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## SPEAKING THEIR TRUTH: BLACK WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVES ON EXECUTIVE-LEVEL ADMINISTRATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Tanja N. Bibbs

*University of Kentucky*, [tanja.bibbs@uky.edu](mailto:tanja.bibbs@uky.edu)

Author ORCID Identifier:

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5554-1128>

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Tanja N. Bibbs, Student

Dr. Wayne D. Lewis, Jr., Major Professor

Dr. Margaret Bausch, Director of Graduate Studies

SPEAKING THEIR TRUTH:  
BLACK WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVES ON  
EXECUTIVE-LEVEL ADMINISTRATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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DISSERTATION

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the  
College of Education  
at the University of Kentucky

By  
Tanja N. Bibbs  
Lexington, Kentucky  
Director: Dr. Wayne D. Lewis, Jr. Associate Professor of Educational Leadership Studies  
Lexington, Kentucky  
2019

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<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5554-1128>

## ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

### SPEAKING THEIR TRUTH: BLACK WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVES ON EXECUTIVE-LEVEL ADMINISTRATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

While Black women have etched a place for themselves as leaders within colleges and universities, few have advanced to the most senior levels of postsecondary administration and they remain underrepresented in those type of roles (Gamble & Turner, 2015; Jackson & Harris, 2007; West, 2015). Scholarly research has explored Black women's experiences as institutional leaders (Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Smith & Crawford, 2007; Waring, 2003); yet the phenomenon of executive-level higher education administration, specifically as it relates to Black women's perspectives, is not well known (Enke, 2014; Jean-Marie, Williams, & Sherman, 2009). Moreover, research that directs attention to Black women's unique leadership experiences as executive-level leaders within a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) is scarce (Gamble & Turner, 2015; Mosley, 1980; West, 2015).

This transcendental phenomenological study examined the perceptions of Black women's leadership experiences in their roles as executive-level higher education administrators at a PWI and strategies they used to cope with their experiences. Black Feminist Theory, which centers the narratives of Black women and explores how intersecting oppressions impact their everyday lives, was used to frame the study. Semi-structured, face-to-face interviews and a review of relevant documents were used to collect the voices of four Black women executive-level leaders. Data collected were analyzed using Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological method of analysis and synthesized to reveal an essence of the experience of an executive-level higher education administrator at a PWI from the Black woman's vantage point.

Results indicated the meaning ascribed to the experience of being an executive-level higher education administrator were rooted in: Knowing Who You Are, Developing as a Leader, Engaging in the Rules of the Game, Building Relationships, and Navigating Bias and Conflict. Further, Finding Strength through Spirituality, Relying on Family and Friends, Pursuing Enjoyable Activities emerged as strategies used to manage the phenomenon. This study offers a unique view into Black women's lived experiences and their perspective on leading at a PWI as an executive-level higher education administrator. Findings contribute to building transformative change at colleges and universities by providing insight and knowledge about the experiences of Black women in higher education administration.

KEYWORDS: Black Women, Higher Education Administration, Executive-level Administration, Educational Leadership, Predominantly White Institutions, Black Feminist Theory

Tanja N. Bibbs

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*(Name of Student)*

April 3, 2019

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Date

SPEAKING THEIR TRUTH:  
BLACK WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVES ON  
EXECUTIVE-LEVEL ADMINISTRATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

By  
Tanja N. Bibbs

Dr. Wayne D. Lewis, Jr.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Director of Dissertation

Dr. Margaret Bausch  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Director of Graduate Studies

April 3, 2019  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## DEDICATION

To the Black women in higher education administration,  
who may feel silenced and invisible.  
I hear you. I see you.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and most of all, I would like to give glory, honor, and the most humble thanks to God. For without His love, promise, and grace none of this would be possible. He gave me strength to endure this journey. I am indebted to my dissertation chair, Dr. Wayne Lewis. Thank you for your guidance, wisdom, and confidence. I have grown as a scholar because of you pushing me to do my best. To my dissertation committee members, thank you so much for your time and support. Dr. Lars Björk, I am thankful for your validation that I could be successful in a doctoral program. Your feedback over the years has been more than encouraging. Dr. John Thelin, your openness and insightful suggestions were invaluable. I am privileged to have learned about higher education from you. Dr. Chamara Kwakye, I am so grateful for your pep talks and appreciate you affirming me when I needed it the most. Thank you for sticking with me! Dr. Chana Akins, thank you for extending your time and energy. I would like to express my immense gratitude to the four amazing women who thought enough of this study and me to share their experiences. There are no words that will adequately articulate how grateful I am. You have touched my life deeply and infinitely. Thank you for trusting me with your stories. I pray I honored them in a way that is pleasing. I am a strong believer that God funds purpose. My sincerest gratitude for the financial support from the Wallace Charles Hill Graduate Fellowship and Arvle and Ellen Thacker Turner Research Fund.

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## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

When American higher education opportunities extended access to women and Blacks after the Civil War, the landscape of education changed for Black women (Glover, 2012). No longer deprived of a formal education, Black women chose to further their education at colleges and universities. Black women's entrance into higher education as students eventually expanded into faculty and administrative roles. Although legislative policies such as affirmative action, as outlined in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 intended to diversify the hiring of minorities and remedy past discrimination (Anderson, 2004; Eisaguirre, 1999; Somers, 2002), Black women's presence as higher education administrators is underrepresented (Mosley, 1980; Wilson, 1989; West, 2015), even withstanding the rising number reaching executive-levels of leadership (Glover, 2012).

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2013), Black women held 11% of the total executive, administrative, and managerial positions at postsecondary institutions in fall 2011. The disparities in representation of Black women in higher education is not limited only to administrative positions. Since faculty members often pursue a pathway into executive levels of higher education administration (Glover, 2012), it is important to note Black women are also underrepresented in faculty roles at colleges and universities (Gregory, 2001; Jones & Dufor, 2012). Of all faculty at degree-granting postsecondary institutions in fall of 2011, only 8% were Black women (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). The underrepresentation of Black women in higher education reflects the lack of literature about their experiences (Patitu & Hinton, 2003).

As Black women have advanced in positions of leadership within colleges and universities, a number of studies have emerged to explore their perceptions and experiences as higher education administrators (Barksdale, 2006; Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Jackson & Harris, 2007; Jean-Marie, Williams, & Sherman, 2009; Lloyd-Jones, 2009; Mosley, 1980; Smith & Crawford, 2007; Waring, 2003; West, 2015). Because of their race and gender, Black women hold a unique position not only in America, but in higher education leadership. However, research has not fully explored how the intersections of race and gender shape the leadership experiences of Black women in executive-level positions within higher education (Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Enke, 2014; Jean-Marie et al., 2009; Lloyd-Jones, 2009; West, 2015). The purpose of this study is to fill that gap in the literature by exploring lived experiences of Black women executive-level higher education administrators.

Specifically, this study sought to understand how race and gender influence the leadership experiences of executive-level administrators in higher education at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs). The study findings and conclusions gives voice to often silenced Black women in educational leadership. It also contributes to the paucity of literature about Black women in higher education administration (Patitu & Hinton, 2003) and provides an opportunity to understand ways intersecting oppressions, related to race and gender, affect their lived experiences as executive-level administrators in higher education.

### **Problem Statement**

For a very long time, Black women serving in higher education administration was an anomaly (Moses, 1997). While Black women's career trajectories in higher

education now more often include positions in administration, they continue to be underrepresented in executive leadership positions at colleges and universities (Gamble & Turner, 2015; Jackson & Harris, 2007; West, 2015). Black women in these top leadership roles, and other administrative levels, at postsecondary institutions face different challenges related to racial discrimination (Jackson & Harris, 2007; Mosley, 1980; Patitu & Hinton, 2003); gender discrimination (Gamble & Turner, 2015; Jackson & Harris, 2007; Mosley, 1980; Patitu & Hinton, 2003); mentoring and networking relationships (Barksdale, 2006; Davis & Maldonado, 2015); isolation (Patitu & Hinton, 2003); tokenism (Mosley, 1980); unequal pay (Jackson & Harris, 2007; Jean-Marie et al., 2009; Mosley, 1980; Wilson, 1989); and homophobia (Patitu & Hinton, 2003).

Gender or race are often the focus in terms of discrimination Black women experience (Barksdale, 2006; Waring, 2003), with few studies directing attention to how race and gender interact to shape the experiences of Black women in administrative roles (Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Waring, 2003). The assumption is that Black women must choose which competing identity they identify with, being Black or being a woman, but the idea is their identity cannot include both (Gay & Tate, 1998). This inference disregards Black women's distinctive position and experience and reinforces the discourses that what is true for White women is representative for all women and what is accurate for Black men is also accurate for Black women (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Yet studies have revealed this is not the case and Black women's experiences in higher education are unique and deserve special attention (Moses, 1997).

The type of institutional environment has been shown to have an impact on the experiences of Black women in administration (Dawkins, 2012). Since Blacks were

traditionally restricted to Historically Black colleges and Universities (HBCUs) until integration allowed them access as faculty and administrators to PWIs (Benjamin, 1991), it is expected that Black women have held fewer administrative positions at PWIs in comparison to HBCUs (Becks-Moody, 2004). Nonetheless, they experience similar issues at PWIs and HBCUs as the climate Black women experience at both are marked with hostility (Hinton, 2001; Jean-Marie et al., 2009). The challenges Black women confront at HBCUs stem more from gender bias while race-based discrimination is not as pervasive (Bonner, 2001). Parker (2005) asserted the ways race and gender intersect in women's work experiences should be the focus when exploring and analyzing their leadership within predominantly White organizations. How intersecting oppressions related to their race and gender identities impact Black women higher education administrators, especially at PWIs, have not been fully explored, warranting the need for the research study (Gamble & Turner, 2015; Mosley, 1980; West, 2015).

### **Purpose and Significance of Study**

The literature about women in educational leadership at postsecondary institutions primarily address the experiences of White women (Barksdale, 2006; Patitu & Hinton, 2003). Generalizations about women's educational leadership experiences that rely on White women are somewhat misleading as White women do not have to manage gender and race roles. This research study contributes to the body of literature about Black women in higher education administration, which is currently limited (Barksdale, 2006; Mosley, 1980; Patitu & Hinton, 2003). Also, previous research has focused on Black women in higher education as students and faculty (Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003), with minimal attention devoted to Black women and their experiences in administrator

positions (Howard-Vital, 1989; Mosley 1980; Rusher, 1996). Further, while scholars have uncovered the double jeopardy of racial and gender discrimination Black women encounter (Mosley, 1980), there are minimal studies that direct attention to how intersectionality shapes experiences of Black women in higher education administration (Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Waring, 2003). Furthermore, this study utilized a theoretical framework that centers Black women, which is not often used when researching the experiences of Black women in higher education administration (Enke, 2014; Jean-Marie et al., 2009).

Furthering the scholarship on Black women in higher education adds diversity in perspective to the field of educational leadership and gives voice to Black women who are often overlooked. Also, by advancing the exploration of gendered and racial differences Black women in higher education administration face, the study seeks to inform practice within institutions. Exploring Black women's leadership experiences is valuable for recruitment and retention efforts of other Black women in administrative roles (Patitu & Hinton, 2003; Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003). The meaningful contributions Black women in higher education administration make in regards to mentorships, retention, and persistence of students of color is valuable to colleges and universities (Patitu & Hinton, 2003), making this study significant to that area of scholarship and practice as well.

### **Research Question and Design**

The research questions that guide the study are: (1) How do Black women perceive and describe the influence of race and gender on their leadership experiences as executive-level administrators in higher education? and (2) What strategies (if any) do

Black women in executive-level administrative positions use to cope with the perceived influence of race and gender on their leadership experiences as executive-level administrators in higher education? To answer the research questions, a qualitative methodological approach through phenomenological inquiry was used. Qualitative research seeks to explore how people understand their experiences and what meaning they attribute to their experiences (Merriam, 2009). A phenomenological approach allows for the discovery of the lived experiences of several individuals in relation to a certain phenomenon (Creswell, 2007), which for this study focused on describing what Black women in executive-level higher education administrative positions encounter regarding how race and gender influence their leadership experiences and how that phenomenon is experienced (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994).

Black Feminist Theory or Thought (BFT) informed the study. In the 1990s, Patricia Hill Collins produced BFT developed from Black women intellectuals and their activism to end oppression (Guy-Sheftall, 1995). BFT is a Black feminist consciousness that channels Black women's narratives and explores how the intersections of racism, sexism, and classism affect every facet of their daily experiences. As a theoretical lens for the study, BFT provided a generalized explanation of how race and gender shape Black women's point of view.

The research sample included Black women who are currently serving or have served as higher education administrators in executive-level administrative positions at PWIs. Using BFT to undergird the study, answering the research questions was accomplished by conducting semi-structured interviews and reviewing relevant

documents during data collection. The data analysis phase involved developing an essence of the experience for all participants in the study (Creswell, 2007).

There are identified weaknesses with this research study. First, the sample of participants focuses on a very specific group, Black women in executive-level administrative positions at PWIs. Second, the sample size of participants is small which is limiting. Third, Black Feminist Thought does not follow a traditional, dominant epistemology as the theoretical framework is guided by Black women's experiences (Collins, 1989; 2009). Finally, since the researcher is the instrument in qualitative research, there is a possibility to introduce bias and error when conducting the study.

### **Definition of Terms**

For purposes of this study, the following terms are defined.

- **Black:** A person who has origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa (U. S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.).
- **Executive-level administrative positions:** Individuals who maintain high-ranking positions within colleges and universities and have leadership responsibilities that include, but are not limited to, creating and managing institution, division, or departmental strategies, overseeing budgets and personnel, and influencing policies and practices (U. S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, n.d.). These positions include roles such as president, vice president, provost, chief executive officer, and dean.
- **Gender:** The social construction of sex, which refers to the biological categories of male and female (Colebrook, 2004; Oakley, 1985). Gender is psychologically

and culturally based and corresponds with the categories of masculine and feminine (Oakley, 1985).

- Higher education administrators: Individuals in positions at colleges and universities who need specialized expertise and knowledge to accomplish academic and institutional tasks central to the organization's mission (Birnbaum, 1988).
- Leadership: An influential relationship that inspires followers to achieve a shared vision and stated objectives (Rost, 1993).
- Predominantly White Institutions: Colleges and universities that are composed of a primarily White demographic and the institutional practices are interconnected with Whiteness (Bourke, 2016).
- Race: A socially constructed concept that changes over time and references the physical differences between groups of humans and entire cultures (American Sociological Association, 2017). Race is tied to social positions within society and political conflicts and interests (Winant, 2000).

### **Summary**

This chapter provided an overview of the research study and its importance in adding to the field of educational leadership and literature about Black women in higher education administration. The second chapter outlines the literature reviewed to situate the study. The literature review includes a discussion of the historical and contemporary perspectives of women, and specifically Black women, in leadership and gives focus to higher education administrative leadership. The literature review also describes the theoretical framework intended to guide the study. The third chapter details the

qualitative research methods used to explore the research questions. The fourth chapter presents the research study findings. The fifth chapter discusses the study findings, implications, and opportunities for future research.

## CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter explores literature relevant to this research study, which sought to explore the influence of race and gender on the leadership experiences of Black women in executive levels of higher education administration, and the strategies they use to cope with those leadership experiences. To ground the study, historical and contemporary perspectives significant to the research questions were of central focus. The literature review is organized in six different sections. It begins with a review of literature describing the historical and contemporary experiences of women in leadership. Next, literature about past and present-day challenges confronting women administrators in general, and Black women administrators specifically, in higher education is presented. Then, a review of the scholarly literature on mechanisms women and Black women employ to cope with situations encountered as higher education administrators is presented. Finally, since a Black Feminism viewpoint is being used to undergird the study, the last section of the literature review concludes with an outline of the theoretical framework for understanding how Black women's race and gender identities shape their outlook and a synthesis of relevant studies which use that lens to explore Black women in higher education administration.

Reviewing literature for the dissertation study involved identifying, retrieving, reading, analyzing, and synthesizing resources related to Black women in higher education, with an emphasis on administrators. First, previous doctoral coursework was referenced to identify any useful resources to review. Additionally, electronic research databases, including EBSCOhost, Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, and Google Scholar were utilized to conduct a more

comprehensive search of extant sources specific to the research questions. The electronic research databases yielded books, peer-reviewed scholarly journals, and dissertations that were relevant to the research topic and used to identify primary and secondary sources to critique for the literature review. Various wording used in the keyword searches included general phrases and very specific phrases with the intent of capturing a wide array of resources to review. Phrases included *Black women and higher education*, *Black women and higher education administration*, *African American women and higher education*, and *African American women and higher education administration*.

After reviewing various primary and secondary sources from the initial search, it was discovered much of the literature published about Black women in higher education was limited (Patitu & Hinton, 2003), with little attention devoted to Black women as higher education administrators (Howard-Vital, 1989; Mosley 1980; Rusher, 1996). Thus, literature about the leadership experiences of women in general, including those working in fields outside of higher education, was considered to provide historical and contemporary contexts. Further, of the literature written about Black women higher education administrators, very few relied on theoretical frameworks that used Black women's unique viewpoint to define and understand their leadership experiences (Hylton, 2012; West, 2015). Even so, the minimal number of studies that were available were reviewed and a synthesis presented to conclude the literature review.

Since the inception of the United States of America, women have been burdened with a struggle for equality and lack of ability to display their leadership acumen (Whitaker, 2010). To understand the prospects and problems contemporary women in leadership encounter, it is necessary to reflect on the historical journey of women leaders.

The next section briefly details the history of women's participation as leaders in various professional fields.

### **History of Women in Leadership**

There has been an increased focus on the field of leadership studies (Rost, 1993), with much research on leadership focusing extensively on men, while discounting the contributions of women in the literature (Chemers, 1997). Studies devoted to women in leadership did not surface until the 1970s, and the lack of interest can be attributed to the insignificant number of women in the workplace (Chemers, 1997). The small number that were employed worked in the nursing and teaching professions (Karsten, 1994). After the conclusion of World War II, women began working outside the home in greater numbers (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014) because of the economic downturn brought on by the Great Depression (Karsten, 1994). The next era of women's participation in the labor force, especially in management roles (Karsten, 1994), dramatically increased was during the 1960s (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). This upsurge can be credited to historic federal legislation that influenced their representation in the workplace (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

An important piece of legislation the federal government enacted to fight inequities women faced in employment practices include The Equal Pay Act of 1963, which determined women should receive equal pay when they hold positions similar to that of men (Crampton, Hodge, & Mishra, 1997). The Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibited discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin in the workplace, was also monumental for women (Crampton et al., 1997). Additionally, in 1972, Congress passed Title IX of the Education Amendments, intended to prohibit sex

discrimination in education and eventually broadened to include employment (Galemore, 2003).

In an effort to strengthen civil rights policy, the U.S. government established a special initiative, noted as affirmative action, to encourage education and employment opportunities for women and minorities (Orlans, 1992; Somers, 2002). Affirmative action intended to mitigate barriers that women, people of color and other groups facing discrimination experienced in order to extend equal opportunity and access to those individuals (Eisaguirre, 1999; Somers, 2002). Affirmative action programs also served as a means of retribution for the effects of institutional discrimination and injustice that transpired in America in previous years (Anderson, 2004). Although critics assert affirmative action as violating the 14<sup>th</sup> amendment, which cites equal protection of all individuals, it has helped benefit women and people of color economically, reduce inequality, and increase diverse representation among professionals across all organizational sectors (Konrad & Linnehan, 1999).

Leading up to the 1990s, women have advanced to more prominent roles within management and administration, including board positions, directors, chief executives, and senior managers (Karsten, 1994). Yet despite the progression of time and existence of the aforementioned pieces of legislation, research shows women continue to battle some inequities within organizations (Eagly & Carli, 2007). The following section outlines current issues women in leadership confront.

### **Issues Facing Contemporary Women in Leadership**

The expansion of access to higher education has served as an impetus for women to enter employment sectors traditionally characterized as male-dominated. With the

trend of women attaining undergraduate and advanced degrees at progressive rates, women have used their education to gain ground in joining the leadership ranks within organizations (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Nevertheless, there remains a leadership gap in the number of women who hold executive-level positions within companies (Hoyt, 2013) and in higher education (Chliwniak, 1997). The disproportionate representation of women in lower echelons of organizations can be attributed to barriers related to the glass ceiling (Gibelman, 2000). The glass ceiling is a metaphor that gained widespread attention with Hymowitz and Schellhardt's (1986) use of the term in the *Wall Street Journal* to depict barriers women encounter, regardless of their credentials, when striving to move up the ranks towards senior-level management. Barriers to the success of women in leadership roles as cited in the literature include: gender stereotypes (Catalyst, 2005; Oakley, 2000), mentors (Ragins, 2002), networking (Lyness & Thompson, 2000; Schor, 1997), work-life balance (Hoyt, 2013), and unequal pay (Alkadry & Tower, 2006).

Perceptions of women as leaders are based on stereotypes that lead to discrimination women face within organizations. Stereotypes are characteristics projected upon certain groups due to their sex, race, nationality, or other identifying trait (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Almost half of senior-level women executives surveyed by Catalyst (2004) cited gender-based stereotypes as a barrier to advancing in corporate leadership. Because leaders have been revered as being masculine, it makes it difficult for women to be portrayed as being effective if they are stereotyped as lacking the various qualities commonly associated with leaders (Catalyst, 2005). This gender bias leads to women confronting a double bind (Bauer, 2013), where women are faced with a no-win situation depending on if they act a certain way versus another (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

Mentors are individuals, who influence, coach, and support a less experienced or knowledgeable person (Hill & Ragland, 1995). Securing necessary bonds and mutual relationships that nurture leadership and encourage growth through mentorships is often a hurdle for women. Because of the scarcity of women in top tiers of administration, women are faced with a lack of access to possible mentors (Ragins & Cotton, 1996). Additionally, women in varying organizations have reported the unwillingness of potential mentors to mentor them as a barrier to attaining mentors (Ragins & Cotton, 1996).

Networking allows women the opportunity to connect with other like-minded individuals and build mutually beneficial relationships (Eagly & Carli, 2007). In the study conducted by Lyness and Thompson (2000), it was reported women corporate executives perceived being excluded from informal networks as a perceived barrier to advancement. Schor (1997) found women presidents and vice presidents of insurance companies reported gaining access to networks was challenging and noted not being able to engage in outside of work activities, such as golfing or other sports, to foster networks like men do. Additionally, the existence of the old boy's network, an informal male system within organizations (Oakley, 2000), makes it difficult for women to attain upper ranks of leadership (Sanchez, Hucles, Sanchez-Hucles, & Mehta, 2007).

The demand of managing multiple roles between professional and personal lives presents a constant struggle for women to balance and still maintain equilibrium in both work and life (Miller & Vaughn, 1997). A study that included executive-level women employed in varying service industries and sectors identified family and work-life balance as a deterrent to women attaining senior-level executive positions (Boone et al.,

2013). Roebuck and Smith (2011) also found that women opted to not pursue top leadership positions because of family and home demands that conflicted with their workplace.

Despite the Equal Pay Act of 1963, studies report women continue to earn lower wages than men do (Levine, 2003). Alkadry and Tower (2006) found of public administration officials surveyed, gender was statistically significant in the variance of salaries amongst men and women holding procurement positions. Similarly, a research survey of men and women healthcare executives found despite attaining equal education and having commensurate experience, women earned \$23,200 less than men (American College of Healthcare Executives, 2006).

Historically, gender-based barriers were the most noted obstacles women faced as leaders across all sectors and race was often not a focal point in the scholarly research. As a result, much of the literature about women in leadership focuses primarily on White women, and neglects the unique contributions of Black women (Parker, 2005; Parker & ogilvie, 1996; Tillman, 2013). By examining gender and race separately, it implies Black women's experiences are synonymous with White women; yet research suggests the experiences of women of color differ from that of White women (Key et al., 2012). The following section describes issues contemporary Black women face in leadership roles.

### **Issues Facing Contemporary Black Women in Leadership**

Black women's participation in the labor force has been steady (Gregory, 1999) with Black women holding formal positions of leadership in education, industry, social services, and civic organizations (Davis & Chaney, 2013). Black women have reported personal and professional satisfaction because of holding positions of leadership (Bell,

1990). However, research shows Black women experience issues such as gender discrimination (Hall, Everett, & Hamilton-Mason, 2012); racial discrimination (Bova, 2000; Catalyst, 2004; Tassie & Brown Givens, 2013); shortage of professional relationships and networks (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Hall et al., 2012); low promotion rates and lack of access to career development opportunities (Combs, 2003; Hite, 2004); and lack of institutional support (Catalyst, 2004; Eagly & Carli, 2007).

Scholars argue that research pertaining to women in management positions lacks examination of the effects both racial and gender discrimination have on Black women in executive leadership roles in White dominated organizations (Parker, 2005; Parker & ogilvie, 1996). Despite this assertion, there has been a recent emerging focus on the phenomenon. Brown (2013) indicated differences in legislative influence, based on race and gender of state legislators who are Black women. Parker (2002) reported Black women senior executives in organizations within public and private sectors of the United States (U.S.), perceived their race and gender as sources of differential treatment they experienced in the workplace. Byrd (2009) identified Black women, in predominately White organizations, confronted many issues such as desiring validation, being the only Black woman, and dispelling stereotypes because of intersectionality.

One field women have achieved substantial leadership gains is education (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Similar to experiences of women in other organizational leadership positions, women have faced specific challenges and barriers while working to support institutional efforts through their roles as higher education administrators. In order to understand the problems women administrators encounter in higher education, first, a

review of the historical perspective is necessary. The following section details the history of women in higher education administration leadership.

### **History of Women in Higher Education Administration Leadership**

Historically, deans of women positions were the gateway for women to gain entry into professional administrative ranks at institutions (Clifford, 1989). Deans of women were safeguards of women students and administrators of women's services including health and physical fitness or feminine related fields such as student affairs (Nidiffer, 2010). These roles also had teaching responsibilities in addition to their administrative duties. The dean of women position created a pathway for women in faculty positions to transition to administration, and served as an opportunity for women to move easily from institution to institution (Clifford, 1989).

Women in these professional positions at postsecondary institutions faced barriers such as denied requests for promotion, additional staffing assistance, and salary increases (Anderson, 1989; Fitzpatrick, 1989). Eventually, deans of women positions expanded to a dean of students, dean for student personnel, or vice president for student personnel services and filled by men, with women serving in a subordinate role as a liaison for women students (Nidiffer, 2001; Parker, 2015; Schwartz, 1997). Ultimately, many deans of women positions were eliminated or vacated by the 1970s (Nidiffer, 2001; Schwartz, 1997).

Around the time in which deans of women positions were dissolving, the federal government enacted legislation to fight inequities women faced in employment practices. Federal and education policies such as affirmative action helped foster the expansion of higher education and improved women's status at colleges and universities. Women

tended to hold positions as assistants or associates, with a small number serving as presidents, vice presidents or vice chancellors, deans, or directors (Kaplan & Tinsley, 1989). Women in higher education administration during the era following the civil rights and women's movements held positions of registrar, librarian, and director of financial aid (Kaplan & Tinsley, 1989).

Although not much attention has been given to Black women's historical journey to higher education administration roles, their experiences were similarly marked by inequality and exclusionary practices (Carroll, 1982). However, they also faced a different dynamic due to their race (Moore & Wagstaff, 1974). The following section describes the oppression Black women historically faced as they entered into administrative ranks at postsecondary institutions.

### **History of Black Women in Higher Education Administration**

Black women were expected to use the knowledge gained from a formal education to become educators and teach other Black children as a demonstration of their social responsibility to their community (Hine, 1997; Lerner, 1972). Prior to World War II, Black faculty and administrators were intentionally barred from Predominately White Institutions (PWIs) (Benjamin, 1991). Institutions serving Black students were the first opportunities for Black women to work as faculty members and administrators at colleges and universities (Wilson, 1989). Black colleges did not have resources to institute separate women's colleges for Black women interested in pursuing educational opportunities (Anderson, 1989). Thus, Black coeducational schools integrated Black women students, faculty, and administrators (Anderson, 1989); and their presence as

educators and administrators was generally confined to all Black institutions until around the 1960s (Moore & Wagstaff, 1974).

Despite the criticism of affirmative action, it has assisted many women in becoming academic leaders in higher education (Glazer-Raymo, 2002; Somers, 2002). However, there were few positive results for Black women as their presence expanded (Moore & Wagstaff, 1974; Mosley, 1980). According to Moore and Wagstaff (1974), Black women earned less pay and were promoted less frequently in comparison to White women at PWIs. Further, Black women reported being stereotyped as aggressive and caricatured as dominating and loud in the academic community (Moore & Wagstaff, 1974). Myrtis Mosley (1980), in her seminal work “Black Women Administrators in Higher Education: An Endangered Species,” identified similar findings as Moore and Wagstaff (1974), in addition to reports of Black women exuding feelings of isolation and aloneness, identifying conflicts with Black men in the workplace, and lacking access to information pertinent to their positions. Further, the Black women in Mosley’s (1980) study disclosed they lacked budgetary decision-making and limited oversight in areas they were responsible for managing. Black women were deemed “invisible beings” and occupied positions of low importance (Mosley, 1980).

Although Black women administrators have been described as being an endangered species (Mosley, 1980) and not a priority at PWIs (Moore & Wagstaff, 1974), the literature cites they have made strides in gaining visibility and prestige amongst the academic community of colleges and universities (Gamble & Turner, 2015). Many of the barriers and circumstances Black women, and women in general, historically experienced as administrators in higher education have translated to problems they

continue to encounter as contemporary leaders (Hannum, Muhly, Shockley-Zalabak, & White, 2015). The next section describes the challenges and barriers women in higher education administration positions confront as contemporary leaders.

### **Contemporary Women in Higher Education Administration Leadership**

Although there is increased visibility of women in higher education, there are disparities in how women are valued and perceived, molding their experiences as leaders (Barksdale, 2006; Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Jackson & Harris, 2007; Jean-Marie et al., 2009; Lloyd-Jones, 2009; Mosley, 1980; Smith & Crawford, 2007; Waring, 2003; West, 2015). The status of women in leadership positions within postsecondary institutions has encouraged scholars to capture many aspects of these women's lives. Since the 1990s, women have made strides in gaining prominence and prestige amongst the academic community (Gamble & Turner, 2015; Gerdes, 2006). Yet there is a gap in the number of women in higher education leadership (Chliwniak, 1997), especially at the highest levels (Kellerman & Rhode, 2014), and they continue to confront varying challenges in the workplace. These issues include enduring gender discrimination (Reis, 2015), finding a mentor (Reinarz, 2002), balancing work and family (Bornstein, 2008), and earning a lower salary than men for equal work (Glazer-Raymo, 1999).

Similar to other employment sectors, women in leadership roles within higher education also experienced challenges based on their gender (Chliwniak, 1997). Reis (2015) interviewed four women presidents and found that gender bias was the most common barrier they encountered. The 35 women in senior-level positions surveyed by Hannum et al. (2015) identified the different expectations for men and women as a barrier they faced in their leadership roles. The women recounted incidents in which they

felt their job performance would have to be at a higher level in order to be perceived as competent (Hannum et al., 2015).

Ballenger (2010) reported the scarcity of female representation has made it challenging for women to seek out and form relationships with other women who can relate to their experiences and guide their development as administrators. As a result, many women have to turn to male mentors, who are not always able to provide advice to many of the unique issues women administrators face (Ballenger, 2010; Dunn, Gerlach, & Hyle, 2014). Alternatively, they engage in informal mentoring by observing on the job behavior or engaging in private conversations with other higher education leaders (Searby, Ballenger, & Tripses, 2015).

Research has demonstrated a commitment to career advancement has an effect on women and the personal choices they make as university administrators. In the study conducted by Fochtman (2010), 10 mid-career student affairs professionals sacrificed advancement and personal development opportunities in order to raise their children or spend more time with their loved ones. The well-being of women administrators is often sacrificed when trying to negotiate work-life balance because of women's commitment to their profession (Dunn et al., 2014). Self-care behaviors such as personal friendships, interests, and physical activities are regularly neglected when women in higher education administration attempt to create harmony between their work and life opportunities (Marshall, 2009).

Earning equal pay has been noted as a barrier to women academic leaders. Tiao's (2006) study of senior women leaders in higher education discovered the majority of participants experienced being underpaid at some point in their career. An examination of

the gender pay gap at private postsecondary institutions concluded that women in the top paid administrative positions earned 13% less than men did (Monks & McGoldrick, 2004). According to Chliwniak (1997), the inequality women experience with their salary is not related to their performance or the institution's mission, but more so their gender.

Congruent to the literature about women in leadership, the body of research about women academic leaders in higher education focuses primarily on barriers as they relate to White women, and disregards the unique experiences of other races and ethnicities, including, but not limited to, Black women (Barksdale, 2006; Patitu & Hinton, 2003). Although Black women endure many of the same disparities and inequities, they also experience varying issues not shared by other women leaders (Parker & ogilvie, 1996). The following section describes the experiences of Black women in higher education administration.

### **Contemporary Black Women in Higher Education Administration Leadership**

Scholars have begun to explore the complex experiences of Black women in higher education administration, but there remains a paucity of literature about their presence at colleges and universities (Howard-Vital, 1989; Jackson, 2004; Lloyd-Jones, 2009; Rusher, 1996). Existing research about Black women reveals a different dynamic and myriad of challenges they encounter when seeking advancement and maintaining certain roles in higher education administration (Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Gamble & Turner, 2015; Jackson & Harris, 2007; Lloyd-Jones, 2009; Moses, 1997; Mosley, 1980; West, 2015). Scholars have examined Black women in leadership roles at postsecondary institutions and found they face barriers and issues related to mentoring (Gamble & Turner, 2015; Holmes, 2003; Smith & Crawford, 2007); networking relationships

(Barksdale, 2006; Smith & Crawford, 2007); work and life balance (Gamble & Turner, 2015; Miller & Vaughn, 1997); isolation (Mosley, 1980; Patitu & Hinton, 2003); tokenism (Holmes, 2003; Mosley, 1980); and the double jeopardy of gender and race discrimination (Gamble & Turner, 2015; Jackson & Harris, 2007; Mosley, 1980; Patitu & Hinton, 2003).

Akin to White women, the literature suggests securing necessary bonds and mutual relationships that nurture leadership and encourage growth and engaging in networking is often a hurdle for Black women administrators (Gamble & Turner, 2015; Holmes, 2003). The acquisition of mentors is essential to retention and career advancement opportunities for Black women (Henderson, Hunter, & Hildreth, 2010). However, the scarcity of Black women mentors has made it challenging for other Black women to seek out and form relationships with others who can relate to their experiences and guide their development as administrators (Gamble & Turner, 2015; Smith & Crawford, 2007). In addition, because Black women are considered outsiders in higher education, they are seldom included in university networks (Jackson & Harris, 2007; Moses, 1997). Further, they often experience negative repercussions such as hindered career progression because of their lack of networking (Gamble & Turner, 2005; Barksdale, 2006).

The struggle of work and life balance is another commonality Black women and other women in higher education administration share. Research has demonstrated a commitment to career advancement has an effect on Black women university administrators and the personal choices they make (Moses, 1997). Gamble and Turner (2015) found the challenge to balance work-life opportunities for Black women at

executive administrative leadership levels at Georgia postsecondary institutions was attributed to societal expectations surrounding family, child rearing, and household responsibilities while being successful in a career. Gamble and Turner (2015) detailed the sacrifices Black women made as well as stress they sustained in order to manage their professional and personal roles. Mosley (1980) found Black women administrators believed their partners were unable to accept their career goals and ambitions, which was a barrier to their advancement.

The small number of Black women on college and university campuses has led to feelings of isolation and aloneness for Black women in administrative roles (Mosley, 1980). In Mosley's (1980) study of Black women administrators at PWIs, participant's responded isolation was also a result from the lack of collegial relationships with colleagues. According to Daniel (1997), Black women are isolated from men in power and other women at the university or college as well. Being socially separated from others at institutions leads to feelings of "not fitting in," guarding themselves, and having to act as a personal support system (Daniel, 1997, p. 174). West (2015) reported because of lacking a connection with non-Black colleagues, Black women student affairs professionals had to serve as their own support system. Further, West (2015) found Black women administrators were often physically secluded from other Black women, Black men, and their own office staff, resulting in loneliness.

Kanter (1977) introduced the concept of tokens to describe individuals who serve as representatives of a specific cultural status or category when in an environment where they are not members of a dominant group. Tokens are revered as "symbols rather than individuals" (Kanter, 1977, p. 966). The status of Black women administrators is often

likened to that of tokens in higher education institutions (Holmes, 2003; Moses, 1997; Mosley, 1980). Due to the underrepresentation of Black women at colleges and universities, Black women are expected to serve as spokespersons for the entire race (Holmes, 2003; Moses, 1997) and interpret the needs of Black students, faculty, and the Black community (Benjamin, 1991). Holmes' (2003) found mid- and senior-level Black student affairs women at PWIs were often enlisted to provide guidance on all Black-related programming and events as well as assist in resolving crises involving Blacks.

Although Black women experience comparable challenges as White women, the issues Black women encounter are compounded by the intersections of race and gender, making it more difficult for them to ascend to higher levels of leadership (Carter-Frye, 2015). However, research about Black women in higher education administration often focuses on either race or gender (Barksdale, 2006; Waring, 2003). Viewing race and gender as separate issues suggests gender discrimination can be eliminated while racial discrimination remains intact (Schramm, 2002). Myers (2002) found Black women administrators speculated when the word 'woman' is used it is referring to White women and when 'Black' is used it is referring to Black men. This conjecture leaves Black women lost as the essence of being Black and a woman is separated (Myers, 2002). To shed light on this thought, there is emerging research that explores the intersection of race and gender and its impact on Black women administrators at colleges and universities (Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Dowdy, 2011; Lloyd-Jones, 2009; Price, 2015; Ravello, 2016; Wright, 2008).

Waring (2003) posited discrimination Black women experience as a result of their race and gender are commonly examined as isolated oppressions, meaning research does

not link the impact of both race and gender on their leadership experiences. Davis and Maldonado (2015) found Black women in senior-level administrative positions believed their race did not undermine their gender and their gender did not undermine their race. Where race and gender converge, it serves as a source of tension and creates double jeopardy for Black women, in which they experience discrimination based on them being Black and a woman (Holmes, 2003; Mosley, 1980; Myers, 2002). Scholars have uncovered the double jeopardy of racial and gender discrimination Black women encounter (Mosley, 1980) create difficulties for them as racial and gendered oppressions are the source of many types of patriarchal influence within higher education (Schramm, 2002). Holmes (2003) found Black women administrators endured a lack of meaningful relationships, alienation, isolation, and being overworked because of double jeopardy.

The consequences of double jeopardy, along with other identified barriers, Black women encounter as higher education administrators, results in them searching for ways to respond to their daily experiences. Black women and women academic leaders, in general, respond to adversity in the workplace by utilizing coping strategies. The following section focuses on coping strategies women, and specifically Black women, in administrative roles employ as they work within postsecondary institutions.

### **Coping Strategies of Contemporary Women Higher Education Administrators**

The opportunity to brave long-standing obstacles in higher education is conceivable when women are able to find solace through coping strategies. Coping includes different techniques used to handle the pressures of society (Myers, 2002). Aside from determination and perseverance, women are able to wield the challenges of higher education administration by relying on their family backgrounds and values (Madsen,

2007a, 2007b; Diehl, 2014), mentors and networks (Gerdes, 2003), and professional development opportunities (Hannum et al., 2015; Lafreniere & Longman, 2008).

Drawing from their upbringings, women have been able to lean on those experiences as they relate to their development as a leader. Family connections are very influential in the lives of women and many qualities women displayed are credited to their child rearing (Madsen, 2007a, 2007b). Religious beliefs and church participation were also influential in the upbringing of women administrators (Madsen, 2007a). Many women continue to rely on their spirituality to maintain their momentum in the midst of challenges they face as administrators. Faith was noted as one strategy women presidents, provosts, and vice presidents articulated they used to navigate hardships as a women leader in Diehl's (2014) study of the adversity women encounter in higher education.

Professional networks allow women the opportunity to engage with other like-minded individuals and build mutually beneficial relationships (Eagly & Carli, 2007). These networks are also valuable to women administrators in higher education as these connections usually serve as mechanisms to enhance their careers. They provide a source of "social support, role modeling, and information about overcoming discriminatory obstacles" (Eagly & Carli, 2007, p. 146). The administrators interviewed in Gerdes' (2003) study, which focused on advice from senior academic women, recommended mentoring and/or networking as a strategy to cope with the disadvantages women face as a result of their gender. Respondents advised mentors and networks could assist with giving advice and serve as a sounding board (Gerdes, 2003).

Professional development opportunities such as workshops, conferences, seminars, leadership programs, and external organizations are useful to women because

these development opportunities guide their careers (Hannum et al., 2015; Lafreniere & Longman, 2008; Tiao, 2006). Lafreniere and Longman (2008) found a year-long women's leadership program offered to women in faith-based institutions between 1998 and 2004 was extremely beneficial to participants. Fifty-three women were surveyed and indicated that shadowing other women on various campuses, restricting the program to women, and interacting and networking informally were most beneficial.

In order to survive the effects of discrimination and inequality in the workplace, women administrators in higher education have had to rely on varying strategies and sources of support. Dealing with the dual impact of race and gender for Black women higher education administrators yield somewhat similar strategies. The next section presents research literature on coping strategies Black women use while serving as administrators in a dominant culture.

### **Coping Strategies of Contemporary Black Women Higher Education Administrators**

Despite barriers Black women working at colleges and institutions face, they have identified strategies to handle any undesirable experiences they have endured. Shorter-Gooden (2004) identified coping strategies Black women use to manage stress related to discrimination based on race and gender. Relying on prayer and spirituality, leaning on social support networks, and reducing contact with specific individuals were identified as methods Black women use to manage the negative impact of perceived oppressions as a result of their race and gender (Shorter-Gooden, 2004).

Clayborne and Hamrick (2007) reported Black women in mid-level student affairs administrative positions pray, read the bible, and attend religious services as a way to

cope with the pressures and stress of work and life. Participants in the study relied heavily on relationships with family and friends as support structures when dealing with work-related issues (Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007). In addition to depending on their spirituality and relationships, the five Black women mid- and senior-level administrators in the study conducted by Hinton (2001) would laugh, cry, withdraw, and move on to cope with their working environments. West (2015) identified spending time away from non-Black individuals and connecting with other Black women at work were strategies for Black women at PWIs to maintain their personal well-being.

Given not much literature exists about Black women's experiences, specific to their race and gender, as higher education administrators, there is a lack thereof related to how they manage their marginalized status as academic leaders within postsecondary institutions. Thus, an exploration of how race and gender inform the leadership experiences of Black women higher education administrators and the coping strategies they use is warranted. The next section describes the theoretical framework that informed the research study.

### **Black Feminist Theory as a Theoretical Framework**

Black Feminist Thought or Theory (BFT), centered on Black feminism, provides a generalized explanation of how race and gender discrimination shape Black women's point of view. Black women in America live in a starkly contrasting world than people who are not Black women (Collins, 2009). The negotiation and reconciliation of Black women's identities informs their discourse and knowledge, or standpoint (Collins, 2009). Black women's standpoint distinguishes the complexities of being a Black woman in America and encompasses experiences and ideas Black women share as a group. BFT

centers Black women, and provides an understanding of their truths and details how their experiences differ from other women and Black men. BFT also seeks to resist oppression Black women encounter in America, articulated through their knowledge, and the systems and views that rationalize these injustices (Collins, 2009).

BFT's focus on Black women's vantage point and the diversity of their experiences provides an appropriately broad lens to explore their lives as executive administrators within higher education. By channeling the narrative of Black women, BFT explores how intersectionality of race, gender, and class discrimination affects the daily lives of Black women (Collins, 2009). However, this study explored only the intersections of race and gender using BFT. Since BFT grounds Black women's point of view, it provides enlightenment surrounding Black womanhood, the nature of their oppressions, sustained struggle for a self-definition, liberation of Black people, and gender equality (Collins, 2009; Guy-Sheftall, 1995). The BFT framework provided a lens that contextualizes how race and gender influence Black women's experiences as executive higher education administrators. BFT notes not all Black women have similar theoretical interpretations of their reality, or responses to common challenges that create their knowledge (Collins, 2009); thus, BFT guided the study in "clarifying a Black woman's standpoint of and for Black women" (Collins, 1986, p. 24). These challenges Black women experience, identified through core themes, may or may not produce similar perspectives among Black women (Collins, 2009). It is through the core themes that commonalities identified through the ontology of Black women's experiences are conveyed.

### **Core Themes in Black Women's Standpoint**

Core themes of Black women's standpoint, include their work, controlling images, self-definition, sexual politics, love relationships, motherhood, and activism (Collins, 2009). These themes interlace with the overarching sentiment of struggle and provide context for a trend of resistance. It is through this tradition of strife and activism that transcends throughout Black women's standpoint, as articulated through BFT.

### **Black Women's Work**

The American political economy has profited from economic, social, and political disenfranchisement of Black families (Collins, 2009; Davis, 1983; hooks, 1982). History behind this exploitation provides a frame of reference for Black women's work inside and outside of the home (Collins, 2009; Davis, 1983). Periods connected to Black women's work are derived from the days of chattel slavery, "free" labor, and domestic work.

Although much is not known about Black women slaves, due to the focus being primarily on Black men slaves, contributions from Black women slaves during this period of servitude is no less important (hooks, 1982; White, 1985). Black women slaves encountered three distinct constraints because they were slaves, Black, and women (White, 1985). As a result, their experiences were not always the same as Black men slaves, and especially not White women, who endured a level of oppression from White men. Although they performed the same types of work as Black male slaves, there were different expectations projected onto Black women slaves. In addition to manual labor, which directly benefited slave owners, Black women slaves had the responsibility of "bearing, nourishing, and rearing children" in order to expand the labor force of slaves

(White, 1985, p. 69). Black women slaves employed different measures to resist the oppression they faced such as escaping the plantation, revolting against the working conditions, resisting sexual assaults of White men, and committing acts of sabotage (Davis, 1983; hooks, 1982; White, 1985). After the emancipation of slaves, Blacks eventually earned wages for their labor.

The turning point from laboring for slave owners to individual gain would mean Black women would experience pay that was practically nonexistent. Black women were concerned with attaining a sufficient family income; yet, given the scarcity of meaningful jobs available to Black men, Black women had to work (hooks, 1982; White, 1985). Their occupations were either as workers in the field, where the head male figure in the family received the wages, or as domestic workers, where the pay was minimal and Black women were subjected to sexual harassment (Collins, 2009; hooks, 2000). While Black women worked outside of the home, they also tended to domestic and rearing duties at home, which provided them no pay (Davis, 1983; hooks, 1982). Eventually, migration and urbanization afforded Black women more work albeit with lower wages.

Black women, as paid domestic workers, were able to move from a residential servant to a daytime employee with the expansion of urban labor markets (Collins, 2009; Davis, 1983). In this role (and many others henceforth), Black women had an outsider-within status. Black women were still subjected to power imbalances and injustices due to their exploitation as 'Others' (Collins, 2009; hooks, 1982), but they were also exposed to hidden perspectives of predominantly White locations. This designation of 'Other' stems from the objectification of individuals who compose a subordinate group (Collins, 2009). As domestic workers, Black women were required to be submissive. The manner

in which they were addressed, attire they wore, sexual harassment endured, and being confined to certain areas of the house were all used to objectify Black women working as domestic workers (Collins, 2009; Davis, 1983). Although conditions remained oppressive for Black women, this new line of work afforded them the ability to devote more time to their family and progress towards some capacity of economic improvement. This improvement was more prominent with the creation of the Black middle class after World War II (Collins, 2009).

Progression of the political economy and Black political activism of the 1950s and 1960s encouraged stratification of Black social classes. Black women performing industrial and clerical work and low-paid service work were included in the Black working class (Collins, 2009). One implication for Black women within the low-paid working class was the increased number of individuals who were heads of single-parent households. These women also elected to pursue government assistance for support due to their poor circumstances. Alternately, middle-class Black women took advantage of positions as managers or other professional capacities post-World War II (Collins, 2009). While these women may have secured substantial earnings and established social status within America, their power as the Black middle-class still differed from Whites (Collins, 2009; hooks, 2000). The exclusion from certain occupations and confinement to lower-paying, lower status professional positions often resulted from the nexus of race, gender, and class oppressions experienced by Black middle-class women. The range of labor experiences Black women endured composes their viewpoint and connects to controlling images projected onto them.

## **Controlling images of Black women**

Controlling images of Black women were created to maintain the connecting systems of race, class, and gender oppression in America (Collins, 2009; hooks, 1982). These images began with slavery and continued throughout American history as Black women were treated as 'Others' (Collins, 2009; hooks, 1982). This objectification of Black women as 'Others' further instigated their erasure in America, evidenced by the lack of acknowledgement of their historical contributions and roles in America, especially their work towards liberation in times such as chattel slavery and the Civil Rights Movement. This erasure has subjected them to various debilitating circumstances and allowed their identity to be created by individuals other than themselves (Collins, 2009; hooks, 1982). The distorted stereotypes of mammies, matriarchs, welfare mothers, and Jezebels are all controlling images that perpetuate oppression of Black womanhood.

Chattel slavery sparked the manifestation of many interrelated controlling images of Black womanhood (Collins, 2009; Davis, 1983; hooks, 1982; White, 1985). The first, a mammy, was a devoted, docile domestic helper manifested to justify the exploitation of economic benefits of house slaves and provide an explanation for continued confinement of Black women to domestic work (Collins, 2009; hooks, 1982; White, 1985). Mammy was a symbol of subordination and reinforced the power of Whites in relation to Black women (hooks, 1982; White, 1985). In addition to being used as a tool for racial oppression by attempting to shape how Black women mothered their own children, the mammy likeness was used to perpetuate gender oppression by asserting mammies were asexual and their service was to only care for White families (Collins, 2009; White, 1985). The mammies were unattractive, overweight, and unclean, which contributed to

the nonthreatening characteristics of the mammy figure (hooks, 1982). Despite the objective to oppress Black women through use of the mammy image, it was not enough to dictate their behavior. Black women would be submissive in their work environment, but did not instill this behavior with their own children at home (Collins, 2009).

A second controlling image of Black womanhood instituted to control Black women's behavior was the matriarch. Matriarchs negatively personified what the Black woman represented in Black homes (hooks, 1982). This image conveyed a Black mother working countless hours, lacking oversight of her children, and emasculating her partner (Collins, 2009; hooks, 1982). These symbolizations allowed Black women to be used as scapegoats for the stagnation of Black children, creation of impoverished circumstances, division of the Black community, and separation from their men, all intersecting oppressions of class, race, and gender of Black women. Matriarchs represented the antithesis of mammies since they shunned personification of the submissive servant (hooks, 1982). Equating the image of Black women as strong members in their homes, symbolized through matriarchs, was not enough to maintain their oppressive state. Therefore, the portrayal of another controlling image, welfare mothers, was projected onto Black women.

Poor, working-class Black women were the sole target of the welfare mother image since they were recipients of welfare benefits. The political economy after post-World War II diminished job opportunities available in America, resulting in a number of unemployed Black women (Collins, 2009). While Black women's fertility was profitable during the time of slave breeding, it was frowned upon after the post-war era, believed to cripple the political and economic strength in America, and used as the basis for linking

oppressions of race, gender, and class (Collins, 2009). Images of a lazy Black woman complacent with receiving government assistance and causing her own poverty-stricken life provided an illustration of the welfare mother. The welfare mother was essentially another image of Black women who failed to uphold the mammy persona, as did the fourth controlling image of the Jezebel.

The Jezebel focused on regulating Black women's sexuality, and portrayed a whore or a sexually aggressive woman (Collins, 2009; White, 1985). Originating in chattel slavery times, the Jezebel figure legitimized the demeaning sexual treatment Black slave women were subjected to by White men. Black slave women were depicted as sexually insatiable and fertile (Collins, 2009; Davis, 1983; hooks, 1982; White, 1985). The modernized adaptation of the Jezebel is conveyed as a hoochie and freak (Collins, 2009). All of these symbols of Black womanhood associate Black women's sexuality in the frame of deviant behavior, a sharp contrast to the expression of White women who are posited as sexually passive.

Imagining of the mammy, matriarch, welfare mother, and Jezebel were all used to justify intertwined oppressions of race, gender, and class against Black women. The images of control present a foundation for objectification of Black women and the perception of their fertility and sexuality defined by elite White males (Collins, 2009; Davis, 1983; White, 1985). Additionally, the images communicated Black women's ordering in American social classes. In present day, legitimizing these controlling images occurs through social institutions such as schools, media, and government entities. However, Black women have rejected the objectification portrayed through controlling

images, and shifted to developing positive self-definitions to contradict internalization of mummies, matriarchs, welfare mothers, and Jezebels.

### **Black women's self-definition**

Surviving controlling images used to describe Black women requires the management of separate self-definitions—one to cope with controlling images of Black womanhood and the other which rejects these images and forms distinct consciousness. Discovering one's own self-definition is challenging when having to resolve the erasure Black women experience at the hands of externally created images and oppressive treatment, in addition to dealing with their positions as an outsider-within (Collins, 2009; hooks, 1982; White, 1985). However, since controlling images are not the reality for many Black women, Black women are able to resist acceptance of stereotypes and work to replace them with self-defined knowledge as a means of forming their own psyches. Black women's ability to form a self-defined standpoint has been possible by engaging in three different safe spaces: relationships with other Black women, music, and scholarship (Collins, 2009). These safe spaces are locations used to contradict controlling images of Black womanhood and nurture Black women's consciousness.

Formal and informal relationships amongst Black women facilitate the construction of an individual and grouped subconscious (Collins, 2009). The mother-daughter duo is one significant relationship of support for Black women. Black mothers teach their daughters the importance of survival and provide them with the essential knowledge to do so. Black women friendships provide a space to acknowledge "one another's humanity, specialness, and right to exist" (Collins, 2009, p. 113). Additionally, Black women who may be unfamiliar with each other, but recognize the need to applaud

Black womanhood, present another dimension of Black women relationships. This space of support is empowering by contributing to the creation of a self-definition for Black women. Black women's relationships with one another are vital to the formation of knowledge, but it is within music, another safe location, that the Black women's standpoint has also been articulated (Collins, 2009).

Considering not many Black women were educated and engaged in reading, the oral tradition of blues music was cathartic and served as a platform for self-definition expression (Collins, 2009). Singing the blues delivered a personalized rendition of not only the individual's standpoint, but of the collective group of Black women. Words blues singers recited were a form of activism against controlling images by which Black women were plagued. Singers like Ma Rainey, Sara Martin, and Bessie Smith sung about experiences of working-class Black women, their true womanhood, and the spirit of independence (Collins, 2009). The oral tradition of blues music was not the only medium in which Black women freely expressed their standpoint. Voices of Black women writers also established a safe space for Black women's self-definition.

Written literary works were an alternative primarily available to educated Black women. Some authors were able to generate writing that centered the working-class and reflected their experiences. These publications gave a voice to many Black women who felt succumbed to silence, given their oppressive situations (Guy-Sheftall, 1995; hooks, 1982). Emergence of Black women's scholarship and literature in the 1970s from authors like Toni Cade, Shirley Chisholm, Toni Morrison, and Audre Lorde provided an even more visible source of resistance and explored previously forbidden topics (Collins, 2009; Guy-Sheftall, 1995; James & Sharpley-Whiting, 2000). Black women's writings in

this time built on thoughts and perspectives expressed in blues and previous writings that portrayed the importance of Black women's relationships as safe spaces (Collins, 2009).

Black women's relationships, blues traditions, and voices of Black women writers, deliver alternatives to oppressive circumstances Black women were exposed to as 'Others', and reiterate the importance of a self-defined standpoint. Self-definition, self-valuation and respect, self-reliance and independence, and personal empowerment of Black women's consciousness surfaces from these safe spaces (Collins, 2009). The sexual politics of Black womanhood also influences Black women's consciousness.

### **Sexual politics of Black women**

Sexual politics is the association between sexuality and power. Controlling Black women's sexuality has been an important domination when examining the interlocking of race, gender, and class oppression of Black women. Intersecting oppressions are conceptualized through the approach of heterosexism as a system of power, sexuality within distinctive systems, and sexuality that joins the systems of oppressions.

As a system of power, heterosexism is normalized and the symbolic and structural dimensions of Black womanhood are emphasized. The symbolic dimension attributes sexual meanings used to describe and assess sexuality of Black women, such as the hoochie image (Collins, 2009). Conversely, the structural element defines how social organizations are formed to portray heterosexism as evidenced through laws and ideologies (Collins, 2009; Davis, 1983). For example, foregoing prosecution of Black women's rapists because of the characterization of Black women as freaks is a social practice (Collins, 2009). Despite the underlying power structure of heterosexism, Black women establish their own sexual meaning and practice by rejecting traditions and ideas

defined by others (Collins, 2009). Another approach to how intersecting oppressions sexually exploit Black women is through the pairing of systems of race, gender, and class.

Heterosexism combined with the systems of oppression commodifies and exploits Black women's sexuality. Regulating Black women's sexuality as a Jezebel condones class oppression by cultivating the stereotype of promiscuity (White, 1985). Controlling Black women's sexuality and fertility to prevent the combining of races is a racial oppression against Black women (Collins, 2009, Davis, 1983). Categorizing Black women based on sexuality and morality through controlling images is a mechanism of gender oppression. While each system of oppression is distinct, the joining of systems through sexuality of Black women attempts to control Black women's bodies.

Regulation of Black women's bodies evidenced through pornography, prostitution, and rape serve as a shared site of oppressions with Black women's sexuality as the focus (Collins, 2009; Davis, 1983; White, 1985). Pornography represents women as sex objects, includes a theme of sexual violence, invokes submissiveness of women, and profits from sexual exploitation of women (Collins, 2009; hooks, 2000). These portrayals are comparable to the dehumanizing conditions of slavery Black women endured, and the pornographic objectification of their bodies that continue today. Black women as prostitutes, an extension of the Jezebel and hoochie controlling images, exploit Black women economically and dehumanize them (Collins, 2009; White, 1985). Prostitution conveys Black women's bodies are sexual commodities for economic benefit; and any sexual act, such as rape, that can be committed against their bodies demeans Black women (Collins, 2009). Rape is a tool of sexual violence against Black

women (Collins, 2009; Davis, 1983; hooks, 1982; White, 1985). Rape and other sexual exploitive acts were legitimized and considered forms of domination against Black women. The legacy of Black women's experiences with pornography, prostitution, and rape have conditioned the communal, love relationships of Black women (Collins, 2009).

### **Black women's love relationships**

Sexual politics of Black womanhood have affected interpersonal love relationships Black women have with other individuals. Domination from sexual politics Black women experience invades their daily lives and consciousness (Collins, 2009). As a result, Black women's standpoint affects their interactions and relationships with Black men, Whites, and each other.

Tension between Black women and Black men is characterized as a volatile relationship, marked by love and violence (Collins, 2009, hooks, 2000). The love Black women feel for Black men can be traced to slave narratives describing the emancipated Black woman's journey to find lost loved ones, Black women's literature tributes to Black men, and love songs full of odes to Black men (Collins, 2009). Trouble between Black women and Black men arises when the emphasis on opposing sex roles, derived from White male standards, influences the experiences of Black women and men (hooks, 1982). Black women often reject expected gendered behavior, such as passiveness and subordination, commanded by Black men (hooks, 1982). Some Black men who are rejected may resort to physical and emotional abuse; and the strained relationship with and rejection by Black men often results in Black women ending up alone (Collins, 2009; hooks, 2000).

Despite desires to form loving relationships, Black women find themselves without a partner. Solitude Black women experience generates circumstances in which Black women focus their energies into motherhood by themselves or their career. Longing for the ideal Black man is heightened with pain when Black women realize Black men pick non-Black women, especially White women, over them (Collins, 2009; hooks, 1982; hooks, 2000). Rejection from Black men for women who embody standards set by Whites and the history of sexual politics with White men that White women turned a blind eye to, shape associations Black and White women have (Collins, 2009; hooks, 1982). Conversely, Black women interested in crossing color lines to date White men face the horrifying legacy of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse endured by Black women at the hands of White men (Collins, 2009). This, as well as the likelihood of being a traitor, creates unresolved tension resulting in Black women to refrain from pursuing long lasting relationships with White men. The dominant conversation about Black womanhood and their love relationships is typically in reference to heterosexual associations, yet the standpoint regarding Black lesbianism is also crucial to understanding Black women's relationships with each other.

An analysis of Black women's love relationships begins with addressing the sources of pain, often found in how Black women view themselves and love other Black women (Collins, 2009). Loving other Black women can be alarming if, as a result, heterosexual Black women discover romantic or sexual expressions towards other Black women. Lesbianism is stigmatized and the fear of this label paired with homophobic attitudes, influences Black women's ideas and relationships with one another (Collins, 2009; hooks, 1989). Dismissing the dual stigma appropriated to Black heterosexual

women as hoochies, and Black lesbians as sexual deviants; redefining beauty inclusive of Black women; and discovering means for Black women to learn expressions of love for one another are key to contradicting systems of oppression (Collins, 2009). Not only does the harmful and warped feelings birthed from the oppression of Black women influence their standpoint about love relationships, it also transcends to their specialized knowledge of motherhood.

### **Motherhood of Black women**

Based on controlling images that have tainted the perception of Black women, negative assumptions about Black women and motherhood have resonated in America. The conceptualization of motherhood from Black women's standpoint aims to debunk the representation of Black mothers as defined and interpreted by Black and White males (White, 1985). Black women experience contrasting depictions of motherhood as explained through five different thoughts: (a) mothering and othermothering, (b) mother and daughter relationship, (c) community othermothering activism, (d) power symbolism of motherhood, and (e) individual opinion of motherhood.

Biological mothers, also referred to as bloodmothers, have the expectation of caring for and rearing their own children (Collins, 2009). Despite this expectation, Black communities have realized mothering is not always feasible for one person. To assist with mothering responsibilities, Black women have also taken on the role as othermothers to support bloodmothers. Othermothers included, but were not limited to grandmothers, sisters, aunts, or cousins, but not all networks of motherhood figures had to be of biological kin (Collins, 2009). Neighbors also shared responsibilities and offered childcare assistance and other supports when needed (hooks, 2000). Women-centered

family structures were important to Black women and their children for socializing, procreating, supporting, and other differing purposes to endure and confront oppression (Collins, 2009). Confronting oppression was an emergent theme specific for Black women mothering their daughters, another depiction of motherhood.

Black mothers have to balance teaching their daughters how to survive systems of oppression by fitting in and risking succumbing to their own subordination (Collins, 2009). Conversely, if Black daughters have a strong sense of self, rejection of oppressive systems could lead to them not being able to survive physically. Black mothers have to negotiate this spectrum by imparting tools and knowledge necessary for their daughters to persevere as Black women in America, but also condition them to renounce the systems of oppression Black women consistently encounter (Collins, 2009). Navigating between these mindsets sparks an emotionally intense relationship between Black mothers and daughters often resulting in an exchange that is tough and unaffectionate. Othermothers help alleviate some of this tension by serving as confidants for daughters and communicating efforts Black mothers employed to provide a “physical and psychic base for their children” (Collins, 2009, p. 202). In addition to offering emotional support to Black daughters, there are othermothers who extend their care to the entire community.

Black women community othermothers consider biologically unrelated children as members of their own families and care for them as such (Collins, 2009). The sentiment for community children ignites a devotion in some Black women to advocate for causes that address needs of their own children, neighborhood children, and the entire community. For example, the community othermother mindset hints to the relationship between Black women teachers and their Black students (Collins, 2009). This

relationship extends beyond the classroom and traditional mentoring in which these Black teachers engage in academic mothering or “mothering the mind” (Collins, 2009, p. 207). Community work othermothers demonstrate is important to the power of motherhood.

All expressions of motherhood exerted by Black women are symbols of power within their communities (Collins, 2009; White, 1985). Community work Black women are immersed in displays a vital foundation for power within Black culture (Collins, 2009). The purpose of this work is to uplift members of the community so they can be self-sufficient and independent. This work is mistaken for a secondary status rather than an inherent symbol of power (Collins, 2009). Motherhood, as a symbol of power, is relative to the Black women’s personal definition of mothering.

Considering oppressions Black women confront, Black motherhood can be empowering and burdensome. The contradictory nature of mothering frames differing opinions of mothering, which varies for Black women (Collins, 2009). Contrary to traditional ideals of family and Black community reproduction expectations, unintended pregnancies and responsibilities associated with parenting left many Black women resenting their children and dismal circumstances (Collins, 2009). Pain associated with being aware of the oppressions Black children stand to face in the future is another aspect of motherhood Black women occupy. The protection and survival from social conditions of Black children are of concern for Black women. In addition, the sentiment of sacrificing their own dreams and realizing their full potential and creativity occurs when Black women experience motherhood (Collins, 2009). Daily demands of mothering suppress the self-actualization of Black women’s creativity (Collins, 2009). Despite these

frustrations, Black women still find some enjoyment in Black motherhood. Affirmation experienced from Black children and motherhood in the midst of oppression is one of many sources of Black women's activism, the last core theme of BFT.

### **Activism of Black women**

Black women's activism can be displayed through different forms and exercised through varying activities. Black women's involvement in public displays of activism was considered nonexistent because of their exclusion from positions of formal authority and membership within political organizations (Collins, 2009; Guy-Sheftall, 1995). This limitation of Black women's activism overlooks less obvious, but equally meaningful expressions of political activity within Black communities (Collins, 2009). For example, Black women fought for anti-lynching legislation, union status as workers, reproductive rights, and improved working conditions (Guy-Sheftall, 1995). Black women's activism in America encompasses two different dimensions: (a) struggles associated with group survival concerned with establishing domains in which Black women were influential; and (b) struggles associated with transforming institutions by modifying their policies and procedures (Collins, 2009).

The scarcity of resources to challenge oppressive institutions directly spurs Black women to utilize other strategies in the struggle for group survival (Collins, 2009). One strategy was for Black women to embrace and empower their family structures and children by focusing on self-valuation and self-reliance (Collins, 2009). Black women's dedication to education was another important element of their activism (hooks, 1989). Black people were believed to be intellectually inferior dating back to chattel slavery times; yet the innate desire for knowledge was always present and education was deemed

a necessity (Davis, 1983; hooks, 1989). The acquisition of education was a tool of empowerment and myth debunker of inferiority for the Black community. Black churches were vessels also used to support progression and development of Black people and their communities (Collins, 2009). Black women encouraged education by learning the Bible and fundraising as a source for economic gain. Although not open to all social classes, Black women's participation in club organizations and sororities were platforms in which Black women uplifted their communities (Collins, 2009; Guy-Sheftall, 1995). Political strategies employed in the crusade for group survival were interdependent to Black women's struggle to incite social justice within formal institutions.

Black women's activism to transform social institutions extended to various domains, such as the government, economy, and education, which restricted the lives of Black women (Collins, 2009; Guy-Sheftall, 1995; James & Sharpley-Whiting, 2000). Forming coalitions have been vital to Black women's pursuit of changing institutions as evidenced in the civil rights, feminist, and labor movements (Collins, 2009; Davis, 1983). Black women's leadership within organizations has helped propel changes within institutions. Rather than teaching individuals how to follow, as leaders, Black women believed people should be self-reliant and strived to empower them. This philosophy of empowerment is one way Black women use their influence to shape organizational behavior (Collins, 2009). Black women are also able to alter policies and procedures from the top-down when they are in positions of authority in organizations. Connections between Black women's consciousness and their activism within communities for group survival and change within institutions are necessary when contemporary challenges related to systemic oppressions are prevalent.

The circumstances Black women encounter shape the unique lens they have about themselves and the world in which they live. The core themes of Black women's standpoint, as articulated by BFT, are important to understand the viewpoint of Black women, especially those serving in roles of higher education administration. The next section provides a review of existing literature regarding the use of BFT as a theoretical lens to understand the experiences of Black women higher education administrators.

### **BFT as a Theoretical Framework for Black Women in Higher Education Administration**

Scholarly literature focused on unique circumstances Black women higher education administrator's face due to the intersections of race and gender is dearth, yet emerging (Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Dowdy, 2011; Jean-Marie et al., 2009; Lloyd-Jones, 2009; Price, 2015; Ravello, 2016; Wright, 2008). However, research that has given attention to BFT, or other perspectives that recognize diverse identities, as a theoretical framework to investigate the leadership experiences of Black women in higher education administration is practically nonexistent (Enke, 2014; Jean-Marie et al., 2009). This discovery provides an opportunity for the study to contribute to the limited body of knowledge that situates the perspectives of Black women in leadership positions.

A review of the literature revealed scholarly works that have used BFT to understand the experiences of Black women leaders in higher education administration. West's (2015) examination of Black women student affairs professionals at PWIs investigated their racial gendered experiences as it related to underrepresentation, isolation, and marginalization within their positions. Respondents in Clayborne and Hamrick's (2007) study cited their unofficial role as caregiver in their student affairs

position was associated with the stereotypical image of a mammy, which dates back to chattel slavery days. The Black women in the study believed the stereotypes marginalized them to an outsider status based on their race and gender and possibly influenced their ability to advance within their organization (Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007). Holmes (2003) reported Black women administrators lacked genuine collegial relationships with their White counterparts, subjected themselves to unnecessary expectations to combat stereotypes, and completed additional duties and service all resulting from their race and gender status.

Although BFT has framed the exploration of experiences of Black women academic leaders, studies that rely on it as a framework to understand the impact of race and gender on leadership experiences of Black women in executive-level administrative positions is lacking. The value of BFT remains relevant and useful to the lives of Black women, especially in higher education administration; and it is a suitable framework for the study as the core themes and key concepts offer a deeper understanding to the experiences of Black women in higher education administration. The next section provides a summary of the literature reviewed for the study.

### **Summary**

This chapter outlined literature reviewed about Black women's status as leaders in academic postsecondary administration. First detailed was the historical context of women in leadership, followed by literature outlining the issues contemporary women, including Black women, in leadership encounter. Next, the literature review entailed a historic account of women, and specifically Black women, as administrators within higher education. While there has been progress, women continue to endure barriers and

challenges as administrators on university and college campuses, as described in the section, which outlined the literature illustrating their experiences as contemporary leaders. A discussion of the coping mechanisms utilized by women, and particularly Black women, to address their experiences followed. Rounding out the literature review was a presentation of Black Feminist Theory and an explanation of how commingling Black women's standpoint with theory offers sensemaking of the experiences and knowledge of Black women higher education administrators. The next chapter discusses specific details related to the methodology for the research study.

## **CHAPTER 3. RESEARCH METHODS**

This chapter outlines the methodological approach that was used for the research study, which explored the lived experiences of Black women executive higher education administrators. Research questions which guided the study are: (1) How do Black women perceive and describe the influence of race and gender on their leadership experiences as executive-level administrators in higher education? and (2) What strategies (if any) do Black women in executive-level administrative positions use to cope with the perceived influence of race and gender on their leadership experiences as executive-level administrators in higher education? This chapter details the research design including the research setting, sample selection and procedures, data collection methods, and data analysis techniques.

### **Research Approach and Study Design**

Qualitative research provides an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the viewpoints and perspectives of people in relation to a problem (Creswell, 2009; Yin, 2011). Qualitative study of educational leadership has expanded consciousness of varying dynamics within the context of educational organizations (Brooks & Normore, 2015); specifically, the importance and significance of “leaders as makers of meaning,” which is challenging to extrapolate with quantitative research (Bryman, 2004, p. 762). The research questions aimed to explore qualitative factors in behavior and experience of Black women educational leaders (Moustakas, 1994). Thus, a qualitative approach supported the discovery of reality as articulated by Black women in executive-level administrative positions within higher education.

To understand how race and gender influence the leadership experiences of Black women in executive administrative positions within higher education, the researcher employed a phenomenological inquiry method, specifically transcendental phenomenology. Phenomenology is appropriate when a problem is important to understand from the shared experiences of many individuals about a phenomenon of interest and it provides an opportunity to describe commonalities as experienced by participants (Creswell, 2007). Furthermore, examining common experiences provides an opportunity for practical application, in which practices and policies concerning the phenomenon can be established (Creswell, 2007). Through phenomenological methods, the shared, lived experiences of participants in this study, as it relates to their perception of interlocking social systems of race and gender, or intersectionality, were explored (Crenshaw, 1991; Creswell, 2007; Creswell, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). According to Crenshaw (1991), intersectionality acknowledges Black women occupy various social identity categories.

Phenomenology is rooted in philosophy, as it seeks to explore true knowledge (Stewart & Mickunas, 1974). With much of its foundation attributed to German mathematician Edmund Husserl (Creswell, 2007), others such as Heidegger and Sartre have expounded upon Husserl's ideas creating varying conceptualizations of phenomenology (Stewart & Mickunas, 1974). Despite the variations, there are philosophical perspectives central to phenomenology, which include: (a) focusing on individual lived experiences; (b) understanding experiences are derived from human consciousness; (c) approaching research in which previous assumptions of experiences

are released; and (d) developing descriptions, not explanations, of the essence of a lived phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990).

The type of phenomenological approach selected for the research study was transcendental phenomenology, as articulated by Moustakas (1994). Transcendental phenomenology emphasizes the human experience and considers only the participants' description of what appeared and a reflection of their experiences (Moustakas, 1994). The researchers' interpretation of phenomena experienced by participants is not a focus when utilizing transcendental phenomenology (Creswell, 2007). Because the research focus is on the descriptions of how race and gender influence the leadership experiences of Black women in executive levels of higher education administration, transcendental phenomenology allowed for the collection of individual accounts of their experiences with the phenomena and captured essences of the experience from individual meanings. The next section describes the research setting for the study.

### **Research Setting**

While the focus of the study is on Black women, the researcher was interested in exploring their individual leadership experiences and identifying a shared reality amongst Black women executive-level administrators who are/have been employed at PWIs. Historically, American higher education was exclusionary and many institutions would bar admission to individuals based on race, gender, and other social identities (Thelin, 2001). By law, Blacks, in particular, were prohibited from pursuing a college education in the South, and this restriction was a widely adopted custom in other regions of the United States (Roebuck & Murty, 1993). Additionally, Blacks were deliberately prohibited from working as faculty and administrators at PWIs (Benjamin, 1991).

Eventually, colleges and universities created explicitly for Black Americans to acquire an education were established (Betsey, 2008); and HBCUs emerged as a space for Blacks to embrace their culture during a time whence segregation marred the nation (Cantey, Bland, Mack, & Joy-Davis, 2013).

Since that time, Black women have made some advances within higher education administration, but not without adversity (Barksdale, 2006; Gamble & Turner, 2015; Holmes, 2003; Jackson & Harris, 2007; Lloyd-Jones, 2009; Miller & Vaughn, 1997; Moses, 1997; Mosley, 1980; Patitu & Hinton, 2003; Smith & Crawford, 2007; West, 2015). And although still underrepresented, Black women have ascended into more executive-level leadership roles at PWIs than they previously have (Barksdale, 2006; Enke, 2014), they are not a priority at these institutions (Moore & Wagstaff, 1974). With present-day HBCUs tending to be more racially desegregated than PWIs in terms of student enrollment and administrative staff (Roebuck & Murty, 1993), Black women administrators experience more gender-related issues at HBCUs rather than challenges based on race (Becks-Moody, 2004; Bonner, 2001). Thus, the institutional context of a PWI was more fitting to explore how the intersection of race and gender inform the leadership experiences of Black women in higher education administration than HBCUs. Additionally, because of the paucity of literature describing the influence of race and gender on Black women in executive administrative positions at PWIs (Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Enke, 2014; Jean-Marie et al., 2009; Lloyd-Jones, 2009; West, 2015), it is necessary to extend understanding of what they experience. The next section outlines the research sample for the study.

## Research Sample

It was the intent of the researcher to identify a reasonably homogenous sample of participants to study the influence of race and gender on the leadership experiences of Black women in executive administrative higher education positions as articulated in the research question. The research sample was purposefully selected in order to identify individuals who can purposefully inform the research questions (Creswell, 2007; Maxwell, 2013). Specifically, through a combination of criterion and snowball sampling, which are types of purposeful sampling, potential research participants were chosen to participate in the study (Creswell, 2007; Glesne, 2011; Yin, 2011). Criterion sampling involves setting criteria, which all participants must meet (Creswell, 2007). Snowball sampling grants researchers knowledge of possible participants by relying on networks of existing participants and those who know people who fit the research study (Glesne, 2011; Yin, 2011).

In regards to criterion sampling, the selection criteria for participants were individuals who: (a) self-identify as women; (b) self-identify as Black; (c) held, or currently hold, executive-level higher education administrative positions reflected in titles such as president/chancellor, vice president/vice chancellor, chief academic officer, chief student affairs officer, and dean for at least one year; and (d) perceived, or currently perceive, their race and gender identities influence(d) their leadership experiences as executive-level administrators. The decision to study Black women in executive-level positions was based on those categories that represent the highest tiers of administration at colleges and universities. These formal positions of authority often mean the pinnacle of careers, and Black women who have attained upward mobility have a different positionality and can offer unique insight on how race and gender interact in regards to

their leadership experiences. Additionally, of the studies conducted about Black women in higher education administration, many have focused solely on the role of the presidency (Jackson & Harris, 2007; Waring, 2003; Wright, 2008), with limited literature that speaks to other executive-level administrative positions (Lloyd-Jones, 2009). One year of experience in the executive-level position assumed participants were acclimated to requirements of their role and the institutional culture. As to not discount within-group differences that affect Black women, other social identities, such as dis/ability, sexual orientation, religious or spiritual affiliation, and age, were not limited as specific criteria for potential participants in the study. However, the race and gender identities of the participants were of interest for the research study and were the focal points. Also, the perception of the influence of race and gender on their leadership experiences was included as a criterion in order for the researcher to identify and articulate a common understanding and essence of the research topic from the participants (Creswell, 2007).

Once the researcher received approval from the University of Kentucky's Institutional Review Board (IRB), recruitment activities for the research study ensued in November of 2017. With reference to snowball sampling, the researcher contacted in person, by phone, and email her personal and professional networks to solicit names of Black women in executive leadership roles in higher education administration not readily accessible to her. The researcher also relied on the networks of her friends and colleagues to solicit other potential participants. An invitation email was extended to individuals to solicit their participation and a slightly modified version asking for recommendations for participants or for the invitation email to be forwarded was used for the researcher's network to send to their contacts. The recruitment email can be found in Appendix A.

Follow-up emails were sent to potential participants when no response was received within a week. Using the Internet was also a useful online recruitment tool since social networks may promote access for hard to reach populations (Benfield & Szlemko, 2006). The researcher solicited participation by posting the study description on the social media platform Facebook, specifically in a group for Black women employed in higher education.

From the aforementioned recruitment activities, the researcher secured contact information or names for nine Black women from the researcher's network and two Black women expressed interest from the social media posting. Four of the women identified from snowball sampling never responded to the initial email and/or follow-up communication so the researcher ceased outreach to them. The seven remaining Black women expressed interest in participating in the study. To confirm they met the selection criteria, respondents were required to answer questions from a demographic survey (see Appendix B). Prior to sending out the survey via email, the researcher noted their current positions based on their email signatures and conducted an internet search of the names of each Black woman to find any relevant information, such as organizational charts and curricula vitae (CVs), to unofficially confirm they met the criteria. The researcher confirmed the PWI designation for the institution in which the respondent held the executive-level position by accessing The Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) fall 2015 provisional enrollment data by race/ethnicity for each institution as that was the latest dataset available. Two of the respondents did not respond to the demographic survey after multiple follow-up attempts. One of the respondents did not meet the selection criteria based on the requirement of holding an executive-level

position at a PWI, as the student demographics at her institution were no longer considered predominantly White. The researcher extended appreciation for her willingness to participate.

The remaining four Black women offered responses to the study and were assigned a pseudonym upon confirmation of them meeting the study criteria. The first letter of their chosen name coincided with the order in which they were interviewed, following the letters of the alphabet. Their given names also honor bold women in Black History. The first question asked the participants to reply with their race/ethnicity. Angela, noted she was Black, Bridget and Claudette identified as African American, and Dorothy replied African American and included Black in parenthesis denoting they were interchangeable. All of the participants self-identified as female when prompted for their gender. Each participant answered yes to the question that inquired about them currently or previously holding a higher education administrative position that would be regarded as executive-level. For the fourth question, Angela named the title of her executive-level position as Dean, Bridget reported Associate Dean, Claudette replied Vice President, and Dorothy answered with three titles: Vice President, Provost, and Dean. The fifth question prompted the women to disclose the number of years they had been in that position. Angela was Dean for three years, Bridget had been in her role for two years, Claudette replied under a year, and Dorothy stated 13 years total. The sixth question inquired whether the executive-level positions the women held were at Predominantly White Institutions. All of the participants confirmed they were at PWIs. The final question on the questionnaire asked if the women believed their racial and gendered identities influenced their leadership experiences as a higher education executive-level

administrator at a PWI. Angela, Bridget, and Claudette responded “yes” and Dorothy provided her affirmation with an exclamation of “Absolutely!”

Angela sent the link to her professional website when she inquired to express her interest. Her current position was assistant dean. Because the study criteria did not explicitly include assistant and associate levels, the researcher initially excluded her as being eligible for the study. It was not until a follow-up email in which the respondent forwarded her CV that included her previous position of dean, reporting directly to the institution’s president, and duties of that role that the researcher felt she would fit the criteria. This information was also confirmed by the questionnaire responses. Bridget answered the survey questions by phone. Her fitting the criteria based on being an associate dean was also questioned. The respondent described the scope of her position and the researcher was able to confirm it was an executive-level role by comparing the definition to the list of responsibilities and oversight the respondent had at her institution. Claudette and Dorothy both responded to the questionnaire via email. Although Claudette was newly in her present role of vice president, she had held other executive-level positions for at least a year as outlined in her CV found online and the researcher was able to substantiate her meeting the study criteria. During the recruitment phase, the researcher realized that position titles are ambiguous and do not always accurately reflect the level of responsibility, as was the case for Bridget. Thus, following up with the respondents for any clarification was necessary.

After confirming the study criteria were met, the researcher sent follow-up information to schedule the face-to-face interviews with the participants. The assistants of Claudette and Dorothy handled some, if not all, of the arrangements of their respective

interviews while Angela and Bridget managed the details of their interviews personally. Interviews for Angela and Bridget were held in December of 2017, Claudette's interview took place in January of 2018, and Dorothy's interview occurred in February of 2018. The participants' rights were articulated to them with an informed consent document (see Appendix C), which was emailed to them in advance and signed in-person during the interviews.

A phenomenological approach suggests studying several participants who have shared experience with a phenomenon of interest (Creswell, 2007). Since phenomenology does not encourage generalizing, as the objective is to discover the uniqueness of a specific experience, a smaller sample size is suitable and preferred (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2011). Snowball sampling was also used to inquire if selected participants knew of any other Black women administrators who would be interested in participating in the study. Angela offered the names of two Black women executive-level administrators in her network. One was a vice president and the other a dean. The researcher opted to hold off contacting them unless the desired number of participants was not reached through the other recruitment activities. The Black women held similar roles to Angela and the researcher was interested in a diversity in executive-level positions of the participants, if possible. Bridget suggested the name of a dean, who she touted as having a very intriguing story, but had no relationship or connection with her to extend an introduction on the researcher's behalf. The researcher emailed her, but she declined participation as she was already involved in a research study on a similar topic and would not have time to devote to the researcher's study. The next section describes the data collection methods for the research study.

## Data Collection

Evidence collected from phenomenological research is obtained through first-person accounts of life experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Collins (1986) asserted Black women's marginalization in the White, male-dominated field of postsecondary education creates a "distinctive voice and epistemological standpoint" (Wilder, Jones, & Osborne-Lampkin, 2013, p. 29). The researcher collected data from Black women's standpoint that describes what Black women experience as executive-level higher education administrators within the context of intersectionality, and how they experience/have experienced it within PWIs to acquire an understanding of the essences of their experiences and wholeness of life (Moustakas, 1994). The study followed Moustakas' (1994) approach to conducting transcendental phenomenological research, with data collection beginning with phenomenological reduction prior to facilitating in-depth interviews.

The specific step of phenomenological reduction that is important prior to conducting phenomenological research is Epoche. Epoche is the process of suppressing any biases or preconceptions about experiences to allow new knowledge to enter into consciousness (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher must bracket out her own knowledge and experiences with the phenomenon in order to understand from the participants' perspectives and describe their shared experiences (Creswell, 2007). Moustakas (1944) shared this is a difficult undertaking and commanded phenomenon should be allowed to be what it is when it appears. Engaging in Epoche, prior to, during, and after the data collection methods, mitigates understandings and biases from influencing the research study (Moustakas, 1994). In order to set aside personal views through the Epoche process, the researcher reflected on her own leadership experiences working at a PWI as

it relates to being a Black woman in an administrative role. A journal was used to document this reflection throughout data collection and analysis, and allowed for a fresh perspective and discovery of new knowledge (Creswell, 2007), and ensured the researcher's own perceptions and interpretations were not injected into the research study.

The primary data source of in-depth, qualitative interviews offered rich descriptions from participants (Moustakas, 1994). A qualitative interview using a phenomenological approach follows a relaxed and reciprocal format (Moustakas, 1994) and lends itself to engaging in a conversation (Yin, 2011). Following a semi-structured approach, open-ended questions facilitated the gathering of data that generated descriptions of the experiences and offered understanding of commonalities experienced by participants (Creswell, 2007). A semi-structured format permitted the addition or replacement of previously established questions as they emerged while interviewing the participant (Glesne, 2011) and discovering their experiences as it relates to the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

Because of the sensitive nature of the research questions and the importance of witnessing nonverbal cues and other contexts firsthand, interviews were conducted in-person, based on the participant's availability, and at a location of their choice (Creswell, 2007). When following phenomenology, long interviews are typically conducted (Moustakas, 1994); the interviews for this research study ranged approximately 60 minutes to 3 hours and 45 minutes. Interviews were audio recorded using an Olympus Digital Voice Recorder Model WS-853 and a voice recorder application for iPhone as a back-up in order to capture a verbatim account of the conversation. Recording the

interviews equipped the researcher with a detailed account of what was communicated and encouraged attentiveness to the conversation (Glesne, 2011).

Black Feminist Theory informed the interview questions and protocol for the study. This theory, centered on Black Feminism, provides a generalized explanation of how sexism and racism shapes Black women's point of view (Collins, 2009). Using this theory to guide the creation of interview questions facilitated an understanding of how race and gender influence the leadership experiences of Black women in executive administration positions at higher education institutions. A list of questions, designed to conjure a detailed account of the participant's lived experiences as executive-level leaders at a PWI and in what contexts, was created for the study (Moustakas, 1994; Yin, 2011). The interview protocol is presented with Appendix D.

Literary sources are used during phenomenological research and were collected during this phase (van Manen, 1990). Since artists are involved in the creation of art, any relevant forms of art were an extension of the participants' lived experiences and served as a source of data (van Manen, 1990). Prior to requesting any form of art, it was necessary to determine if the additional forms of data were useful extensions of the data collected from the qualitative interviews (Gribch, 2007) and examine them for authenticity (Merriam, 2009). Each participant was asked during the interview phase if they had any resources they were willing to share with the researcher, which served as evidence of their subjective realities as an executive-level higher education administrator. Only Dorothy offered a relevant document that was reviewed by the researcher at a later date.

Additionally, the researcher composed extensive interview and field notes, memos, and journal entries, which served as data. Field notes, memos and journals provided the opportunity to review personal reflections and commentary about the research study (Yin, 2011); and were useful in helping to understand the research topic (Maxwell, 2013). To further preserve confidentiality and privacy of the participants, all data generated were safely and securely stored on a password-protected computer or stored in a locked filing cabinet at the researcher's private residence. The next section describes the techniques that were used to analyze the data collected.

### **Data Analysis Methods**

The goal of analyzing data is to make sense of what was seen, read, or heard during the data collection phase in order to answer the research questions (Merriam, 2009). Analyzing data collected is an iterative process (Creswell, 2009; Maxwell, 2013). Data analysis began shortly after collecting data and continued throughout the entire time of conducting research (Maxwell, 2013). The qualitative data that were analyzed for the research study included interview transcripts, a literary source, and researcher-generated documents.

The first step in analyzing the semi-structured interviews was transcribing the recordings verbatim and saving the transcripts in a word processing document file. One of the recordings was outsourced to a third-party for transcribing because of the duration of the interview. The other interviews were transcribed by the researcher using Express Scribe transcription software and a foot pedal control, WAVpedal. The interview transcripts were sent to each participant to give them the opportunity to review and provide any comments prior to moving forward with the data analysis. Prior to analyzing

the data, the researcher read the interview transcripts for content and to become familiar with the participants' experiences. Since phenomenology was the research approach, a phenomenological process of analyzing data from the interviews was appropriate. Moustakas' (1994) approach to phenomenological research, which the author cites is a modified version of van Kaam's method, offers systematic steps to analyzing data collected. When reviewing the interview transcripts line by line, all statements significant to the research topic, each having equal relevance, were highlighted (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). This process is horizontalization (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher then reread each transcript, paying attention to the highlighted meaning statements, and eliminated any statements that were not necessary to understand the participants' experiences and could not be labeled (Moustakas, 1994). Once all statements were horizontalized, what remained were invariant constituents of the participant's experience as executive-level higher education administrators (Moustakas, 1994).

Coding, a type of categorizing strategy, creates descriptions of what the participants experienced (Maxwell, 2013), as outlined in remaining steps of phenomenological reduction (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher accomplished this through two cycle methods of coding, with the first being initial coding. Initial coding is an open-ended method that allows the researcher to label what they infer from the data (Saldaña, 2009). Initial coding was accomplished by reading each transcript and making notes on them using the language from the participants or other descriptors that related to their experiences. After rereading the transcripts and reflecting, the researcher discovered it was often necessary to consolidate or relabel some of the codes created during initial coding because they had similar meanings or a more expressive label was identified. A

second cycle method of coding, focused coding, was used in order to consolidate the meaning of the initial codes to create appropriate categories and themes (Saldaña, 2009). After comparing the data, the researcher categorized the codes with related meanings and overlapping concepts and then collapsed them into common groupings (Maxwell, 2013). From there, similarities and patterns amongst the categories were identified and clustered to create major themes, which captured the essence of the Black women's experiences.

The task of developing textural descriptions of the phenomenon was the last step in phenomenological reduction and involved using verbatim examples from the individual participant experiences (Moustakas, 1994). After developing textural descriptions, the task of imaginative variation occurred (Moustakas, 1994). Through imaginative variation, the researcher considered possible meanings of the participants' experiences and uncovered the context or setting that detailed the how of what the participant experienced in relation to the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). These are structural descriptions and included references to "time, space, bodily concerns, materiality, causality, relation to self, or relation to others" (Moustakas, 1994, p.99). Synthesis was the last step of the phenomenological research process (Moustakas, 1994). During this stage, textural and structural descriptions for each participant were integrated to create textural-structural descriptions of their experience as executive-level higher education administrators. Using the textural and structural narratives, statements revealing a description of the experience of the phenomenon to represent all of the research participants were constructed (Moustakas, 1994).

Dorothy was the only participant to offer a document that was relevant to the research study. The document was a firsthand account of her spiritual relationship with

God and corroborated many of the details she described in her face-to-face interview. The literary resource underwent a similar process of data analysis as the semi-structured interviews. Gribch (2007) described a thematic approach of content analysis that is useful in pinpointing textual patterns from written documents. An inductive approach to analysis was followed, which involved coding any concepts or situations, noted during data collection, with labels using a combination of words or sentences (Creswell, 2007; Gribch, 2007). The codes were combined with the textural and structural details found when analyzing the interview transcripts to arrive at general descriptions and theme connections (Creswell, 2009). This process was also used to analyze the researcher-generated documents of interview and field notes, memos, and journal entries.

Creswell (2009) noted validity in qualitative research involves checking for accuracy in the study findings. In an effort to establish validity, or credibility of data collected for this study, the researcher incited member checks. Member checking provided participants the opportunity to review data collected and any interpretations generated, to ensure the truth was documented and articulated correctly (Yin, 2011). Member checking for this study included sending participants the verbatim transcript for her interview and allowing the opportunity for review and feedback. Angela identified a few places in her transcript that she could offer additional information or clarifying comments. After following up with her, she decided not to edit the transcript as not to hold up the researcher in moving forward with the research study. None of the other participants offered any changes to their transcript. Participants were also invited to review and offer feedback regarding the textural and structural descriptions that emerged during the coding phase of data analysis. Three of the four participants responded to this

invitation by offering words of encouragement and stating no changes needed to be made to the textural and structural descriptions of their experiences. Additionally, capturing rich descriptions of firsthand perspectives from the participants extended validity of the study's findings (Maxwell, 2013; Yin, 2011). Also, utilizing different data collection methods (i.e. interviewing, reviewing documents) allowed the researcher to gain a better understanding of the influence of race and gender on the leadership experiences of Black women executive-level administrators (Maxwell, 2013). This strategy, referred to as triangulation, helped determine the validity of the data collected and strengthened the credibility of the data (Creswell, 2009; Maxwell, 2013). Lastly, disclosing any biases clarified what lens the study findings may be influenced by (Creswell, 2009; Yin, 2011). The next section describes the role of the researcher and reveals the biases brought to the study.

### **Role of the Researcher**

Researchers serve as the instruments when conducting qualitative studies (Creswell, 2007; Maxwell, 2013). As the instrument, researchers collect data through document examination, behavior observations, and participant conversations (Creswell, 2007). Being the instrument also includes bringing in assumptions, values, and beliefs when conducting studies (Glesne, 2007); and separating any presuppositions that could be harmful to the study and undermine any researcher biases (Maxwell, 2013). Thus, it was important to acknowledge any biases as the researcher, which were documented through memos and journal entries continuously throughout the duration of the study (Maxwell, 2013), and convey identified biases to the reader.

My interest in this research area is very personal. I self-identify as a Black woman. I have worked in higher education administration at a PWI since 2009. I aspire to attain an executive-level position in higher education in the future; and throughout my time in postsecondary education, I have rarely seen many Black women at that level. My connectedness to higher education as a Black woman administrator has facilitated my development as a scholar. The interactions I have experienced as an administrator have informed my research desires and scholarly interests. When I first began researching this topic, Mosley's (1980) call for the need of "Black women to write about Black women" (p. 309) resonated with me. And I desire to emerge as an arbiter of the experiences of Black women higher education administrators and add to the paucity of literature about this often forgotten population.

### **Summary**

This chapter outlined the methodological approach that was utilized for the research study, which sought to examine how being a Black woman informs the leadership experiences of executive-level higher education administrators. First, the research design was discussed, followed by details of the research setting and sample. Then, sections describing the data collection and data analysis methods were presented. A synopsis of the role of the researcher concluded the chapter. The next chapter details the study findings.

## **CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS**

This research study examined the lived experiences of four Black women who previously served or currently serve in an executive-level higher education administration position at a predominantly White institution. The qualitative phenomenological study explored how the participants perceived and described their leadership experiences as higher education administrators with an executive-level position. The following research questions guided the study: (1) How do Black women perceive and describe the influence of race and gender on their leadership experiences as executive-level administrators in higher education? and (2) What strategies (if any) do Black women in executive-level administrative positions use to cope with the perceived influence of race and gender on their leadership experiences as executive-level administrators in higher education? This chapter provides a description of the participants and findings ascertained from in-person interviews and review of relevant documents.

### **Study Participants**

This study included four executive-level higher education administrators. The participants in this study met all of the criteria necessary to explore the shared lived experience of Black women in executive-levels of higher education administrative leadership. The roles of the participants included dean, associate dean, and vice president positions at a predominantly White institution. In order to maintain confidentiality of the Black women who participated, they were assigned pseudonyms of Angela, Bridget, Claudette, and Dorothy. Further, other identifying information (i.e. full title, name of PWI, and location of PWI) was also redacted to lessen the risk of re-identification.

Universally, the women did not specifically set out to become an executive-level higher education administrator when sharing details about their career journey. When leadership opportunities presented themselves, they took advantage of them. All of the women are quite accomplished, including holding terminal degrees in differing disciplines. They have juggled successful careers while managing other roles such as wife and mother. The following details a brief description of each participant.

Angela grew up in the southern region of the United States. She divulged she first wanted to pursue a career as a law professional. Yet during college she was encouraged to consider a path within higher education. Angela has over a decade of postsecondary education experience, which spans teaching, research, and administration. She held varying staff roles while in graduate school before she worked her way up to administrative positions within student affairs at a predominantly White institution. She served as interim dean before officially being named to that executive-level role and led as dean for several years.

Bridget is middle-aged. Her career began in corporate America where she worked in a demanding, high pressure environment. She enjoyed what she was doing, but the feeling of wanting to do something else overcame her. Bridget earned her terminal degree and began her career within higher education as an academic faculty member. She eventually advanced to her current role of an associate dean, reporting directly to one of the college deans. She has served in this capacity for a few years.

Claudette grew up in the “deep South”. She admitted she did not consider a career in higher education when she was pursuing her doctoral degree in the social sciences. Claudette entered academia as an assistant professor and quickly moved up the hierarchy

of faculty ranks. After witnessing there were other opportunities available in higher education, she considered administrative positions within her institution. Claudette held a number of professional positions before being named to her current role as vice president. She attributed all of her success to God.

Despite growing up “in the projects”, Dorothy’s working-class parents expected her to attend college. She acknowledged always being purposeful in her career trajectory; however, the bigger picture for her journey had not always been clear. Dorothy divulged a career in higher education was not her first choice as her background was in elementary education before she made the leap into pursuing a doctoral program. Dorothy has over 20 years of higher education experience, with her initial introduction to the postsecondary setting as a faculty member. Dorothy taught for several years before transitioning to her first administrative role and has held several executive-level positions, all at PWIs.

### **Participant Interviews and Documents**

Each study participant was recruited using the process outlined in the previous chapter with data collection beginning in November 2017 and interviews continued on until the end of February 2018. The researcher conducted face-to-face semi-structured interviews with all four participants. Each participant reviewed and signed the informed consent document prior to the researcher asking the first interview question.

The researcher conducted Angela’s interview at a local area soul food restaurant. Angela emailed prior to the meeting asking the researcher to push back the meeting time because she had to go into the office for a quick meeting. Without hesitation, the researcher obliged. Upon arriving at the restaurant, the researcher observed Angela already seated at a table, perusing her phone. Angela and the researcher exchanged

greetings and placed their food orders before the lunch crowd arrived. Angela was extremely warm and welcoming. She was very eager to speak about her experiences as dean. The conversation began with the researcher sharing her journey to higher education administration, which lead into Angela divulging similar details. Angela shared stories about mentorships and networking, being true to yourself, her leadership style and development, being the only minority, the importance of social support, and provided personal reflections on the unequal treatment she encountered as an executive-level higher education administrator.

The interview for Bridget, an associate dean, was conducted in her office and occurred during her institution's closed session. Because the buildings were shut down, Bridget had to meet the researcher at the front door to gain entry. Bridget greeted the researcher and engaged in a story about the recently renovated university building while walking to her office. The participant hung the researcher's coat in her closet and directed her to a table to conduct the interview. The researcher perceived Bridget as guarded and this was evident during the first couple of questions where she offered short and very succinct responses. Despite the researcher having to probe for further depth in Bridget's answers in the beginning, she eventually opened up with more detail as the interview progressed. Bridget shared stories about the power of relationships, negative situations she encountered, her leadership development, and strategies for personal well-being.

Claudette's interview was conducted in her administrative office at her institution. She was late arriving to her office for the scheduled appointment time. It turns out she was dining with her husband at a nearby campus restaurant and lost her phone. She attempted to contact her daughter a couple of times for her to engage the phone locator

application, but was unsuccessful in reaching her. Even with this happening, she did not let that situation distract her from having a meaningful conversation with the researcher. Claudette exuded relaxed and comfortable body language throughout the meeting time. She spoke in a very calm tone, but also exhibited varying cadence when appropriate. Claudette shared stories about the importance of interpersonal relationships, being a minority in a majority setting, the value of mentoring, playing the game of politics, and her foundation in faith.

Dorothy was very gracious when welcoming the researcher into her home to conduct the interview. She greeted the researcher at the door with a hug, despite a warning that the researcher had a common cold. The participant responded she was not concerned. Dorothy went to shut off her music that had been playing and asked where the researcher would prefer to talk. She ventured to the space off the living room, which had a built-in bookshelf adorned with books of varying topics. The researcher followed suit, and sat adjacent to Dorothy seated at the table. Dorothy questioned the researcher's intentions after graduation and connected it to her own experience of having someone to help guide her. This was the perfect segue to the conversation about her lived experiences. Dorothy shared stories detailing her experiences with knowing who you are, mentoring, holding 'the other' status, and feelings of being undervalued and valued.

Dorothy was the only study participant to offer a document for the researcher that was accessed and reviewed at a later date. The document was a written account of her spiritual journey with some of Dorothy's leadership struggles and successes weaved into it. Other documents that were reviewed were the researcher's field notes, memos and

journal entries as they related to each specific participant and the research study in general.

### **Emergent Themes**

In order to answer the research questions, the researcher developed textural, structural, and textural-structural descriptions of each of the participants' lived experiences and perceptions of being an executive-level higher education administrator. Textural descriptions describe what each participant experienced as an executive-level higher education administrator at a PWI as evidenced through excerpts from their respective face-to-face interview and/or document (if applicable). Structural descriptions explain the contexts and how each participant experienced the phenomenon of an executive-level higher education administrator at a PWI. Textural-structural descriptions integrate the textural statements with the structural qualities of the experience. The descriptions unique to each participant were analyzed and synthesized to identify themes and patterns common to all of the Black women.

In essence, five themes emerged from the participants' face-to-face interviews and relevant document review to answer research question one. The themes included: Knowing Who You Are, Developing as a Leader, Engaging in the Rules of the Game, Building Relationships, and Navigating Bias and Conflict. The themes identified for research question two are: Finding Strength through Spirituality, Relying on Family and Friends, and Pursuing Enjoyable Activities. The themes represent the phenomenon of being an executive-level higher education administrator for the Black women in the research study and how the women cope with their experiences as it relates to the phenomenon.

## **Research Question 1**

The first research question for the study was: How do Black women perceive and describe the influence of race and gender on their leadership experiences as executive-level administrators in higher education? To discover how Black women make sense of the phenomenon of executive-level higher education administration, the participants were asked numerous questions to conjure details about their leadership experiences. The semi-structured interviews included questions about their background and professional journey covering topics related to career advancement, mentoring and networking, relationships, and overall work experiences. All of the Black women shared details about negative situations, yet also acknowledged rewarding times as executive-level higher education administrators. Their responses to the questions led to the emergence of five themes for this research question.

### **Theme 1: Knowing Who You Are**

The ability to preserve who they are as a person was noted as a contributing factor to the majority of the participants' leadership experiences. From the lens of Black feminism, being aware of who they are encourages Black women to create their own self-definition rather than relying on others to create their identity (Collins, 2009). All the participants provided an expression of their self-identity and described situations which tested who they are as a person.

In one of Dorothy's previous executive-level positions, she described different instances in which her sense of self was being overshadowed by having to occupy somewhat of a subservient role to her supervisor, the institution's charismatic president. In the vein of choosing to stay who she was or at least trying to stay who she was, she

endured several years of mistreatment. She disclosed, “I took about as much as I could until my husband said, ‘You are disappearing. Who you are, you’re becoming invisible.’ And I cried and I cried. Cause to me that meant failure.” Rather than continue to let her identity dissipate, Dorothy elected to take a year sabbatical and use that time to heal and rediscover her worth. Having braved through situations “detrimental to her”, it was expected that the first piece of advice Dorothy would offer to Black women aspiring to roles such as those she’s attained would be to “Know who you are. Be true to who you are.” She admonished, “Don’t flip flop and try to fit in to what somebody says.” She acknowledged she’ll have opportunities and opposition “just because I am who I am” as a Black woman administrator at a PWI. She explained further,

It means I have to know who I am in order for me to be able to give back. I can never, ever leave this building and walk on campus and not know who I am. And beyond just the ascribed characteristics, I mean knowing who I am as a person. I experienced that at [name of previous institution] when I lost who I was. I never wanna go back to that again.

Angela spoke to adapting to various situations as an administrator, but remaining her authentic self was a strategy she employed as a higher education administrator. Angela recognized the need to adapt depending on her setting, but stressed the difference between maintaining your sense of self and changing who you are. “You make a— you adapt, you adjust, you work with people, but when you have to change—that’s totally different.” Prior to becoming dean she had always wondered when she would be confronted with the decision to change who she was in order to stay an executive-level administrator or remain steadfast in her truth. In the last year of Angela’s deanship, she

had to make that choice. She chose not to change and left that institution after tolerating several years of adversity, similar to Dorothy.

Claudette echoed similar sentiments about adapting her personality and likened herself to a “chameleon”. She explained,

I can be flexible and fluid and get along with my colleagues. I can laugh and talk, about a lot of things....But what I try to do is be able to fit into different settings, while also maintaining an important part of who I am. So even though I can be friendly and jovial and kid and laugh and talk, when those issues come up that I have to bring an alternative perspective to, then I’m willing to do that.

**Leadership Style.** The development of a self-identity seemed to contribute to the construction of the participants’ leadership style. A leadership style is drawn from an individual’s character traits and personal attributes and is defined as the approach a leader assumes when interacting with their followers (Kippenberger, 2002). Analysis of the data revealed the significance of the participants’ personal values as it relates to their leadership style and the impact their lens as a Black woman had on their leadership experiences as executive-level higher education administrators.

All of the participants described how they lead in terms of their personal values. Claudette’s leadership style was situated within the context of service. She identified as a “servant leader” and believed she was “blessed to be a blessing.” Claudette relished in the fact that she was able to “be at the table, to be a voice for people who aren’t at the table” and the work she was doing aligned with a core personal value, which was “to positively impact the lives of others.” Angela looked to the needs of others as well as a higher education administrator, citing she loved “being the only one [only person of color] that I

did not have” for the students at her former PWI. Dorothy also equated her leadership role as a Black woman executive-level administrator at a PWI to serving others. She shared her perspective on the connection between her personal and leadership identities, “It means that I’m blessed. It means that to whom much is given, much is expected.” Bridget cited “fairness matters a lot to me” and her decision-making as a leader reflected that. She told a story of a staff member who had an office which was not physically located within the department she transitioned to and as a result caused some unrest amongst her colleagues who sat in cubicles. Bridget was confronted about her decision to move the staff member by the department chair and asserted, “I cannot have one staff person receiving a benefit that’s not available to the other staff people. She needs to sit in her unit like every other staff person in the college sits with their unit.”

All of the participants expressed valuing collaboration and communication. Dorothy recognized the importance of her team when sharing about her leadership style. She stated “I try to put people around me who think differently than me, who are not yes men or yes women, but will say, ‘Dorothy, you’re barking up the wrong tree.’” Dorothy recounted how vital the Bolman and Deal (2013) frames of leadership were in terms of her team. She posited, “You know the Bolman and Deal frames? You gotta have those frames. You gotta know where you fit. Those that you don’t have, you put people around you that have them.” She also stressed the importance of being transparent with others and felt “telling people why I’m doing what I’m doing” was important as a leader who is confident in who they are. Bridget had a similar approach to achieving transparency and synergy within her team. She shared,

Now I kinda do this whole big, “hey, this is what I'm thinking does anyone have a problem with it? This is the reason why.” And everyone's like, “oh, I don't care what you do, go on and do it. Why you keep asking us what we think?”

Claudette provided her perspective,

I believe in communicating, talking to people. Giving people certain levels of input and perceived input. [Laughs] Because sometimes it's you [indistinguishable] people allowing them to give input, but truth be told it's, no, the decisions already made. But it's the perceived input.

All of the participants expressed varying appreciation for their staff and their contributions to their leadership experiences, Claudette even shared she thought of her staff as family. Further, all of the participants were able to manage being collaborative and recognize times when exerting their authority surpassed the need for concerted efforts.

The majority of the participants recognized them being a Black woman influenced some aspects of their leadership style and approach. Angela believed the negative implications of who she was as a Black woman in her role as dean and admitted she found herself having to put her racial identity on the back burner and personify her status as a woman more when sharing about her leadership style, especially when dealing with White women. Claudette touched on having to manage identities as well. She stressed the importance of being keenly aware of her emotions and feelings as a leader and mentioned numerous times she often had to recalibrate when she found herself getting angry in certain situations. She spoke about “reframing your reality” to maintain a positive outlook and self-identity. She offered, “Because if you don't reframe your reality, you get

bitter and angry. And then you become the angry Black woman.” On the contrary, Bridget expressed uncertainty as to whether or not her race and gender influenced her leadership style or approach. She confessed, “I don’t know. These are, this is a very difficult convo—difficult question because I’ve only ever been this race and this gender. I’m uncertain if it affects how I do things. I don’t. I’m uncertain.” Thus, Bridget adopted a neutral outlook and was compelled to exercise a level of impartiality about others when it came to leading.

This theme captured the participants’ feelings about self-awareness. It was clear from the data the participants’ demonstrated the importance of remaining true to themselves despite the level they attained, the people they engaged with, and the situations they encountered as executive-level administrators. While each participant’s mental map differed, they were all attentive to who they were as an individual which converged into their own personal leadership style and how that shaped their approach to leadership.

## **Theme 2: Developing as a Leader**

At some point during their administrative career, each participant identified the need for and usefulness of professional development. The theme Developing as a Leader discusses how the participants’ sought to increase their effectiveness as executive-level higher education administrators. In addition, the participants’ responses detailed the level of institutional support they received when pursuing leadership development opportunities.

Bridget affirmed the importance of professional development within the context of self-improvement for her and her team. Bridget enlisted leadership support once she

attained her position and acknowledged how beneficial it was to have an outsider perspective to provide insight on a different approach to her leadership praxis. Prior to her taking her role as associate dean, Bridget's staff had never had professional development so she identified opportunities for them. She shared, "The first thing we did was everyone took this assessment called the DISC assessment....My direct reports, I have them listening to this podcast on leadership. And I send them podcasts and articles to read." Bridget expressed gratification that her efforts were working with a specific direct report as his personal and professional demeanor had matured as a result of the professional development.

Claudette's motivation for professional development was due to the longevity at her institution. She declared, "In order for me to convey that I have been developed as a leader outside of the confines of this institution, I will have to have these experiences on my vita." Claudette discussed attending conferences and leadership institutes as well as observing other leaders as different avenues to encourage her professional development and upward trajectory. She shared, "I think my credit is that I observe people a lot. I'm a people watcher. I study behavior and so I emulate behavior and I ask a lot of questions. I think that has been really helpful for me." Claudette also went on to reveal she received a grant that allowed her to visit another institution to shadow a woman who was over the academic area similar to the executive-level position she was vying for at her institution. This allowed her to gain valuable insight that she previously would not have acquired. She disclosed,

In order to make myself marketable, I'd always would think "what would make me marketable?" What would set me apart from, so that when I interviewed I can

say, “I’ve never done the job,” but I could say “I’ve had the opportunity to shadow. I’ve had the opportunity to talk to former [title of higher education administrative position].” It shows you’ve done your homework. People want to see that you’ve done your homework. And you can’t do your homework the day you apply. You gotta be. It’s a process.

Dorothy recalled an experience with her mentor in which she was tasked with paying attention to who she was becoming as a leader, which was accomplished through reflection and a personality assessment.

He had me to do a Myers-Briggs, which I didn’t know a lot about then. But on that particular assessment, all of my scores were in the nineties for the areas that I was in. I realized that I have a very dominant, strong personality in each category. I’m an E N F J. He said, “I want you to think about how you use your E N F J, but I want you to pay attention to your blind spots. Because you’re so high in every category.” That means I’m blind to some things and I didn’t even know I was. I started entering into meetings and projects and observations with that as my lens.

The majority of the participants described their ability to pursue whatever opportunity they were interested in and had the budgets and institutional support to do so. Bridget shared she had “a professional development account” and attested “anything I do related to my role as dean, the dean’s office pays for it, not mine.” Alike Bridget, Claudette and Dorothy also discussed having resources for professional development at their disposal. Claudette mentioned she was an “opportunist” and with every role she’s had she set out on a quest for money for personal leadership development, as evidenced with the grant she acquired to shadow another administrator. She disclosed, “The

president has been good about saying, ‘are you interested in going here? Do you want to go there?’ He said, ‘Anything you want to do, you just let me know.’” Dorothy experienced similar backing from her president and declared, “I can go to anything I want to. [Laughs]” She went on to elaborate her husband would like for her to stop attending conferences because she is always traveling. Dorothy stated,

In fact, the week after next I have a trip to Florida. I’m going there for a vice president’s conference. I leave that conference and go to Washington, D.C. before I come back here to go to [name of organization] because I’m doing a workshop at [name of organization]. And the university is picking up every tab.

The quotes from the Black women participants demonstrate an ongoing commitment to develop themselves as leaders as well as those around them. The Black women took advantage of varying opportunities, both internal and external to their institution, to enhance their personal growth and enrichment. Depending on the institutional resources, the participants’ shared the magnitude of their professional development opportunities.

### **Theme 3: Engaging in the Rules of the Game**

The participants mentioned political games and each provided differing perceptions about their involvement within the workplace. Being that Black women are a minority in a majority setting of a PWI, it was not alarming to discover their political participation as higher education administrators was a means to acquire power and influence while navigating the political landscape of their institutions. The participants’ descriptions demonstrate engaging in the rules of the game was necessary to achieve work outcomes, and in some cases, attain and retain their executive-level position.

All of the participants articulated their motives for knowing the rules of engagement and playing by them, primarily because organizations tend to be political arenas. Bridget shared when she first joined as a faculty member she learned quickly higher education was not a meritocracy and expounded, “It’s about who has the leverage, who has the power, who has the decision-making rights, right?” She went on to explain engaging in politics “is not an indication of your worth or your value or how committed or uncommitted you are. It’s an indication that you want to be successful.” Dorothy commented she was very weak in the political scene. She divulged,

I don’t wanna do it. [Laughs] I know that I need to have it and I know that it’s there. When I sense that’s what’s happening, I use the person on my team, who is very strong in that to brainstorm with me. I know that’s important.

Angela felt playing the game was requisite of Black women due to their marginalized status as an executive-level higher education administrator within a PWI and having to work harder as a result. She proclaimed, “And I think it’s being aware of that as a Black female. And that you do. I’m sorry, I don’t care what anyone says, you do have to work. You do....The games and the politics and things like that.”

All the participants had varying tactics they employed under the guise of playing the game in order to incite action and accomplish individual or institutional goals. One strategy was rooted in trying to exert influence through political connections and networking. Bridget proclaimed, “People who have power are the people who can help you more than the people who don’t.” When asked what advice she would offer to aspiring Black women higher education administrators, Bridget commented on the social circle aspect of office politics,

The clubbiness that underrepresented minorities see that exists among White people is because they socialize. If you want to receive the benefits of the clubbiness, then you too, must partake of the socialization. Choosing not to just makes it so much easier for me to....not consider you for opportunities.

Claudette reflected on her experiences with social capital when discussing the journey to her current role. She stated,

I never considered higher ed administration when I first entered or even prior to coming. Because I think if I had, I probably would've been more mindful of relationships and I would've been more politically savvy about not [brief pause] ticking people off. Because [brief pause] realizing when you go up for leadership positions, it could come back and haunt you.

Because of past experiences, Claudette recognized the need to gain as much social capital as she could when preparing for one of her next career opportunities at her institution. She shared she spent her time "getting to know people in position of influence." She elaborated,

Schmoozing up to these folks because that's part of it. It's not just what you know, it's that relationship and schmoozing up and validating their thoughts and ideas and making it more than sometimes what it actually is.

Dorothy disclosed how her influence and building a network of allies helped her circumvent attempts by the president to stall initiatives she was championing at her institution. She explained,

Every initiative that I started, he found something wrong with it. I was able to get several things through. Because number one they needed to happen. But number

two I was using that skill set of collaboration. I would get people on board and even if it didn't come out of my mouth, it would come out of the mouth of somebody else and it would get received. Then he would find out it was my idea.

Another strategy articulated by the participants' experiences was being methodical when articulating their ideas. Claudette mentioned she's "calculated" in her approach to making suggestions to her current supervisor and the institution's president.

Things come up and I'll say "You mind if I give you my opinion or can I give you my honest opinion?" Because when you give, when you ask for permission and people give it to you, they're more ready to hear what you have to say, even if it's something they disagree with. Usually you say, "Can I give you my honest opinion?" I haven't had a person yet to say "no [Laughs], that's okay."

She admitted employing that strategy with her supervisor in one of her previous executive-level roles as well. Claudette narrated,

I had to make sure he felt validated. Even though there were times I felt like, I didn't feel that he had the knowledge. There were certain things he was very knowledgeable about, but there were certain things he weren't. But I still had to give him the respect and affirmation he deserved. Because if not, it would've been my kiss of death. To show him up, is my kiss of death....He would come asking me "What do you think?" And I would tell him what I would think. Realizing, I was influencing his thinking, but then I would affirm that "See you already knew, you just needed me to validate it." I would just try, [Laughs] it was almost comical. But I just had to realize that to get to the next step, I needed to be savvy. You have to be savvy.

Bridget noted her colleagues would cry, yell, or scream to get what they wanted. However, she drew a clear boundary on engaging in the rules of the game. For her, being direct and forthcoming was how she conducted herself and proclaimed, “Probably my path is a more difficult one because I’m not going to do that. I mean, I view all of that as manipulation.” But she would also be deliberate in her opinions when solicited by her supervisor. When discussing if another administrator should be reappointed to his role within their college, Bridget indicated her evaluation of the individual swayed the dean’s decision to hire someone else. She commented, “The dean has agreed to this. And so this guy is not happy. He’s really upset. But he does not know that. [Laughs] He doesn’t know that [Bridget was influential in the decision-making].”

In this theme, Engaging in the Rules of the Game, analysis of data revealed the participants perceived politics were a critical aspect within their institution and participation was necessary. The participants’ experiences described behavior they exhibited that was political in nature. The participants relied on interdependent relationships and interpersonal influence as strategies to manage political processes.

#### **Theme 4: Building Relationships**

All of the participants provided insight into the significance of building relationships with others. They all reported favorable experiences with relationship building, in general, and specifically with mentorships. The participants considered their mentors were beyond valuable in the support, advice, and information extended to them on their journey.

The majority of participants expressed how much maintaining relationships was vital to their leadership experiences and how those connections had a positive impact on their inclusiveness within their institution. Claudette asserted,

Because the thing about being successful as a leader at a PWI, that interpersonal is huge. You can't be so serious. You have to be able to engage people. They have to feel like I like her. Sometimes even when they don't even know a person's knowledge, skills, and abilities, if they like you, it's like they believe you can even before you've done anything.

Because of her influential relationships and being a Black woman, Claudette believed she was afforded an advantage.

They, often times, the majority in administration, they want to have, somebody used this phrase, a favorite son or a favorite daughter. I think I have been privileged in that I have, I am now perceived, and I say now, because you can fall out of favor. But I think right now, I am now perceived as a favorite daughter.

And so because of it, I'm able to get certain opportunities.

Dorothy described the personal relationship she has built with her current president and how he has fostered an institutional culture that made her experience a sense of belonging. Dorothy shared,

He's a real person. But he's transparent and open. He doesn't mind crying in front of me. Or saying to me, "Dorothy, can you pray with me right now? I'm worried about—." We've actually prayed together. I know that's not supposed to happen in higher ed, but it—He has a strong faith and so do I...But we talk about, this is kinda telling you about the relationship. We talk about all kinds of things.

She professed, “I have never in my [number] years had someone that I reported to that cared about me like that.” She also described a moment after U.S. President Trump was elected and to lessen some of the fears the faculty, staff, and students had about the impact of the new administration’s agenda on their institution, the president told her, “we need to strategize”, recognizing her contribution was valuable. They both wrote separate emails addressing the campus community and from that experience she detailed the aftermath,

That’s when [name of president] and I realized that we think so much alike. Even though we’re different in some ways too. But we mesh so well, that from that point on, whenever we had to introduce something new or if we were in any way doing the symbolism that goes with being an administrator, we would always do it together. So faculty assembly, [name of president] speaks first and I run the meeting. But I always have some challenging statement to make to the faculty. That’s what I mean about it’s been wonderful being here because who I get to work with.

Relatedly, Angela recalled having support from her institution’s faculty in her role as dean after attending more faculty meetings and networking with those in attendance. The dean had a non-tenured faculty position and her president at the time questioned why she was not attending the faculty meetings. As a result, she made it a point to attend and indicated, “I remember when I started coming and people were like, ‘It’s good to see the Dean here.’” She stated, “I had support, the faculty— because a lot of them had known me and watched me and when, you know, people respect you.” The relationships she built were key in her acquiring a place on the agenda at the faculty meetings.

Each of the participants shared their experiences with fostering a relationship with mentors that were beneficial to them as executive-level higher education administrators. When discussing her career journey, Bridget mentioned the impact of mentors on her career journey. She questioned rhetorically, “You know how you will always have people who say ‘you should do this’ or ‘have you ever thought about’?” She described a collegial relationship she had with an administrator at her current institution who was committed to diversity and was instrumental in her landing a position there. She offered,

I think probably him coming to the leadership here and saying here is someone who is looking, who’s a diverse candidate, we need diversity in the college. And kind of him probably championing that. In hindsight, I see that probably made a bigger difference than if he had not been in the role where he was.

Similarly, Dorothy commented on how transformational mentoring was to her.

I think I probably wouldn't be where I am had I not had people who first saw something in me and took the risk to say something to me....And so for me, the possibilities for mentoring go beyond the cognitive to the area of affect. And affect is what changes hearts.

Angela shared that it tended to be White men who expressed a vested interest in helping her along her journey. She recalled the experience when she was named the permanent dean for her institution.

I get called to his office, me and the dean, and so he looks at me and he says, “I’m going to make you dean.” I looked at my boss and I said, “Where are you going?” He’s like, “Oh I’m going to [name of another division].” I’m thinking, “You’re too happy about this. Something ain’t right.” Then I said, “Oh you’re going to

make me interim again until you hire who you want.” He said, “No. I’m going to build your career.” He said, “We’re going to build it here at [name of institution].”

The mentors in the participants’ lives did more than help propel their career in higher education, they would offer honest and meaningful advice about their career choices and leadership experiences. Claudette shared a heart-to-heart she had with a Black male mentor of hers regarding a situation when she was pursuing her first executive-level position.

He said “Sister, it’s not that you can’t do the job. He doesn’t want you for the job. You’re not getting the job.” I can remember sitting in his office, literally crying, and I said, “But why? I have the knowledge, the skills, abilities.” I said, “In fact I could do the job better than he can.” He said, “It’s not about what you can do. He doesn’t want you.”

Dorothy acknowledged one of her mentors she was working under instilled in her the value of reflection and forced her to recognize her strengths and weaknesses with a personality indicator. The insight she gained from him was invaluable and she confessed the time spent learning from him was life changing. She recollected,

But what he wanted me to know is that all of my career had been built on doing things. He wanted me to pay attention to how you do things. Because as you become an administrator, you need to know how you administer. It’s not so much as getting the task done. It’s the choices you make to get those tasks done.

The theme Building Relationships provided a discussion in the participants’ own words of how critical relationships are to their careers as executive-level higher education

administrators. Each participant shared what the social connections they built within their institutions meant to them. The majority of participants attributed their entry into professions within higher education, and specifically executive-level administration, was facilitated by individuals they considered mentors or encouragers.

### **Theme 5: Navigating Bias and Conflict**

All of the participants' acknowledgment of representing the "first" or "only one" at their institution is illustrative of the disproportionate representation of Black women in executive-level administrative roles within higher education and that progress in this regard has been stagnant. In this theme, analysis of the data suggested Black women had to navigate bias and conflict in their administrative positions. The lack of diversity resulted in circumstances described as racial microaggressions and the effects of hypervisibility and invisibility. The majority of the participants would also attribute much of the conflict they experienced as a byproduct of them being Black women.

**Racial Microaggressions.** Racial microaggressions are described as either deliberate or unintended verbal, behavioral, and environmental circumstances that convey aggressive, offensive, or harmful racial smears and insults to an individual or group (Sue et al., 2007). The lived experiences as described by the participants revealed some were rooted in racial microaggressions. Bridget mentioned a comment a White woman colleague friend of hers made after she was appointed to her role of associate dean. Her colleague said, "I've always thought, I've always wanted an administrative role. But it must be nice being an African American woman and getting all of these opportunities because of that." Bridget, taken aback, opted not to respond to her and went back to her

office. Early on in the conversation with Claudette, she indicated, “a lot of times for African Americans on a majority campus at a predominantly white institution, figuring out your conduit into leadership is not always easy.” She discussed her aversion to being encouraged to pursue “a minority position” and asserted she did not want “opportunities that are consistent with being a minority.” She stated matter-of-factly, “I want those opportunities that will position me to become a president of a predominantly White institution.” She mentioned others would question did she mean becoming a president of a HBCU instead. She rebutted,

No. If I were to go to an HBCU, that’ll be my last stop on my career journey.

That’s not where I want to go. I have to make sure that people in positions of power know that I have my eye on a prize.

Dorothy remembered entertaining at events hosted by her former president and having been required to arrive before everyone else and leave only once everyone had departed. Attendees would often say to her supervisor “you have a really good African American woman” not knowing that expression was causing more harm than acknowledgement of her contributions to the institution. Angela recalled playing golf with her supervisor and colleagues, all White men, one day when one of them smarted off to her, “What you going to be the caddy today?” He apologized after her supervisor addressed the colleague’s derogatory comment.

**Hypervisibility and Invisibility.** How people are seen and perceived by others is labeled as visibility (Buchanan & Settles, in press). Hypervisibility and invisibility are varying forms of visibility. Hypervisibility is defined as the disproportionate attention Black women receive in predominantly White spaces as they are perceived more

noticeably different than the norm (McCluney & Rabelo, in press). The unique contributions of Black women are not always recognized within the workplace, which is identified as invisibility (McCluney & Rabelo, in press). The examples of the participants' experiences as executive-level higher education administrators aligned with conditions related to hypervisibility and invisibility.

Because of the lack of diversity in administration, the participants were extremely visible at their respective PWI. Hypervisibility results in Black women feeling pressured to act in ways that align with the dominant culture (McCluney & Rabelo, in press). This is often demonstrated by Black women changing their tone and behavior so as not to alienate themselves (Dickens, Womack, & Dimes, in press). All of the participants except for Bridget acknowledged they are conscious of how they interact with others in regards to their tone, mannerisms, and overall appearance in hopes of not being stereotyped as the "angry Black woman" and ultimately ensuring others feel comfortable at their expense.

Bridget likened any change in behavior from how one may act at home to a work persona. She explained, "All of us have a work persona. And having a work persona doesn't say anything about you being less Black or less this or more. It means you are behaving appropriately for the place where you're working." Angela described being in an executive-level higher education administrative position "meant always being on my Ps and Qs, everything." She stated,

It always meant making sure my shit was together. Everything's fine....Always making sure you're articulate, it's just your whole presence, that when people look at—[name of one of the institution's presidents] told me this and I started thinking about when I walk into a room I know people see three things. Age, race,

and gender. Before I became dean I'd never thought about it like that and I'm very much conscious of that. That when I would, especially when I didn't know people, I knew the first thing that they were going to think: age, race, and gender. Dorothy operated within the realms of acculturation rather assimilation because it allowed her to "walk in more than one world." With that, she does find herself having to be conscious of what she says and how she says it, which is taxing on her. She indicated, I spend lots of time educating people. And it's a lot of energy. Because I'm relational, I want people to genuinely understand. I don't like to just say things and leave it with people. I spend a lot of time in my head figuring out how do I say this so that it is understood and received, so this person is helped by it. Lots of time, I leave meetings and I'm exhausted. Because I've spent a lot of time in my head doing that. If I don't do that, and I just say things, it alienates people. And that isn't good for me.

She went on to describe her intuitiveness has helped her shift her behavior if needed.

People don't necessarily have to say something to me. I just know it. I look at body language. Facial expressions....I think I see that in the way people respond. They became staccato in how they respond to you because they're fumbling for their words or they drawback. I've seen people cross their legs away from me. I'll say "why did you do that?" And they're like, "What?" "Why did you cross your legs in that direction?" "Oh, I didn't notice." Those kinds of things I pay attention to. Sometimes I'm off base. But because I do it almost without thinking, I kinda see little cues and signs that make me say you need to word that differently, you need to say that with a different tone.

Claudette mentioned reframing her reality so she would not be stereotyped as the “angry Black woman” when speaking about a position she was vying for and having to endure a series of interviews with individuals in varying levels of authority before she was vetted for the role. To combat what she perceived as biased circumstances, Claudette declared,

I said, “See, if I get angry, he gets what he wants.” What I said was, “This is a blessing that I’m getting to interview with all these people. Because it allows me to show who I am to different audiences and it gets me ready for whenever I have to interview to become a provost or president.” I’m like, you know what? Bring it. I just got ready to talk the talk, look the part, ‘cause that’s also important for us. We can’t, [humph] you know. I know colleagues they have it, but opportunity and also you have to dress for the part you want.

Dorothy also referenced the angry Black woman stereotype when sharing about her perceptions of the colleagues on her team. She shared,

There are men on the home team. It’s really funny. They don’t quite know what to do with me either. Because when I’m passionate, sometimes it’s misunderstood as anger. That happens with Black women when we get passionate. We become the angry Black woman. I very seldom am angry. If I do it’s with [name of husband].

[Laughs]

Angela reiterated why policing your behavior as a Black woman was crucial to her as an executive-level higher education administrator. She declared, “You have to—I think, so as a Black female you’re always just aware of your tone with people....I think we pick up this attention to stuff like that because we know how people—the angry Black woman.”

Bridget rejected any mention of the angry Black woman stereotype in the workplace, asserting, “No, ‘cause I’m not, that’s not my personality.”

Opposite hypervisibility, invisibility encourages the erasure of Black women. While there were instances in the participants’ experiences that afforded them inclusion, they were also subjected to situations that caused them to be forgotten and invisible. Angela described an instance where she was not privy to information and excluded from important meetings. For the longest time, Angela thought it was merely because she was a woman that she was on the receiving end of questionable comments. It was not until people that she worked with for a long time began treating her differently that she began to question the dynamics of her role and her position within the institution. She recalled,

It became about my race, about you got this young Black girl up here telling you, “Y’all are going to do this,” and I’m calling you out that y’all having these back room meetings. We would be in president’s council underneath this last president and this was the only time I had this issue. I’m like, “Because people havin’ back room meetings.” We’d be in president’s council and the people having back room meetings and they’re not going now and I said, “I can’t help it if you’re having these back door meetings.” That was my saying. I was going to say and people get quiet. And he wouldn’t call ‘em out on it. He wouldn’t call ‘em out at all. He would just say, “Well, we all need to— we don’t need to have silos.” Well, you’re going to have silos if you have back room meetings. I said, “That’s fine if you don’t want me in these meetings, but don’t come, don’t act like I’m supposed to know when you’re all having these meetings.”

One occurrence in particular that Dorothy deemed the beginning of the end at her previous institution was when the president told her, “don’t be a whiner” when questioning why he did not introduce her at an institutional function. This behavior continued during other instances and it became very apparent so much so others quizzed her about the president’s negligence in addressing her. She stated, “This is who I report to. I’m not going to say anything negative. I would say, ‘I don’t know, I guess he overlooked it in his script.’ But it was a pattern.”

The participants disclosed details about different incidents in which they experienced conflict in their role as executive-level higher education administrators. The majority of participants cited their authority was questioned or undermined. Dorothy divulged her former supervisor publicly challenged her in front of other colleagues. “If I were be in faculty assembly and say something, he would come up afterward and say, ‘Well, I really disagree with what Dorothy just said, I don’t know where that came from.’” Angela recalled a situation where a colleague was probing one of her staff members about her decision-making and she confronted her about it. She shared,

I said, “What you don’t realize is that when you’re in that meeting and you’re talking to them, they’re texting me half the time and they’re telling me about how they are being treated in this meeting.” I said, “Y’all are questioning the decisions that I have made.”

The majority of the participants also discussed being disrespected in their roles as executive-level higher education administrators. Angela described an uncomfortable situation with a colleague and her former institution’s president when they met about a

project that did not pan out as anticipated. During this meeting, she felt her peer was scolding her. She recalled,

The president doesn't say anything. It's a table. The president's here and he's there [Angela demonstrates with her hands the proximity of everyone during this engagement]. This man is basically berating me and he's not—and I'm looking at the president and I'm shaking a little bit and I said, "God help me through it." I said, "Don't you ever talk to me like that again."....He just got huff and puff and he didn't say sorry or anything. He said "I have nothing else to say." He leaves, so the president doesn't say anything. I said, "You're going to let him talk to me like that?" He said, "Well he's very upset, about what happened."

Bridget shared a similar experience when a colleague yelled at her over a decision she had made. She explained, "He was up, his hands up, and getting all loud." She immediately advised him to sit down and the conversation concluded with her telling him, "You're not going to be in here yelling at me and being disrespectful." Contrary to sentiments from some of the other participants, Bridget stated she could not attribute the negative treatment and conflict she experienced as associate dean solely to her race and gender. When sharing her outlook, Bridget expressed, "For me, the lens that I choose to view these people through is, they're just difficult people."

The described experiences in this theme illustrate the mistreatment these Black women have endured as executive-level higher education administrators within a PWI. Despite being at the senior most level of administration at their institutions, the participants were subjected to circumstances that diminished who they were and the contributions they made. While each participant had their own unique outlook to the

oppressive circumstances, it is suggested the commonalities of their experiences are rooted in their marginal status as an outsider within majority spaces.

## **Research Question 2**

The second research question that guided the study was: What strategies (if any) do Black women in executive-level administrative positions use to cope with the perceived influence of race and gender on their leadership experiences as executive-level administrators in higher education? Questions asked during the face-to-face interviews focused on self-care, support, and empowerment. Work-life balance was challenging for the participants and they all identified specific strategies they turn to when seeking to offset the pressures of their administrative role. These strategies are identified with the three themes for this research question.

### **Theme 1: Finding Strength through Spirituality**

All of the participants spoke about the significance of their spirituality as a coping mechanism in some form. The Black women's spirituality was applied to their lives, often every day, and expressed through activities such as praying and listening to gospel music. The commonality amongst the participants is they all recognized a higher power in their lives.

Claudette mentioned, "For me, I'm a woman of faith. I don't believe in happenstance, I'm a firm believer what happens is part of divine intervention." Prayer was very apparent as a daily practice for Claudette and she attested, "I pray a lot." When faced with a situation in which she had to decide to pursue a position she was not necessarily vying for or one in which she knew she was not qualified for, she believed

her faith would bring her clarity. She shared, “I was just fraught with trepidation and I remember just praying and saying ‘God, help me to discern.’” Claudette recounted other ways aside from praying that she relies on her faith when managing any negative experiences, she may confront. She stated, “I meditate. I come to work listening to different sermons on the radio. Chuck Swindoll and David Jeremiah. Praise music. I do a lot of that.” Claudette stays grounded based on the notion that her experiences are what God wants for her and reaffirmed,

But I have to realize that, what God has for me is for me. I know even in being in this position I’m trusting God that I will be able to get to my next destination. I’m also doing my part as well. [Laughs heartily] Gotta do my part as well.

Angela similarly mentioned she “gotta listen to my gospel music” and revealed her daughter can recite many gospel songs considering it was all she heard when Angela was experiencing trying times at her previous institution. She shared,

Gospel music too. My daughter loves gospel music because she’s been—because that’s what got me through, the other thing too. Talking about faith—I’m serious—[name of daughter] can sing ‘Take Me to the King’ ....I don’t need to listen to it as much anymore on the daily drive, but every once in a while she goes, “Mama, can we listen to some gospel music?”

She went on to affirm prayer is one spiritual practice she engages in when handling challenging situations and insisted, “Faith is the center of everything I do.” She explained how daily devotions were integrated into her day as an executive-level higher education administrator. Angela recalled,

It was about 8:00 in the morning and I would read my devotional. She [Administrative Assistant] knew that was my time. I had a devotional at work and I have one, the same one, and I still do this same thing in the office and I read it. But it was blocked from 8 to 8:30 and I would read. She and I would just talk, maybe talk about that, just it was a break.

Dorothy shared similar sentiments about her relationship with God being at the core of who she is and how she relies on her spirituality to maneuver tough situations. “Prayer was key” for Dorothy when dealing with her life experiences and she made regular use of a prayer diary. At one point during her higher education administrative journey, Dorothy and her husband were living in different states. However, that did not deter them from continuing to “pray together daily.” She revealed during that time she believed her faith reached new heights and her spiritual life was growing. When offering details of her sabbatical after a tumultuous leadership experience, Dorothy shared, “That year I spent healing, essentially. Emotionally, praying a lot because I didn’t really know my next steps.” Despite that feeling, Dorothy remained steadfast in her faith and affirmed it was “all this God stuff working” as to how she arrived in her current role.

Research has shown Black women are highly spiritual and religious (Taylor, Chatters, & Levin, 2004). This theme demonstrated how the participants’ spirituality encapsulated their lives and how they practiced their religion to manage situations they encountered as executive-level higher education administrators. Spirituality offered a sense of healing and strength for the majority of participants when battling workplace stressors.

## **Theme 2: Relying on Family and Friends**

Many of the participants' experiences were centered on their intimate relationships with others, which was recognized as a coping strategy. The participants' spouses, family, friends, and colleagues from their institution were all identified as helpful when it came to managing their lives as executive-level higher education administrators. The following descriptions offered different contexts in which the Black women's family and friends provided them support and encouragement.

All of the participants acknowledged their husbands played a fundamental role in their self-care. Bridget's spouse is a mental health specialist and she mentioned using that to her advantage when sharing how she handles her lived experiences. Claudette declared, "My husband is my rock" and "is a great listener", when describing how he often serves as her sounding board when she's thinking situations through. Dorothy shared similar sentiments and lovingly stated, "I have a wonderful husband, who knows me better than anybody." She recalled a quiet evening they enjoyed at a local pizza parlor. "But we were just kinda sitting there together. Talking. Not about anything special. That's really important to me." Angela also shared details about the support her husband extended given the long days and nights she would spend working at her institution. She recalled a time when she was summoned to work because of an emergency the same day they were planning to celebrate his birthday. He was very understanding because he knew it was the nature of her job.

Children, other relatives, and family friends were also discussed when the participants were describing personal support systems. Claudette shared, "I'm always grounded with my girls.... 'Cause my girls, they'll keep it real. [Laughs].... Even with

them I talk to them about different things. Because I want to get them thinking about and get them ready for.” Dorothy also relies on her daughters to nurture her self-care. She mentioned one of her daughters proclaimed she needed her mother’s touch to help decorate her newly purchased home. Dorothy confessed, “That’s fun for me. Somebody else might see it as work.” During her interview, Angela commented on the social support her sister and parents extended. They would often share encouraging words and advice when she was in need of comfort. Angela discussed the financial assistance her parents offered for her to attend a women’s leadership program if her institution would not pay for it. Angela also noted her in-laws were great sources of social support that helped her to balance her role as dean. She recalled a time when her child’s daycare had the flu. She said,

It was a Tuesday morning— I remember calling my husband, “They have the flu! What am I going to do? It’s president’s council morning, what am I going to do with [name of daughter]?” “Call my mom and dad.” “But they’re not going to be here for another hour.” [Name of daughter] had to hang out in my admin’s office. She took [name of daughter] out for breakfast and stuff like that and then they came. I remember sitting in the president’s council in our president’s office and seeing my in-laws get the stuff out of my car.

Bridget disclosed one of her friends is a therapist and had offered insight into Bridget’s working relationship with a colleague who she’s experienced conflict with and helped her process that situation.

Former and current colleagues turned confidants were cited as beneficial to their mental well-being by all of the participants. Claudette admitted,

The president's wife is a great support. I think she's been very instrumental in opportunities [for me]. I was thinking to myself, huh, that's interesting that [she would be supportive]...I think sometimes I realize we're people, first, and what connects people are those life experiences. But she's a great support.

Claudette also mentioned she has a good friend who previously worked as an administrator at her current institution whom she maintains communication with and leans on for support. She declared,

She still knows a lot of the players. She just knows the academy. She is the one who, to me, she's a little more knowledgeable about the professoriate and becoming an administrator in the professoriate than I am. She's a great conduit to process with.

Bridget shared she also deliberates about various topics with former colleagues she now considers close friends. When debating whether or not she should accept the appointment as associate dean, she had confided in her friends and solicited their advice. Bridget also recalled a time when one of those friends encouraged her to seek out additional leadership support and she expressed appreciation for the recommendation citing, "I've learned a lot from [that person]." Dorothy stated the bonds she shares with others outside of her family often serve as a source of solace for her. She reflected on the time her personal trainer attended her university Christmas party and her administrative assistant, who is not Black, visited her church one Sunday as evidence of this gratification. She explained,

It's my concentric circle. Those things are very rewarding to me and they also speak to who I am. That is self-care for me. If the people who I touch their lives,

umm, come into my life, outside of work, or outside of other relationships, that's very rewarding to me. And it's fulfilling.... For me, it isn't about things. It's about people.

Angela discussed her relationship with a fellow colleague from another institution that she met through her sister. She recalled, "And so she emailed, that's how that started." Angela connected with her and was able to lean on her when she was enduring arduous times at her institution. She asserted,

You always need a good girlfriend....If I didn't have that, outside the—I don't know. I sometimes—as I sit here sharing my story. If I didn't have [name of friend] and [name of friend] didn't have me sometimes. You need someone that's not going to judge you, that will listen to the craziness that you have. You need that. And it's hard to find that.

Relying on administrative staff and colleagues was also a helpful coping strategy for Angela and Dorothy. The care Dorothy extends to others is often reciprocated. She explained there are times when she gets "too focused" and "out of balance" and she proclaimed, "I am very blessed that I have people around me who pay attention and will kick me back into action." She recalled times where her administrative assistant would tell her she didn't eat lunch that day or inquire, "Have you had any water?" Dorothy also mentioned her leadership experiences with her current president were marked with mutual respect and reverence, a stark contrast to that of her previous institution. She indicated how supportive he was when she had to be away from work to care for an ill parent and remarked, "I never felt I was torn between one or the other place." The gratitude in her voice was apparent when Dorothy revealed,

He chastised me a little bit because last year I didn't really take my days, off. I was working. He said, "I don't want you in this office on weekends. And you need to take your vacation days." I've done that this year. I've been taking my days. I don't go up there and work on weekends. It's always something I could be doing. But as he said, "your family is important."

Likewise, one of Angela's administrative staff members had witnessed firsthand her hectic schedule and was instrumental in forcing her to set time aside daily for herself. She further explained,

I came in one morning and she was like, "Sit down." I said, "I am in trouble."...But she said, "Eleven to one is blocked off on your calendar." I said, "[name of administrative staff], I can't—." She went, "Dup— don't say anything [makes motion to demonstrate stop talking with hand]." So I just didn't say anything. She had seen me all through these years, she goes, "Eleven to one is blocked on your calendar. I don't care what you do in that time." She goes, "I don't care if you go in that door and you just sing and dance to yourself. I don't care if you take a nap." She goes, "But you're not doing anything from eleven to one." She goes, "And you're not doing anything for the first couple weeks and then we'll slowly start to add things." But see that's when our staff went to lunch and sometimes I started missing lunch with them. They would come in and say, "Angela, go to lunch." "I can't. I gotta do this. I gotta do that." And she saw that. She—I was not getting—and she said, "You're not getting a break." And it was hard to go away from that. But I needed lunch, I would go eat with the staff. I'd come—and it was great. If I needed to put a meeting up, I could do that. I would

check my email and then my door was closed. [Name of administrative staff member] would close my door. “Angela is in there.” Or “Dr. Angela is in there. Is it an emergency?” After a while, everyone on campus knew eleven to one was my time. That was my time with my staff, my email, and that was a coping strategy that was kind of forced, but it was the best thing.

All of the aforementioned experiences are significant to the lives of these Black women and provide examples of how their family and friends assume a support role for the participants to cope with their leadership experiences as executive-level higher education administrators. Many of the participant’s experiences revolved around their nuclear and extended family. This theme also demonstrated how the participants were able to forge bonds with their colleagues and depend on them for social support.

### **Theme 3: Pursuing Enjoyable Activities**

This theme demonstrated how participants perceived the importance and meaning of pursuing enjoyable activities as executive-level higher education administrators. Personal maintenance activities and varying forms of entertainment were described by the Black women as ways to escape their realities. While all the participants recognized balancing their professional and personal lives was a bit challenging, they still discovered ways to seek enjoyment.

All of the participants discussed physical activities and how they engaged in different forms for their health and wellness. Although she described having “a love-hate relationship” with her trainer, Dorothy does “work out twice a week.” Claudette shared, “I exercise or think about exercising. My husband and I, we walk a little bit and that kinda thing.” Bridget works out and commented, “I have a bike and when the weather is

nice, I will ride that.” She also shared that since leadership was currently transitioning within her college and because her workload would not be as hectic, she was contemplating bringing back an old tradition of hers. She expressed,

I have a friend, who’s a professor, and we used to do [exercise class] one day a week. And we leave, it was a 10 o’clock class and I always get to the office at 7 o’clock. For me, leave in the middle of the day, go do [exercise class] with her. We’d go to lunch after, it would be kinda a whole thing. I think maybe I’ll just start doing that again.

Angela recognized she had gained weight after leaving her position as dean citing she did not recognizing how active she was in her previous role. She stated, “I didn’t realize how much working out played into that until I gained the weight. That’s why I mentioned that, until I gained the weight. I have gone back to that. I’ve gone back to working out.”

Angela noted playing golf was an extracurricular activity of hers that she enjoyed as well.

The majority of the participants also divulged details about other activities and outlets they participate in with self-care in mind. Bridget named Netflix, a book club, a quarterly gourmet club, and her children’s activities and sports events were all outlets she turned to when nurturing her personal well-being. Claudette is very in tune with her emotions and commented “I’m always trying to sense, how am I feeling? Am I feeling stressed? Am I feeling tense? ‘Cause sometimes I, you can feel it.” Claudette counters these feelings by disconnecting. She referred to a song “Window Seat” by singer-songwriter Erykah Badu and recited some of the lyrics,

She sings this song, “Can I get a window seat? Don’t want nobody next to me.

Just want a ticket out of town to look around.” I sometimes even sing the words to

that song. ‘Cause sometimes you need a window seat. You just need a ticket out of town to get away. I’m always mindful of when I need to do that.

In addition to getaways, some other ways of disconnecting Claudette mentioned throughout the interview were laughing, having fun, and not taking herself so seriously. Dorothy stated she intentionally looks for activities and places that will help her to relax. She mentioned her and her husband “take a vacation together every year, usually ten days” and have went on cruises to a number of locations. Other places Dorothy values are those rooted in Black culture. She recalled a time her and her husband attended an African American celebratory talent show on her institution’s campus. Dorothy was enthralled with the students’ dancing, spoken word, and singing performances. She remembered declaring to herself after that event, “I need more Blackness in my life.” Dorothy goes on to say,

Because that to me is self-care. I need to be around my people. That’s why church is important to me. Because I can. That’s why [name of local Black-owned restaurant] is important to me because it is a reprieve from the world that I have to walk in.

The theme Pursuing Enjoyable Activities provided a discussion of the hobbies and interests the Black women depend on to provide them some respite from their lives as executive-level higher education administrators. As discussed, the participants engaged in physical activity as a practice to encourage their mental health. The Black women also described other pleasurable endeavors, such as traveling and attending events, they incorporated into their lives as a means of self-preservation.

## Summary

Four Black women who held executive-level higher education administrator positions at PWIs participated in the research study which sought to explore their leadership experiences. The researcher conducted face-to-face interviews with each participant. Also collected was a relevant document provided by one of the participants, which was reviewed by the researcher along with researcher generated documents. Following the phenomenological approach to data collection, findings from the interviews and documents revealed five themes that answered research question number one. Three themes were identified from the relevant invariant constituents for research question number two. The themes depicted the essence of the research participants' experiences, which as described by Moustakas (1994), is the development of "a unified statement of the essences of the experience of the phenomenon as a whole" (p.100) and is the final step in phenomenological analysis. Moustakas (1994) asserted the understanding of a common phenomenon is not fully exhaustive and the essences of an experience is representative of a particular time and place from the vantage point of the researcher.

The essence describes what and how Black women experienced the phenomenon of executive-level higher education administration at a PWI and their coping strategies, as guided by the research questions. The participants' development of their own personal brand informed their leadership identity, which was a reflection of their values, beliefs, and mindset. Through contrasting experiences, the participants' identified situations that challenged their authentic self, but the commonality was them preserving their self-defined standpoint in spite of those experiences. Collectively, the executive-level leaders recognized the advantage of leadership development opportunities. Each participant

invested in and developed themselves, as gaining new knowledge contributed to their professional growth and capacity.

Involvement in organizational politics was stressed by all participants as mandatory. The executive-level higher education administrators were able to formulate strategies, such as influencing others and creating alliances, to maneuver within the political arena of their PWI. The participants' characterized relationship-building at their institutions as necessary for advancing and fostering a sense of community with others. All participants in this study asserted mentoring relationships were influential in their decision to pursue executive-level roles within the PWI setting and persist as educational leaders.

Gendered racial bias and conflict were salient in the leadership experiences of the Black women executive-level higher education administrators. Conjointly, feelings of disrespect and being discounted were evident and manifested from experiences rooted in visibility and racial microaggressions. Collectively, the participants' exuded bravery and tenacity in the midst of unfairness and opposition they endured as executive-level leaders. The universal essence of the participants' coping strategies as Black women in executive-level higher education administration positions relied on experiences and entities that elicited positive emotional responses. Spiritual connections with a higher being, kinships with family and friends, and gratifying activities were means the executive-level higher education administrators used as escapism and to refuel all aspects of their lives.

Overall, the participants' described adverse situations they experienced as executive-level higher education administrators, derivative of their marginal status within a PWI. When the institutional culture and organizational members were characterized as

inclusive and supportive, the perceptions of the participants' leadership experiences were affirmative. Collectively, the opportunity to be a beacon for change and serve others at their PWI, afforded by their executive-level position, was a driving force for them. The participants were mindful of self-care strategies when a reprieve from leading their institution was warranted. The next chapter includes a discussion of these findings situated within the framework of Black Feminist Theory and the relevant literature about Black women in executive-level higher education administrative positions.

## **CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

This research study sought to explore the leadership experiences of Black women in executive-level higher education administration positions at Predominantly White Institutions. The research questions that guided the study are: (1) How do Black women perceive and describe the influence of race and gender on their leadership experiences as executive-level administrators in higher education? and (2) What strategies (if any) do Black women in executive-level administrative positions use to cope with the perceived influence of race and gender on their leadership experiences as executive-level administrators in higher education? In order to answer the research questions, qualitative interviews were conducted and relevant documents were reviewed. This chapter will provide a summary of the study, discuss the findings within the context of the research literature and theoretical framework, and offer suggestions for practice and future research.

### **Summary of the Study**

Although Black women have made strides in attaining executive-level positions, they are still underrepresented in the upper echelon of higher education administration (Gamble & Turner, 2015; Jackson & Harris, 2007; West, 2015). Black women in these top leadership roles, and other administrative levels, at postsecondary institutions face different challenges related to racial discrimination (Jackson & Harris, 2007; Mosley, 1980; Patitu & Hinton, 2003); gender discrimination (Gamble & Turner, 2015; Jackson & Harris, 2007; Mosley, 1980; Patitu & Hinton, 2003); mentoring and networking relationships (Barksdale, 2006; Davis & Maldonado, 2015); isolation (Patitu & Hinton,

2003); tokenism (Mosley, 1980); unequal pay (Jackson & Harris, 2007; Jean-Marie et al., 2009; Mosley, 1980; Wilson, 1989); and homophobia (Patitu & Hinton, 2003). Gender or race are often the focus in terms of discrimination Black women experience (Barksdale, 2006; Waring, 2003), with few studies directing attention to how race and gender interact to shape the experiences of Black women in administrative roles (Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Waring, 2003).

Using Black Feminist Theory to guide the study, the exploration of how Black women perceive and describe their leadership experiences and coping strategies as executive-level higher education administrators at PWIs followed a transcendental phenomenology methodological design. Face-to-face semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted with four Black women. In addition to the researcher-generated artifacts, one document provided by one of the women was reviewed. From the interviews and the relevant documents, textural (what was experienced), structural (how it was experienced), and textural-structural descriptions (combination of what was experienced and how it was experienced) for each participant were created. For the first research question, five themes were identified after analyzing the data: Knowing Who You Are, Developing as a Leader, Engaging in the Rules of the Game, Building Relationships, and Navigating Bias and Conflict. Three themes emerged after data analysis for the second research question: Finding Strength through Spirituality, Relying on Family and Friends, and Pursuing Enjoyable Activities. The findings suggested Black women in executive-level higher education administrative positions at PWIs have an understanding of who they are, value professional learning and continuing development, are politically aware and participate in institutional politics, cultivate relationships, brave

through negative experiences, and find strength and comfort from their faith, social support, and other positive means.

## **Discussion**

This section of the chapter will discuss the study findings for each research question, relate the study findings to literature about Black women in educational leadership and Black Feminist Theory, identify contributions to the field, outline study limitations, and provide recommendations for practice and future research.

### **Research Question 1**

When describing their leadership experiences, the Black women offered meaningful details about their lives as executive-level higher education administrators at a PWI. From their distinct standpoint, common themes to answer research question one emerged. While experienced differently for each Black woman, each theme connected their lives and created an essence of experiences as an executive-level administrator within higher education.

#### **Theme 1: Knowing Who You Are**

The majority of the participants shared knowing their identity was core to their leadership experiences as executive-level higher education administrators. By knowing their identity, the Black women used that self-awareness to make decisions and determine how they would or would not be treated as a leader. According to the literature, a person's self-identity and beliefs have implications on how they approach leadership (van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg, De Cremer, & Hogg, 2004). For instance, Bridget

valued fairness and used that as a moral compass for how she handled the office situation with one of her staff members despite a colleague's antics and attempts to undermine her authority. This discovery is consistent with Dowdy's (2011) study of Black women higher education administrators' perception of identity and leadership and Henry's (2010) study of Black women in the field of student affairs who stressed the importance of Black women administrators knowing who they are.

The study participants also described not changing who they were when contested was central to how they approached leading within their institutions. Angela and Dorothy indicated experiences in which they perceived required them to change who they were. Both women chose to leave their institutions, which suggests their self-respect and personal worth were more important than their respective positions within their institutions. This finding is parallel to Myers' (2002) assertion that if Black women know themselves, they are able to deal with challenging experiences and maintain images they have of themselves. While Dorothy felt she truly lost herself, she reaffirmed who she was as a person and vowed to never get to that point of conformity again. That newly discovered self-definition gave her the confidence to pursue other executive-level positions, ultimately to a place where she felt valued and appreciated for who she is as an individual and leader. One notable caveat that must be considered is how the participants were able to distinguish whether or not experiences required them to merely adapt to personalities and circumstances or truly change who they were as an individual.

The majority of the participants expressed their personal ideologies originated from serving others and making a change. Claudette described situations in which she would not hesitate to bring issues to the forefront of discussion under the guise of being

“a voice for people who aren’t at the table.” Using the theoretical framework of BFT, the researcher expected the historical context of Black women’s work and longstanding tradition of being in a service role to their communities to influence the participant’s leadership style of wanting to be of service to others (Collins, 2009). What is of further interest is how the Black women participants might feel about advancing the causes for others when their needs and interests are not always addressed within a PWI setting. Claudette also expressed she was “blessed to be a blessing” and branded herself a “servant leader.” This finding is congruent with the research literature about Black women’s approach to leadership and how they intertwine their faith with their interest in serving others (Lewis, 2016). Despite the expression of spirituality being a complicated topic in higher education (O’Neil, 1997), the Black women did not allow that to dissuade how their leadership style was situated within their spiritual beliefs. It is plausible to infer the Black women felt it was their responsibility as a believer to live their religious values within the workplace.

The participants’ experiences suggest regardless of being surrounded by a culture that is not their own, the Black women remained steadfast in their truths of what being a Black woman executive-level higher education administrator meant to them. The Black women did not assimilate into the majority culture, but were able to adapt in order to navigate their minority status, which showcased their versatility. Their experiences also suggest a level of leadership cognition that allows them to integrate multiple leadership styles to achieve results as an executive-level higher education administrator.

## **Theme 2: Developing as a Leader**

The study participants demonstrated identifying and participating in diverse development opportunities for personal and professional growth. The participants attended formal events such as leadership institutes and conferences and completed personality assessments. When Dorothy shared a mentor of her directed her to take the Myers-Briggs assessment, admittedly she learned more about her personality type and honed in on the skills she needed to address to be an effective leader. She described being methodical when attending meetings and pursuing projects by framing how she accomplished tasks within the context of her weaknesses and strengths. Dorothy also shared she had plans to attend a number of conferences and was presenting a workshop as part of her professional development. Despite not much literature existing about all of the professional development opportunities Black women engage in and take advantage of (West, 2017), the findings of this study support Killian and McClinton's (2012) study that indicated professional development was important from a survey of Black women student affairs professionals and they take advantage of workshops, development seminars, and conferences (Jackson & Harris, 2007; Smith & Crawford, 2007). One of Dorothy's development opportunities was a vice presidents conference and suggests not all professional development is used to advance to higher positions. It is plausible to infer Dorothy recognized this conference was necessary in order for her to maintain a level of continued competency of her position as vice president. This finding extends the report that Black women administrators seek out avenues to develop their leadership skills often in sole preparation for advancement (Jackson & Harris, 2007; Smith & Crawford, 2007).

Additionally, this research study found developing as a leader occurred informally as demonstrated by Claudette, who disclosed she shadowed people. Because of Claudette's longevity within her institution, she knew she had to communicate her growth occurred from beyond her institution. Being able to shadow another leader and learn hands-on from someone else in the field gave Claudette a competitive edge when interviewing for an advanced position within her institution. This finding is consistent with Smith and Crawford's (2007) discovery of Black women pursuing non-conventional ways to professional development, such as casually observing others to learn what to do and not to do as a higher education administrator.

The majority of this study participants expressed professional development was a personal responsibility and revealed using institutional resources to attend and participate in external and internal development opportunities that were valuable to their professional growth. According to the data, the majority of the Black women in this study indicated their institutional leaders recognized their potential and expressed willingness to devote resources to develop their leadership skills, similar to findings reported in DeFrantz-Dufor's (2007) analysis of Black women's experiences as American Council on Education Fellows, which found institutional leadership encouraged and supported the participants to apply for the leadership program. Bridget expressed having more than enough financial backing to engage in whatever professional development opportunities she saw fit. She had her own professional development account as well as access to a budget for activities as it related to her associate dean position. The question does arise whether funding for professional development is accessible and equitable depending on the locality of the position, either within Academic Affairs or Student Affairs.

Considering Black women's presence is often saturated within the division of Student Affairs (Glover, 2012), this has the potential to negatively impact the likelihood of Black women pursuing and engaging in professional development activities. And it could shed light on the limited experiences Angela shared.

The participants deliberately examined how different professional development pursuits would encourage their growth by expanding their knowledge base, improving how they lead, or, assisting with job advancement. This commitment to lifelong learning and professional development from the Black women in this study is demonstrative of a core theme of Black Feminist Thought. The study participant's pursuit of education is a form of activism as recognized by BFT (hooks, 1989). From the days of chattel slavery, Black people were considered inferior in terms of intellectual capacity (Davis, 1983; hooks, 1989). Yet Black people, especially Black women, used education as a vessel to empower themselves (Collins, 2009). Because of this historical context, it is reasonable to infer that Black women continue to hold onto this sentiment of using education as a way to embolden themselves in a space, such as PWIs, where their existence is often challenged and disregarded.

### **Theme 3: Engaging in the Rules of the Game**

This study found that the Black women in executive-levels of higher education administration recognized the necessity to utilize strategies to play politics within their organization in order to align with the majority culture. Angela was adamant that she had to put in the extra effort of participating in workplace politics because her status as a Black woman put her at an unfair disadvantage within a PWI. This finding aligns with Davis and Maldonado's (2015) report that Black women have expressed an

understanding that they should not dwell on the unequal playing field in higher education because it will never be equal; but they should develop strategies to enhance their abilities to operate as an administrator in a bureaucratic institution. Results from this study indicated the participants admitted to engaging in workplace politics, yet recognized boundaries they would not cross and upheld their values and beliefs. Bridget professed her colleagues would exercise manipulative behavior to achieve results at her institution. However, maintaining her regard for fairness, she expressed her refusal to use tactics such as yelling, crying, or screaming often required her to travel a more difficult path to accomplishing her goals. This sentiment aligned with findings from Davis and Maldonado (2015) who posited the Black women academic leaders vowed to never conform their standards or ethics when engaging in politics at work.

Creating powerful connections was a notable tactic the participants used to advance their personal agendas or incite institutional change. Dorothy's recollection of her supervisor derailing many of her initiatives when she was provost was succumbed by her ability to collaborate with faculty within her institution to achieve certain goals. She affirmed, "I would get people on board and even if it didn't come out of my mouth, it would come out of the mouth of somebody else and it would get received." Her ability to rally buy-in from institutional stakeholders is analogous to forming coalitions, a political strategy that relies on leaders building groupings of individuals with divergent interests to push forward an agenda (Bolman & Deal, 2013). This finding coincides with Smith and Crawford's (2007) study of Black women administrators who used their influence to corral individuals with shared concerns to produce action. Further, according to BFT, engaging in rules of the game to influence change within social institutions is a form of

activism for Black women, with coalitions being integral to their ability to transform social institutions (Collins, 2009). This study has also shown through their use of political strategies Black women are able to exploit an oppressive circumstance, such as being excluded, to effect the powerful networks within PWIs in some capacity. This is in contrast to the literature that states Black women are isolated from informal networks (Holmes, 2003) and it is often difficult for them to penetrate the powerful ‘good ole boy networks’ to influence the inner workings of their institutions (Smith & Crawford, 2007).

Results from this study identified Black women executive-level higher education administrators relied on persuasion when attempting to influence institutional operations at their level. For instance, Claudette admitted to having the ear of her president and provost and using that to her advantage to sway their thinking and decision-making. Claudette provided another example of her offering a former supervisor insight and affirming him by saying, “See you already knew, you just needed me to validate it” when he solicited her opinion, realizing she would need his backing for future roles she would pursue. By being savvy with their persuasion, the participants were able to maintain positive rapport with colleagues. This behavior is consistent with the findings from Smith and Crawford (2007) who reported the Black women senior-level administrators in their study used persuasive communication when playing the game to advance their careers.

“Being at the table”, as mentioned by Bridget and Claudette, symbolized having the opportunity to incite change at the institution and expressed activism on behalf of the Black women (Collins, 2009). As previously cited, Claudette expressed being able to use her voice for those who were not represented at the table and address not-so-popular issues at any given opportunity were valuable to her as an executive-level higher

education administrator. This finding is consistent with Davis and Maldonado's (2015) study which reported being at the table was suggested as important to politicking for Black women leaders in higher education. Being in a position of authority, as described by Collins (2009), gives Black women the ability to impact policies and processes from the top-down as data in this study shows the participants were able to do. The participants' experiences with engaging in the rules of the game suggests regardless of their positional authority and perceived power, they still had to employ political tactics to accomplish goals at their institution.

#### **Theme 4: Building Relationships**

The participants' experiences with building relationships indicates their willingness to connect with others despite holding a marginal status and suggests they understand working in isolation is not beneficial to their leadership experiences or others. The majority of the participants acknowledged the value of relationships to their leadership experiences, which supports Myers' (2002) findings that relationship networks were pivotal to Black women's careers. Dorothy conveyed she was able to nurture a positive relationship with her current president and as a result acquired some sense of belonging and feeling valued at her PWI. This also fostered a sense of empowerment to perform her job. Angela recalled how the faculty at her previous institution embraced her when she began attending their faculty meetings. Being visible and accessible to the faculty spurred inclusivity for her within that realm, as she was added to their meeting agenda, and showed how developing relationships translated to Angela feeling supported by the faculty. The study participants did not express any difficulty in establishing relationships nor did they cite professional bonds as being a barrier to their success. This

finding is contrary to the literature as scholars have indicated Black women considered building a network of relationships a hindrance to their career progression (Barksdale, 2006).

The Black women executive-level higher education administrators in this study indicated they were able to acquire mentors and, in some cases, sponsors, despite research that has concluded establishing these types of relationships are difficult for many Black women administrators (Holmes, 2003). These individuals showed an interest in their success and provided guidance to them along their journey as higher education administrators. Often, this support was not sought out by the participant and they were approached by others. Meaning individuals in positions of power identified the potential within the Black women and expressed interest in fostering their capabilities. Angela described how the president of her previous institution was committed to building her career and, as a result, she was afforded an opportunity for advancement and was appointed to her executive-level position.

The participants' expressed having meaningful relationships with their mentors and described situations in which their mentors provided advice and support to encourage their personal and professional growth. Claudette stated her mentor, who was a Black male, was very candid with her when deliberating with him as to whether or not she would be chosen for her first executive-level administration role. She recalled him saying, "Sister, it's not that you can't do the job. He doesn't want you for the job. You're not getting the job." This level of candor was valuable for Claudette as it made her consider advice that otherwise she may not have received from those not invested in her success. As previously stated, it was a mentor of Dorothy's, a White male, who

encouraged her to be reflective when considering how she administers and this recommendation contributed to her development as a leader. This finding is consistent with Bertrand Jones and Dufor's (2012) study that reported mentors of Black women administrators offered assistance with work-related issues, career advice, and personal development.

As demonstrated with the study findings, the majority of the participants in this study shared experiences with mentors, formally and informally, who were not all Black, which is congruent with the scholarly literature (Gamble & Turner, 2015). White men were identified by the majority of the Black women as individuals who they came in contact with who were willing to mold and guide them while on their career path, similar to what Davis and Maldonado (2015) reported. This finding is likely given White men dominate leadership positions within higher education (Gangone & Lennon, 2014). The question is raised whether the relationship dynamics differ for Black women depending on the race and gender of their mentor.

### **Theme 5: Navigating Bias and Conflict**

The participants perceived some of their experiences as executive-level leaders at PWIs were as a result of bias others had against them. This finding aligned with the literature that Black women higher education administrators are subjected to issues such as racial and gender discrimination (Gamble & Turner, 2015; Jackson & Harris, 2007; Mosley, 1980; Patitu & Hinton, 2003), isolation (Mosley, 1980; Patitu & Hinton, 2003), and tokenism (Holmes, 2003; Mosley, 1980). The oppression the Black women experienced also demonstrates little progress has been made with the representation of Black women in higher education administration as the participants were referred to as

“first” in their positions or represented the only Black woman in a senior-level role at their institution, also found in the study conducted by Gamble and Turner (2015).

Further, it’s indicative of Black women continuing to face adversity because of their race and gender regardless of the executive-levels of leadership they achieve within higher education (Scott, 2016).

While the terminology was not articulated explicitly, all of the participants in this study described negative experiences that were consistent with racial microaggressions (Sue et al., 2007). In addition to blatant racism, scholars have attested Black women administrators at PWIs have confronted racial microaggressions, encounters that are less overt than racial discrimination (Clay, 2014; Mercurius, 2018). The participants found themselves having to endure scrutiny because of their gender and racial identities despite their competencies and credentials. For instance, Bridget reported being told by a White woman colleague that “I’ve always thought, I’ve always wanted an administrative role. But it must be nice being an African American woman and getting all of these opportunities because of that.” Comments such as this ignore the accomplishments and acumen of Black women and contribute to them being devalued and disrespected. Similar to the data from this study, Holder, Jackson, and Ponterotto (2015) found that although Black women have reached the senior-most positions within their workplace, their intelligence, expertise, and abilities were contested and questioned, often through the racial microaggressions they experienced. What is not clear is how this type of rhetoric may have influenced their self-definition, perhaps by promoting self-doubt in Black women or spurring questions of legitimacy.

Some of the study participants admitted having to alter their behavior to counter the increased attention they perceived was projected unto them. For example, Angela indicated when she walked into a room she would be conscious of her presence and aware of her tone when speaking with others. This behavior has been coined as shifting and is defined as the change in behavior, attitude, or tone Black women practice to accommodate others and put them at ease (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003). This finding reinforces the literature that Black women spend additional time engaging with others and thinking about how they present themselves because of their race and gender (Waring, 2003). Because Black women often struggle to fit into spaces in which they are not a majority, it was expected for the participants to describe strategies they use to diminish their visibility within a PWI setting.

Efforts to dismantle stereotypes and prevent being mislabeled were also motivation for the majority participants' change in behavior and tone. The majority of this study participants were acutely aware of the angry Black woman stereotype that is projected onto Black women. Claudette expressed she would have to monitor her emotions to ensure she was not perceived in a negative light. Dorothy remarked she found herself policing passionate responses when discussing issues with colleagues so her tone was not misconstrued as anger. This study finding is consistent with the literature in which Black women in senior higher education administration compete with controlling images and alter themselves as a result (Scott, 2016). The angry Black woman stereotype can be likened to a controlling image and reinforces the oppression of Black womanhood, as articulated through BFT. The restraint Black women must exhibit when engaging with colleagues causes them to have to tread cautiously when interacting with

others at their institution and compromises their authentic selves. However, BFT asserts Black women are able to reject images that negatively portray them and resist acceptance of them as those images are not their reality (Collins, 2009), as demonstrated with Bridget refuting being stereotyped as the angry Black woman because it was not her personality.

Consequently, increased attention from the hypervisibility the study participants experienced prompted them to be easily ignored and discounted because of their minority status in their workplace, similar to the finding in the study conducted by Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003). Accommodating others by shifting or working twice as hard were ways the majority of the Black women in this study responded to the circumstances of being hypervisible. Dorothy shared she would be exhausted leaving meetings because she would be engaging in extra work to ensure she was not alienating anyone by her actions or words. Although she complained about this added responsibility, she confessed not doing so would be detrimental to her as an administrator. Dorothy willingness to sacrifice the mental and physical toll to her health to accommodate others and be successful in her position points to the continued exploitation of Black women's work. Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003) reported similar findings and described this behavior as Black women overextending themselves in order to contest conditions of invisibility and dispel myths projected onto them.

While conflict could be considered a normal occurrence within organizations often caused by competition over scarce resources (Bolman & Deal, 2013), the majority of the study participants attributed negative conditions they experienced to them being Black women. The mistreatment the participants experienced at the hands of colleagues,

peers, and supervisors spoke to their resilience and inner strength as they were able to sustain their role as executive-level administrators despite negative circumstances.

Directly confronting colleagues who yelled or disrespected them was a common response for the Black women, and even disregarding the situation was used to manage workplace conflict and bias. Addressing negative behavior in the manner in which they saw fit was a way for the participants to exert boundaries and authority over how they would be treated within the workplace. Their reactions of being silent or addressing their transgressor were expressed in the study findings and both types of behavior are forms of activism Black women can exhibit to reject and resist oppressive circumstances, which is essential to their survival as suggested by Black Feminist theorists (Collins, 2009). Other reactionary responses the Black women identified were characterized as coping strategies and were discovered with the second research question.

## **Research Question 2**

Striving to achieve work-life balance, nurturing personal well-being, and handling workplace stressors were catalysts to developing coping outlets and strategies for the Black women participants. The participants' experiences suggest their fortitude alone cannot sustain what they face daily as executive-level administrators and they depend on diverse spaces to cope with varying situations. These spaces, described as safe spaces or homespaces, serve as means in which Black women are able to freely be themselves and reaffirm who they are after experiencing environments that are oppressive (Collins, 2009; hooks, 2012). Relying on their faith and spirituality was the most notable outlet for the majority of the Black women. Other safe spaces included leaning on family and friends for support and pursuing enjoyable activities.

## **Theme 1: Finding Strength through Spirituality**

A commonality amongst the participants was the influence of spirituality as it related to their thoughts and outlook. The majority of the participants acknowledged their faith and prayer when divulging specifics of their experiences and how they managed as an executive-level administrator. This finding is consistent with the conclusions from other scholars who have explored how Black women higher education administrative professionals cope with the challenges they face or decisions they make as leaders (Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007; Lewis, 2016; Shorter-Gooden, 2004). Historically, Black women have been known to lean on religious practices and use spirituality as a means to negotiate and understand the situations they encounter (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Mattis, 2002). Thus, it was not surprising to find the Black women participants describe spirituality as a form of escapism and source of comfort.

According to the data, the participants indicated using literature and music as expressions of their spirituality. In addition to utilizing daily devotions, Angela shared she listened to gospel music to help nurture her spiritual life. Additionally, Dorothy's use of a prayer diary and her literary composition were releases for her. As identified in the literature, these mediums have served as safe spaces and sources of liberation for Black women (Collins, 2009).

## **Theme 2: Relying on Family and Friends**

The participants also described how integral their families, friends, and even colleagues were to their self-preservation. The research conducted by Clayborne and Hamrick (2007) identified similar findings for Black women student affairs professionals

who depended on their family and friends for social support. According to the data, the study participants emphasized the role their husbands played in offering support of them as executive-level higher education administrators. This finding supports previous findings of the study conducted by Patitu and Hinton (2003) in which spouses were among the support network Black women administrators turned to when coping with their careers and personal life. Similar to Patitu and Hinton (2003) and West (2015), results in this study indicated the Black women executive-level administrators experienced camaraderie from colleagues and supervisors, which proved to mitigate any negative effects of their leadership experiences.

All of the participants juggled their leadership role with that of being a mother. The majority of the participants' disclosed the sex of their children and indicated they had daughters. As this study verified, Black women's relationships with one another, specifically the mother-daughter duo, are significant relationships of support for Black women; and Black motherhood is pivotal in the creation of Black women's standpoint (Collins, 2009). For instance, Angela mentioned how she and her daughter bonded over gospel music. Claudette shared her two daughters keep her grounded and "they'll keep it real" with her. The study participants expressed delight when sharing about their daughters and this finding is consistent with BFT's supposition that the relationship Black women have with their daughters is affirming, in spite of the contradictions they face in their everyday experiences (Collins, 2009). While the participants expressed positive experiences with their children, expressly with their daughters, the question must be asked as to how their leadership experiences impacted their ability to raise a family and manage their role as mother.

### **Theme 3: Pursuing Enjoyable Activities**

In this study, exercise was identified as a strategy all of the participants used to manage their well-being. This is consistent with findings from the research study conducted by Hall et al. (2012), which indicated physical activity was a coping response Black women utilized as a result of the stress they encountered within the workplace. According to the data, the study participants did not depend on any one source of enjoyment to nurture their well-being. Methods such as laughing, traveling, and other positive activities were also mentioned by the participants. Consistent with the qualitative results of this study, research shows Black women reported engaging in activities to address workplace stressors and life balance as a higher education administrator (Patitu & Hinton, 2003; West, 2015). In addition to serving as positive outlets, the deliberate incorporation of leisurely activities and enjoyable spaces was plausibly an attempt for the Black women to maintain their individuality and have some semblance of a life outside of the demands of their executive-level role. Given that research has not fully explored coping strategies of Black women in higher education administration, this finding expands the research on how Black women nurture their well-being as higher education administrators and adds to the understanding of this gap through the identification of other strategies Black women turn to outside of social support and spirituality.

#### **Contributions to the field of Educational Leadership**

The findings of this study extend existing research on Black women's experiences as educational administrative leaders, in general, and specifically, in the senior sphere of postsecondary leadership. Also, since this study focused on Black women executive-level

higher education administrators working at PWIs, it adds to the literature about that specific environment and offers information to the colleagues of Black women regarding their leadership experiences within that space. Finally, by using Black Feminist Thought to guide the research study, this study utilized a nontraditional framework to add and diversify knowledge about educational leadership.

### **Limitations**

Due to the nature of phenomenology, a noted limitation is the study findings only offers a description of what the participants experienced rather an explanation. Another limitation of this study is participants were required to self-report that their race and gender influenced their leadership experiences instead of the researcher exploring their experiences in general to answer the research questions. Generalizability of the study findings is beyond the scope of this study as the commonalities in perspective are only accounted for the study participants rather than a universal outlook for all Black women higher education administrators in executive-level positions. Additionally, there was no set criteria for the research setting in which the participants described their leadership experiences, which also limits being able to generalize the study findings to Black women working at any type of predominantly White institution.

### **Implications**

The experiences of Black women administrators in higher education has not garnered much attention in the literature (Howard-Vital, 1989; Mosley 1980; Rusher, 1996). Further, very little practical application has materialized as Black women's contributions continue to be devalued within the realm of higher education administration

(Patitu & Hinton, 2003). Opportunities for future research and practical application can be gleaned from the study's findings.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study has added to the scholarship on Black women in executive-levels of higher education administration at predominantly White institutions by focusing on their race and gender within the context of their leadership experiences. As an emerging topic of study within the field of educational leadership, future research of Black women should also be examined from the perspective of other groups they belong. For example, participants in this study indicated bias against them could also be attributed to their age. Understanding how social identities such as age, sexual orientation, religion, and class influence Black women's experiences is worth exploring.

This study has shown the importance of self-identity in forming a leadership style and approach for Black women higher education administrators. Future research should include a more in-depth look at how Black women in leadership roles have been able to create their self-definitions as a leader within higher education by focusing on their college, life, and early employment experiences. Additionally, it would be valuable to know in what ways Black women's leadership experiences have contributed to shaping their already established identity and sense of self.

There is a dearth of studies that have used a theoretical framework centered on Black women's viewpoint to understand their experiences (Enke, 2014; Jean-Marie et al., 2009). The findings from this study have contributed to giving a voice to the Black women that make meaningful contributions within higher education administration. Further research on Black women as higher education leaders should continue to situate

them and explore issues unique to them so they can serve as an authority on their experiences rather than using a perspective that discounts their culture.

### **Recommendations for Policy and Practice**

Not only do the study results offer insight into opportunities for future research, but the data could inform policy and practice to benefit aspiring Black women leaders, current Black women higher education administrators, and institutions. The following are recommendations for policy and practice:

- Institutions should create diverse recruitment strategies to attract Black women to higher education administration. Recruitment strategies could include leveraging relationships with search firms and promoting opportunities within professional associations and at conferences that attract diverse populations and specifically, those Black women participate. Institutions can also be strategic in their recruitment by modifying committee search and screening processes to be more inclusive and nondiscriminatory against Black women. Additionally, developing a ‘promote from within’ practice and grooming entry- and mid-level Black women leaders could create an internal pipeline of qualified Black women to fill upper-level positions within institutions.
- Institutions should consider strategies focused on retaining Black women in higher education administration. Through the identification of resources and services, institutions have the opportunity to better socialize and support Black women into the campus culture. For example, the construction of a formal mentorship program will make it easier for new

leaders to connect to more seasoned administrators, of all races/ethnicities and genders. Additionally, the formation of a sister circle is a practice institutions could introduce to offer a sense of community for Black women administrators. Lastly, an examination of workplace policies and the creation of a well-defined flexible work plan could facilitate the success of Black women administrators. Also, in the event a Black woman does separate from an institution, reviewing exit interview documentation and addressing identified issues could contribute to an institutions strategic efforts to retain Black women administrators.

- Institutions should develop ongoing trainings centered on diversity, inclusion, and equity to foster cultural competency. Trainings could be virtual or in-person, for individual or group settings, and follow a prescribed format with guest speakers or as informal as lunch and learn series. Care should be taken to solicit buy-in from key stakeholders to facilitate a cultural shift and encourage success of any initiatives prior to implementation. Further, this recommendation necessitates evaluation to assess the effectiveness, possibly with periodic campus surveys to gauge the climate of the institution.
- Institutions should assist Black women with professional development opportunities by launching their own leadership program that supports the personal and professional growth of Black women and orients them to administration. Also, institutions could make career management for Black women a priority and offer assistance with short-term and long-term

career planning, to coincide with the ‘promote from within’ practice.

Additionally, institutions should encourage Black women’s participation in outside organizations and networks to foster their professional development and give access to any available funding or resources to do so.

### **Summary**

Black women’s leadership contributions within higher education have long been overlooked and dismissed (Mosley, 1980). With their increased presence, attention has been shifted to include Black women in the scholarship of educational leadership. Yet few studies have relied solely on the voices of Black women to tell their own stories. This study explored the experiences of Black women higher education administrators holding executive-level positions within a predominantly White institution by relying on their unique viewpoint. The Black women who shared details of their journey revealed how they perceived their leadership experiences as executive-level higher education administrators. Further, the Black women described the strategies they used to cope with those leadership experiences.

Because of their minoritized status, the Black women were able to extend a distinct perspective about the upper echelons of leadership in a majority setting of a PWI. Their discourse is a valuable addition to the scholarship on Black women in educational leadership and understanding their leadership experiences is necessary for institutions to create more accepting and supportive environments for Black women. This study advances the literature about the leadership experiences of Black women who are executive-level higher education administrators. This study affirms the importance of

spirituality, social support, and enjoyable activities to the resilience of Black women in higher education administration.

This chapter provided a summary of the study, which detailed the research problem and methodology used. The study findings and implications were also discussed in detail. Recommendations for research and practical application concluded the chapter. Following this chapter are the references and appendices cited throughout the chapters.

## APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT CORRESPONDENCE

Dear <Potential Participant's Name>,

I am writing to solicit your participation in my study (OR) XXX mentioned I should contact you to ask for your participation in my study.

I am a Black woman administrator at Western Kentucky University and a Ph. D. candidate in the University of Kentucky's Department of Educational Leadership. As part of the requirements for completing my doctoral degree, I am conducting a research study on Black women higher education administrators. This explores how race and gender intersect to influence the leadership experiences of Black women in executive-levels of higher education administration and what strategies they use to cope with the perceived influence of race and gender on their leadership experiences.

I am inviting you to participate because you may meet the criteria for my study, which includes individuals who:

- self-identify as a woman;
- self-identify as Black, defined as a person who has origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa;
- are employed, or were previously employed, at an institution of higher education that is a regionally accredited, four-year public, coeducational predominantly White master's or doctoral-granting institution;
- held, or currently hold, titles such as president/chancellor, vice president/vice chancellor, chief academic officer, chief student affairs officer, and dean for at least one year; and
- perceived, or currently perceive, their race and gender identities influence their leadership experiences as an executive-level higher education administrator

If you agree to take part in this study, you would be agreeing to respond to a demographic questionnaire to determine if you meet the all of the outlined criteria and be interviewed face-to-face one to two times. Each interview lasts between 60 and 90 minutes. You would also be asked to provide any documents relevant to understanding how race and gender inform your leadership experiences. Participation in the study is completely voluntary and your participation in the study and all study data would be kept completely confidential by the researcher. Neither your name nor any identifiers will be included, except for your race, gender, and executive-level position. For your convenience, I have attached a copy of the consent form to this email. If you meet all the sampling criteria and are interested in participating in the study, please respond to my invitation at [REDACTED]. If you have any questions, I can be reached by email or [REDACTED].

Thank you for considering this request and I hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely,  
Tanja N. Bibbs  
Ph.D. Candidate, Education Sciences  
Department of Educational Leadership  
University of Kentucky



## **APPENDIX B: DEMOGRAPHIC SCREENING QUESTIONS**

By telephone)

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study. As you know, I am interested in how race and gender have informed and/or influenced your leadership experiences and the strategies you have used to cope with these leadership experiences. To ensure you meet the selection criteria for the study, I have some demographic questions I would like to ask you. In order to protect your anonymity and confidentiality, all identifying information will be changed.

(By email)

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study. As you know, I am interested in how race and gender have informed and/or influenced your leadership experiences and the strategies you have used to cope with these leadership experiences. To ensure you meet the selection criteria for the study, would you please respond to the following demographic questions? Please note, to protect your anonymity and confidentiality, all identifying information will be changed.

Please state/provide your full name.

What is your race/ethnicity?

What is your gender - male/female?

Have you ever or do you currently hold a higher education administrative position considered as executive-level?

What is/was the title of that position?

How long were/have you been in that position?

Was/Is that position at a Predominantly White Institution?

Do you believe your racial and gendered identities have influenced your leadership experiences as a higher education executive-level administrator at a PWI?

## **APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

### **Consent to Participate in a Research Study**

#### **WHY ARE YOU BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH?**

You are being invited to take part in a research study about the influence of the intersections of race and gender on leadership experiences of Black women in executive-level higher education administrator positions. You are being invited to take part in this research study because you are a Black woman and a higher education administrator in an executive-level role at a predominantly White institution. If you volunteer to take part in this study, you will be one of up to 5 people to do so.

#### **WHO IS DOING THE STUDY?**

The person in charge of this study is Tanja Bibbs, a Ph.D. candidate of University of Kentucky Department of Educational Leadership. She is being guided in this research by Dr. Wayne D. Lewis, Jr. There may be other people on the research team assisting at different times during the study.

#### **WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?**

The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of Black women executive higher education administrators. Specifically, this study seeks to understand 1) how do Black women in executive-level administrative positions perceive and describe the influence of race and gender on their leadership experiences in higher education? and 2) what strategies (if any) do Black women in executive-level administrative positions use to cope with the perceived influence of race and gender on their leadership experiences in higher education?

By doing this study, we hope to learn more about how race and gender intersect to influence the leadership experiences of Black women executive-level administrators working at predominantly White postsecondary institutions in the United States and add to the body of knowledge on this topic.

#### **ARE THERE REASONS WHY YOU SHOULD NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?**

There are no known reasons that would subject you from being excluded from taking part in the research study.

#### **WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?**

The research procedures will be conducted as a face-to-face interview in a private location of your choice, your natural setting, or the site in which you experience (or experienced) intersectionality as a higher education administrator. The interview will take 60 to 90 minutes. Multiple interviews may be conducted. You will also be asked to review the interview transcripts and themes that emerge during data analysis for

accuracy. The total amount of time you will be asked to volunteer for this study is 2 ½ to 3 ½ hours to over the next couple of months.

**WHAT WILL YOU BE ASKED TO DO?**

The research study will utilize face-to-face interviews and a review of relevant documents. The interviews will be audio recorded and the recordings transcribed for analysis. During the interview, you will be asked various questions related to how race and gender are interconnected in reference to your leadership experiences as a Black woman in an executive-level position of higher education administration. During the interview phase, any documents relevant to your leadership experiences, specifically in terms of how the overlapping racial and gender identities impact it, will be requested and reviewed. Notes about the documents will be taken for recording purposes and copies and/or photographs of the documents will be requested. During data analysis, the interview transcripts and notes about any relevant documents will be reviewed for common themes and any findings will be interpreted and reported.

**WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS?**

To the best of our knowledge, the things you will be doing have no more risk of harm than you would experience in everyday life. Although, you may find some questions we ask you to be upsetting or stressful due to the sensitive nature of the topic.

**WILL YOU BENEFIT FROM TAKING PART IN THE STUDY?**

There is no guarantee that you will get any benefit from taking part in this study. Your willingness to take part, however, may, in the future, help society as a whole better understand this research topic.

**DO YOU HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY?**

If you decide to take part in the study, it should be because you really want to volunteer. You will not lose any benefits or rights you would normally have if you choose not to volunteer. You can stop at any time during the study and still keep the benefits and rights you had before volunteering.

**IF YOU DON'T WANT TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY, ARE THERE OTHER CHOICES?**

If you do not want to take part in the study, there are no other choices except not to take part in the study.

**WHAT WILL IT COST TO PARTICIPATE?**

There are no costs associated with taking part in the study.

**WILL YOU RECEIVE ANY REWARDS FOR TAKING PART IN THE STUDY?**

You will not receive any rewards or payment for taking part in the study.

**WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT YOU GIVE?**

Information collected from the interviews and review of relevant documents will be safely and securely stored on a password-protected computer.

We will make every effort to keep confidential all research records that identify you to the extent allowed by law. Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When we write about the study to share it with other researchers, we will write about the combined information we have gathered. You will not be personally identified in these written materials, other than your race, gender, and executive-level position. We may publish the results of this study; however, we will keep your name and other identifying information private. We will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that you gave us information, or what that information is. We will keep private all research records that identify you to the extent allowed by law. We may be required to show information, which identifies you to people who need to be sure we have done the research correctly; these would be people from such organizations as the University of Kentucky.

**CAN YOUR TAKING PART IN THE STUDY END EARLY?**

If you decide to take part in the study you still have the right to decide at any time that you no longer want to continue. You will not be treated differently if you decide to stop taking part in the study. The individual conducting the study may need to withdraw you from the study. This may occur if you are not able to follow the directions they give you or if they find that your being in the study is more risk than benefit to you.

**ARE YOU PARTICIPATING OR CAN YOU PARTICIPATE IN ANOTHER RESEARCH STUDY AT THE SAME TIME AS PARTICIPATING IN THIS ONE?**

You may take part in this study if you are currently involved in another research study. It is important to let the investigator/your doctor know if you are in another research study. You should also discuss with the investigator before you agree to participate in another research study while you are enrolled in this study.

**WHAT ELSE DO YOU NEED TO KNOW?**

There is a possibility that the data collected from you may be shared with other investigators in the future. If that is the case the data will not contain information that can identify you unless you give your consent or the UK Institutional Review Board (IRB) approves the research. The IRB is a committee that reviews ethical issues, according to federal, state and local regulations on research with human subjects, to make sure the study complies with these before approval of a research study is issued.

**WHAT IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS, SUGGESTIONS, CONCERNS, OR COMPLAINTS?**

Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions, suggestions, concerns, or complaints about the study, you can contact the investigator, Tanja Bibbs at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the staff in the Office of Research Integrity at the University of Kentucky between the business hours of 8am and 5pm EST, Mon-Fri. at 859-257-9428 or toll free at 1-866-400-9428. We will give you a signed copy of this

consent form to take with you.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed name of person agreeing to take part in the study

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of (authorized) person obtaining informed consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Thank you again for agreeing to participate in this research study. As previously mentioned, I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Educational Leadership at the University of Kentucky. This interview is part of a study examining how race and gender influence the leadership experiences of Black women in executive-levels of leadership within higher education administration. The research study is intended to add to the body of knowledge about Black women's perspectives in higher education leadership. This interview should take approximately 60-90 minutes. Also, I am also interested in reviewing any documents you may have, such as curriculum vitae, publications, journals, written and electronic correspondence, poetry, photographs, or any other forms of art that may be relevant to how race and gender influence your leadership experiences. If you are willing, these documents can be shared at any point during the interview phase.

In order to capture a detailed account of what we discuss, and if you are comfortable, I would like to audio record the interview. I would also like to make a copy of or photograph any documents you present, after any personal information is redacted, to reference during data analysis. The information collected from the interviews will be stored electronically on a secure, password protected computer or flash memory drive or stored in a locked filing cabinet at my home. No identifying information will be used other than your race, gender, and executive-level position and the pseudonym that was assigned during the screening process will be used for each participant.

At any time during the interview, you may decline to respond to any of the questions and if you wish to terminate your participation at any point, please let me know.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Do you consent with having the interview audio recorded?

Before we begin, I need you to sign the informed consent forms.

**I appreciate you meeting with me today to talk about how you perceive the influence of your intersecting identities on your experiences as an executive-level higher education administrator. I would like to begin by asking you questions related to your background and work experiences within higher education.**

### **Background and Academic Career**

How did you become interested in a career in higher education? **Probe:** Do/Did you think race and gender impacted why you pursued a career in higher education? If so, how/in what ways?

Describe the journey to your role as XXX (title of executive-level position).

In what ways has your race and gender helped you when pursuing career advancement in higher education administration?

In what ways has your race and gender hindered you when pursuing career advancement in higher education administration? What did you do to overcome these barriers?

To what extent did/has mentoring or networking support(ed) or shape(d) your career?

What does/did being a Black woman administrator at a predominantly White institution mean to you? **Probe:** Did/Do you think your race and gender influences/influenced your leadership style in your current position? If so, how/in what ways?

How do/did you feel you fit into the organizational/institutional culture at a PWI as a Black woman in an executive-level position? **Probe:** Do/did you feel appreciated and valued in your role? Do/did you believe you had/have the resources, support, and authority to fulfill the duties of your role?

In your role as XXX (title of executive-level position), who do/did you report to directly? How would you describe your working relationship with your supervisor? Your peers? Your subordinates? **Probe:** Do you believe your race and gender influence(d) your interactions/relationships with your colleagues that are Black men? White men? Black women? White women? If so, in what way(s)?

In your role as XXX (title of executive-level position), have/did you altered/alter your personality or identity based on interacting with certain individuals or in specific circumstances? In what ways have you changed and why did you think it was necessary? **Probe:** Have you encountered any stereotypes about Black women in your role as XXX (title of executive-level position)? If so, in what way(s)?

**Thank you for reflecting on your background and work experiences. Now we will move onto questions related to self-care, unless you have any other comments about your role as a higher education administrator that we did not discuss.**

### **Coping Strategies**

How do you handle challenging situations at work in your current role?

How do/did you nurture your own personal well-being to deal with any work-related stress? **Probe:** Please describe any practices or activities you engage(d) in to attend to your physical, emotional, and spiritual health.

How do/did you feel you are/were supported professionally as a Black woman administrator at your institution? **Probe:** Please describe any formal programs or professional development opportunities that empower(ed) you as a Black woman higher education administrator at a PWI.

How do/did you feel you are/were supported personally as a Black woman administrator at your institution? **Probe:** Please describe your support systems you rely/relied on at your institution.

Describe how you balance(d) your career and personal life.

What advice do you have for Black women who are aspiring to attain positions such as yours? **Probe:** What skills, strategies, or professional/personal development is necessary to better prepare other aspiring Black women to positions similar to yours?

Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences as a Black woman in higher education administration at a PWI? If so, what?

**That concludes our interview. The information you provided will be extremely useful to my research. Once the interview is transcribed, I would like to give you the opportunity to review the transcript for accuracy and include any clarifying comments. Would you mind if I contacted you about this? If necessary I may be interested in a follow-up interview. Would you be willing to meet with me again? Please feel free to contact me if you have any question, comments, or concerns regarding the interview or the study in general. Thank you again for your time and participation.**

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VITA

**Tanja N. Bibbs**

**EDUCATION**

<b>Western Kentucky University (WKU)</b>	<b>Bowling Green, KY</b>
Master Public Administration	December 2007
Bachelor of Arts in Sociology	December 2005

**PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE**

<b>Western Kentucky University</b>	<b>Bowling Green, KY</b>
Program Manager, Online Program Development	07/2017 – present
Assistant Director, Distance Learning	07/2014 – 07/2017
Coordinator, Distance Learning	02/2012 – 07/2014
Independent Learning Specialist	02/2009 – 02/2012
<b>Audubon Area Community Services</b>	<b>Bowling Green, KY</b>
Job Readiness Trainer	07/2008 – 02/2009
<b>Barren River Area Agency on Aging</b>	<b>Bowling Green, KY</b>
Case Manager	02/2007 – 07/2008

**TEACHING EXPERIENCE**

<b>Western Kentucky University</b>	<b>Bowling Green, KY</b>
Instructor, Dual Credit	01/2014-05/2014

**HONORS & AWARDS**

<b>University of Kentucky</b>	
Arvle & Ellen Turner Thacker Research Fund Recipient	2018
Wallace Charles Hill Graduate Fellowship Recipient	2016, 2017
<b>Association of Continuing Higher Education</b>	
Emerging Leader Institute participant	2016
<b>Bowling Green Human Rights Commission</b>	
Women Reaching Higher Award	2010

**Kentucky Commission on Human Rights**

Unbridled Spirit of Justice Award 2010

**Western Kentucky University**

Graduate Assistantship, Department of Political Science 2006, 2007  
Award of Distinction Scholarship 2001 – 2005

**PUBLICATIONS**

Uranis, J., & Bibbs, T. (2017). The challenge of CBE programs: Administrative and technological considerations pertaining to the delivery of non-semester based programs. In: Rasmussen, K., Northrup, P., & Colson, R. (Eds.), *Handbook of research on competency-based education in university settings* (pp. 92-115). Hershey, PA: IGI Global.

**PROFESSIONAL PRESENTATIONS**

Hatfield, B., Bibbs, T., & Thrasher, E. (2016, November). *Using digital resources to build a self-paced MBA foundations solution*. Presented at the Kentucky Convergence Conference, Bowling Green, KY.

Uranis, J., & Bibbs, T. (2016, April). *Competency-based education: Leveraging resources*. Workshop presented at the University Professional and Continuing Education Association Annual Conference, San Diego, CA.

Bibbs, T., Vincent, T., & Reiger-Ward, Danita. (2016, January). *A collaborative approach to recruiting and retaining students for a personalized learning program*. Presented at the Western Kentucky University Student Success Summit, Bowling Green, KY.

Bibbs, T., & Vincent, T. (2015, November). *Non-term based courses: Leveraging operations for competency-based education*. Presented at the Kentucky Convergence Conference, Bowling Green, KY.

Uranis, J., & Bibbs, T. (2015, September). *Developing a competency-based education program*. Presented at the Kentucky Association for Continuing Higher Education, Park City, KY.

Bibbs, T., & Kirtley, S. (2014, November). *For students by students: An approach to addressing accessibility*. Presented at the Kentucky Convergence Conference, Louisville, KY.

Bibbs, T., & Troutman, C. (2014, October). *From the ground up: Building student services for distance learners*. Presented at the Online Learning Consortium

International Conference 2014, Orlando, FL.

Bibbs, T. (2012, October). *How did you hear about us?* Presented at the Association of Distance Education and Independent Learning Annual Conference, Grand Junction, CO.

Dougherty, B., Thornton, P., Bibbs, T., & Vincent, T. (2010, October). *Expanding opportunity for servicemembers: Leadership, advocacy, policy and practice.* Workshop presented at the Association for Continuing Higher Education Annual Conference, Albuquerque, NM.

Bibbs, T., & Haugen, J. (2010, April). *What should my password be?.* Presented at the Association for Continuing Higher Education South Spring Conference, Cocoa Beach, FL.

Bibbs, T., & Haugen, J. (2009, October). *Independent Learning: 2008 rebranding initiative.* Presented at the Association for Continuing Higher Education Annual Conference, Philadelphia, PA.