and to keeping their cameras on for the duration of the interview. The online videos were recorded via Zoom's recording feature. I also recorded the audio of each interview using a voice recorder as backup. Each participant was provided the autonomy to answer each question as experienced throughout their journey to becoming senior leaders at CCCU member institutions.

The semistructured interview's guided protocol allowed participants the freedom to provide as much or as little detail as they were comfortable sharing about their lived experiences. Follow-up questions were used as appropriate to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' experience. The narrative inquiry methodology and IRB protocol was approved by Abilene Christian University (Appendix B).

Throughout the data collection process, all interviews, transcriptions, coding, and field notes, were kept confidential and were saved to a password-protected external hard drive. All

interviews were transcribed using the professional transcription services company, Cockatoo. All data uploaded to Cockatoo is encrypted and secured via their server and never sold to nor granted access to third parties. I deleted all interview transcription files from Cockatoo upon completion and stored them on my external hard drive which is password-protected.

Data Analysis

The primary medium used for data collection for this research study was semistructured interviews of each participant which were conducted using the Zoom online video software program. Upon obtaining informed consent, each of the 10 research participants shared their lived experiences as Black women of their ascension to senior leadership roles at CCCU member institutions. While conducting each interview, I was also taking field notes, observing body language and tone cadence as well as taking notes for follow-up questions when appropriate. Each interview was also recorded via audio only on an external video recorder for backup purposes in the event any data were lost during the online video interview.

Each interview was transcribed verbatim using an online professional transcription service – Cockatoo. Following verbatim transcription, all video and audio recordings as well as field notes were reviewed multiple times to ensure the accuracy of the information and to gain a full understanding of each participant's responses, cadence, and body language. Upon completing multiple reviews of all data collected, I proceeded to conduct a thematic analysis of the data to determine emergent themes (Saldaña, 2021).

Qualitative data analysis was conducted using the ATLAS.ti software program. The ATLAS.ti software program provided an in-depth review of each interview transcript using thematic coding by identifying keywords in the context of each participant interview and then comparing keywords used across all 10 participant interviews. Emergent themes were identified

based on the number of occurrences of the same keywords across the participant interviews. The ATLAS.ti software program also identified individual participant quotations that were connected to each theme as outlined in the coding matrix. Qualitative data analysis through the ATLAS.ti software program resulted in the creation of an emergent themes table based on the lived experiences noted in the interviews of each participant (see Tables 2, 3 and 4).

The major themes table allowed data patterns to emerge. Verbatim quotations from participant interviews were used with the thematic patterns outlined in the emerging themes. Words and phrases consistently used across all 10 participants that were shared during the interview process were then included in the emergent themes chart (Appendix F) for clarity and were used to guide the study results. Detailed and multiple reviews of each interview transcript along with the field notes and multiple reviews of video recordings were conducted to ensure study validity and findings and accuracy of the findings. The findings from each participant interview were identified by the emerging themes based on each of the three research questions. Each of the 10 participants is identified by a pseudonym—P1 through P10—to maintain confidentiality and compliance with IRB protocol.

Key Findings

The key research findings of this study are organized based on the emergent themes of each research question. The themes identified are a result of the stories shared by each participant, highlighting the lived experiences of their professional leadership journey as Black women serving or recently retired from serving as senior leaders at CCCU member institutions. RQ1 examined the barriers that the participants had to overcome to obtain senior leadership positions at a CCCU member campus. RQ2 explored how mentorship opportunities aided the

participants' accession to serve as senior leaders at a CCCU campus. Finally, RQ3 considered how the participants' Christian faith influenced their leadership journey.

Research Question 1: Barriers to Senior Leadership Positions

RQ1 asked what barriers do Black women overcome to obtain senior leadership positions at a Council for Christian Colleges and Universities' institution? Participant responses to this question yielded four major themes: (1) The Lack of Mentors and Mentorship Opportunities, (2) Racial and Gender Discrimination, (3) Microaggressions, and (4) Lack of Support in Role.

Table 2

Barriers to Senior Leadership (RQ1)

Themes	Frequency of participant responses	% of participants
Lack of Mentors/Mentorship Opportunities	7 out of 10 responses	70
Racial/Gender Discrimination	8 out of 10 responses	80
Microaggression	8 out of 10 responses	80
Lack of Support in Role	6 out of 10 responses	60

Lack of Mentors and Mentorship Opportunities

Seventy percent of the participants indicated that not having a mentor in their field or access to mentorship opportunities was a barrier that they experienced in their journey to senior leadership roles at CCCU institutions. Of the 10 participants, only three stated that they had mentors who provided guidance and support in their ascension to senior leadership. Throughout the interview process, each participant spoke about the value of mentorship in trying to successfully navigate Christian higher education and obtaining senior leadership roles at CCCU campuses.

Participant 4 shared that she believes that mentoring and mentorship are valuable and important for Black women in Christian higher education. She expressed that from her experience, it is not always easy to find a mentor as a Black woman because of the percentage of Black women and women of color in leadership roles at CCCU campuses. Participant 4 shared that she did not have a mentor during her professional academic career: "My mentor was God putting me in places and opening doors that I was foolish enough to walk through."

Participant 9 stated that she believes that your mentor does not have to be the same race as you for the mentorship to be successful. She indicated that because of the small percentage of Black women serving in senior leadership roles, it can be a challenge to find a Black female mentor and if that is a requirement, Black women could lack a mentor to support them professionally. Her experience had been that cross-racial mentoring can be successful:

> I had the most wonderful mentor, and everything I know, he taught me. He taught me by example. I watched him. I watched how he led meetings. I watched how he responded to disruptions. I watched how he talked to students. And he came to me once and he said, "You know, I think you've got administrative gifts." We've kept in touch. He's getting much older now, but we would just go out, meet up, and have some iced tea or coffee and just talk. But he is responsible. He is solely responsible for this: if I am successful, he did it.
>
> I really believe that mentorship is about being humble and about wanting to learn and I think that if someone says I want to be a good leader, you know, I want to do a good job in my role and then a person comes along and wants to show you how to be good at your job, or the job you want, then let them show you. It doesn't have to be a woman. They don't have to be Black. Like, because I'm a Black woman, does that mean

> I can only learn from Black people? I can only learn from a female? You learn from whom God sends your way. He sent that man my way and I owe everything to him.

Participant 2 indicated that she did not have a mentor in Christian higher education. She stated that the lack of Black women serving in senior leadership roles at CCCU campuses directly impacts the availability of mentors for Black women who want to serve in senior leadership:

> I learned mostly what not to do. I was not mentored. I was not pastored. I was not shepherded. I was not guided. I don't mean that I'm self-made. There's no such thing. But I mean that most bosses that I had were White men. So, I have only ever seen what not to do. It is only in my very recent adult life that I've hired coaches, and professional people out of my own pocket to get developed and challenged.

Participant 1 shared that she did not have a formal mentor throughout her career trajectory. She stated that while she sees some benefit in mentorship, her position is that sponsorship is more valuable than mentorship for Black women. Participant 1 said:

> What makes the difference for people of color and their career advancement is having a sponsor rather than a mentor. I have found that to be true; that it's not so much just an opportunity to have someone who can encourage and be a sounding board and who can be a friend and colleague. Those things are great, and we need that. But as far as the career advancement and opportunity to step into leadership, absent a sponsor, I think we're (Black women) often just not seen. And having that person in a senior leadership role who is in the meetings, who is with cabinet members, who is with board members, say your name, it makes all the difference in the world.

Most of the participants shared that there is a lack of mentorship opportunities that target Black women in the CCCU, which has been a barrier in their career journey. Participant 6 indicated that the CCCU does have some good mentorship opportunities but none that target Black women specifically. She shared that she has participated in some of CCCU's Leadership Institute programs and believes that a targeted effort from the CCCU to increase opportunities for mentorship and leadership development of Black women would increase the percentage of Black women serving in senior leadership roles at CCCU campuses:

> I was selected for (CCCU program) and that was the first time through the CCCU that I was aware of mentoring opportunities. And since then, I think because of that, I've gotten other mentorship opportunities because of (my mentor). She's kind of like my go-to person and I can just be raw with her. She's introduced me to other women within the CCCU and has been a great resource of information for me. So, a long way to say, but for that, you know, getting to be chosen for that, I don't know if I would have had mentoring opportunities through the CCCU.

Some of the participants expressed not having knowledge of CCCU mentorship programs and opportunities. Participant 9 shared, "I've never heard of them (CCCU mentorship opportunities) quite frankly. There is not a lot of marketing of programs by the CCCU to our campus, possibly because it's a small school." Participant 3 also indicated that CCCU has some mentorship opportunities but none that target Black women specifically. Participant 3 stated that the CCCU flyers lack a diverse representation of participants, and therefore Black women who may be interested in the advertised mentorship opportunity may not apply, because they may feel as though they will not be able to connect, so they do not apply. She stated, "I feel the more that

they diversify even just their publicity material, I feel like that will be more helpful to get us more engaged."

Racial and Gender Discrimination

Eighty percent of the participants shared that racial and gender discrimination were key barriers in the journey toward their senior leadership roles. The lived experiences of the participants highlighted racism and sexism in varying degrees. Most of the participants spoke to the intersectionality of race and gender in their experiences and that the discrimination was rarely overt but subtle and apparent. Participant 9 shared, "Racism can be very subtle, very subtle. And it still lives quietly within the walls of these campuses; in the background most of the time. But, when it shows up, ain't no denying it." Upon being hired to her first senior-level role, Participant 9 shared that her department faculty perceived her as potentially having an "agenda" as a Black woman. Participant 9 stated that while they did not speak to or treat her negatively directly, she felt it:

> I was in a department with all men, all White men, and you could feel some of the resistance when I got there. And it was clear that it wasn't because I was a woman. It was because I was a Black woman. They were very suspicious of me, perhaps I was a Black feminist or something. They were afraid. And, I realized I was going to have all these White men reporting to me, you know, I was a little nervous myself. I had a little bit of resistance, but they knew the Lord too much to get in my face, to get in anybody else's face and make my way hard. They knew that wasn't right and they never tried it, and everything was fine. Most of the time, you know if you really know Him (God), you'll listen. You will listen. So, it was pretty rocky for a while there, about 2 good years it was

> rocky, but they all, you know, they all grew to love me and respect my leadership. And we have wonderful relationships now.

In response to being asked if she experiences any barriers and if so, what barriers did she experience on her journey to a senior leadership position, Participant 10 stated the following:

> Absolutely. Yes, my skin is a barrier. My gender is a barrier. I'm the first Black person serving (in this senior leadership role) on this campus. So that in and of itself is an area of uncomfortableness for some people. But those are just things that I have to deal with. But it doesn't and it hasn't stopped me from working towards my primary goal—to get others to see the equitable place and space that we should all function from. And sometimes that's a barrier in and of itself because I deal with a lot of people who don't look like me and who have old mindsets. So, I'm not only fighting to change a system so that is equitable for all people. I'm also fighting against hearts and minds that don't believe that there's value in having people who look like me serve or learn on their campus. I honestly didn't expect it to be this way in Christian higher education. Sometimes, though, I feel like shame on me for expecting it to be different.

Participant 2 shared that she experienced a lack of formality in the interactions with faculty and staff that her predecessors who have been men and over 50 did not experience:

> People refer to me by my first name, which I don't mind, but some folks have just knocked and walked in my office. They would never just walk into the office of my predecessor or refer to him by his first name casually. Many times, I have to ask for simple things to be done that a man in my position would never have to ask for. Being Black means I have to remain "accessible" which at times leads to outright inappropriate and abused "feedback" coming my way because the expectation is that I will take it and

> handle it with grace. I have never heard a male executive addressed with the lack of respect I experience.

The participants also spoke about not being believed when they shared their experiences with racism and sexism on campus. Participant 7 stated the following:

> They're not saying I'm lying; they're saying that what I experienced is unbelievable to them. They're saying, "I have nothing sticky in my own experience that related to what happened to you therefore I don't know how to support you, I don't know what to do about it, I'm appalled at it, but I don't understand it." The biggest barrier is just not being believed.

Microaggressions

Racial microaggressions were also experienced by 80% of the participants. Racial microaggressions are defined as "brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to people of color because they belong to a racial minority group" (Sue et al., 2007, p. 271). Participant 5 shared that there is an unwritten requirement to be aware of how she "shows up" because of unbalanced expectations of what a Black woman leader is or should be or looks like from administration and students compared to her male and other female counterparts. Participant 5 said that

> I would say that's been a big component; I think the awareness of how I have to show up. And it's not a written rule, it's the unspoken rules. It's the, how should you wear your hair? I've gone through those journeys, right? And again, depending on context, sometimes I show up and I'm like, can't wait to wear my hair natural, and I'm gonna just have fun with it and this is great, and I feel good and then there have been environments where I'm like okay what will allow me to be seen and heard? And there have been times

where I've had to make different decisions but there's a cost; there's always a cost, because I feel like when I'm not wearing my hair like this (its natural state) I feel like I'm shrinking. So right now, today, if you were to ask me how I show up, this is how it's gonna be, my hair like this (in its natural state), but I know that's not always how it's been. How I show up in the room can't disguise what level of emotion can I show; that's a big one for me I am not someone who hides my emotion.

Regarding microaggressions, Participant 5 further shared the following:

I'm professional, but if there are charged topics, there are charged topics. If there have been wrongs whether personal or organizationally where things need to change, I'm going to express that with the level that matches the offense. And that can come with a whole set of meaning based upon the skin, the package that I'm showing up in. And so, I'm very aware of that, that my message may be received and heard differently because it's read through who I am as a Black woman.

Participant 8 discussed feeling like she had to be overly cautious about her appearance/hair and how she is perceived based on her appearance:

Early in my career, it was made clear that I needed to wear my hair in a "professional" style. I kept my hair straightened and styled in a simple shoulder-length bob for about 10 years. I would usually get my hair braided in the summer because it was easier to manage (due to summer temperatures). The year that I was going up for my first senior-level position, one of the interview committee members, the dean of one of colleges, who I considered friendly, asked me if I would be changing my hair prior to the interview so that the braids wouldn't be a "distraction." His level of audaciousness equaled my level of rage at his comment. Do you think I could respond the way I wanted to?! If I

> responded the way I wanted to his racism, I assure you I would have not had a successful interview and would have not gotten that role. I did take my braids out for that interview and went back to my simple bob. And, when I earned that promotion, I decided to cut the perm out of my hair and wear it in its natural state. I refused to allow them to dictate my hair choices ever again, and I had this freedom only because I was now in senior leadership.

Participant 4 expressed frustration with having to tell colleagues that it was inappropriate to touch her hair: "If I had a $1 for every time I've had to tell a colleague and sometimes even a supervisor that it's inappropriate to (try to) touch my hair, I could retire from academia." Participant 6 shared that she is asked about her hair/hairstyle often and that she observes that her White female counterparts are not asked about their hair in the same manner or consistency:

> I have honestly never heard anyone ask one of my White female or other women of color colleagues for that matter if their hair "was real." I've been asked if my hair is real countless times. The mere fact that a person feels entitled to an answer about MY hair. Like, if I answer no, then you have proof of what? It is disrespectful and humiliating. And it's peak anti-Blackness.

Some participants expressed feeling like they have to be measured in how they respond to conflict because they have been either the only or one of only a few Black senior leaders on their CCCU campuses. Participant 1 stated the following:

> Usually, I'm the only one or one of two in the room. So, I find that I still count (how many Black people are present). I still find myself walking into the room and counting and for whatever that means. There have been different times in my life where that means I don't want to be in the room. There have been times in my life where I'm like I need to

> be in the room because of that. There have been times in my life where I'm like I'm gonna be in the room and I'm gonna be quiet. There are times where it's like I'm gonna be in the room and I'm really gonna show up. And it ebbs and flows for me depending on the level of energy I have, depending on what it is, what conversation is taking place, depending on what level of support that I find. And you know, at times that has actually been part of the critique of my leadership, because it's maybe seen as, well, you're in the room, you need to speak up all the time on behalf of those who look like you who are not in the room.

Participant 7 expressed how microaggressions were so constant that they became a distraction to her work:

> When I first moved into (senior leadership) position, I experienced microaggressions so often that it just became a regular part of work. But at one point, the microaggressions started happening so often that it was like distracting from work. I was like, I can't get my work done. So, I decided to write them down and put them in a jar. I got a jar for my office and whenever I experienced a microaggression I would just write it down and put it in a jar. That at least allowed me to leave it in the jar for the moment, or at least that's what I thought. I was trying my best to compartmentalize. So let me put this in the jar so that I can keep moving, because I'm here for these students. And I need to make sure that these students, you know, get what they need because I'm purposely seeking first generation college students. I'm purposely recruiting students of color. Yes, so the work I was doing to build our program looked different.

Participant 7 also expressed the following:

> My credentials were often questioned. My background was always questioned. We know what it is when it shows up. I was often told "what you're trying to do isn't going to work" or like, "you're new here so you don't understand how we do things here." Yeah. So, like the book *Presumed Incompetence*, there was a presumption of incompetence that I, there was just a presumption of incompetence when I entered rooms on my campus, until I doubled (enrollment) numbers in a year and then tripled numbers and then quadrupled numbers. Then those same people began to come to me to consult with them on how to get the numbers up for their programs and how can they get those (first gen and students of color) students for their programs. At which point I told them I am happy to consult and here is my fee structure.

Lack of Support in Role

Sixty percent of the participants indicated that a lack of support from their supervisor, and/or university president or board of trustees was a barrier in their career. Participant 2 shared the following:

> I do not always feel supported. I don't always feel fully supported by the executive leadership, which struggles with diversity conversations and does not overtly have conversations about race or gender due to fears of being "too liberal" or "being too woke." On the faculty and staff side, I think that I have a lot of support, as well as from the community. But I believe that some people just love the idea of me. By that I mean they love that I am their well-dressed, funny, articulate, Black woman leader. And they really want to get behind that image, but sometimes I wonder if it is because it makes them feel good.

Participant 7 shared that oftentimes the lack of support can feel like a set up for failure:

> But often for a woman of color these positions are not an opportunity to break the glass ceiling. They are an opportunity to walk off a glass cliff. The glass cliff comes in the form of being offered something when it was already dead, when it already is on life support. Then you call on a woman of color to be a miracle worker or to take the fall. Either way, the people that made the mess abdicate their responsibility for the problem onto the shoulders of a woman of color. It often feels like I am paying the invoice for the bills that predecessors ran up. Someone described my position as being handed a grenade with the pin already pulled. I'm not complaining about that. I'm not a victim and understood the system before entering it.

Some participants indicated that although they have felt supported in their role verbally, the support was not always matched with action and resources to lead effectively. Participant 5 stated that in her current role, she feels that she is supported by her campus; however, the role itself has not been fully supported by the university due to a lack of intentionality for the programs that fall under her purview:

> We had a huge campus and community-wide celebration when I accepted my (senior leadership) position. I am the first Black woman to serve in my role. It felt like I had the support of the entire campus community at first. What I wasn't prepared for was the lack of financial resources for my department, essential financial resources that were required to manage my department and programs effectively, the amount of questioning of why I need the necessary funds required to do the job they hired me to do. I wasn't prepared for that.

Research Question 2: Mentorship and Ascension to Senior Leadership Roles

RQ2 asked how do mentorship opportunities aid Black women in their ascension to senior leadership roles on a Council for Christian Colleges and Universities' member campuses? Participant responses to this question yielded three major themes: (1) Served as Mentors, (2) Leadership Development, and (3) Kinship.

Table 3

Role of Mentorship to Senior Leadership (RQ2)

Themes	Frequency of participant responses	% of participants
Served as Mentors	10 out of 10 responses	100
Leadership Development	5 out of 10 responses	50
Kinship	10 out of 10 responses	100

Served as Mentors

One of the key findings of this research study is that although most of the research participants did not have mentors themselves, 100% of the participants stated that they believe that mentoring and mentorship opportunities can aid Black women in their ascension to senior leadership roles on CCCU member campuses. To that end, all the participants of this research study shared that they have and/or are currently serving as mentors to Black women aspiring to become senior leaders on their CCCU campuses.

All of the participants shared that they have invested their talent, time, and resources to support young Black women who desire to become senior leaders. Participant 4 shared that she has informally served as a mentor to students on her campus, both White and Black female students:

> I've mentored any young woman on my campus who has expressed an interest in learning about how to lead a department, or ultimately a campus. However, it is always

> extra special when I get the opportunity to mentor a Black female student, because I am blessed to provide them with representation that I didn't have. I can offer them an opportunity to learn from a Black woman in my position and offer guidance on how to be successful in the academic space.

Participant 1 stated that she serves as mentor to Black women and other women of color, because she wants to help others not make similar mistakes or fall prey to pitfalls that she experienced on her journey as a senior leader without a mentor:

> Higher education and especially Christian higher education does not allow people of color to merely be subject matter experts in their discipline. The academy requires you to be well-versed in and of the "rules" if you have any expectation to advance beyond your professorship. And from my experience, you simply cannot learn the "rules" without either going through the fire and learning the hard way, which so many of us have, with scars to prove it, or you learn the "rules" by being taught them by someone who is willing to teach them to you. You simply don't know what you don't know. I take no pride in having gone through the fire. I wish I had a mentor early in my career to help guide and support me. It's because of me having gone through the fire that I've committed to mentoring Black women and women of color who express an interest in senior leadership on the campuses I've worked at.

Participant 3 stated that she has a duty to mentor Black women because of the investment that was made in her:

> My mentor was an African American female. And so as soon as I came onto campus, she took me under her wing to show me things that she wasn't shown. Throughout my life, I have experienced strong mentorship. I pursued my PhD because of my former mentor's

> encouragement. I wasn't even aware of a doctorate prior to my mentor educating me about it. The support and guidance from my mentors prevented me from experiencing barriers that many other Black women have experienced in their journey toward a senior leadership role. Had I not had mentoring at each step of the way, one, I wouldn't have felt as confident being in some of these White spaces, or predominantly male spaces a lot of times. And because I was blessed with amazing mentors, how can I not mentor other Black women and bless their journey like mine was blessed?

Participant 8 expressed the importance of mentoring others to increase the percentage of Black women in the field:

> If we can't show other young Black women that we can be in these positions, that we exist, how will they know? It's the same thing with any other academic area, right? If they don't see Black women as engineers, if they don't see Black women as doctors, if they don't see Black women as dentists, and all the spaces and places that we know are dominated primarily by men, specifically White men, and if they don't see us, like even presidents of colleges and universities, right? We're out there, maybe small in numbers, but we're out there. But if we don't present that to them and show that to them in a public way, how are they going to know that they can achieve that? I mentor young Black women for this reason and this reason alone.

Participant 10 shared that she mentors Black women staff and faculty who are interested in higher education administration:

> I'm old school. I come from the "each one teach one" generation. If you tell me you want to be (a senior leader) on our campus, then I'm going to do all I can to support you. I'm inviting you to the committee meetings, setting up opportunities for you to shadow me or

> another leader so that you can see what we do daily, and I'm being candid with you about what you may have to deal with as a Black woman in these spaces. Should we have to worry about our hair, or coming off as aggressive? No! But that's not reality. It is what it is. I want to see you win. Because when you win, we all win, and the road gets a little less rigid for the next generation.

Leadership Development

Fifty percent of the participants stated that they participated in CCCU-sponsored leadership and/or mentoring programs. Thirty percent of those participants stated that their participation had a positive impact on their career trajectory and indicated that participation fostered leadership development opportunities for them. These participants' experiences demonstrate that a multilayered and tiered perspective is often required for Black women seeking to advance in senior leadership positions with CCCU member campuses. The CCCU-sponsored programs that these participants were engaged in prioritized mentorship and/or leadership development of women and people of color within the CCCU. There was not a singular program offered by the CCCU that targeted Black women specifically. Participant 5 shared that participation in CCCU sponsored programs is vital if one wants to grow in leadership at a CCCU member institution:

> As a Black woman (in senior leadership or who aspires to serve in senior leadership) it is imperative to have some White people in the mix on your care team, because they're the ones who helped me to see that this is the network of people that you need to know in order for you to, you know, make it in leadership in the CCCU, for lack of a better word. I mean, you don't have to know them, but it makes life a little easier. And so, me participating in those events got me into their circle. And then when you Google your

> name, you're all over CCCU stuff. And when you seek out other positions and those higher ups Google you and see your participation in CCCU programs, it helps, I'm telling you. It's a networking tool. So, I generally recommend to people, if they're thinking about leadership in the CCCU, to participate in those.

Participant 6 shared that Black women are not visible within the CCCU generally, but participation in CCCU sponsored leadership programs can increase Black women's visibility and opportunities within the CCCU:

> I really wasn't aware of the mentoring programs that CCCU offered to its membership. I learned about a leadership program, applied and was selected to participate. Through my participation in that program, I was made aware of CCCU mentoring opportunities. And since then, I think because of that, I've gotten other mentorship opportunities because, like I mentioned, the ranking of the mentor I was assigned in the program. She's kind of like my go-to person when I need support in navigating these systems. She's not Black, but she's definitely an ally. She has given me space to be raw and open with her about my experiences as a Black woman in senior leadership. She's introduced me to other women leaders who are serving within the CCCU, who I've been fortunate enough to build relationships with. Then I was gifted consulting hours with a business coach and other opportunities. So, a long way to say, but for that, you know, getting to be chosen for that (CCCU leadership program), I don't know if I would have had mentoring opportunities through the CCCU.

Participant 10 indicated that her participation in a CCCU leadership program has benefited her greatly:

> I gained so much through (the CCCU leadership program). I had an opportunity to job shadow (a person serving in the role), which is my ultimate career goal. That experience was critical for my professional growth. And, through the mentorship that I gained from my participation in the program, I was able to develop and hone the skills that are needed to be an effective senior leader. I was afforded networking opportunities that I would not have otherwise been privy to had I not participated in (this CCCU sponsored leadership program). Now, there are not a lot of us participating in these programs. And I am not sure why, but I can tell you that when I've talked about my participation to my peers (Black women) most often they have never heard of the program. The CCCU needs to do a better job of marketing and soliciting the participation of Black women. We have the passion and the talent to lead. But so many of us need the opportunity.

Kinship

One hundred percent of the participants expressed the importance of kinship among Black women in higher education, both within CCCU member institutions and those not a part of the CCCU. One way that the participants experienced kinship is through their off-campus organizational connections. Forty percent of the participants indicated that they were members of a Black Greek letter sorority and that their sorority was a primary source of support throughout their professional journey. Participant 5 stated that time spent with her local sorority chapter has offered her balance:

> Listen, it is beyond draining some days. To be a woman in this skin on this campus. Some days, you just want to pull your hair out because you absolutely know that you know and the second guessing of your expertise is beyond the pale. I have a Soror that I

> can call and literally just scream through the phone. She just lets me. Then we laugh. And I can get through another day.

All the participants indicated that having a connection with other Black women professionals was critical to their overall well-being, which benefited them professionally. Participant 8 shared that sometimes one must create their own support system if you are not part of an existing group:

> If there isn't a network for you to tap into, make it up. Sometimes on campuses, we work in siloes. Networking will provide the opportunity to just to check in with each other, encourage each other, and see what's going on. So that's a way of saying find your tribe, find your people, and don't limit yourself to your institution or your region of the country. If you are a Black woman working in senior leadership in higher education, faith based or secular, I promise you, we have a shared experience in academia and we need each other.

Participant 2 expressed that she has found support and kinship with other Black women in senior leadership roles at both CCCU and secular universities:

> I am someone who wants to be poured into and who can be poured into. I am not a loud person or a big personality. The support that I receive from other Black women in my network has helped me learn how to navigate the (CCCCU campus) culture and gain the confidence as a Black woman that allows me to push past imposter syndrome that I sometimes experience and be affirmed in who I am, and the job God has placed me here to do.

Participant 3 indicated that she shares a sisterhood with several of her peers who serve at CCCU institutions across the country:

> I think it's about the relationships that we've cultivated. They're genuine. I mean, we have cried together, we have prayed together, we have, you know, okay, I need this right now or she needs this right now. We show up for each other. Because we understand what the others are experiencing on their campuses, in their roles, because it is all of our experiences. And, you know, being able to have somebody speak into you, you know, that's what these women do for me. They are my sisters; I have their back and they have mine.

Regarding kinship, Participant 5 expressed the following:

> It's hard to kind of find kindred spirits there (on her CCCU campus) and I find it with other Black women. The problem is those other Black women are also trying to survive and are drowning and so we get together just to like breathe together. Get through another day. We fill each other's cup. When they call, you pick up, and it's reciprocal. You call at two in the morning, she's there for you. And it's private, we don't advertise our group on campus because it would no longer be a safe place. We come together, regularly, we breathe, we exhort at each other, absolutely.

Research Question 3: Influence of Black Women's Christian Faith

RQ3 asked how does Black women's Christian faith influence their leadership journey? Participant responses to this question yielded three major themes: (1) Faith Identity, (2) Calling From God, and (3) Leadership Style / Approach.

Table 4

Faith Journey to Senior Leadership (RQ3)

Themes	Frequency of participant responses	% of participants
Faith Identity	10 out of 10 responses	100
Calling From God	10 out of 10 responses	100

Leadership Style/Approach	10 out of 10 responses	100

Faith Identity

One hundred percent of the participants affirmed that they are professed Christians and active members of a church community that ranges from denomination-specific to nondenominational. Eighty percent of the participants stated that they accepted Jesus Christ as their personal Savior in childhood and 20% of the participants stated that they accepted Jesus Christ as their personal Savior in adulthood. Another 30% of participants shared that they were either children of ministers, married to a minister, or an ordained minister themselves. Participant 6 described herself as a "PK – "Preacher's kid" and does not remember a time when God was not a part of her life. "I'm a PK to my heart honey."

Participant 9 stated that she is married to a minister and that she accepted Christ as her Savior at an early age: "I don't know what it's like to NOT know Jesus because I made that decision early." Participant 4 shared that she is an ordained minister. She professed that "God got jokes," because she changed denominations in the last decade and is currently a member of a multicultural church where she also leads women's ministry:

> It's not that funny multicultural church where you're the one Black person that shows up and everybody pats you on the back; this multicultural church is led by a pastor that is a man of color and our church addresses racism from a biblical perspective.

Participant 1 shared that she became a Christian in graduate school. She shared that she has accepted Jesus as her Lord and Savior:

> I recognize the atoning work on the cross that allowed access for me to be in a relationship with my father, with God. And being a Christian is really saying, I'm going to follow. I'm going to follow the ways of Jesus. And in my daily life, I try to really make

> decisions in a way that I think would be consistent with those values. But it is daily submission, recognizing that I'm not doing this work for self. Yes, there's a part of it where work can be something we enjoy and it's for us, but ultimately, I serve God and I want to reflect that to others in my decisions. It does shape my leadership and the way that I think about my work, the reason why I do my work, all of those things.

Participant 2 expressed that she is a Christian and has been a Christian most of her life:

> I believe that God is who He said He is and He came to do what He said He came to do and He believes about me what He said He believes about me. It's really that simple. And so, for me, I just have the audacity to believe that when He says you need to care for the marginalized, that He means that. When He says don't do people wrong, when He says have a true pure faith. When He says, He's elevating women and those that aren't "the right ones" and saying, these are the ones that are going to go first in my kingdom. This is what I believe.

When asked how she defined Christianity for herself, Participant 10 stated that "it won't sound like a Bible department response":

> For me, I have submitted my life to Jesus Christ. And that's in everything that I do. I try, and honestly, I'm not always really good at it. But it's in everything that I do, how I think. The words I use, I want people to have the experience when they've been around me or we spend time together that I am a servant of Christ. I wanna be Christ-like in every interaction with others and operate with wisdom and my passion for what I do. Now, what Christianity looks like here in my role as (senior leader on her CCCU campus) is that I work as unto the Lord and that's my motto, Colossians 3:23, that whatever I do, I do it as unto the Lord rather than to man or even to myself and so it is

integrated throughout my life and I believe when I stand before the Lord, I'm going to answer for every student, every program, every professor I hired. I'm going to answer for how I raised my children. Every single thing, I believe I'm going to be held accountable. It's not a fear thing. It's a stewardship thing. How did I effectively steward what was entrusted to me? How did I take care of it, and how am I presenting it back to the Lord?

Participant 8 shared that she "serves a sovereign God, an Almighty God":

I believe in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. I am not a member of a particular denomination; I don't see that as the most important thing. The most important thing for me is my relationship with Christ. My relationship is personal and mine alone. As a servant of the most High God, and being a woman of faith, I understand, and I am very clear that I was created for a purpose and walking in that purpose.

When asked how she defines Christianity, Participant 5 indicated the following:

Christianity for me, I just really believe that the core of my faith is that there is one God and that the teachings and the principles of the Bible are what my beliefs are. And so, I don't get deep into things of, well, you got to believe this way. I don't get into those debates. I just tell people about me. And the easiest way I say for me to explain my Christianity, let me just tell you how I tell young people: I am just sold out from the littlest hair on the top of my head to the bottom of my feet for this man that I know to be God and I know what he is capable of doing, because he brought a little country girl from (her hometown) who was poor, to not only get an education and get out of poverty but to have the opportunity to be sitting in a room with not one, but two presidents of the United States. And so, I know him to be real. And I know he's real when I'm sitting around

> those tables. The favor that he has given me over these years, I recognize it and I understand it. So that's my Christianity. It's not some formal thing. I'm like, child, I can't tell you too much about no scripture, but I can tell you I can call on the name Jesus, and he'll answer.

Regarding how she defines Christianity, Participant 3 stated the following:

> I define a Christian as someone who knows and believes that God is; who believes that Jesus came to earth as equally human and equally divine; that He was God wrapped in flesh; that He was conceived by the Holy Spirit born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and buried and arose on the third day. He rose from the dead. He arose and now sits at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty. So that is what I believe.

Calling From God

One hundred percent of the participants believe that God called them to serve in their capacity at their respective CCCU campuses. Each of the participants expressed that they believed they were called by God to serve at their respective CCCU campuses. Participant 8 said she believes she was called by God to serve at her current CCCU campus:

> I don't think that anyone possibly could have set up as well and as fast what I have set up at (her CCCU campus) in the past two and a half years without God's calling and without His direction. The mission, vision, the relationships formed with community partners, and the strategic direction, all of it came from God. So yes, I feel called to be doing what I'm doing where I'm doing it right now.

When asked if she believes that she was called by God to serve at her CCCU campus, Participant 1 said that

> I do. I do. I say that with some hesitation because I never want to be so quick to just jump and say, yes, it's a calling. I mean, I'm aware that I also have agency and I make decisions and choices. And so do I feel that the Lord has opened up opportunities and given me a picture of what it can be like to really serve him and where I see that aligning with my work in the CCCU. And yeah, do I feel like he's carved a path for me for that? Absolutely. When I look back and see that I was not a believer during my graduate studies, you know, the pastor that I was introduced to happened to work in Christian higher education. I didn't even know about it. When that door opened for me to even apply for that position and then, you know, just serving in that role and I really just don't see myself anywhere else. I do feel that I was called to Christian higher education.

When asked if she believed she was called by God to serve at her CCCU campus, Participant 3 stated that

> Wholeheartedly. The moment I stepped on this campus during my interview, I knew this is where I needed to be. It was crystal clear. I knew from that moment, this is where He wanted me to be. And this year especially, through all the students that I have engaged, through some of my colleagues, time and time again, he has confirmed this is where I'm supposed to be. So, everything that I overcame, all the barriers, and again, I'm still overcoming them, I lean into with my faith so wholeheartedly and believing blindly has led me to this moment, has led me here, and it's going to continue to lead me, you know. But no, yeah, that's, I would say as far as being a believer, as far as being a Christian, the best thing that we could do is step out on faith. Period. Even when we doubt, step out there anyway because he's going to show us whether it's for us or not, right? Even when I doubt, believe. Even when I have questions, believe. Even when I think, again, that

> imposter syndrome is a real thing and it creeps up, even when that happens, again, faith. Step out on faith, step out on faith, step out on faith.

Participant 4 shared that she has experienced success as a senior leader on her CCCU campus because God has called her to serve in this capacity:

> I do this because I really feel like this is what God has called me to. And because God has called me to it, He'll give me the resources to get through it, and I know the difference between something God has called me to and I'm doing it, relying on God's strength- opposed to doing this work, because I just think I'm big enough and grown enough to do it, and I'm trying to do it on my own strength. And if I'm trying it on my own strength, I'm in the fetal position on the floor crying. Or you know, hiding with ice cream somewhere. Or lighting a match. Lighting a match and throwing it over my shoulder and walking out. So, if I allow God to use me, I also know that I don't have to be used up. So, that's how my faith motivates me, keeps me, and informs me how I do this work. And honestly, that's the only reason why I stayed because I know I was called to do this work.

Some of the participants expressed that they would not be serving in senior leadership roles at CCCUs without believing God called them to the roles because of the challenges they have experienced in their ascension to senior leadership positions within Christian higher education, conveying that most people would not choose to work in situations that involved racial and gender discrimination. Participant 9 expressed that a calling from God is essential for Black women to work at a CCCU campus:

> I would say, if you're trying to lead anything on (a CCCU member campus) you need Jesus. Period. As a Black woman, this (obtaining a senior leadership role) is not going to

> happen, and you will not be successful without Jesus. You need to be guided and led by the Spirit because you are coming against principalities and powers.

Participant 8 shared that she believes she was called by God to serve at her CCCU campus, because she didn't want to be there:

> I was trying to leave. And there were plenty of people on this campus who were working behind the scenes trying to orchestrate my departure when I was hired into this position. I grew weary of having to defend myself and my credentials to lead. But God told me to stay put because He has a plan for me at (her CCCU campus). So, trust me when I tell you, I wouldn't be doing this work at (on her CCCU campus) if God didn't say this is where I'm supposed to be serving.

When asked if she felt called by God to serve at her CCCU campus Participant 7 stated the following:

> I do because I didn't want to go. I did not want to go. I was doing well at the secular college I worked at, the Lord had given me favor there, and I was doing well. And then I get this phone call (to see if she was interested in working at the CCCU campus) and the first thing I said was "no." And then the Lord just kept telling me to follow it up. Next thing I knew I was interviewing. So, this is where the Lord wanted me; He wanted me to move, and so I did. I didn't make any extra money either by the time I looked at all the withdrawals and everything that they took out of my check. I was like I could've stayed where I was, but then I wouldn't be doing what God wanted me to do. It took me a year to accept that. I thought I had maybe made a mistake. I came to understand that I'm right where He wants me to be.

Participant 2 expressed that she was clear that God called her to lead on her CCCU campus:

> I took this position because I was called by the Lord to do it. And I had full insight about what it really was. I'll tell you what the Lord told me: I'm placing you in this position and you're going to disrupt these systems and I'm going to provide for you. So everywhere I look, I'm looking for who are the people that can come with me that I can empower? Who are the people of color I can hand the microphone to as it's been handed to me? I really see this position as this kingdom building effort. I see that my success is predicated on how successful the women, people of color, and healthy relationships are around me. So, I'm doing this in a completely different, nonhierarchical way. I'm an introvert. I do not rock the boat. I'm security-oriented. This is how I know that this calling is from God. And God is keeping his word and providing for me and protecting me.

Leadership Style

One hundred percent of the participants stated that their Christian faith directly impacts their leadership style as senior leaders at CCCU member institutions. Participant 5 indicated that her faith is foundational to her leadership style:

> So, I know that my faith shows up in my leadership style because of grace and mercy. Those two things are core for me. One of the things that I have come to understand as a leader, people bring the best version of themselves into the room. And having to understand that that version may be broken, it may be flawed, it may be the most put-together I've ever seen, but that's how my faith shows up, grace to accept them at the best version of themselves that they present at that time. Because when they show up in

> the room, I go, God, why are they coming across my path? What would you have me do for them? How can I make them better off having met me than to have never crossed my path? So, using that as just kind of an opening to get to know people, it then helps me with whatever it is that gets translated into a task or activity or conversation or whatever. My faith is integrated in it, and I understand that God has given me grace, that He has always shown me grace and mercy, I must then extend that grace to others. So that's just pretty much it. It's just who I am. I love everybody.

Participant 10 indicated that her faith is front and center in her leadership style:

> I am very transparent about my faith. I pray with my faculty, I pray with my colleagues, I pray for them. I often talk to them if they're requiring wise counsel, so to speak, as the word says. But those are the ways. We pray before meetings, pray during meetings, and just try to help them to understand my walk by faith and my walk as a Christian. And because of this, I'm very vocal when I see things that are not the way I think they should be in terms of a Christian response in how we govern and serve our campus community. I try to help my faculty and colleagues see that we can't forget the missional work that we're supposed to be engaged in. We have been commissioned by God, and that should be first and foremost in our work and in our minds. My faith is the cornerstone of how I lead on my campus. I wouldn't be an effective leader at (her CCCU campus) if it wasn't.

When asked how her faith shapes her leadership style, Participant 3 stated that her faith has resulted in a more inclusive approach to leadership on her CCCU campus:

> I was born and raised COGIC [Church of God in Christ], and so I believe in all principles of the Bible. But in my career field, I do feel like I'm more liberal and a little bit more understanding, right? Because of the populations that I serve. And so, I'm not only

serving those that are Christian, I'm serving those that come from different religious affiliations and/or no affiliations at all, right? I even have students in the classroom that are atheists. And so, it's like how can we still have discussions, a faith of treating people right, of Christianity, even when you don't believe that? How do we include your voices and your experiences because those are relevant too, even though we're not on the same page?

So, although I'm a Christian to the core, professionally, I'm a little bit more open on how I treat and view and write my assessments towards those communities. It's about reminding people, because particularly when it comes to issues of racism, it's this superiority complex, right? And so, it's reminding people that we are all equal under God's eyes. Nobody is better than the other. We both bleed the same blood, right? It's been culturally ingrained in us to treat people differently. And so, it's bringing back scriptures to show people that God created us equal, that God commands that we treat people like we would treat ourselves.

God calls us to be the resources when we have them, right? And so, we are not doing the work of the Lord if we're not abiding by those principles too. And when we think about inequity, it's always just about reminding people that everybody needs somebody. And that we're called to assist and to minister and to help. Even Jesus washed people's feet, right? And so, it shows that we can be humble regardless of the positions that we have. My goal is really just to try to be that light because I feel that people are watching. And so, when they see you as a good example, over time that might minister to them in a different way than just talking to them for that.

Participant 6 stated her leadership approach is rooted in God's love for all people:

My leadership approach, I have to remember that for every person I'm working with, Christ died for them. Their value and their worth is the blood of Christ. And so, when I'm thinking about even responding to crazy stuff you know, like okay, how do I answer in a way that honors the value of their life the way that Christ sees it? I also use the gifts that he's given me. I'm pretty strategic in a lot of things. So, I'm going to use wisdom that way in how I operate. So, if I feel like a question is probably leading to do something else, then I'll pull my response from a policy. It's like, you know, pursuant to page 27 of the catalog, my answer is guided by the catalog. So even in that, I believe that the Bible calls us to be wise. And I try to use that wisdom the same way, but also not trying to damage anybody or a relationship or anybody's reputation. They can do that on their own.

Participant 4 also indicated that her faith requires that she leads with love:

So, my faith is my why; why am I doing this work. And it's my faith that really informs how I do this work, how I lead. I am not the consultant or the trainer who comes and says you're a racist. No, that's not my approach. My approach is I lead with love until you show me that you don't want to love. I want to love. I don't have to deal with you. So, my faith gives me permission to come in, to walk alongside. But it also gives me permission to walk away, because if you don't want this good news, if you don't want this message, guess what? I can shake the sand from my shoes and keep walking. I don't have to do this. I get to do this. I will walk with you, but you have to want to walk. And ultimately, I know that I can't change anyone's mind or anyone's behavior, but the Holy Spirit can.

Participant 8 shared that because of her faith, her leadership approach centers on growing people:

> People and plants need to be watered and every plant started as a seed and so because of my faith I believe that everyone who falls under my leadership, I'm a steward of their time talent and treasure and I need to think about the parable of the talents and multiply it. They should be more valuable when they leave my stewardship than they were when they came. And so, my leadership style is "I grow people." The people that work for me will tell you, I'm always pushing them to do something else, grow their skills, and expand their résumé. I work to facilitate opportunities for them to grow in their areas of expertise and commit the resources necessary for them to attend and participate in professional development opportunities. I'm like, if we shut down right now, your CV, and your resume should be better than it was when I met you. My job as a leader is to grow more leaders.

When asked how her faith shapes her leadership style, Participant 1 replied that

> I really recognize that I am here to serve and so when I'm thinking about the people on my team, I'm going to think about them holistically. We're going to have prayer. We're going to have devotions. We're going to have some time to check in with folks and, you know, where we need to be attentive to the needs of those on our team. I would say that my approach in difficult situations and any time you're dealing with people and having to manage and work through personnel issues, there's brokenness in the room always. There's also beauty in the room. I try to be aware of that.
>
> I try to be aware of that, how I show up in conversations and when maybe someone is coming at me in a way that is not as professional or maybe is somewhat

> hostile, yes, I can address it and I can hold them accountable, but how can I also tend to whatever it is that they are battling in that moment, and recognizing that the person in front of me may not be the kindest in that moment, that's not my enemy. And it's, I do believe very much in spiritual warfare. And so, I do think about work challenges and dilemmas through that lens. Like, okay, this is what I'm seeing with my eyes. Like, this is what's going on. Why are the dynamics of my team the way they are? Why are we having so much trouble filling this position? Why are our programs not growing? Yes, I'm seeing it in a physical sense of what's actually going on and what the data is showing me.

Participant 1 further indicated the following:

> But I'm also trying to be very attuned to what else is going on in the Spirit. And what do I need to be paying attention to? How is God inviting me to the work that he's already doing? And how can I make sure that I am emptying myself as much as possible so that his spirit can fill me so that I can be a usable vessel. So, it's taking myself out of the way and utilizing my expertise, but not relying on just my head knowledge, because there's only so much that can do for me.

Chapter Summary and Preview of Chapter 5

The 10 participants of this research study addressed three research questions that provided an understanding of the lived experiences of Black women currently serving or recently retired from serving as senior leaders at CCCU member institutions. The three research questions that were asked and answered by the participants in Chapter 4 examined the challenges and barriers experienced by the participants, the role of mentorship in their leadership journey, and

the impact of their Christian faith in their career trajectory to senior leadership positions in CCCU member institutions.

From the three research questions, 10 major themes emerged, and these 10 themes were described in detail by the responses of the participants. RQ1 provided the participants with the opportunity to share the challenges and barriers they encountered and overcame to become senior leaders at CCCU campuses. RQ1 specifically asked what barriers do Black women overcome to obtain senior leadership positions at a CCCU member institution? Four of the 10 major themes were derived from research question one, including (a) Lack of Mentors/Mentorship Opportunities, (b) Racial and Gender Discrimination (c) Microaggressions, and (d) Lack of Support in Role. The second research question asked how do mentorship opportunities aid Black women in their ascension to senior leadership roles on CCCU member campuses? Three additional major themes were determined, including (e) Served as Mentors, (f) Leadership Development, and (g) Kinship. Finally, participants were then asked the third research question: How does Black women's Christian faith influence their leadership journey? Participant responses resulted in the final three major themes, including (h) Faith Identity, (i) Calling From God, and (j) Leadership Style/Approach for a total of 10 major themes.

The lived experiences of the 10 research participants were captured in the individual responses to the three research questions. The individual responses provided a perspective of the shared experiences of the participants that were evident in the themes that resulted from the responses to the three research questions. The experiences shared within the interview process were captured and articulated within the 10 major themes outlined. The responses from the 10 participants of this research study provided a measure of depth of the lived experiences of Black women who serve in senior-level leadership roles at CCCU member institutions. The results

presented provided insight into why there is a dearth of Black women serving in senior-level leadership at CCCU member institutions.

Chapter 5 expands the discussion of the lived experiences of Black women in senior leadership roles at CCCU member institutions. Chapter 5 provides a summary of the research findings, an interpretation of data collected from the research questions, a summary of the findings related to the research questions, the implications of the findings to impact future practices, and recommendations for future practice and research to increase the number of Black women serving in senior leadership capacities within the CCCU.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations

The purpose of this research study was to examine the lived experiences of Black women who serve in senior leadership roles at CCCU member institutions. There has been considerable research conducted that demonstrates the benefits and added value of having women serve in leadership roles in Christian higher education. Existing literature also addresses the lack of women serving in senior leadership roles at CCCU member institutions and addresses the importance of increasing the percentages of women in senior leadership on CCCU campuses.

However, existing literature explores these issues from the experiences of White women almost exclusively. There is a lack of research that examines the experiences of Black women and women of color in senior leadership within CCCU member institutions. The goal of this research study was to contribute to the existing body of research on women in senior leadership in Christian higher education by highlighting the experiences of Black women in the senior leadership space on CCCU campuses. The research explored their lived experiences to gain an understanding, based on the lived experiences of the participants of this research study, of how to increase the numbers of Black women serving as senior leaders at CCCU campuses.

This research study explored the lived experiences of Black women serving as senior leaders at CCCU member institutions through a narrative inquiry qualitative research methodology. By conducting semistructured interviews with open-ended questions of current and recently retired Black women senior leaders at CCCU member institutions, participants were afforded the opportunity to share their experiences and provide insights into their leadership journey as well as offer an understanding of the challenges and barriers that they faced in working towards obtaining a senior leadership position, how mentorship impacted their leadership journey, and how their Christian faith shaped their leadership style and approach.

Chapter 5 provides an in-depth review of the central research study question and subquestions as answered by the research participants, as well as a summary of the research study and the narrative inquiry research methodology I used. Chapter 5 also provides an interpretation of this study's findings that have been outlined in Chapter 4 and based on past literature. Chapter 5 also discusses data themes, implications of the research study, recommendations for future research, and practical application of the findings.

Research Questions

The central research question that guided this study was the following: What is the lived experience of Black women serving in senior leadership roles in the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities institutions? From this central question, the following research questions guided the exploration of this phenomenon.:

RQ1: What barriers do Black women overcome to obtain senior leadership positions at a Council for Christian Colleges and Universities institution?

RQ2: How do mentorship opportunities aid Black women in their ascension to senior leadership roles on a Council for Christian Colleges and Universities members campus?

RQ3: How does Black women's Christian faith influence their leadership journey?

Using a guided interview protocol, I collected quotes from each participant as they shared their lived experiences based on the central research question and subquestions. The participant quotes allowed an in-depth understanding of each participant's leadership journey, which culminated into the major themes of the research study.

Methodology

This narrative inquiry qualitative research study examined the lived experiences of 10 Black women currently serving as and/or having recently retired from serving in a senior

leadership capacity at a CCCU member institution. Using a narrative inquiry methodology, which captures participant experiences as expressed in lived and told stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), provided the opportunity for the participants to define their own experiences, as they lived them, through storytelling, which aligns with self-definition as applied in Black feminist thought (Collins, 2000, 2009), which was the theoretical framework for this research study.

I collected participant data through semistructured interviews with 10 Black women who had served in a senior leadership role at a CCCU member institution for at least 2 years. The participants of this research study were found through purposive sampling. Purposive sampling provided the most accurate representative sample of Black women senior leaders at CCCU member campuses. With 28 Black women identified via the CCCU membership website directory as eligible to participate in this research study, the participant sample size represented 35% of Black women currently serving in a senior leadership capacity at CCCU member institutions (CCCU, 2023a).

I interviewed each of the 10 participants via the Zoom online platform. Each participant interview was recorded within the Zoom platform as well as on an external backup device. Verbatim transcription was recorded via Cockatoo transcription software of each interview. The verbatim transcription was analyzed and coded to present emergent themes utilizing the ATLAS.ti thematic analysis software program. The data analysis conducted resulted in the identification of 10 major themes based on the key findings from participant responses to the three research questions and as such, established current and future implications for Black women leaders within Christian higher education and Black women serving in senior leadership at CCCU member institutions.

Summary of Research Findings

Ten Black women currently serving as and/or recently retired from serving as senior leaders at CCCU member institutions were selected through purposive sampling for this research study. The 10 research participants consented to a semistructured interview process that used a guided interview protocol from August to November 2023. Each participant was afforded access to the guided interview protocol before the scheduled interview session, giving the participants an opportunity to deliberate on the research questions so that they would feel comfortable sharing what they experienced in their journey toward senior leadership roles at CCCU member institutions.

As this research study was centered on the lived experiences of Black women in senior leadership at CCCU campuses, I took great care was given to ensure that the identities of the participants were protected to not only comply with IRB protocols but also to shield the participants from any potential backlash as a result of participating in the research study. Due to the dearth of Black women currently serving in a senior leadership capacity at CCCU campuses, concerns of retaliation were expressed by six Black women who ultimately decided that it was not safe for them to share their lived experiences for this research study and therefore did not participate.

Each of the 10 Black women who committed to participate in the research provided in-depth information about themselves and shared similar overarching experiences that focused on overcoming barriers, the importance of mentorship, and the impact of their Christian faith in their leadership journey. The data collected from the stories and information disclosed in the semistructured interviews identified 10 major themes that resulted from the three research questions.

RQ1 explored the challenges and barriers that Black women faced on their journey to senior leadership roles at CCCU campuses. The findings revealed four major themes:

- Lack of Mentors/Mentorship Opportunities
- Racial and Gender Discrimination
- Microaggressions
- Lack of Support in Role

RQ2 examined what impact mentors and mentorship have had on Black women seeking senior leadership positions at CCCU member institutions. The findings indicated the following three major themes:

- Served as Mentors
- Leadership Development
- Kinship

RQ3 considered how Black women's faith influenced their leadership journey. Three major themes were determined from the findings:

- Faith Identity
- Calling from God
- Leadership Style/Approach

Discussion of the Findings in Relation to Past Literature

Selecting appropriate theories for understanding the needs of Black women should be based on their cultural, personal, and social contexts, which differ significantly from those of people who have not experienced racial and gender oppression (Patton & Harper, 2004). As such, Collin's (2000, 2009) Black feminist thought (BFT) was the theoretical framework used for this research study. Using BFT as the theoretical framework, this research study centered the

voices of Black women senior-level leaders at CCCU campuses and provided them a platform to speak about their lived experiences in a way that other research methods may not have offered. BFT considers the intersection of identities and how Black women explore their lived experiences while rejecting biases and stereotypes that produce barriers connected with oppression (Grant, 2012).

There are three essential characteristics that BFT provides for understanding Black women's lives (Collins, 2000, 2009). The first is the significance of self-definition and self-valuation. This research study addressed self-definition and self-valuation by allowing Black women to share their experiences as senior leaders at CCCU member institutions and share their contributions to Christian higher education. Findings from this research study deepen the notion that the lived experiences of Black women who serve in senior leadership roles at CCCU campuses differ from their peers due to their gender and racial identities.

These findings support the second essential characteristic of Black feminist theory, which is the interlocking nature of oppression (Collins, 2000, 2009). Finally, the third essential characteristic of Black feminist theory is the significance of Black women's culture. The findings of this research study highlighted the significance of kinship among other Black women in Christian higher education as part of the lived experiences of the participants.

Limitations

Limitations represent weaknesses within the study that may influence the outcomes and conclusions of the research (Ross & Bibler, 2019). Further, limitations can impact various aspects of the research study, but limitations are often beyond the researcher's control (Harley, 2009). One limitation of this research study is the low percentage of participants. The potential participant pool for this research study was limited to fewer than 30 potential participants based

on the number of Black women identified as serving in or having recently retired from serving in senior leadership positions at CCCU member institutions for at least 2 years.

Another limitation of this research study was the number of potential participants who decided not to participate or who chose to speak off the record due to fear of retaliation if they participated. Upon soliciting potential participants for this research study, I was surprised to learn that so many potential participants denied contributing to this study, not because they did not deem this research study worthy of their time, but because every Black woman who declined to participate in this research study explicitly expressed that they were afraid of retaliation or retribution if they participated in this study.

Further, because of these concerns, I took extra steps to protect the identity of my research participants by excluding all demographic information. A limitation of this research is that data that have typically been included in existing research were excluded. Specifically, this research study did not include the names and/or locations of the CCCU campuses where the participants worked. The titles and exact positions that the research participants currently serve in were also excluded to protect the identity of the research participants. In doing so, this research study lost the use of potentially useful data that could have been used to discover additional emergent themes.

Last, as a person who identifies as a Black woman and who works in higher education at a secular university, my positionality could be considered a limitation. However, I believe each participant was honest in her responses to the research questions during the semistructured interviews and gained a level of trust in me as another Black woman in higher education, which provided a level of reliability. Being objective is an essential aspect of research inquiry; researchers must examine methods and conclusions for bias (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). To

ensure that I did not insert my thoughts and experiences into the data analysis, I engaged in member-checking with all participants, which strengthened the validity of the research findings.

Interpretation of the Findings

This chapter offers an interpretation of the findings and recommendations for implementation based on the data collected and analyzed for this research study. Ten major themes emerged from the findings of the three research questions asked of the research participants. A detailed description of each of the 10 major themes is provided and explained.

Lack of Mentors/Mentorship Opportunities

Seven of the 10 research participants shared that they did not have formal mentors nor had an opportunity to participate in mentorship programs. Coleman (2019) stated that education alone is insufficient as a basis for human capital; mentorship is essential to removing barriers and growing leaders. These participants indicated that they find value in mentorship/mentoring and stated that mentorship opportunities were important to the success of Black women interested in senior leadership roles. Several participants shared that there is a lack of mentorship opportunities for Black women in Christian higher education. Further, while participants indicated knowledge of mentorship opportunities offered by the CCCU, each of the participants expressed that there are currently no culturally competent mentorship programs offered by the CCCU that specifically target Black women or programs that promote leadership development for Black women within the CCCU.

Many of the participants expressed that the marketing of the existing CCCU mentorship programs needs to be improved because of a lack of diversity in the representation of participants. Some participants shared that the lack of diversity in the marketing materials for CCCU mentor programs can prevent Black women from applying to said program(s), because

they may feel as though they will not be able to connect or can feel as though the program(s) are not for Black women, so they do not apply. The participants expressed that oftentimes mentorship opportunities and/or obtaining a mentor are challenging for Black women who work at CCCU campuses, because the location of many of the schools is such that there is not a lot of diversity within the institutions or the greater campus communities.

Black women can fail to find a mentor based on known factors, such as similar race and gender (Gardner et al., 2014). Participants also indicated that it is not always easy to find a mentor as a Black woman in senior-level roles because of the low percentage of Black women and women of color in leadership roles at CCCU campuses. The low percentage of Black women serving in senior leadership roles has resulted in a challenge to find a Black female mentor for Black women seeking such a mentor at CCCU member institutions. Many of the participants conveyed that cross-racial mentoring is possible but not always ideal if shared ethnicity is important for the mentee. The lived experiences of three participants who did have mentors and/or participated in mentorship programs throughout their careers affirmed the benefit of mentorship to Black women seeking senior leadership positions at CCCU member institutions.

Each of the three participants who had mentors and/or participated in mentorship programs indicated that their mentors provided them with networking opportunities as well as professional development and support opportunities that prepared them for success as senior leaders. Of the three participants who had the opportunity to participate in mentorship programs and/or have mentors in their leadership journey, two of the participants stated that they had mentors who were women and men of a different race and ethnicity. These two participants shared that their experience with cross-racial mentoring was successful, and that cross-racial

mentoring can be fruitful if the mentor possesses an understanding of the challenges that Black women encounter in Christian higher education and life as an American in general.

Racial and Gender Discrimination

Baxter-Nuamah (2015) stated that Black women who hold leadership positions in higher education are continually required to demonstrate that their achievements are deserved and earned rather than the result of affirmative action, opportunity hiring, or tokenism. Eight of the 10 participants stated that racial and gender discrimination were barriers that they endured and had to overcome during their journey toward their senior leadership roles at CCCU member institutions. The participants expressed that their experiences with racism and discrimination were mostly subtle but obvious.

Participants indicated that they experienced their educational credentials and field expertise questioned throughout their leadership journey by students, colleagues, and executive leadership. Many of the participants shared stories of being mistaken for administrative support staff and not senior leaders on their campuses. Participants also shared experiences of resistance to their leadership that were evident by direct questions of their ability to lead, being accused of being hired because of affirmative action, and/or resistance to proposed programs that faculty members decried as a "liberal agenda."

Participants also experienced not being believed when they asserted that they had been victims of racism or discrimination on their CCCU campuses. Because of the scarcity of Black women senior leaders at CCCU campuses, the participants have been marginalized to the extent that they can experience the outsider-within status (Collins, 2000, 2009), which can have a direct impact on the participants' sense of belonging on their respective CCCU campuses. Collins

determined that Black women's identity and their experiences as Black women place them in a position as outsiders in higher education administration spaces.

Microaggressions

This research study found that eight of the 10 participants experienced microaggressions in their capacity as senior leaders at CCCU campuses. Sue et al. (2007, p. 271) defined microaggressions as "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental actions, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group." The extent to which the participants experienced microaggressions supports existing research that Black women experience continual racial microaggressions in the workplace, and those experiences are often subtle and affect Black women's perceived character, unlike their White female and male colleagues (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Nottage, 2020; Sue et al., 2007).

Existing research supports the participants' lived experiences of racial microaggressions relating to hair. Black women suffer from more challenges at work because of their hair, which is 2.5x more likely to be perceived as unprofessional (Crown Act, 2024). American beauty standards have historically upheld a European aesthetic as ideal (Donahoo, 2019). As a result, Black women have often had to transfix their hair in such a way as to be more aligned with that of a White woman's hairstyle as it has been deemed more "professional" as opposed to typical or natural hairstyles for Black women based on their hair texture (Crown Act, 2024).

Black women's hair has been used to deny them access to professional opportunities for centuries (Synnott, 2008). Many of the participants spoke of the pressure of having to wear their hair straightened to be taken more seriously by their peers and executive leadership. Participant 8 shared that she was told by a member of the interview committee that her braided hair was a

distraction and suggested that she change her hair to a more professional style before interviewing for her first senior-level leadership role.

Participant 5 shared that she has had to consistently address people trying to touch her hair in the workplace and the offense taken by those whom she denied access to touching her hair. The issue of hair discrimination is unique to Black women in the United States. White women and other women of color do not have to contend with hair discrimination like their Black women counterparts (Donahoo, 2019). To eliminate the discrimination that Black women have faced regarding their hair, a team of Black women leaders created the CROWN Act movement in partnership with a coalition of organizations and individuals (Crown Act, 2024).

The CROWN Act, which stands for Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair, is a law that prohibits race-based hair discrimination, which is the denial of employment and educational opportunities because of hair texture or protective hairstyles including braids, locs, twists, or bantu knots (Crown Act, 2024). First introduced in California in January 2019 and signed into law on July 3, 2019, the inaugural CROWN Act expanded the definition of race in the Fair Employment and Housing Act (FEHA) and state Education Code to ensure protection in workplaces and K-12 public and charter schools. Since then, the act has galvanized support from federal and state legislators in the movement to end hair discrimination nationwide and has now become law in 23 states across the United States.

Many participants shared the toll that experiencing microaggressions can take on Black women over time. Black women who hold senior leadership positions can battle with the inner turmoil of self-doubt, negative beliefs, and low self-esteem (Alexander-Lee, 2014). Participants discussed strategies that they had to adopt to protect their mental and physical health from adversely being impacted by constant microaggressions. One participant stated that she

experienced so many microaggressions that it affected her ability to do her job. One strategy she implemented was to write down the specific microaggression that she experienced and put it in a jar to rid herself of the distractions that the microaggressions started to become for her.

Participant 3 shared that she created an informal *sistafriend* support group that included other Black women on her campus at various levels, including staff and faculty, where these Black women could come together to share their experiences on campus and support one another. Participant 3 indicated that they met off campus only and were not an official campus affinity group so that all members would feel safe to share.

Served as Mentors

Mentorship of African American women in educational leadership allows them to increase knowledge, make connections, and learn how to successfully maneuver within educational leadership arenas (Townsend, 2021). Each of the 10 participants shared that they have served as mentors, both formally and informally for women and Black women specifically who express interest in obtaining a senior leadership position in Christian higher education. The findings of this research study revealed that although most of the participants did not have mentors themselves, they each expressed that mentorship is critical for Black women who seek to advance to senior leadership at CCCU member institutions.

The participants indicated that it was important to them to invest their time and expertise in supporting Black women's aid in expanding the number of Black women senior leaders at CCCU member institutions. Gardner et al. (2014) affirmed that mentoring is important for a woman's career trajectory. Serving as mentors also increases the representation of Black women in mentorship programs for other Black women seeking mentors who share both race and gender similarities with the mentee. Even when no formal mentorship programs have existed on their

campus or within the CCCU for Black women, the participants have prioritized cultivating mentoring opportunities on their campuses for Black women.

Lack of Support in Role

When Black women are appointed to senior leadership positions where they are the first to serve in these roles, full support from their board of trustees and university president has a direct impact on garnering the full support of the campus community that includes students, faculty, and staff (Commodore et al., 2020). Six of the 10 participants expressed that they did not experience full support in their senior leadership roles on their CCCU campuses from their board of trustees and/or their university presidents. The lack of support presented barriers for the participants in their role as senior leaders.

Participant 2 shared that the lack of support often felt like a setup for failure in her new position. A lack of visible support from executive leadership can hinder campus-wide support for Black women in senior leadership positions (Townsend, 2020). Participants defined support as providing the resources needed and/or approving requests for resources to fully fund programs and initiatives that are needed on their respective campuses to enhance student success.

Leadership Development

The findings of this research study determined that current leadership development opportunities offered through the CCCU do not expressly target Black women. The findings also revealed that there is a lack of diversity in the marketing of existing CCCU leadership development programming. Only 50% of the research participants expressed a knowledge of or participation in CCCU leadership programs. The lack of diversity in the marketing materials, combined with no existing programming that targets Black women can unintentionally exclude Black women from participating in CCCU leadership development programs. As a result, Black

women who serve on CCCU campuses may not believe that the CCCU's service delivery will meet their leadership development needs.

The participants who have participated in CCCU leadership development programs indicated that these programs increased their visibility within the CCCU and expanded their networking opportunities. Participant 6 expressed that her participation in CCCU leadership development programs not only increased her visibility within the CCCU, but also provided her with opportunities to grow professionally. The research findings suggest that Black women would benefit from participating in CCCU leadership development programs and that the percentage of Black women's participation in CCCU leadership development programs would increase if the CCCU prioritized targeting Black women for their program offerings. If the CCCU tailored a leadership development program to meet the needs of Black women at CCCU campuses, the percentage of Black women serving in senior leadership positions at CCCU member institutions would likely increase.

Kinship

The lived experiences of the participants of this research study expose the importance of kinship to Black women serving in senior leadership at CCCU member institutions. Kinship can be defined as people who are not related by birth or family of origin developing reciprocal social and economic relationships that serve as sources of informal social and psychological support (Cook & Williams, 2015; Fordham, 1996). Within the academy, kinship among Black women offers important emotional, spiritual, and intellectual space to imagine and explore possibilities in higher education and support the nurturing and embracing of Black women's intellect (Cook & Williams, 2015).

Each of the 10 participants affirmed that their kinship relationships were pivotal to their health and well-being as Black women senior leaders at CCCU campuses. Whether the kinship was a result of being a member of a Black Greek letter sorority (four of the participants expressed being a member of one of the four Black Greek letter sororities under the National Pan-Hellenic Council) or from an off-campus support group, the findings of this research study reflect that a critical function of kinship among Black women is to mitigate the personal costs associated with not being valued professionally in the educational realm (Cook & Williams, 2015).

The participants shared stories of their kinships "filling their cup" and "being poured into" when their professional work has taxed them. Plainly expressed, Black women in the academy, whether they are serving as senior leaders at a faith-based or secular college or university, need each other. Their shared experiences as leaders, who are often marginalized by both their race and their gender, need each other to successfully overcome the challenges and barriers faced as Black women senior leaders in higher education. Participants expressed that their kinships with other Black women senior leaders helped them learn and understand CCCU campus culture and how to navigate it successfully while also aiding them in increasing their professional confidence to reduce the feelings of imposter syndrome in their ascension to senior leadership appointments.

Faith Identity

CCCU member institutions are required to have a board-approved and public institutional mission statement that is Christ-centered and aligns with biblical truth, Christian formation, and gospel witness (CCCU, 2023d). As senior leaders of CCCU member institutions, the assumption was made that the participants were Christians because they serve at Christian colleges and

universities. The findings of the research study confirmed this initial assumption. The lived experiences of the participants of this research study suggest that their Christian faith is paramount to their lives. Each of the 10 participants professed to be a Protestant Christian and an active member of a Christian church with varied denominations that include Baptist, Church of God in Christ, Assemblies of God, Apostolic, and nondenominational.

The findings from this research study determined that, while many of the participants were introduced to the Christian faith in their youth, others became Christians in their adulthood. Some of the participants are ordained ministers themselves and some participants are daughters and wives of ordained ministers. When asked how they define Christianity for themselves, the participants expressed that their faith centered on their personal relationship with Jesus Christ, whom each of the participants defined as the son of God. Further, each participant shared that as followers of Christ, they are motivated to honor their Savior in every aspect of their lives, including in their professional capacity as senior leaders at CCCU campuses.

Calling From God

Existing research defines calling as a potentially external and internal motivator for a particular life role *(*Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007). When a person feels called by God to serve in a particular capacity, they are motivated to honor God by committing to the work they believe they are called to. Each of the participants of this research study expressed unequivocally that they believed they were called by God to serve in Christian higher education generally and their respective CCCU campuses specifically.

Many participants disclosed that they would not serve at their CCCU member institution if they did not believe they were called by God to their campuses. The findings of this research study determined that for Black women seeking senior leadership appointments at CCCU

member institutions, a critical component to their success has been their belief that they were called to their roles. When a person believes that they are serving in a position because God called them to serve in that capacity, their willingness to be obedient to God outweighs the challenges and barriers that they may encounter in those roles (Marina & Fonteneau, 2012).

As revealed by this research study, the majority of the participants experienced racial and gender discrimination and racial microaggressions throughout their professional trajectory in Christian higher education. Black women leaders have a sense of spirituality and unyielding faith that grounds them and enables them to strive towards excellence (Marina & Fonteneau, 2012). It is reasonable to assume that, based on their educational attainment and experience, the participants could have used their leadership skills in other capacities and potentially as part of organizations where Black women leaders were more evident than their CCCU campuses.

However, each of the participants indicated that their decision to stay and work in Christian higher education at CCCU members institutions was wholly because God called them to serve at these institutions. Existing research on women of color in higher education and leadership positions confirms that spirituality serves as a refuge for difficult times (Behera, 2011). Existing research also states that Black women who identify as Christian often see a connection between serving the church and serving the world and that these women have a strong sense of efficacy and deeply care about their mission to serve, lead, and educate (Alston 2005). Their steadfast faith in Jesus Christ propelled them to believe, according to Participant 5, that "if God placed me here, He would cover and protect me and provide for me and I would advance God's agenda in my position and experience success that I could not on my own."

Leadership Style/Approach

As their Christian faith is an essential component of how they lead and why they lead at CCCU member institutions, the findings of this research study convey that the primary leadership style of the participants is the servant leadership model. A servant-leader focuses primarily on the growth and well-being of people and the communities to which they belong (Greenleaf, 2002). The servant leader seeks not just to lead, but to serve those they lead by continually building positive influence with team members and investing in their success.

The 10 characteristics of servant leadership are listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community (Parris & Peachey, 2013)**.** The findings of this research study indicate that the participants exhibit these 10 characteristics in their leadership. These 10 characteristics were revealed in the participants' shared stories of how they lead with love and empathy, and how as senior leaders they are committed to empowering and encouraging their staff and students to expand their skills by facilitating opportunities for professional growth and development.

The participants also exhibit servant leadership through their commitment to serve as mentors and advisors to Black women staff, faculty, and students that express interest in becoming senior leaders in Christian higher education. A consistent trait that stood out in the participant interviews was the discovery that participants prioritized the stewardship of those they lead by praying for them, extending grace when needed, and creating systems that are inclusive of the myriad gifts and talents of their teams and how their teams add value to their CCCU campuses.

Implications for Practice

The significance of this research study is that it elevated the lived experiences of Black women who currently serve in senior leadership positions (or who recently retired within the last 2 years) at CCCU member institutions. The findings highlighted the barriers that Black women have encountered in their professional journeys and how they have successfully overcome these barriers to serve as senior leaders within the CCCU. Reflection on the themes that emerged from this research study offers insight into related implications in three areas: (a) the increased gender gap for Black women, (b) the intersectionality of race and gender as a barrier for Black women, and (c) the value of mentorship for Black women.

This research study builds upon existing evidence of a lack of women serving in senior leadership roles at CCCU member institutions. In the first implication for practice, the results of this research study confirm that the gender gap for Black women serving in senior leadership at CCCU member institutions is greater than that of their White female peers (Longman & Lafreniere, 2012). Existing research highlights that there is a gender gap in leadership at CCCU member institutions as women account for only 19% of senior-level administrators at CCCU campuses and only 5.2% of senior-level administrators at CCCU campuses are Black/African American (CCCU, 2021). As of 2021, of the over 150 North American CCCU member institutions, only 16 were led by women presidents, all of whom were White women (CCCU, 2021). As of 2021, there were only 3 African American men serving as president of a CCCU member institution and no African American woman had served in this capacity (CCCU, 2021). In 2023, the first Black woman university president of a CCCU member institution was appointed in the 47-year history of the CCCU (CCCU, 2024).

The second implication of practice relates to the intersectionality of race and gender. While previous research has focused on the lack of women serving in senior-level positions at CCCU campuses and the barriers that impacted women's ability to lead CCCU member institutions (Longman & Anderson, 2011), the existing research has prioritized the experiences of White women and has generally excluded the experiences of Black women and women of color within CCCU member institutions (Longman & Anderson, 2016). The findings of this research study suggest that the dearth of Black women in senior leadership that exists at CCCU member institutions is compounded by the intersection of race and gender.

The third implication of practice develops from the participants sharing their experiences with mentorship within the CCCU. The findings of this research study build upon existing research that indicates the value of mentorship for women seeking senior leadership appointments at CCCU campuses (Longman, et al, 2019). This research study revealed that having a mentor and/or participating in mentorship programs can benefit Black women working toward obtaining a senior leadership appointment at a CCCU campus. While existing research highlighted the value of CCCU mentorship and leadership development programs for women who aspire to become senior leaders at CCCU campuses, the findings of this current research suggest that there are no membership or leadership development programs offered through the CCCU that target Black women. The findings of this research study also suggest that the lack of diversity in marketing materials of CCCU mentorship and leadership development programs has impacted the potential participation in these programs by Black women which in turn may impact the percentage of Black women serving as senior leaders at CCCU member institutions.

Study Recommendations

The following recommendations are made for the CCCU, and its member institutions based on the findings of this research study about the lived experiences of Black women in senior leadership positions at CCCU member institutions and the implications for research. The recommendations include organizational culture assessment, improved data collection at the CCCU, and increasing mentorship and leadership development opportunities for Black women within the CCCU.

Organizational Culture Assessment

The synergy between faith and mission creates an impetus for many faith-based educational institutions (Jun & Aronson, 2021). The CCCU professes a biblical mandate to advance Christian higher education and to help its member institutions exemplify Christian scholarship and service grounded in biblical truth (CCCU, 2023d). Every member institution of the CCCU is required to express a similar mission and vision as a condition of membership. Therefore, a membership-wide organizational culture assessment is recommended to assess if the policies and practices that govern CCCU member institutions are synergistic with their mission to "serve . . . in biblical truth," as stated on their website (CCCU, 2023d), as it relates to cultivating a competent and diverse senior leadership workforce that mirrors the diverse student bodies that these institutions serve and that resemble the diversity of the body of Christ. Tierney's (1988) organizational culture framework provides the basis for organizational culture assessment for higher education institutions. The six components of Tierny's organizational culture framework are mission, environment, socialization, information, strategy, and leadership.

Cultural awareness in higher education helps to achieve organizational goals, analyze organizations, explain differences among organizations, and unify personnel (Tierny, 1988;

Tierny & Lanford, 2018). Tierny (1988) stated that cultural awareness is important because culture influences the making and implementation of decisions. An organizational culture assessment could help the CCCU and its membership better identify the root causes of institutional policies and cultures that are contributing, even if indirectly, to racism and gender discrimination that are a key barrier to Black women in their journey to obtain senior leadership positions at a CCCU campus as revealed in the findings of this research study.

Improved Data Collection at the CCCU

One recommendation for practice is for the CCCU to improve its data collection on the diversity of the CCCU and to provide updated data on an annual basis. The most recent CCCU diversity statistics are from 2021 (CCCU, 2021). As the most recent report is over 2 years old, there is a lack of updated data to illustrate progress in the area of diversity and leadership within the CCCU. An annual report would allow for CCCU member institutions to be able to evaluate, and when necessary, adjust existing programs and policies to ensure that they are moving in the right direction concerning increasing campus leadership diversity.

Additionally, it is recommended that the CCCU expand its diversity data collection efforts to include specific data that examine the percentage of diversity based on gender of all races. The current 2021 diversity report does not provide details on the percentage of women and men serving in administration and faculty positions based on race (CCCU, 2021). For example, the report indicates that 5.2% of administers were Black/African American as of the 2018-19 academic year. However, the report lacks detail of that 5.2%, how many were men and how many were women.

If the CCCU diversity report can provide this important data moving forward, then its member institutions and the CCCU itself would have data that more accurately represent senior

leaders at CCCU campuses and would have the data to support the need for targeted initiatives to increase the diversity of senior leaders within the CCCU. Excluding the gender and racial breakdown of the data lacks the full validity of the state of diversity among staff, faculty, and administrators at CCCU member institutions.

Mentorship and Leadership Development Opportunities for Black Women Within the CCCU

The findings of this research study determined that there are currently no mentorship programs or leadership development programs that specifically target Black women and their unique experiences with the intersectionality of race and gender offered by the CCCU to best prepare them to serve as senior leaders at CCCU member institutions. Curating a service delivery model that prioritizes the needs and experiences of Black women who are seeking senior leadership appointments within the CCCU is a recommendation of this research study. Existing research confirms the importance of mentorship for women who aspire to be senior leaders at CCCU campuses (Longman & Anderson, 2016).

Existing research also affirms that women who have experienced mentors and/or participated in mentorship opportunities benefit from increased opportunities (Mackey, 2018). Mackey stated that women who have had mentors are more likely to overcome obstacles on the path toward leadership and success, are more likely to experience career advancement, and have greater visibility in their field. The findings of this research study suggest that the majority of Black women currently serving in senior leadership positions at a CCCU campus did not have a mentor.

The findings of this research further reveal that of the three participants who partook in a CCCU mentorship program had a positive experience and indicated that their mentors

contributed greatly to their success and ability to achieve a senior leadership role at a CCCU member institution. When considering a mentorship program that prioritizes the needs and experiences of Black women within the CCCU, the potential mentors do not have to be solely Black women for Black women mentees. It will be necessary however, for potential mentors to have an awareness of the experiences of Black women and the barriers that they encounter throughout their career trajectory as this research determined that the intersectionality of race and gender is ever present for Black women in ways that it does not surface for other women (Collins, 2000, 2009).

Further, if the CCCU desired to create a mentorship program for Black women that paired Black women mentees with Black women mentors, the findings of this research study suggest that there is in fact a pool of Black women potential mentors that exist within the CCCU now who are currently serving as senior leaders or who have recently retired from senior leadership appointments within the last two years. If the CCCU intentionally sought out and recruited these women to aid the organization in creating, implementing, and leading a mentorship program for Black women, it could have a direct impact on increasing the numbers of Black women in senior leadership positions as well as positively influence the current climate of fear of retaliation, as evidenced by the number of Black women who declined to participate in this research study, that has resulted in many Black women feeling unsafe to contribute to expanding the understanding of Black women's lived experiences at CCCU member institutions.

Leadership development programs targeting Black women is also a recommendation of this research study. While the CCCU does have programs, such as the Multi-Ethnic Leadership Development Institute for emerging leaders of color (CCCU, 2024), and the Advancing Women in Leadership Conference for women in leadership at CCCU campuses (CCCU, 2023c), no

program exists presently that seeks to sharpen the leadership skills of Black women currently serving in senior leadership roles at a CCCU campus to support their continued growth and development. As there is currently only one Black woman serving as university president of a CCCU member institution, a "senior leader to university president pipeline" for Black women senior leaders is needed to penetrate the absence of Black women serving as university president within the CCCU.

Future Research

The purpose of this research study was to explore the lived experiences of Black women currently serving in senior leadership positions at CCCU member institutions. This research study centered on the lived experiences of Black women because of the lack of existing research that included the experiences of Black women in senior leadership on CCCU campuses. One recommendation for future research is to explore the lived experiences of women of color serving in senior leadership positions at CCCU member institutions.

By exploring the experiences of women of color, future research would expand on existing research and provide a more inclusive and accurate experience for all women in senior leadership at CCCU campuses. Exploring the lived experience of all women can aid in getting to the root causes of the gender gap in senior leadership at CCCU member institutions and offer greater insight into how to lessen the gap and increase the percentage of women serving as senior leaders on CCCU campuses.

Another recommendation for future research is to study the impact of microaggressions on the mental health and well-being of Black women who work at CCCU member institutions. While this research study found that one barrier that Black women senior leaders experience is racial and gender microaggressions, it is worth studying if racial and gender microaggressions

impact Black women staff and faculty at all levels at CCCU campuses. Future research in this area can provide greater evidence of the need for systemic change within the CCCU and its member institutions.

A final recommendation for future research is to examine the career trajectory of Black women who have participated in CCCU mentorship programs in comparison to the career trajectory of Black women who have not participated in CCCU mentorship programs. Future research in this area can offer insight into the tangible benefits of CCCU membership programs for Black women who aspire to serve in a senior leadership capacity at a CCCU campus and how participation in CCCU mentorship programs impacts Black women's opportunities to serve in senior leadership at a CCCU campus.

Concluding Remarks

As a Black woman who has served in higher education for more than 10 years this research study was of great interest to me as I aspire to become a senior leader in Christian higher education. I wanted to understand what it takes to become a senior leader and I wanted to learn from Black women who have successfully obtained senior leadership roles in Christian higher education the career trajectory as well as the necessary steps required to earn a senior leadership appointment at a CCCU member institution.

Through this narrative inquiry qualitative research study, I had the opportunity to explore the lived experiences of 10 exceptional Black women who are currently and/or recently retired from senior leadership appointments at a CCCU campus. I was honored by the trust that the participants extended to me as evidenced by the level of honesty and candor that the participants expressed during our semistructured interviews. The data collected in this research were personal and true based on the lived experiences of each participant. Each of the 10 participants overcame

challenges and barriers throughout their career trajectory and yet their Christian faith provided them with a level of resilience and steadfastness to be obedient to the calling that God placed on their life to serve in senior leadership at a CCCU member institution, despite the sometimes heaviness of the barriers and challenges that they experienced.

All of the participants exemplified a commitment to staying true to themselves as Black women in spaces where they were often times the lone Black woman at the table; where their decisions and credentials were questioned wholly because they were female and Black, and where they experienced racial microaggressions and discrimination based on their race and gender, and where the burden of these barriers could have broken the spirit of these women. I was further impressed at the level of hopefulness and encouragement that each of the participants expressed when they discussed whether they would still work at their respective CCCU campuses if they had the opportunity to do it all over again. Each of the participants indicated that they would "do it all over again" because they expressed that they fervently believed that God called them to serve at their respective campuses.

The most overwhelming experience in the process of conducting this research study was the encouragement and support every participant offered me during our interviews. Every participant conveyed that they were proud of me, having never met or spoken to me prior to this research, for exploring this research topic and my desire to serve as a senior leader at a CCCU campus in the future. Each of the 10 participants extended to me the opportunity to stay in touch with them and reach out to them upon completion of my doctoral degree if I needed help, guidance, and/or mentorship as I enter into Christian higher education. It was overwhelming because after learning about the participants and their journeys through the interviews, I came to admire each of them.

Their lived experiences inspire me as so many of their beginnings—first generation university graduate and growing up in poverty—mirror my own. I am inspired by each of these women. They are role models for me and other women of any race who seek senior leadership appointments within the CCCU.

I pray that this research will bless all who take the time to read it and I pray that I have shared the experiences of the participants in such a way that they are proud of this research. There are clearly areas that are critical to be addressed in order to improve opportunities for Black women who desire to share their gifts and talents in senior leadership capacities at CCCU member institutions. However, the unwavering faith of these Black women, serving in senior leadership roles at CCCU member institutions, despite the obstacles placed along their journey, is a living testament to Romans 8:31—"If God be for us, who can be against us"?

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Appendix A: CITI Training Certificates

CITI PROGRAM

Completion Date 12-Jul-2022
Expiration Date 11-Jul-2026
Record ID 50055751

This is to certify that:

TUCCOA POLK

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.

All Researchers (RCR)
(Curriculum Group)
All Researchers (RCR)
(Course Learner Group)
1 - RCR
(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Abilene Christian University

CITI
Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?web4a732d-c9ad-404e-808f-44aa9781377c-50055751

CITI PROGRAM

Completion Date 14-Jul-2022
Expiration Date 13-Jul-2026
Record ID 50055749

This is to certify that:

TUCCOA POLK

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.

Social & Behavioral Research - Basic/Refresher
(Curriculum Group)
Social/Behavioral/Education
(Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic Course
(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Abilene Christian University

CITI
Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w55c9d419-4320-447f-be05-ac921a6bd9f8-50055749

Appendix B: IRB Approval

Date: July 18, 2023
PI: Tuccoa Polk
Department: ONL-Online Student, 17250-EdD Online
Re: Initial - IRB-2023-161
An Examination of the Lived Experiences of Black Women in Senior Leadership Roles at CCCU Member Institutions

The Abilene Christian University Institutional Review Board has rendered the decision below for *An Examination of the Lived Experiences of Black Women in Senior Leadership Roles at CCCU Member Institutions*. The administrative check-in date is --.
Decision: Exempt
Category: Category 3.(i)(A). Research involving benign behavioral interventions in conjunction with the collection of information from an adult subject through verbal or written responses (including data entry) or audiovisual recording if the subject prospectively agrees to the intervention and information collection.
The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.
Research Notes:
Additional Approvals/Instructions:
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. All approval letters and study documents are located within the Study Details in Cayuse IRB.
The following are all responsibilities of the Primary Investigator (PI). Violation of these responsibilities may result in suspension or termination of research by the Institutional Review Board. If the Primary Investigator is a student and fails to fulfil any of these responsibilities, the Faculty Advisor then becomes responsible for completing or upholding any and all of the following:
• When the research is completed, inform the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs. If your study is Exempt, Non-Research, or Non-Human Research, email orsp@acu.edu to indicate that the research has finished.
• According to ACU policy, research data must be stored on ACU campus (or electronically) for 3 years from inactivation of the study, in a manner that is secure but accessible should the IRB request access.
• It is the Investigator's responsibility to maintain a general environment of safety for all research participants and all members of the research team. All risks to physical, mental, and emotional well-being as well as any risks to confidentiality should be minimized.
For additional information on the policies and procedures above, please visit the IRB website http://www.acu.edu/community/offices/academic/orsp... or email orsp@acu.edu with your questions.

Sincerely,

Abilene Christian University Institutional Review Board

Appendix C: Participant Solicitation Document

Date
Name
Address

Dear Participant,

I am writing to invite you to participate in a research study that will explore the lived experiences of Black women who serve in senior leadership positions at CCCU member colleges and universities. As you are currently serving in a senior leadership role at a CCCU member institution, it is my hope that you are available and willing to participate in this important study.

I am a doctoral candidate at Abilene Christian University. I am working towards my doctorate in Organizational Leadership, Higher Education concentration. I am privileged to have Dr. Jennifer Butcher, Associate Vice President for DEI and Belonging, and Professor in the School of Organizational Leadership as my dissertation chairperson. Her expertise has been extremely beneficial in my doctoral journey. My research interests center around Black women in Christian higher education leadership. My dissertation will be a qualitative research study using narrative inquiry methodology to gain insight and understanding into the lived experiences of Black women who currently serve in senior leadership positions at CCCU member institutions. Current research on women in higher education leadership highlights the experiences of White women almost exclusively. I strive to contribute to the existing research by giving voice to Black women's experiences in higher education, specifically Christian higher education within the CCCU.

I anticipate conducting participant interviews starting in July 2023, and would welcome the opportunity to speak with you as a participant in my research study. The semi-structured interviews will be between 60-90 minutes in length, which can be scheduled at a day and time of your convenience. It would be my sincere honor to have the opportunity to interview you and learn about your experiences as a senior leader and the trajectory of your journey to your current position. If you agree to participate, you will receive a follow-up phone call to schedule an interview. I fully understand that you have an incredibly busy schedule and that your time is valuable. I also believe fervently that your lived experiences as a senior leader need to be included in the body of research on women in higher education leadership within the CCCU.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Kindest regards,
Tuccoa Polk
Doctoral Candidate,
Abilene Christian University

Appendix D: Participant Consent Form

My name is Tuccoa Polk, and I am a doctoral candidate at Abilene Christian University. My dissertation will explore the lived experiences of Black women serving in senior leadership positions at CCCU member institutions.

This letter invites your confidential participation in a 60-90-minute, one-on-one interview virtually or in person toward that aim.

Activities: If you agree to participate in this research, I will ask you to:
1. Participate in an in-person, telephone, Zoom or WebEx conversation to discuss your experiences as a Black woman in Christian higher education and your journey towards your senior leadership role.
2. This interview may take 60 minutes to one hour and a half.

Eligibility: You are eligible to participate in this research if you:
1. Currently serve in a senior leadership role at a college or university that is a member of the CCCU at the administrative or departmental level.
2. Identify as female.
3. Are 18 years or older.
4. You identify as Black/African American.

I hope to include 15 people in this research but not fewer than eight Black women senior leaders.

Risks: There are minimal risks in this study. There is a potential discomfort for participants who may feel stress when describing any bias or stereotyping that they have experienced. If you experience any discomfort, you may skip the question. You may stop the interview at any time.

Benefits: If you decide to participate, there are no direct benefits to you. However, the study will contribute to the body of research on women in Christian higher education leadership and expand the body of research to include the unique experiences of Black women senior leaders.

Audio or Videotaping: I would like to record your responses. You can still contribute if you do not wish to be recorded.

Confidentiality: The information you provide will be kept confidential as allowed by law. I will use a pseudonym or number to identify you to keep your information confidential. I will be the only individual with access to your information. The institutional review board may also review my research and view your information. I will secure your information with these steps: locking it in a filing cabinet or locking the computer file with a password and transporting it in a locked case. I will keep your data for 7 years. I will delete electronic data and destroy paper data after that time.

Contact Information: If you have questions, you may contact me at txxxx@acu.edu.
You may also contact my dissertation chairperson, Dr. Jennifer Butcher at jxxxxx@acu.edu.

Thank you for your time and consideration.
CONSENT AGREEMENT:

I agree to participate in this study.

Yes_____ No_____

I give the researcher my consent to video and audio record my interview.

Yes_____ No_____

_____ _____
Participant's Name (Please print) Date

_____
Participant's Signature

_____ _____
Investigator's Name (Please print) Date

_____
Investigator's Signature

Appendix E: Guided Interview Protocol

Good Morning/ Afternoon/ Evening. As outlined in the informed consent letter you previously signed, may I record this interview session?

To reiterate, all information acquired from this interview will be kept confidential and your responses will be kept anonymous.

Thank you again for your participation and willingness to take time out of your busy schedule to help with this body of research.

If you are ready, let us begin.

Central Research Question: *What is the lived experience of Black women serving in senior leadership roles in CCCU institutions?*

Can you please tell me a little about yourself?
Your background? Educational attainment?
Current job title and how long you have been in senior leadership?
How long have you worked in Christian higher education?

R**Q1.** What barriers do Black women have to overcome to obtain senior leadership positions at a CCCU institution?

1. What are the challenges that Black women in Christian higher education experience that may be different from others pursuing leadership positions?
2. In your journey to your current leadership position, did you encounter any barriers?
3. Do you feel secure in your current role?
4. Does your CCCU campus support you in your current senior leadership role? If yes, can you describe what that support looks like? If not, can you explain what types of support you want from your CCCU campus.
5. As a Black woman in senior leadership, what systems have you put into place to deal with obstacles such as gender bias, isolation, and devaluation of your leadership ability?

Let us shift gears and look into your preparation and mentorship experiences in order to acquire the current position you hold.

RQ2: How do mentorship opportunities aid Black women in their ascension to senior leadership roles on CCCU member campuses?

1. Can you tell me about mentors you have had? What impact have they had on your career?
2. Do you believe Black women are provided appropriate mentorship opportunities and representation to succeed as a leader within the CCCU?
3. Have you participated in an organized mentorship program?
4. Did participation in a mentorship program help you acquire your current

leadership position?

5. How prepared were you for your current position from a mentoring perspective?
6. Who do you approach for leadership advice?
7. Do you serve as a mentor to other Black women in mid and/or lower-level management that aspire to become a senior leader?
8. Who is part of your professional and social network?

Now, I would like to learn about your faith and how it shapes your experiences.
RQ3: How does Black women's Christian faith influence their leadership journey?

1. Are you a Christian?
2. How do you define Christianity?
3. Do you believe you were called to serve at a CCCU campus?
4. How does your faith show up in your leadership style or approach?
5. Does your faith align with the professed theology/mission of the university you currently serve at? If yes, how? If not, what are the differences?
6. Can you share how your faith has helped you overcome the barriers of racism and sexism in your professional journey?
7. How does your faith affect your response to racial and gender inequity on your campus?

Conclusion
I have just a couple of vision-casting questions to close out the interview.

1. What advice would you give to a young professional who has the goal of acquiring your current role?
2. If you had to do it all over again, would you still choose to lead at a CCCU member institution?
3. Do you have any future leadership aspirations or plans?
4. Is there anything I have not asked you that you wish I would have or any topic you would like to provide more information on?

That concludes our interview. Once again, thank you for your time. Once data and transcriptions have been processed, you will receive a 'Member Check Letter' that will allow you to review the data and an opportunity to discuss the findings before publication.

Thank you again for your time. Have a great day/evening.

Appendix F: Emergent Theme Chart

Research Question (RQ) 1
What barriers do Black women overcome to obtain senior leadership positions at a Council for Christian Colleges and Universities' institution?

RQ1 Themes

- The lack of mentors and mentorship opportunities
- Racial/gender discrimination
- Microaggressions
- Lack of support in role

Research Question (RQ) 2
How do mentorship opportunities aid Black women in their ascension to senior leadership roles on a Council for Christian Colleges and Universities members campus?

RQ2 Themes

- Served as mentors
- Leadership development
- Kinship

Research Question (RQ) 3
How does Black women's Christian faith influence their leadership journey?

RQ3 Themes

- Faith identity
- Calling from God
- Leadership style / approach