

Summer 2021

A Narrative Study of the Experiences that Disrupt or Terminate Entry in the Community College Presidential Pipeline for African American Women

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**A NARRATIVE STUDY OF THE EXPERIENCES THAT DISRUPT OR TERMINATE
ENTRY IN THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE PRESIDENTIAL PIPELINE FOR
AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN**

By

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of
Old Dominion University in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

COMMUNITY COLLEGE LEADERSHIP

OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY

August 2021

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ABSTRACT

A NARRATIVE STUDY OF THE EXPERIENCES THAT DISRUPT OR TERMINATE ENTRY IN THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE PRESIDENTIAL PIPELINE FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN

Dana G. Stilley
Old Dominion University, 2021
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Organizational structures, beliefs, and values in higher education are influenced by the deep-seated characteristics of patriarchy, dominance and racial and gender bias, upon which higher education was founded. These factors continue to impact the ascension of African American women to college presidencies. Current challenges facing community colleges include a gap in executive leadership and the underrepresentation of African American women in the presidential pipeline.

The purpose of this narrative inquiry was to better understand the experiences that disrupt or terminate the journey to a presidency for African American women in senior level positions at community colleges. The goal was to share the lived experiences of African American senior level administrators at community colleges in the New York Metropolitan area. Participants shared experiences during semi-structured interviews. Participants also described the impact of the intersection of race and gender on their experiences. Seven African American women from six community colleges in the New York Metropolitan area were selected through criterion purposeful and snowball sampling.

Through the lens of Black Feminist Thought a five-step analysis yielded eight major themes: (a) persistence of power and privilege, (b) development of strategies to survive, (c) community college president's role, responsibilities, and impact, (d) fighting the fight against stereotypes, (e) invisibility, (f) evaluating quality of life, (g) racism and discrimination, and (h) a journey of faith. These findings indicated that the unique experiences of African American women are comprised of racist and discriminatory acts which result in appropriated power, feelings of invisibility, leadership challenges, and struggles with authenticity.

Implications for community college leaders and practitioners consist of taking action to understand why the experiences of African American women leaders are unique, reduce the number of racist and discriminatory experiences, and better understand the impact of these experiences. This study encourages leaders and practitioners to secure mentoring and supplemental support, develop campus-wide cultural competency, and design opportunities to understand unique experiences. Recommendations for further research include exploring other regions of the country, comparing the experiences of African American senior level women with those in other races, and assessing the experiences of mid-level African American leaders in community colleges.

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I dedicate this dissertation to my husband Derrick and my son Derrick James, the loves of my life, who consistently bring me joy and laughter. I also dedicate this dissertation to my wonderful mother Ida, who taught me to love and trust God and through it all reminded me of His favor in my life. This dissertation is also dedicated to my dear departed dad, James, who continues to guide me from his heavenly home above. I dedicate this dissertation to my siblings, David, and Danelle, without whom I would not be able to make this journey. I also dedicate this dissertation to the beautiful, intelligent, sassy, and bold African American women who despite all odds, continue to shine and make magic.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to the many people that contributed to the successful completion of my dissertation journey. To each of you I express my sincere appreciation. Thank you.....

Dr. Mitchell Williams, my dissertation committee chair, for your calm assurances and gentle pushes that strengthened, encouraged, and challenged me during the best and worst times.

Dr. Felecia Commodore and Dr. Schwitzer, the outstanding members of my dissertation committee, who supported, inspired and guided me to think critically about my work, and strive for excellence in my research.

To my large extended family, which includes aunts, uncles, in-laws, cousins, nephews, and my St. Charles AME Zion Church family, your well wishes, prayers, words of encouragement, patience and understanding will forever be etched in my heart.

To my sister-circle, the fabulous ladies that always have my back no matter what. Thank you for allowing me to laugh when I wanted to, cry when I needed to, and use my voice when I so needed to be heard.

To the late Dr. Clarence Branch, Jr., my mentor in so many ways, who guided my educational journey as a young child, and constantly encouraged me to take this leap.

To sweet sixteen, the best cohort to make this journey with that anyone could ask for. I pray that we will continue to celebrate our wins and support each other throughout our losses.

To the wonderful women who participated in this study. I am honored that you shared your stories and trusted me to retell them.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions play a vital role in the development of a multicultural and equitable society. As organizations that support social diversity, equity, and inclusion, higher education institutions are expected to include diversity in their cultures, values, and organizational structures (Arday, 2018; Levine, 1991; Sheppard, 2018; Smith, 2016). The benefits of diversity in higher education systems have been advanced by many scholars (Levine, 1991; Sheppard, 2018; Tienta, 2013). Researchers argued that faculty and staff diversity is important to strengthening the educational workplace and the surrounding community (Gasman et al, 2015; Tienta, 2013). Moreover, researchers have proposed that diversity facilitates credible decision making and policy formation (Milliken & Martins, 1996; Tienta, 2013). Likewise, diversity supports the economy through the engagement of the abilities and aptitudes of many (American Council on Education, 2017; Evans, 2007; Smith, 2016).

Over the last several decades diversity initiatives have been instituted on many college and university campuses (Tienta, 2013). Yet, the lack of diversity in leadership positions in higher education is one of the most important contemporary issues in the academy. According to Wolfe and Freeman (2013), “The underrepresentation of administrators of color in higher education is one of the most important ethical dilemmas facing colleges and universities today” (p 1). Notwithstanding significant advances in access, curriculum, and educational technology, little change has occurred in the level of leadership provided by African Americans (Baxter-Nuamah, 2015; Braxton, 2018; Wolfe & Dilworth, 2015; Wolfe & Freeman, 2013).

The majority of leadership positions at colleges and universities in the United States are held by White males. According to the United States Department of Education (2017), 6% of all

college presidents were Black, Afro-Caribbean, or African American in 2011. This rose to 8% by the year 2016. In the same year, 30% of college presidents were women, yet only 5% of all college presidents were women of color, and only 7.4% of community college presidents were African American women (U. S. Department of Education, 2017). In the fall of 2018 only 2% of all full-time faculty at degree-granting postsecondary institutions were African American females. At the associate professor level, African American women represented 3% (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). As the traditional pathway to an academic presidency is through academic affairs, the pipeline is nearly void of female candidates of color.

Extensive research has been conducted on African American women in leadership positions at Predominately White Institutions (PWIs). Common themes included the examination of personal and professional barriers, and the effect of the glass ceiling (Gamble & Turner, 2015; Jackson & Harris, 2007; Lloyd-Jones, 2009; Selzer et al., 2017). At community colleges, the student body is comprised of people that are diverse in ethnicity, academic ability, college readiness, age, and socioeconomic status. These varied backgrounds call for capable leaders that reflect the diversity of the student body (Braxton, 2018). There is limited research on African American female leadership at the community college. Further research is essential to gain a better understanding of the experiences of African American women in senior level administrative positions at community colleges. The additional research may allow for the implementation of strategies that address the underrepresentation of African American women in higher education, create organizational diversity, and add women of color to the presidential pipeline.

Background of the Study

The American higher education system, founded in the 1600s, was established as a set of patriarchal institutions, governed by the dominant race, for the dominate race and gender (Geiger, 2016). These ingrained characteristics continue to influence organizational structures, beliefs, and values, which impede the ascension of African American women to presidential positions within the academy (Geiger, 2016; Gill & Jones, 2013). Over forty years have passed since the Civil Rights and Women's Movements in the US, yet only 7.4% of community college presidents were women of color in 2016 (Selzer et al., 2017). During the same year it was reported that an excess of 50% of the community college presidents anticipated retiring within the next five years (Selzer et al., 2017). This projection, juxtaposed with the underrepresentation of African American women in executive leadership, demands consideration, thought, and action if there is a desire to change the status quo.

A review of current research illustrates the numerous difficulties faced by African American women in higher education. Select research identified barriers that inhibit entry and retention in senior level administrative positions (Byrd, 2009; Gamble & Turner, 2015; Selzer et al., 2017). With a concentration on leadership as a phenomenon, additional studies provided insight into conflicting leadership characteristics, professional development deficiencies, and the absence of authoritative power (Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Petitt, 2009). Other studies focused on the personal and professional challenges which result from continued stereotyping and discriminatory practices (Byrd & Stanley, 2009; Jones, 2013). Selected literature also emphasized the lack of knowledge regarding the impact of intersecting social identities (Agosto & Roland, 2018; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010).

Numerous researchers concentrated on the professional, organizational and personal challenges confronting African American women leaders. Professional encounters often included marginalization (Baxter-Nuamah, 2015; Hylton, 2012; Petitt, 2009), exclusion from good old boy networks (Byrd, 2009; Jackson & Harris, 2007; Selzer et al., 2017), feelings of isolation (Byrd, 2009; Jones, 2013; Mosley, 1980) and the need to combat stereotypical beliefs (Byrd, 2009; Jackson & Harris, 2007; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). Organizational challenges were inadequate mentorship (Gamble & Turner, 2015; Jones, 2013; Key et al., 2012; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010), the glass ceiling (Baxter-Nuamah, 2015; Jackson & Harris, 2007; Jones, 2013; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010), and unwelcoming and hostile campus climates (Braxton, 2018; Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007; Hylton, 2012). Notable personal challenges included developing a work-life balance (Gamble & Turner, 2015), and child-care management (Jackson & Harris, 2007).

There is limited research on how the intersection of race and gender influences the lived experiences and perceptions voiced by African American women in higher education (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Historically, research devoted to female leaders has focused on only one identity dimension - gender (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010; Stanley, 2009). Key et al. (2012) claimed that research that gives consideration to race separately from gender fails to capture the experiences of African American women. To gain a more exact understanding of the experiences of African American women leaders, the intersection of multiple social constructs must be considered (Key et al., 2012; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010).

The majority of extant research devoted to African American women is heavily focused on identifying barriers and challenges associated with the leadership experience. There is a shortage of research that addresses the complexities of the lived experiences and social realities

of African American women in authoritative positions at community colleges (Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Lloyd-Jones, 2009; Stanley, 2009). Failure to understand the complexities of the experiences from which the barriers and challenges emerge may prevent the advancement to tenured faculty, academic department chairmanships, vice president and presidential positions. Also, the anticipated vacancies in community college presidential positions combined with the benefits of diversity require attention to the outflow of African American women in the presidential pipeline. The literature suggests the need for further study of the experiences of African American women that disrupt or terminate the journey to presidential positions at community colleges.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this narrative inquiry was to better understand the experiences that disrupt or terminate the journey to a presidential position for African American women in senior level positions at community colleges in the New York Metropolitan area. Participants described the lived experiences that disrupted or terminated the journey toward executive leadership. Additionally, participants discussed being uniquely situated in two disadvantaged social constructs, namely race and gender. Participants also described the impact of the intersectionality of race and gender on their lived experiences.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study were:

1. What are the experiences of African American women leaders at community colleges in the New York Metropolitan area?
 - 1a. What experiences influenced African American women at community colleges in the New York Metropolitan area to reexamine the pursuit of executive leadership

positions?

2. In what ways did race and gender influence the experiences of African American women in senior level positions at community colleges in the New York Metropolitan area?
3. What do the stories of African American women in senior level positions at community colleges in the New York Metropolitan area reveal about how social and cultural factors impact the retention and promotion of African American women pursuing executive positions at community colleges?

Professional Significance

Researchers continue to explore justifications for the underrepresentation of African American women in community college leadership positions (Baxter-Nuamah, 2015; Braxton, 2018; Jones, 2013). The findings of this study increased the understanding of the experiences of female African American senior level leaders in community colleges by collecting, documenting, and retelling narratives of lived experiences of these leaders. Reflecting on the overlapping identities unique to African American women, this study examined the experiences that disrupt or terminate the journey toward executive leadership.

The community college student body is generally described as more diverse than the student body at four-year institutions. Yet, the executive leadership at the community college often does not reflect the diversity of its students (Hardy, 2019; Schudde & Goldrick-Rab, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2020). This study is significant for institutional leaders, governing boards, and diversity and inclusion specialists charged with maintaining a diverse organizational structure. A deeper understanding of the unique lived experiences of African American women in the academy may ignite the creation of tangible actions specifically targeted to increase the diversity in administrative and executive leadership.

Hiring managers and human resource professionals also stand to benefit. The findings of this study highlight critical experiences and perceptions that curtailed the pursuit of higher leadership positions for African American women. This knowledge may facilitate the development of institutional programs designed to address institutional retention. Program development may include opportunities for cultural exchanges, professional development, mentoring and additional supportive agendas.

Researchers and scholars who study the community college may also find value in this study. There is a fervent need for researchers to continue to study the impact of race and gender on the leadership development of African American women in the academy (Agosto & Roland, 2018; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). Special emphasis is placed on the necessity to understand African American women's lived experiences and their perceptions (Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Wolfe & Dilworth, 2015). With a focus on African American women in leadership at community colleges, this study expanded the extant knowledge and built on the established framework designed to understand the factors that contribute to the attainment of leadership roles by African American women in higher education.

African American women currently in leadership positions, or those considering a career in higher education leadership may also find worth in the shared experiences reported in this study. Finding value in shared experiences, Rönnegard (2017) stated that by recognizing how similar and different we are to others helps us understand ourselves. Furthermore, the meaning of life is linked to our shared experiences (Rönnegard, 2017). The shared experiences of the participants may help other African American women in leadership positions make meaning of comparable experiences and gain a better understanding of the behavior of others.

Overview of Methodology

As the primary goal of this study was to gain a better understanding of the experiences of African American women in executive leadership roles, this study employed a qualitative method with a narrative inquiry approach. The purpose of qualitative research is to explore, interpret, and understand a central phenomenon (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Hays & Singh, 2012). To gain an understanding of the phenomenon, qualitative researchers engage study participants by asking broad, general questions. Additional characteristics of qualitative research often utilized in studies includes: inductive analysis, purposive sampling, thick description and a flexible research design (Hays & Singh, 2012). Frequently taking place in a natural setting, qualitative research allows for bonding between the researcher and participants (Hays & Singh, 2012). Participants' responses are collected in the form of words, expressions or images. Data are then analyzed, searching for descriptions or themes. Utilizing personal thoughts, experiences, and extant literature, the researcher interprets the information and disseminates it in a final report (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

John Dewey (1938) stated that experience is a method of teaching, provided that the experience is agreeable and has an effect on additional experiences. Deeply rooted in Dewey's theory of experience, narrative inquiry research was designed to facilitate the understanding of experiences and make meaning of those experiences (Bold, 2012; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Developed in the 1980s, narrative inquiry gained significant momentum as a research methodology after the publication of *Narrative Inquiry*, written by Clandinin and Connelly (Bold, 2012). In research, narrative is used to explain human activity. Through narrative, also referred to as storytelling, the nature, connectedness and order of events

that enabled individuality are shared (Bold, 2012). These features make storytelling the best way to make meaning of the experiences of life.

Everyone has a story, and storytelling has a purpose (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Through telling and retelling stories people return to what they know, how it is understood, and what they believe to be true (Baker, 2005). A connection is made and knowledge is gained from the stories of others, as listeners adopt the feelings and sentiments communicated about the storytellers' experience (Baker, 2005). In narrative, the role of the researcher is to extend beyond the limitations and discover the link in the stories.

The target population for the study was women who identified as African American. At the time of the study the participants were employed at a community college or had vacated a community college position within the past 18 months, voluntarily or involuntarily. Purposeful criterion sampling and snowball sampling was used to select participants who held or have held one of the following positions: Dean, Academic Department Chair, or Vice President. All of the women had at least two years' experience in their current or most recent role at a community college located in the New York Metropolitan area.

Field texts were gathered through one-on-one, semi-structured interviews designed to extract extensive narratives. Open-ended interview questions (see Appendix A) enabled the participants to share in-depth details of their stories and experiences. Each interview, which lasted approximately 60 minutes was recorded using Zoom video and audio-conferencing technology. Additionally, a digital voice recorder was used to ensure that the data were captured and secured should there be any technological concerns with Zoom.

Verbatim transcriptions of all interviews and classification of other field texts was the first step in the data analysis process. The researcher applied Black Feminist Thought as the

framework to examine and interpret the data. After transcription was completed, the researcher prepared a summary of each interview, noting the meaningful emergent quotes. The individual summaries and emergent quotes were sent to each participant for review to ensure that the researcher had captured the voice of the participant (See Appendix B).

Follow-up interviews occurred approximately three weeks after the initial interview. During the second interview the researcher reviewed key emerging themes with the participant and asked clarifying questions (See Appendix C). Also, the researcher shared the experiences of other participants, and inquired about similar or differing occurrences. The follow-up interviews, which did not exceed 30 minutes, were also recorded via Zoom and a digital voice recorder.

The final coding cycle helped the researcher determine the structure of the stories. Thick description, member checking, and field note inclusion established trustworthiness of the data. The identity of each participant, as well as their institution, is being kept anonymous through the use of pseudonyms.

Delimitations of the Study

This study had several delimitations. One delimitation was the choice to focus on African American women leaders currently or recently employed in senior level positions at community colleges. Another delimitation was the choice to focus solely on community colleges located in the New York Metropolitan area. Additionally, the job titles of the participants are a delimitation. For the purposes of this study, a senior level administrator is a Dean, Academic Department Chair, Associate/Assistant Vice President, Vice President, Executive Vice President, or Chief Academic Officer.

Definition of key terms

The key terms used throughout this study are defined as follows:

1. *African American*: People of African descent who are citizens of the United States. For the purposes of this study, African American, Black, and people of color may be used interchangeably.
2. *Black Feminist Thought*: A critical social theory that includes African American women's experiences in the discourse on leadership (Byrd & Stanley, 2009).
3. *Community college*: A regionally accredited, two- year institution, which primarily awards an associate degree as their highest academic award (American Association of Community Colleges, 2019).
4. *Cultural Factors*: The system of values, behaviors, and traditions, that individuals internalize and pass from generation to generation.
5. *Experience*: An event or occurrence that happens to someone and effects their feelings.
6. *Good Old Boy Network*: An informal professional network that provides mentoring and professional development opportunities and advantages for men only.
7. *Glass Ceiling*: A variety of intangible barriers that prohibit qualified individuals to advance to higher organizational levels.
8. *Intersectionality*: The acknowledgement of overlapping, subordinate social identities which result in unique discriminatory and oppressive experiences, as a consequence of systemic power imbalances.
9. *Intersecting Identities*: The multiple factors, such as race, gender, ethnicity, class and sexuality, that intersect to form one's identity.
10. *Leadership*: Refers to the upper administrative level responsible for motivating, influencing and implementing a group of individuals toward the achievement of a common goal.

11. *New York Metropolitan area*: For the purposes of this study the New York Metropolitan area is defined as the five boroughs of New York City, Long Island, the Lower Hudson Valley region, Newark, NJ, Jersey City, NJ, Paterson, NJ, Elizabeth, NJ, Edison, NJ, Bridgeport, CT., New Haven, CT., Stamford, CT., Waterbury, CT., Norwalk, CT and Danbury, CT.
12. *Organizational Challenges*: Challenges that are rooted in the foundation of community colleges.
13. *Personal Challenges*: Personal challenges are private life, emotional, or relational challenges unique to a particular person.
14. *Pipeline*: For the purposes of this study, the pipeline refers to the source of qualified candidates for an executive leadership position in higher education.
15. *PWI*: An acronym for predominantly White institutions of higher learning where the majority of the student body is White.
16. *Senior Level Administrative Positions*: For the purposes of this study, senior level refers to a Dean, Academic Department Chair, Associate/Assistant Vice President, Vice President, Executive Vice President, or Chief Academic Officer.
17. *Social Factors*: The educational, political, and economic elements that stem from society.

Chapter Summary

Although the number of minorities in the academy has increased over the past years, African American women continue to be underrepresented in faculty, senior- level administrative, and college president positions in higher education (Davis & Maldonado, 2015; US Department of Education, 2017). Existing research on African American women in community college leadership focused on the challenges and barriers to entry and retention.

There is a need to understand the meaning of the lived experiences that cause African American women to reconsider the journey to college presidential positions at community colleges.

Furthermore, there is a demand to gain better insight into the influence of race and gender on lived experiences and perceptions. Through narrative inquiry, participants shared their unique stories for analysis and interpretation through the lens of Black Feminist Thought.

This introductory chapter provided an overview of the study. Moreover, Chapter One includes the background of the study, the purpose statement, and the research questions. The study's professional significance, overview of methodology, delimitations, and definition of key terms complete Chapter One. Chapter Two reviews the current literature pertaining to the experiences of African American women in leadership in higher education. Chapter Two also contains literature discussing intersectionality, and the unique positionality of African American women. Literature pertaining to Black Feminist Thought builds the framework that was used in analyzing the data. Chapter Three consists of the methodology of study. The third chapter describes the methods, participants, data collection and analysis in detail. In Chapter Four the researcher presents the findings from this study. Chapter Five includes a discussion of the findings of this study. Chapter Five also discusses recommendations and future research opportunities.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this narrative inquiry was to gain a better understanding of the experiences that disrupt or terminate the journey to a presidential position for African American women in senior level positions at community colleges in the New York Metropolitan area. Participants recounted lived experiences that disrupted or terminated the journey toward executive leadership. Additionally, participants discussed being uniquely situated in two disadvantaged social constructs, namely race and gender. Participants described the impact of the intersectionality of race and gender on their lived experiences.

This chapter offers a review of literature related to the distinct experiences of African American women in higher education. The researcher discusses the method used in the literature review, and the conceptual framework of the study. With a higher education context, the researcher then provides a historical framework; discusses diversity and its importance and examines the advancement of research devoted to African American women in higher education. This review also highlights challenges and barriers of African American women in higher education and synthesizes relevant literature on the impact of the intersection of race and gender for African American women in higher education. Also discussed are the challenges facing community colleges, and the need to address the underrepresentation of African American women leaders at community colleges. Additionally, this chapter addresses the experiences of African American female leaders and their pursuit of next level leadership at community colleges. Lastly, gaps in the literature are identified. For the purposes of this study, the researcher used the words African American, Black and people of color interchangeably to denote people of

African descent who are citizens of the United States. Also, for the purposes of this study, the intersecting identities are race and gender.

Literature Review Method

To conduct this review of literature the researcher used the following methodology. First, an outline of the literature review was developed. Then, the researcher developed a literature funnel to illustrate movement from broad topics to the identification of the literature gaps for which this study was designed to address. These tools provided a roadmap that ensured that the flow was logical and easy for the readers to follow. Using the online Old Dominion University library, the databases accessed in the search included Taylor and Francis, ERIC, and EbscoHost. The search was confined to books, dissertations and conference proceedings, as well as peer reviewed articles on studies conducted in the US.

The study focused on better understanding the experiences that disrupt or terminate the journey to a presidential position for African American women in senior level positions. Consequently, key words or phrases used when searching literature were: African American women, Black, diversity, higher education, community college, leadership, narrative inquiry, Black Feminist Thought, and intersectionality. Analysis of the literature included writing annotated bibliographies highlighting the study's methods, findings, limitations, and gaps. To assist in the organization of the literature EndNote was used.

Conceptual Framework

In this study it was important to understand the issues of race and gender that plague African American female leaders in higher education. Black Feminist Thought (BFT) has advanced the exploration, critique and analysis of research devoted to African Americans (Byrd, 2009). As a critical social theory, BFT illuminates the subjugation of African American

women as a group, while seeking to empower them in an environment of intersecting oppressions of race, gender and sexuality (Collins, 2000). Proponents of BFT suggest that African American women will never reach full autonomy until racism and sexism are totally eliminated (Collins, 2000, Davis & Maldonado, 2015).

Black Feminist Thought facilitates the investigation of dominate, oppressive organizations and institutions (Byrd, 2009; Wolfe & Dilworth, 2015). Built upon the belief that race and gender cannot be separated, White (2001) stated that Black Feminism emerged “at the juncture between antiracist and antisexist struggles” (p. 27). According to White (2001) the feminist movement in the United States was segregated during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. When White suffragists became disappointed by the exclusion of voting rights from the Fifteenth Amendment, they began to align themselves with factions working against Black male suffrage. This shift in alliances left early Black feminists experiencing alienation and betrayal, as it appeared that White suffragists were sacrificing the rights of Blacks for their own gain (White, 2001).

Several decades later, during the 1960s Civil Rights Movement, and the Black Liberation Movement of the 1970s, Black feminists began to recognize that the feminist movement either misrepresented or totally failed to represent the Black woman experience (White, 2001). Not only were Black women continuing to feel alienated and estranged from White women, The Black Power Movement created a bond between militant Black men and White male patriachs who continued to exhibit sexism. This shared experience of sexism results in the maintenance of patriarchy, where men continue to hold the power in our society (hooks, 2015). Unable to ally themselves with White men, Black men, or White women, the Black women are “one of the most devalued female groups in American society (hooks, 2015, p. 107).

Established by Patricia Hill Collins, a noted American sociologist, Black Feminist Thought is vital to comprehending the outside influences that shape the lives of Black women administrators (Collins, 2000). Five major themes comprise BFT: (1) Black women have a 'group' viewpoint that is characterized by themes and emphasizes understanding Black women's experiences based on race, gender, and class; (2) responses to the themes are varied; (3) there is a need to acknowledge the experiences and knowledge from the experiences of Black women are interdependent and in opposition to the dominant group's viewpoint; (4) Black women must express their consciousness and viewpoint (self-definition), void of the dominant group's definition; and (5) there is a link between knowledge, activism, and social justice (Baxter-Nuamah, 2015; Braxton, 2018; Collins, 2000).

Collins (2000) declared that it is impossible for Black women to separate their twin identities, race, and gender. As such, BFT offers an explanatory lens to facilitate understanding that African American women's lived experiences differ from every other person who is not Black *and* female (Hylton, 2012). Associated with BFT, is the concept of intersectionality, which was first introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989. Intersectionality focuses on how the overlapping identities of race, gender, and social class, impact the experiences of women of color while navigating oppressive institutional structures (Braxton, 2018; Crenshaw, 1989).

The linkage of intersectionality and the aforementioned themes of BFT make BFT an appropriate framework for this study. As the goal is to better understand the experiences of African American women in senior level positions that disrupt or terminate the journey to a community college presidency, BFT offers the context to boost the comprehension of the complex social realities and experiences of Black women (Collins, 2000; White, 2001). Furthermore, BFT helps African American women understand the construction and opinion of

their leadership experiences and the meanings of those experiences (Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007; Lloyd-Jones, 2009).

Historical Review

James Baldwin once said “Know from whence you came. If you know whence you came, there are absolutely no limitations to where you can go” (300 Quotes by James A. Baldwin [p2]: A-Z Quotes). Accordingly, several researchers agreed that having a historical framework is vital to understanding the contemporary and unique experiences of African American women engaged in academic institutions which were founded to solely benefit White men (Gregory, 2001; Jones, 2013). Holmes (2004) noted that providing historical text serves to frame influences that shaped professional experiences of African American college presidents. Likewise, Wolfe and Dilworth (2015) included a historical review to contextualize a pattern of systematic oppression that continues to marginalize African American women.

American higher education was originated during a period of extreme racial dominance in this country. The first colleges were universities founded during the 1600s and were exclusively for White men. Non-Whites were prohibited from accessing formal education until the establishment of the Institute for Colored Youth, in Cheyney Pennsylvania in 1837 (U.S Department of Education, 1991). Subsequently, Lincoln University, founded in 1854, and Wilberforce University, founded in 1856 provided college educations for free Blacks (Geiger, 2016).

The Morrill Act of 1862, 7 U.S.C. § 301 et seq. (1862) granted land to states for the establishment of colleges which specialized in agriculture or the mechanical arts. Designed to enhance the social and economic status of farmers, the Act also sought to provide access to higher education for all societal divisions (Jones, 2013). In 1890, a second Morrill Act, 26 Stat.

417, 7 U.S.C. § 321 et seq. (1890) was passed. This legislation required states to show that race was not an admissions criterion, or else to designate a separate land-grant institution for persons of color. It further provided additional funding to those institutions that accepted Black students. These actions were the catalysts for the creation of access, and educational and legal rights for Blacks (Jones, 2013). Nineteen universities were granted land-grant status under this act, enabling a significant number of Black students to enter college.

Notwithstanding the growth of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU's) during the 1800s, Black women faced great challenges. Described as the exception of the exceptions, Black college women were not wanted by Black nor White colleges in the South. With the founding of Spelman College and Bennett College, institutions for Black females only, this problem began to dissipate (Jones, 2013).

The northern states offered more educational opportunities for Black women. Black women earned undergraduate degrees, as well as graduate and professional degrees. Lucy Sessions was the first African American women to earn a college degree from Oberlin College in 1850. Shortly thereafter, Mary Jane Patterson attained a bachelor's degree from Oberlin College, and Fanny Jackson Coppin earned a degree from Coppin, both in 1865 (Braxton, 2018). In 1921, Sadie T.M. Alexander became the first woman to earn a PhD in economics from the University of Pennsylvania (Braxton, 2018). In 1954, the ruling in *Brown vs. Board of Education (1954)* abolished segregation in education. In spite of this, little changed in southern colleges and universities. Blacks seeking graduate degrees were forced to exercise their sole option, which was to depart the South and come North (Jones, 2013).

The three decades following World War II were a revolutionary time for the higher education system in the United States. From 1945-1975, the system was marked by significant

expansion, both in the demand for additional colleges and the diversity of the students accessing post-secondary education (Geiger, 2016; Huisman et al., 2015). This time period thrust colleges and universities into a drive to increase diversity on their campuses (Geiger, 2016; Levine, 1991). Thereafter, four additional factors emerged which caused higher education to remain thoughtful about diversity: legal and political dynamics, changing demographics, the rise of a postindustrial knowledge economy, and persistent societal inequities (Williams & Clowney, 2007).

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the Civil Rights Movement fought to establish racial equality for African Americans in the United States. This Era signifies the commencement of actions to fulfill the promises of equality and meritocracy established in the Declaration of Independence (Henson, 2012). Affirmative action is action taken to improve the rights and progress of disadvantaged people. During the Civil Rights Movement, President John F. Kennedy introduced the phrase in an effort to address continued discrimination in spite of constitutional assurances and the law (Martinez, 2014). President Kennedy's Executive Order 10925 (1961) mandated that federal contractors take affirmative action to guarantee equal treatment for all applicants regardless of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. Extending the work of President Kennedy, the Civil Rights Act (1964) set the foundation for the enforcement of civil rights laws and affirmative action (Martinez, 2014).

The Civil Rights Act (1964) outlawed discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, and national origin. It guaranteed equal employment for all, limited the use of voter literacy tests, and allowed public facilities to be integrated. It was not until the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that segregation in the south began to wane. Of the eleven Titles included in the Civil Rights Act, Title VII is the most well-known (*Civil Laws*, 2019; "Civil Rights Act," 1964;

Hersch & Shinall, 2015). Title VII bans employer discrimination. It is a federal law that is applicable to the private and public sector. Title VII also applies to employment agencies, the federal government, labor organizations and education.

The ratification of the Equal Employment Opportunity Act (1972) significantly revised Title VII. First, Section 702 of Title VII was amended to grant the EEOC broader power to investigate and enforce remedies. This change not only provided opportunities for employees to be made whole, but also served as a deterrent to recurring discrimination practices (Deitch & Hegewisch, 2013; Zehert, 2019). Second, revisions to Title VII, Section 702 also terminated the exclusion of employers of educational institutions. In so doing, discrimination employment protection was expanded to include many million more workers. Finally, the revised Section 702 redefined employer to include all state and local government employers and lowered the number of employees needed for employers to gain exemption to Title VII (Zehrt, 2019).

As these laws and affirmative action policies gained momentum, higher education institutions were challenged about the exclusion of minorities. Consequently, higher education was forced to address educational access, career advancement and employment opportunities for everyone (Wolfe & Freeman, 2013). Institutions were required to accept more Black students and hire more Black and female staff, faculty and administrators. Although the laws were designed to protect women and minorities, the law does not guarantee hiring and equal treatment (Jackson & Harris, 2007).

Historically, academic institutions had limited African American women to teaching positions. Nevertheless, the African American female pioneers embraced their leadership skills and became higher education administrators, founders, and presidents (Glover, 2012; Jones, 2013). In 1866, Sara Woodson Early became the first Black woman to join the college faculty at

Wilberforce University. In 1889, at Lincoln University, Josephine Silone Yates served as the Natural Sciences Department Chair. In 1904, the Daytona Educational and Industrial Training School for Negro Girls was founded by Mary McLeod Bethune. Over the next several years, Mary McLeod Bethune provided the leadership that enabled that institution to grow and develop, and ultimately merge with the Cookman Institute of Jacksonville, Florida to become the Bethune-Cookman University (Bethune-Cookman University, n.d.).

Lucy Diggs Slowe, credited for her exceptional work in student personnel, became the first African American Dean at Howard University in 1922. As an outspoken advocate for the progression of college educated African American women, Lucy Diggs Slowe was instrumental in the establishment of the National Association of College Women (NACW) (Perkins, 1996). Founded to improve conditions for Black women faculty and raise the standards at colleges where Black women were attending, these college educated Black women also worked to encourage advanced education, and inclusion in leadership roles for Black women. In spite of these goals and their great concern for Black women in higher education, not many of the members of the NACW were employed in colleges or universities (Perkins, 1990).

As the expansion of higher education continued, the demands and desires of faculty members also shifted. Yearning to devote more time to research, faculty were in need of additional support to ensure that the developmental needs of students continued to be met, both inside and outside of the classroom. Student Affairs departments supplied the needed assistance, and thereby began to flourish (Braxton, 2018). Before long, African American women administrators began to pursue employment in student affairs departments. Now, research indicates that the majority of African American women administrators began their higher

education career in student affairs. Given that the majority of college presidents come through the ranks of Academic Affairs, this is of great concern (Gamble & Turner, 2015).

Historical events shaped the cultural and social constructs of the US. In that same manner, historical events have shaped the cultural and social constructs of higher education. Knowledge of history is vital to understanding the challenges and experiences of African American leaders (Holmes, 2004; Waring, 2003).

Diversity

Higher education institutions play a vital role in the development of a multicultural and equitable society. As such, colleges and universities are obligated to include diversity in their values and organizational structures (Smith, 2016). Diversity is the concept of recognizing and promoting racial, gender, ethnic, religious, and other differences (Hersch & Shinall, 2015; Wolfe & Dilworth, 2015). Diversity cultivates different perspectives, spawns innovation, and allows for creativity. Diversity also stimulates problem solving and new ways of thinking. It increases access and inclusion and supports the economy through the engagement of the abilities and aptitudes of many (*American Council on Education*, 2017; Smith, 2016). An additional benefit often linked to diversity is the diminished presence of bigotry and prejudice (Baker et al., 2016; Sheppard, 2018). Advancing diversity within an organization is a leadership responsibility (Sheppard, 2018; Tienta, 2013).

The benefits of diversity in higher education resulted in The Supreme Court rendering diversity as a compelling state of interest. The rulings of *Regents of California V. Bakke*, 432 U.S. 265 (1978), *Grutter V. Bollinger*, 539 U.S.306 (2003), and *Gratz V. Bollinger*, 539 U.S.244 (2003) legalized affirmative action policies designed to increase diversity. Centered upon the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, these cases support legislative interest in

student body and faculty diversity by proclaiming that diversity is a compelling state interest and therefore a valid reason for affirmative action plans (Eckes, 2005). The *Bakke* ruling stressed the benefit of exchanging healthy ideas as a result of diversity. *Grutter* emphasized the importance of providing talented and qualified citizens of every race and ethnicity with an open path toward leadership. Furthermore, *Grutter* and *Gratz* concluded that using race as a positive plus factor in college admissions to promote future workplace diversity is lawful (Weeden, 2005). As the Supreme Court has yet to rule on the use of race in hiring a diverse faculty, the aforementioned cases are often relied upon to draw conclusions pertaining to hiring faculty (Eckes, 2005; Weeden, 2005).

Definition of Diversity

The word diversity is commonly used on the campuses of most colleges and universities in the United States. Yet, determining a definition for diversity in academia has been difficult. According to Levine (1991), when you ask for a definition of diversity “you will get a reply entombed in ideology and obfuscating rhetoric” (p. 1). Despite being one of the most urgent, challenging issues facing higher education, research devoted to the definition, conceptualization and measurement of diversity in higher education is sparse (Baker et al., 2016; Huisman et al., 2015).

Observable and non-observable dimensions may be considered when crafting a definition for diversity (Milliken & Martins, 1996; Roberson, 2006). Gender, race, ethnicity and age are examples of observable dimensions. Of those, race is the one central observable dimension that is most often mentioned in the definition of diversity (Baker et al, 2016; Roberson, 2006). Research conducted by Hon et al, (1999) found that 81% of the studies participants agreed, strongly agreed or very strongly agreed that race was a relevant dimension when defining

diversity (Hon et al., 1999). Additionally, Hon et al, (1999) asserted that age, gender, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation and religion were included in the definition of diversity less frequently. Likewise, Loden (2010) discussed the concept of dimensions relative to the definition of diversity. According to Loden (2010), two tiers of dimensions exist: primary and secondary. The primary dimensions, considered the center of one's diverse identity, are the characteristics that shape values, self-image and perceptions of others. The secondary dimensions are less impactful and easier to adjust. Examples of secondary dimensions include education, first language, political beliefs, and work experience (Baker et al., 2016; Loden, 2010)

Further concerns relative to the definition of diversity were reported in Levine (1991). Levine (1991) reported study findings devoted to the race, gender and ethnicity of 14 diverse institutions from every region of the US. The 14 assorted institutions were deeply divided about the meaning of diversity. Moreover, most of the 14 participating institutions were unable to clearly articulate desired goals and outcomes pertaining to diversity. Analysis of the data resulted in the emergence of four very different opinions of the meaning of diversity. First, was the concept of representation. Representation implies that the number of underrepresented in all campus populations should be increased to reflect the societal populations. The second viewpoint was support. Specifically related to students, support refers to providing assistance to promote persistence and retention of the student body. The third opinion, integration, encompasses blending new campus populations into those already in existence. The final point of view expressed was multiculturalism. Multiculturalism relates to the concept of a shared community that preserves the integrity of each group contained within (Levine, 1991).

Another challenge associated with defining diversity is its interconnection with the word inclusion (Arday, 2018; Tienta, 2013). Often paired together and referred to as "diversity and

inclusion”, extant research by Arday (2018) and Roberson (2006) suggested the terms should be segregated, as they represent dissimilar approaches to the administration of diversity. The focal point of diversity is the demographic composition of the population. Inclusion, however, converges on the removal of barriers that might otherwise prohibit the acceptance of contributions and widespread participation of all. Inclusion also represents different policies and procedures designed to address equity and equality in the hiring and retention of underrepresented minority groups (Arday, 2018; Hon et al., 1999; Roberson, 2006).

Benefits of Diversity in Higher Education

Diversity initiatives have been instituted on many college and university campuses over the last several decades. As places that support social diversity, equity and inclusion, higher education institutions are expected to include diversity in their culture and organizational structures (Arday, 2018; Levine, 1991; Sheppard, 2018). Designed to strengthen institutions and promote their continued success, diversity is often discussed relative to the makeup of an institution’s student body (Levine, 1991; Wolfe & Freeman, 2013).

The benefits of diversity in the higher education system have been advanced by many scholars (Bowman, 2011, Levine, 1991). Research has affirmed the positive effects of building diversity into educational programming for all students (Bowman, 2011). Evidence now exists that substantiates that interactions with peers of different racial and ethnic backgrounds lead to higher graduation rates, higher levels of civic engagement, positive academic and social self-awareness, and lower levels of prejudice (Bowman, 2011). Moreover, this research classification concluded the existence of legal benefits as well (Bowman, 2011).

Studies devoted to measuring the impact of faculty and staff diversity point to a positive influence in teaching, learning, and community engagement (Bowman, 2011; Smith, 2016;

Tienta, 2013). Researchers writing about faculty and staff diversity have argued that faculty and staff diversity is important to fortifying the educational workplace and the community which it serves (Smith, 2016). Moreover, researchers have argued that diversity enables trustworthy decision making and policy formation. Likewise, researchers assert that diversity supports the economy by utilizing the abilities and aptitudes of many (*American Council on Education*, 2017; Smith, 2016; Stephanie, 2007)

Diversity in Leadership

Despite this knowledge, the lack of diversity in leadership positions in higher education is one of the most important contemporary concerns facing the academy (Wolfe & Freeman, 2013). Notwithstanding significant advances in technology, pedagogy, and access, there has been no meaningful variation in the measure of leadership provided by African Americans (Wolfe & Freeman, 2013). Wolfe and Freeman (2013) stated that the methodology employed to increase the diversity in administrative positions in higher education has been centered on diversifying search and hiring committees. This method is insufficient, as it fails to address institutional racism, and socialization. Research exploring the lack of minority representation in leadership positions revealed the following themes: the value of diversity is complicated, there is no universal approach to diversity, one size does not fit every institution, and difficulties exist with the conceptualization of diversity leadership (Wolfe & Freeman, 2013).

The majority of leadership positions at colleges and universities in the United States are held by White males (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Continuous access and equity issues within the system result in low rates of persistence and completion of graduate and doctoral programs for people of color in comparison to Whites. In 2016-2017, Whites earned 65.8% of the master's level degrees and 67.5% of the doctor level degrees. Blacks earned 13.6% and 8.8%,

respectively (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). Masters and doctoral degrees are the required credential for most upper-level administrative positions in higher education. Without these academic credentials in numbers comparable to Whites, underrepresentation of African Americans in faculty and senior level positions will continue (Gasman et al., 2015).

In the Fall of 2017, only 2% of the full-time faculty at degree-granting postsecondary institutions in the US were African American males, African American females and Hispanic men, down from 3% in the Fall of 2016 (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). Customarily, the route to a college presidency is through faculty and academic positions held in academic affairs departments. The scarcity of African Americans in full-time faculty positions renders the pipeline nearly void of candidates of color. This is further evidenced by the drought of college and university presidential positions held by African Americans. Six percent of college presidents were Black, Afro-Caribbean, or African American in 2011, rising to 8% by the year 2016. In the same year, 3 out of 10 college presidents were women, yet only 5% of all college presidents are women of color (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). In community colleges, institutions that pride themselves on access and diversity, only 7.4% of the presidents were African American women (U. S. Department of Education, 2017).

Evolution of Research on African American Women in Higher Education

Research devoted to African American women in senior level positions in higher education is scarce (Lloyd-Jones, 2009; Stanley, 2009). During the 1970s and 1980s, most of the leadership scholarship spoke to White males or focused solely on middle to upper-class White women (Jean-Maire et al., 2009). Other studies have focused on the lack of career advancement opportunities (Byrd & Stanley, 2009). The majority of the research focuses on identifying common barriers and challenges of African American women senior level leaders at PWIs (Byrd

& Stanley, 2009). Historically, the experiences of African American women have been omitted, misconstrued, and diminished (Jean-Maire et al, 2009).

Finding very little literature relating to African American women administrators in higher education, Mosley (1980) deemed African American administrators invisible and an endangered species, particularly in PWIs. According to Mosley (1980), the status of African American women administrators mirrored their national status, placing African American women at the bottom of the pack. Freeman (1993) confirmed the hiddenness of African American women in senior level positions in higher education research. According to Freeman (1993) African American women in higher education hold titles of assistants or associates, instead of directors, deans, vice presidents, provosts or presidents. This is further illustrated by data on community college presidents during the four-year span from 1987-1990. The number of newly appointed community college presidents during that time totaled 883. Of those, only 11 (18.3%) were Black women (Jones, 2013).

Noting that demographic projections would result in greater student body diversity after the year 2000, Freeman (1993) defended the need to increase the number of African American women in central roles in higher education. Additionally, Freeman (1993) noted that African American women aspiring to executive leadership in higher education would greatly benefit from knowledge pertaining to the experiences and strategies of successful African American women in the academy (Freeman, 1993). Similarly, Lois Benjamin, the editor of *Black Women in the Academy promises and peril*, raised awareness of the scarcity of Black women leaders in institutions of higher education, as well as provided knowledge about the leadership of Black women in the academy. Ms. Benjamin also introduced the concept of including the experiences and voices of Black women in higher education research (Benjamin, 1997).

Professional Barriers and Challenges

Being uniquely situated within at least two social norms that are frequently oppressed (Crenshaw, 1989), the lived experiences of African American women are grounded in collective experiences of everyday life, and multiple social perspectives (Byrd & Stanley, 2009). Accordingly, the realities of African American women should be recognized and given voice (Stanley, 2009). Giving voice is an expression for self-reflective speech. It aids in acquiring self-definition and self-determination (Collins, 2000). Shared self-reflection and perspectives energize people to take action and change the status quo (Collins, 2000; Stanley, 2009).

The inclusion of the voices and experiences of African American women in higher education research has revealed numerous challenges and barriers that these women face. The barriers and challenges are generally clustered as professional, personal, and organizational (Braxton, 2018). Research indicates that the barriers and challenges have not changed significantly over the years (Byrd, 2009; Mosley, 1980; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010; Selzer et al., 2017).

Isolation

Mosley (1980) sought to identify barriers and pressures of Black female administrators at PWIs. Findings indicated that the majority of the participants were the one and only Black administrator or faculty member on their respective campus. This resulted in experiences of isolation and tokenism. Clayborne and Hamrick (2007) relayed similar concerns, noting that isolation is particularly challenging for African American women administrators. Isolation also reinforces the low position of African American women in the academy.

Byrd (2009) conducted a qualitative study that introduced the concept of intersectionality into the discourse. Ten African American women in executive or senior level management

positions at predominately White organizations were engaged to participate in this study. Despite different encounters, these women voiced experiences of isolation. According to Byrd (2009), isolation experiences - being the only woman of color in a group setting or meeting - create feelings of being undervalued, unaccepted and alone. Additionally, feelings of isolation for African American women may instill a lack of trust in the institution and one's professional colleagues (Braxton, 2018). Not limited to administrators, Jones (2013) indicated that isolation remained a challenge even for African American women college presidents. The shortage of other African American female presidents leaves those in the presidential role feeling alone with limited access to a network of other African American women experiencing similar feelings (Jones, 2013).

The good old boy network

In addition to isolating experiences, research confirms that African American women often experience exclusion from the good old boy network (Byrd, 2009; Gamble & Turner, 2015; Jackson & Harris, 2007; Waring, 2003). The African American participants in Byrd (2009) indicated that exclusion from the good old boy network limits access to social connections that give rise to job opportunities, and work-related social activities. Findings also indicated struggling with socializing in a White male world (Byrd & Stanley, 2009). Consistent with the literature, the findings in Waring (2003) indicated exclusion from the good old boy network, and negative repercussions as a result. Designed to understand the backgrounds and conceptions of leadership among African American female college presidents, Waring (2003) found that exclusion from the good old boy network was among the top three barriers to a presidential position.

Marginalization

Another professional challenge identified in the literature is that of marginalization. Marginalization is an issue, situation or event that situates a person outside of the stream of power and influence within an institution (Patitu & Hinton, 2003). For African American women in leadership and faculty in higher education, marginalization is manifested in undermining, resentful, resisting and challenging behavior (Byrd & Stanley, 2009). Louis et al. (2016) focused on the experiences of Black faculty members at predominately White research universities. Findings indicated frequent occurrences of snide remarks, condescending comments, mixed messages, and underhanded actions intended to challenge the participants' credentials and credibility and prevent job advancement.

Challenges related to lack of credibility is one form of marginalization which African American women frequently face (Baxter-Nuamah, 2015; Hylton, 2012). The attainment of a senior level position by an African American woman is often credited to special treatment, implying that African American women lack the ability to earn a senior level position based upon merit (Baxter-Nuamah, 2015). Hylton (2012) asserted that in PWIs, politics demand that African American women must prove their credibility as an administrator from the start. Participants believed that the lack of credibility stemmed from cultural differences and stereotyping.

Lack of credibility is also a challenge for African American female faculty. In a study on women faculty of color, Pittman (2010) supported this claim. In Pittman (2010) White male students were found to challenge the authority and pedagogical expertise of African American female faculty members. Noting the difficulties stemming from a lack of credibility, study

participants in Hylton (2012) and Pittman (2010) agreed that African American women must demonstrate competency at a much higher level than their White counterparts (Hylton, 2012).

Disempowerment is another manner of marginalization. Power is best described as the ability to control resources that affect other people and influence the achievement of other peoples' goals (Petitt, 2009). Powerlessness was affirmed in Mosley (1980). One third of the administrators in Mosley (1980) admitted to having no power over budgetary decisions in areas for which they were responsible. Byrd (2009) determined that disempowering encounters were among the participants' most salient experiences. Examples of overlooked authority, questioned authority, resisted authority, and circumvented authority were recounted throughout the Byrd (2009) study. Petitt (2009) focused on the connection between power and Whiteness. Contending that White's define, control and shape organizations, Petitt (2009) concluded that African American women at PWIs are never fully empowered, and that any power they believe they have can be removed from them at any time.

Personal Barriers and Challenges

Personal barriers and challenges experienced by African American women in higher education leadership include establishing a balance between work and life (Gamble & Turner, 2015; Jackson & Harris, 2007) and maintaining initiative (Gamble & Turner, 2015). Gamble and Turner (2015), sought to identify factors and life experiences that would assist African American women in their pursuit of executive leadership positions in postsecondary education institutions. Of the 10 emergent themes, the difficulty of establishing a work-life balance was the only theme that all participants agreed on. Participants of the study communicated the challenges associated with the social pressure to raise children, employ adequate child-care; maintain a household and have a successful career (Gamble & Turner, 2015).

Leadership is often accompanied with a large time commitment, and a great deal of responsibility and stress. These high demand jobs also require personal and family sacrifice. Aspiring presidents also may have to consider relocating their family to attain a presidency (Braxton, 2018). The women in Gamble and Turner (2015) discussed their inability to adequately use their resources for advance their careers. Although described in different manners, these women felt that their advancement was inhibited by a decision to play it safe instead of taking some risks.

Organizational Barriers and Challenges

Research has indicated that organizational barriers and challenges are rooted in the hierarchical and patriarchal structures of higher education (Gill & Jones, 2013). Some of these challenges continue to exist due to internal processes and organizational policies (Beckwith et al., 2016). For African American women, organizational barriers and challenges include the glass ceiling effect (Jackson & Harris, 2007; Jones, 2013; Key et al., 2012), inadequate mentorship (Gamble & Turner, 2015; Jackson & Harris, 2007; Key et al., 2012; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010), and institutional climate and organizational structure (Braxton, 2018; Hylton, 2012).

The glass ceiling

The glass ceiling refers to a variety of intangible barriers that prohibit qualified individuals from advancing to higher organizational levels (Baxter-Nuamah, 2015). Believed to be a product of cultural attitudes, behaviors and practices within institutions, the glass ceiling effect also can be experienced at every level of the academic ladder (Jackson & Harris, 2007; Jones, 2013). Though applicable to all women, the glass ceiling effect is exaggerated for African American women and is considered a very significant barrier to their advancement (Key et al, 2012). For African American women in upper level positions, the glass ceiling permits a clear

view of their career goals and ambitions, yet inhibits their ability to achieve them (Jones, 2013). This visible *and* invisible barrier creates the perception of incompetence and serves as a primary cause of the small number of African American women college presidents (Baxter-Nuamah, 2015).

Insufficient Mentorship

Research has indicated that mentorship is especially important for women in higher education leadership, and essential for African American women (Beckwith et al., 2016; Jones, 2013). A proven support strategy, mentoring provides skill development, job fulfillment, career elevation opportunities and training for participants (Chopin et al., 2013; Eller et al., 2014; Tolar, 2012). Jones (2013), a phenomenological study in which the author explored the perceptions of barriers to acquiring a presidential position in higher education found mentorship to be an essential tool for future leaders. The challenge for African American women in the academy is the scarcity of influential mentors (Beckwith et al., 2016). Fifty percent of the participants in Gamble and Turner (2015) stated that the number of African American mentors who serve as administrators in academia is insufficient. This deficiency creates a barrier for African American women to rise to higher levels of leadership.

Grant (2012) contended that gender, race and culture intricately influence mentoring relationships. Grant (2012) determined that the African American experience of mentoring differs from the traditional relationship. In addition to seeking academic guidance and career advice, African American participants in Grant (2012) also required nurturing, mothering, and cultural relevancy from their mentoring relationships. These components could best be delivered by another African-American woman (Grant, 2012).

Black women often attain the desired nurturing, mothering, and cultural relevancy they require as noted in Grant (2012) in ‘sister-circle’ relationships outside of the academy. Sister-circle relationships are centered on race and gender and serves to assist African American women in coping with the racism, sexism, and isolation that they often experience on college campuses (Croom et al., 2017). The development of these type of personal and professional connections, whether formal or informal, are also mechanisms used by African American women to articulate and recognize their thoughts and feelings which are often stifled and oppressed (Fries-Britt & Kelly, 2005). Likewise, the participants in Kelly & Winkle-Wagner (2017) voiced the need to find or create relationships with other African American women that generated safe spaces for decompression, support, and discussions relating to cultural realities and empowerment.

Institutional climate and organizational structure

Unwelcoming and hostile campus climates have restricted the leadership ability of African American women (Braxton 2018; Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007). Often described as “chilly”, unwelcoming campus climates at PWIs are characterized as those which treat African American women differently than they treat all others (Hylton, 2012). Campuses such as these find it difficult to employ and retain Black women administrators (Hylton, 2012). Similarly, campus climates that demonstrate a lack of commitment to diversifying the ranks of personnel are also deemed unfit by African American women administrators (Braxton, 2018).

The literature illustrated common experiences of African American women administrators and faculty associated with unwelcoming and hostile campus climates. These experiences include being ignored in policy making decisions, being disrespected, feeling invisible or extra-visible, and being stereotyped and discriminated against (Aguirre, 2000;

Braxton, 2018; Hylton, 2012). African American women in higher education currently on an upward career trajectory that see and experience these types of climates and environments may be less apt to aspire to senior level positions (Braxton, 2018). Although creating a warm campus climate remains problematic for many institutions (Hurtado, 1992), colleges and universities need to create environments that are advantageous and favorable for a diverse population in order to raise the number of African American women administrators and faculty in the academy (Hylton, 2012).

Organizational structures continue to be a barrier and challenge for African American women administrators and faculty. In addition to their academic responsibilities, African American faculty are frequently called upon to act as liaisons to Black campus clubs. They also are frequently tasked with providing multicultural education and problem-solving techniques for sociocultural disputes (Constantine et al., 2008). These additional responsibilities, referred to as *cultural taxation*, result in less time to focus on scholarship which advances one's career (Constantine et al, 2008). As the requirements for advancement include research and publication, this is a major challenge for Black faculty members.

A review of research has illuminated many barriers and challenges that African American women leaders in higher education have faced since their entry into higher education. These barriers and challenges are most commonly categorized as professional, personal, or organizational. Common themes include marginalization, isolation, exclusion from the good old boy network, maintain a work-life balance, campus climate and organizational structure (Braxton, 2018; Hylton, 2012; Waring, 2003). The barriers and challenges identified by African American women in higher education are further complicated by racial and gender biases which

Meritocracy

Meritocracy is a sacred social norm that suggests that individual advancement is based on one's capabilities, talents, and merits as opposed to one's social status and wealth (Crossman, A., 2019). In the US, structural inequalities and systems of oppression have been designed to limit opportunities for marginalized groups. These structural and systemic factors result in the persistence of racial stratification and present a challenge to the validity of meritocracy (Crossman, A, 2019; Knowles & Lowery, 2012).

Knowles & Lowery (2012) asserted that Whites who embrace meritocracy often regard themselves as high in merit and deny racial inequities. Furthermore, it appears that White people are averse to ascribing the disparate outcomes between African Americans and Whites to biases within the system (Knowles & Lowery, 2012). Attributed to the psychological need to maintain a high meritorious self-regard and promote a positive self-image, White people often repudiate the concept of White privilege (Lowery et al., 2007).

In the workplace, the adoption of merit-based practices is often considered a variation of meritocracy. The implementation of said practices are the responsibility of the leadership team which is most often comprised of individuals associated with different organizational structures and cultures (Castilla & Benard, 2010). Findings in Castilla and Benard (2010) indicated that the process of evaluation during merit-based practices are influenced by the cultural context of individuals. Consequently, meritocracy in the workplace has the potential to unintentionally introduce gender bias and racial inequalities which may be manifested in wage differences and job titles.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a tool that facilitates the analysis and examination of interlocking injustices stemming from oppressive social identity markers such as race, gender, sexual identity,

religion, and class (Collins, 2000). Agosto & Roland (2018) asserted that the origin of intersectionality can be traced back to social movements in the 1960s and 1970s.

Intersectionality requires the observance and analysis of power imbalances in systems, and how those power imbalances impact marginalization and oppression of those in subordinate groups (Collins, 2017).

Birthing from Critical Race Theory and BFT, Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term intersectionality in 1989. Crenshaw (1989) revealed the limitations of the antidiscrimination laws designed to address sexism and racism, especially for Black women, who are uniquely situated with the subordinate race and the subordinate sex (Agosto & Roland, 2018; Crenshaw, 1989). Crenshaw (1989) argued that when examining the discriminatory experiences of Black women, the intersectionality of race and gender is greater than the sum of racism and sexism. Moreover, for Black women, racism and sexism are not mutually exclusive. Crenshaw further asserts that it is the overlapping structures of oppression, the erasure of individual's intersectional experiences, and the formation of negative stereotypes that continue to discredit experiences of marginalization (Crenshaw, 1991).

Collins (2006) discussed by what means intersectionality creates unique lived experiences and social realisms for Black women. Proclaiming that intersectionality creates different inequalities and power imbalances, Collins (2006) described societal power as a matrix of domination comprised of oppressive systems that overlap. The intersecting systems of oppression are systematized by structural, disciplinary, interpersonal, and hegemonic domains. The law, economy, and religion are elements of the structural domain, which shape power relationships. According to Collins (2006), the disciplinary domain, comprised of bureaucratic organizations, manages oppression. The interpersonal domain consists of personal relationships

and experiences that influence our daily lives. The hegemonic domain, which links the three other domains, is comprised of our values, language, and ideas. It is the domain that legitimizes oppression (Collins, 2006). The matrix concept described by Collins (2006) implies that the lived experiences resulting from intersectionality are influenced by societal changes that impact the structural, disciplinary, interpersonal, and hegemonic domains of the domination matrix.

The extant research on how the intersection of race and gender influences the lived experiences and perceptions voiced by African American women in higher education is inadequate (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Even less frequent is any consideration of how race and gender might influence leadership in academia (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Nevertheless, the fundamental concepts of intersectionality when applied in educational leadership research may strengthen transformative leadership to intervene in interconnected systems of subjugation (Agosto & Roland, 2018).

Jean-Marie et al. (2009) examined the intersection of race and gender through the experiences of leaders in an attempt to eliminate racism and sexism in their leadership development. The 12 African American women participants were asked to tell their life stories, reflecting on their professional experiences and encounters. Three important findings resulted from Jean-Marie et al. (2009). First, the participants noted links between their personal, educational and professional encounters and the difficulties related to the Civil Rights movement. Second, during the pursuit of higher education, they reported experiences of racial and gender discrimination. Lastly, the core values of their leadership style mirrored those of the Civil Rights Movement. This demonstrated that the personal encounters and experiences of African American female leaders in higher education were framed by their connection to historical and contextual factors. Like the Civil Rights Movement, the participants' leadership

styles emphasized institutional change, the elimination of power and influence, and social change. They planned to accomplish these goals through inclusion, consensus building and collaboration. These findings support the assertion that leadership styles developed by African American women in higher education are directly correlated with their lived experiences and encounters.

Davis and Maldonado (2015) also added to the research literature on African American women in leadership in higher education and intersectionality. Davis and Maldonado (2015) built on the premise that leadership development for African American women is influenced by their experiences relative to their race and gender (Stanley, 2009). Using a phenomenological research method, through the lenses of Feminist, Black feminist, intersectionality and socio-cultural theoretical frameworks, Davis and Maldonado (2015) examined intersectionality and leadership development through the lived experiences of African American females. The criteria for participation included African American women currently in positions of President, Vice President or Dean in two or four-year colleges. The five women who were selected to participate were asked *in what ways did race and gender identities inform your leadership development experiences*.

Through shared experiences, five topics surfaced that influenced how the participants' developed as leaders. A summary of each topic and the relevant experiences follows.

- 1) The participants were predestined for success. Family and role models within the community instilled self-confidence, self-pride and a determination to never quit, despite the odds, within the participants. They were confident they were capable of success and had the skills and fortitude to achieve it.

- 2) Sponsorship and Mentorship contributed to their upward mobility. The development and maintenance of key relationships was vital to their access and promotion in higher education. The participants experienced using tactics and planning to achieve their relationship goals.
- 3) Double jeopardy of race and gender. African American women confront stereotypes and racism regardless of holding leadership positions. Among the reported experiences were feelings of isolation, invisibility, oppression and discrimination.
- 4) Learn to play the game. In 2016, 83% of college presidents were White. The White male dominance makes for an un-even playing field. Participants reported the importance of recognizing there is a game and adopting accordingly.
- 5) Pay it forward. With so few African American women in leadership roles in higher education, the participants understood the need to serve as mentors and encourage the development of future African American leaders.

The results of this study confirmed that race and gender inform the development of African American female leaders. Results of this study can serve as a guide to understanding the experiences of African American female leaders (Davis & Maldonado, 2015).

Oikelome (2017) utilized an intersectional framework to explore the impact of race, gender, and other social identity structures on the experiences of White and African American women college presidents at 4-year institutions. The first theme, challenges to progression, illustrated clear differences based upon the race of the participant. The White participants noted gender bias as a challenge, while the African American women quickly moved to include gender and race concurrently in their stories.

Additionally, the study indicated that the organizational structure of the academy still favors the traditional pathway to a presidency, which is through academic affairs (Oikelome, 2017). Succession from faculty to academic administrative roles had been the pathway for 12 of the 13 presidents surveyed (Oikelome, 2017). These findings are consistent with findings in other research (Jackson & Harris, 2007). As African American women maintain more positions in student affairs and diversity offices than they do in academic affairs, this demonstrates a relationship to the underrepresentation of African American women in presidential positions (Gasman et al, 2015).

The additional emergent themes from this study included competence supersedes identity and navigating the pipeline. All 13 women presidents confirmed that competence, and the ability to lead directed the achievement of their presidencies, regardless of what others supposed about their identities. In terms of navigating the pipeline, mentoring, leadership development and understanding institutional fit were necessary for all of the women pursuing a presidential role. One notable finding was that African American women tended to be mentored by White men more than men of other races, or White women.

For the participants in Oikelome (2017) institutional fit was definitely linked to identity. Nonetheless, no participant was willing to hide or restrain their true personality or style to fit in. Additionally, the participants agreed that the ability to understand institutional fit as a concept was learned by their experiences. Eight of the participants experienced more than one failed attempt when pursuing a college presidency. Although they perceived that they were a good fit for those institutions, the perceived reasons for some of these failures was bias, sometimes evident and other times subtle.

Community College Changes and Challenges

In 1901, the first community college, Joliet Junior College, was founded to enhance the higher education opportunities available to high school graduates that were unable to leave home (Bahr & Gross, 2016). After World War II, President Harry Truman proposed significant changes to the American higher education system. These changes, along with the passing of the GI bill, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Higher Education Act (HEA) of 1965, led to the evolution of the community college, and established it as an open access institution (Bahr & Gross, 2016). Crafted around three central points, the mission of the community college is to provide access to postsecondary programs that meet the educational needs of the public and strengthen the economic status of the surrounding community (Harbour, 2015; Vaughan, 2006).

Over time the role of the community college has evolved. No longer solely considered centers for workforce development, community colleges have become essential components of a K-14 educational experience designed to terminate with a workplace credential or an associate degree (Wrighten, 2018). Accompanying this evolution is a myriad of complicated issues. Among them are decreased enrollment, budget constraints, accreditation, questions regarding student success and the completion agenda, increased remedial education, and diversity issues (Wrighten, 2018). According to The Aspen Institute's *Renewal and Progress Report* (2017), rapid change and intensification of these challenges is expected.

Further complicating the aforementioned challenges of community colleges is the level of anticipated retirements by community college leaders. More than half of the community college presidents are expected to retire between 2016 and 2023, which leaves a significant leadership void (AACC, 2013). Adelhoch (2015) declared that filling leadership roles with people that are committed to upholding the vision and mission of the community college may be one of the greatest challenges yet to come. There simply are not enough individuals with the skills to

address the challenges and develop new strategies to successfully lead the community college in the presidential pipeline (Wrighten, 2018).

African American Women Leaders and the Community College

Nevarez and Santamaria (2010) emphasized the importance of an administration that reflects the diversity of the institutions' student body. In addition to enhancing the ability to relate to a diverse student body, diversity in leadership brings a new cultural perspective and demonstrates an organizational commitment to diversity (Wrighten, 2018). Community colleges serve the highest percentage of women and African American and Hispanic students. Data from Fall 2019 indicated that 57% of the students enrolled at community colleges were women, versus 43% men. Additionally, 53 % of Hispanic undergraduates and 43% of Black undergraduates were enrolled at community colleges (AACC, 2021). White student enrollment at community colleges has declined steadily since 2010, with White students losing their national majority status as of 2014 (Juszkiewicz, 2017). Yet, Whites constitute nearly 80% of community college leadership. As of 2016, only 7.4% of the community college presidents were African American women (U. S. Department of Education, 2017).

Braxton (2018) sought to examine the experiences and perceptions of African American women administrators considering a community college presidency. With a focus on women employed in California community colleges, Braxton (2018) uncovered two important findings. First, Braxton (2018) asserted that the experiences of African American women are framed by BFT and the impact of intersectionality. Citing a conflict between their leader identity expectations and social identities, participants expressed difficulty in being their authentic selves at their institutions.

According to Braxton (2018), the participants felt that being authentic would damage their image as a prototypical administrator, and lead to an increase of bias and discrimination. Consequently, some participants were careful to avoid any stereotype threat, ensuring that they were always prepared and well dressed. Other participants, however, were committed to being their authentic selves. Acknowledging the associated risks, these participants chose to challenge the college culture by supporting social justice initiatives, or challenging hiring practices. With this commitment came an understanding that authenticity and their behavior could alter one's career trajectory (Braxton, 2018).

The second notable finding in Braxton (2018) was that most women desired to advance to at least the next level of leadership. Moreover, 50% of the women expressed a desire to become a community college president (Braxton, 2018). Mentorship and sponsorship played a significant role in the desire to move to the next level of leadership according to the participants. The yearning to change the lives of students was also a factor that influenced the pursuit of leadership positions for these women (Braxton, 2018).

Chapter Summary

This literature review began with a summary of the theoretical framework utilized in this study. A historical review of higher education was followed by a discussion of the benefits and legality of diversity. This review continued with a presentation of literature devoted to African American women in leadership positions in higher education. The literature identified African American women's challenges and barriers to success, particularly at PWIs (Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007; Byrd, 2009; Mosley, 1980; Gamble & Turner, 2015; Jackson & Harris, 2007; Jones, 2013; Key et al., 2012). The literature also addressed the impact of stereotyping and discrimination, and its deep roots in the development of this country. This chapter also focused

on literature pertaining to the influence of the intersection of race and gender on the experiences of African American women in higher education – both in presidential positions and those aspiring toward senior level administration (Baxter-Nuamah, 2015; Braxton, 2018; Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Hylton, 2012; Jean-Maire et al., 2009; Oikelome, 2017). The review closes with an examination of the community college, its current leadership crisis, and the underrepresentation of African American women in leadership at community colleges.

The literature revealed a shortage of research devoted to the study of African American women in higher education. The majority of extant research devoted to African American women is heavily focused on identifying barriers and challenges associated with the leadership experience. Yet, literature on the barriers that African American women experience does not describe how barriers and challenges can influence one's decision to pursue or not pursue an advanced position (Hardy, 2019). Likewise, highlighted in the literature is the need to closely examine what influences African American women's decisions to pursue senior level or presidential positions at community colleges (Braxton, 2018).

In Chapter Three, the researcher provides an overview of the research methodology used in this study. The research questions are restated, followed by an epistemological statement. The remaining portion of the chapter includes details pertaining to the research design, population selection, instrumentation, and data collection and analysis.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the researcher addresses the methodology used to answer the proposed research questions. First, the research questions are restated. Second, the researcher provides a description and justification for the qualitative research design use for this study. Third, the rationale for the use of narrative inquiry as the analytical tool, and Black Feminist Thought as the theoretical tool are discussed. Fourth, the researcher discusses the research setting, participant sampling and selection techniques. Fifth, the procedures for data collection and data analysis are explained. The chapter concludes with descriptions of the limitations of this study.

To improve student achievement and enrich cultural perceptions, the demographics of the community college administration should mirror that of the community college student body (Nevarez & Santamaria, 2010; Wrighten, 2018). Since the majority of community college students are women and students of color, there is a need to increase the number of African American women presidents at community colleges. This study sought to provide knowledge that will strengthen efforts to bolster the number of African American women presidents at community colleges.

The purpose of this narrative inquiry was to better understand the experiences that disrupt or terminate the journey to a presidential position for African American women in senior level positions at community colleges in the New York Metropolitan area. Participants described the lived experiences that disrupted or terminated the journey toward executive leadership. Additionally, participants discussed navigating the intersectional identities of both race and gender. Participants also described the impact of the intersectionality of race and gender on their lived experiences and the perception of these experiences.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study were:

1. What are the experiences of African American women leaders at community colleges in the New York Metropolitan area?
 - 1a. What experiences influenced African American women at community colleges in the New York Metropolitan area to reexamine the pursuit of executive leadership positions?
2. In what ways did race and gender influence the experiences of African American women in senior level positions at community colleges in the New York Metropolitan area?
3. What do the stories of African American women in senior level positions at community colleges in the New York Metropolitan area reveal about how social and cultural factors impact the retention and promotion of African American women pursuing executive positions at community colleges?

Epistemology

Research paradigms are human constructed beliefs that describe the viewpoint of the researcher. Generally comprised of ontology and or epistemology, research paradigms guide the researchers' actions (Hays & Singh, 2012; Lynch, 2018). The social constructivism paradigm does not believe that a single reality or truth exists, therefore social constructivism has no ontological perspective (Hays & Singh, 2012). Rooted in the epistemological point of view that knowledge is created, the search for reality and knowledge consists of exploring and interpreting social interactions based on human perception and social experience (Creswell, 2014; Hays & Singh, 2012). For the social constructivist, knowledge is dependent on (a) social structures, such as race and gender, (b) multiple contextual viewpoints, and (c) independent voices (Hays &

Singh, 2012). With a spotlight on contexts, social constructivists acknowledge how individual circumstances influence one's interpretation of their life and work. Social constructivist researchers seek to make meaning of events by exploring the viewpoints fashioned through interactions, and historical and cultural norms (Creswell, 2012).

A social constructivist point of view is centered on the belief that peoples' identities and backgrounds have an impact on their lived experiences and their perception of those experiences. Researchers affirmed that the experiences of African American women are influenced by their social realities (Collins, 2000; Stanley, 2009). In the present study, the concentration was on the experiences of African American women in senior level administrative positions at community colleges located in the New York Metropolitan area. As the goal of the researcher was to gain a better understanding of the experiences of the participants, this epistemological standpoint provides guidance to engage in exploration and interpretive methods to seek the present-day truth.

Research Design

This qualitative study was designed using a narrative inquiry approach, framed by Black Feminist Thought. The goal of qualitative research is to process information and gain a complex, detailed understanding of the phenomenon or the lived experience (Creswell, 2012; Hays & Singh, 2012; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Qualitative research is a methodology by which researchers study life, behavior, culture, and emotions. Qualitative researchers seek to unearth participants' inner experiences by the assignment of meaning to social actions, beliefs, and values, rather than by performing variable analysis (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Hardy, 2019; Jones 2013).

Unique characteristics of qualitative research include purposive sampling, open-ended questions, and the researcher operating as the key data collection and analysis instrument. Additional features include the context or natural setting in which qualitative research occurs, interpretive analysis, and a flexible research design (Creswell, 2012, Hays & Singh, 2012). These features allow for the discovery of complex human experiences and align with the exploratory and interpretive ideals of social constructivism (Research Design Review, 2015).

Creswell (2012) further maintained that researchers also conduct qualitative studies to “empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices and minimize the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participants” (p. 40). Similarly, Stanley (2009) addressed the need to give voice to the unique experiences of African American women. Giving voice supports the establishment of self-definition and self-determination for African American women (Collins, 2000). This study was designed to give voice to its participants. It was the intent of the researcher to gain knowledge from the participants’ narratives to better understand the experiences that disrupt or terminate the journey to executive leadership for African American women in community colleges.

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry is an ideal methodology to employ to gain a better understanding of the experiences that disrupt or terminate the journey to presidential positions for African American women in senior level positions at community colleges in the New York Metropolitan area. In 1938, John Dewey stated that experiences are built upon previous social and personal experiences. Furthermore, wisdom gained from lived experiences produces consequential situations where invaluable knowledge can be gained (Dewey, 1938). The typical experience materializes in a narrative manner (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Dewey, 1986; Harbour, 2015).

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) declared that narrative inquiry “is a form of narrative experience” (p. 19). Deeply rooted in John Dewey’s theory of experience, narrative inquiry is a qualitative research method that is used to explain human activity (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Dependent on interpretative analysis, generalizable and precise findings are not the goal of this method of research. Rather, narrative inquiry is intended to facilitate the understanding of experiences and make meaning of those experiences (Bold, 2012; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Narrative inquiry allows the researcher and participant to form a collaborative relationship. This relationship promotes telling and living the stories of experiences; and re-telling and re-living those same experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The repetition of the stories promotes the reconsideration of what we know, how we understand what we know, and what we believe as true. As a consequence, a connection to the stories is created, from which we learn and discover new knowledge (Baker, 2005).

Characterized by opportunities to share the nature and order of events and facilitate self-definition and personal identity (Bold, 2012), narrative identity is commonly framed by the elements of temporality, people, and context (Bold, 2012; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Temporality, which implies that experiences have a past, present and a proposed future, encourages analysis of experiences as they unfold over time (Bold, 2012; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In narrative inquiry, temporality is described by Clandinin & Connelly (2000) as the ability to not only be “concerned with life as it is experienced in the here and now but also with life as it is experienced on a continuum” (p. 19). As the unique and professional experiences of African American women are better understood when framed by historical texts (Gregory, 2001; Jones, 2013), the concept of temporality in narrative inquiry supports the researchers goal of analyzing past and present-day experiences in an effort to better understand their impact on

proposed future experiences relative to senior level or presidential positions at a community college.

The aspect of personal change in people is another element of narrative inquiry that supports the decision to utilize this method of analysis for the current study. Recognizing that individual personal change may occur at any time, it is the goal of the researcher to re-tell the participants' narratives by capturing the pertinent history as previously described and retelling the narratives in terms of the change process (Bold, 2012). The intent in doing so is to illuminate and identify experiences that impede or disrupt the ascension of African American women in leadership in the community college.

As a final point, the concept of context in narrative inquiry bolsters its appropriateness for this study. Whether temporal, spatial, or related to other persons, contextual influences will yield different narratives, with different meanings, at different times and different social events. To better understand a person's narrative, it is important to be aware of the contextual influences on the experiences that determine how the narrative evolves, the narrators' identity, and the narrators' self-definition (Bold, 2012; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Directly correlated with temporality and personal change, the researcher will use the guiding research questions to establish interview questions and prompts that stimulate the participants to tell their stories. The flexibility of the semi-structured interview process will assist in extracting the contextual influences of each experience. This will enable the researcher to re-tell a narrative that facilitates a better understanding of the impact of the context on the lived experiences as well as how these lived experiences may impact the underrepresentation of African American women in college presidencies at community colleges.

Theoretical Framework

Black Feminist Thought (BFT), the guiding theoretical framework for this qualitative, narrative inquiry study, is an extension from the social constructivist viewpoint that perception and knowledge are gained in a social construct. The pronouncement in Collins (1989) that BFT is characterized by the belief that the social constructs of economic and political status provide Black women “with a distinct set of experiences that offers a different view of material reality than that available to other groups” (p. 747) directly aligns with the social constructivist perspective. Furthermore, the distinct experiences of Black women differ from those that are not Black *and* female (Hylton, 2012). These experiences influence how Black women work together, learn, and live.

Byrd and Stanley (2009) declared that Black Feminist Thought is one of the most common frameworks utilized in the analysis of African American women leadership. Used by researchers to study institutional and organizational oppression, alienation, and domination, BFT helps African American women understand the construction and opinion of their leadership experiences and the meanings of those experiences (Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007; Lloyd-Jones, 2009). It is the researcher’s goal to unearth opportunities to reverse the underrepresentation of African American women in executive leadership at community colleges by gaining a better understanding of the experiences that thwart the desire to seek executive level positions at a community college. Through the descriptive lens of Black Feminist Thought, the researcher will gain insight and knowledge to add meaning to the participants lived experiences.

Key in the decision to utilize BFT as the framework for this study is the belief that race, and gender influence the impressions of African American women (Byrd & Stanley, 2009; Collins 2000). Additionally, BFT advocates argue that the intersection of race and gender is

useful in helping to understand the workplace behavior encountered by African American women (Lloyd-Jones, 2009). This connection to Intersectionality strengthens its suitability as a framework for this study, as the researcher seeks to discover in what ways race and gender may have influenced the experiences of the African American women participants.

Harris (2007) declared that affording intellectual space for the voices of African American women to be heard will further the knowledge gained pertaining to their marginalized experiences in the academy. Similarly, BFT promotes the idea of Black women using their voices to share their self-definition, self-evaluation and experiences. Collins (2000) claimed that Black women's lives are a series of negotiations directed to reconcile contradictions between Black women's internal image of themselves and the image imposed upon them by the dominant culture. By giving voice, the collective self-defined standpoint *of* Black women is articulated *by* Black women (Collins, 2000).

The use of narrative inquiry complements the concept of giving voice described by BFT. Narrative inquiry methodology provides the participants with the opportunity to voice their experiences as senior level administrators at a community college. Moreover, narrative inquiry promotes the retelling of the stories in a way that promotes a better understanding of the voiced experiences. Gaining additional knowledge of African American female senior level administrators at community colleges may illustrate how those experiences directly or indirectly influenced the decision to pursue senior level and executive positions at the community college. The results may lead to supportive programs that enhance their persistence and ascension to presidential positions in colleges and universities (Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Wolfe & Dilworth, 2015).

Research Setting and Context

The researcher chose the New York Metropolitan area for this study because it is anchored by New York City which is the most ethnically diverse, congested, and urban city in the country. Often described as the largest, most influential American metropolis, the urban areas of New York City extend to adjoining sections of New Jersey and Connecticut. Six community colleges served as sites for this study. They include urban and suburban community colleges located in the New York Metropolitan area. As a result of COVID-19, each participant was interviewed via Zoom. The participants had the option to be in their office on campus, or in their office at home.

The researcher assigned college size based upon the fall 2019 enrollment. The college that is classified as small had enrollment of less than 5,000 students. The two medium sized colleges had enrollment that ranged from 5, 000-10,000 students. Colleges with enrollment greater than 10,000 students were classified as large (NCES, 2019). Four of the six community colleges reported that more than 75% of the faculty are White. At the remaining two community colleges, approximately 50% of the total faculty was White (College Factual, 2020).

Participants

Creswell and Guetterman (2019) stated that “in qualitative research you select people or sites that can best help you understand the central phenomenon” (p. 206). Purposeful sampling, sometimes referred to as purposive sampling, is the qualitative sampling process in which the researcher intentionally selects participants and sites to facilitate comprehension of the research problem or experience (Creswell, 2012; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Several types of purposeful sampling methods exist (Hays & Singh, 2012). Criterion purposeful sampling and snowball sampling are the methods that were used to select the participants for this study.

Criterion purposeful sampling occurs when the researcher is seeking participants that meet specific, predetermined criteria (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). This study required the participants to be women that identify as African American. Were also required to be employed or had recently vacated a position within the last 18 months, voluntarily or involuntarily. At the time of the study the selected participants held or had previously held one of the following positions: Dean, Academic Department Chair, and Vice President at a community college located in the New York Metropolitan area. These positions were chosen as they represent the standard senior level administrative positions at most community colleges. To enhance the likelihood of multiple experiences and leadership encounters, the participants were required to have had at least two years' experience in their senior level position. The 18-month time parameter for those who had vacated a senior level administrative position at a community college in the New York Metropolitan area was chosen to allow for adequate retention of details and sharing of experiences to address the research questions of this study.

Narrative inquiry focuses on the intense exploration of a small number of experiences in a particular context (Bold, 2012). The target population size for this study was five to eight participants. When criterion purposeful sampling did not yield enough participants, the researcher engaged in snowball sampling. Snowball sampling occurs when research participants are asked to identify others that may be eligible to participate in the study (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Given the underrepresentation of African American women in the academy, snowball sampling was an appropriate secondary sampling method to increase the pool of potential participants.

If more than eight African American women had indicated an interest in participating in this study, the researcher would have eliminated some prospects from the pool. To maintain a

diverse participant pool, the researcher would have considered various areas of diversity which include place of employment, job title, and length of service. Elimination from the pool would have been determined by duplication in those areas, in the order in which they are presented above.

Instrumentation

Qualitative researchers strive for understanding the deep structure of knowledge that comes from visiting personally with participants, and probing to obtain detailed meanings (Creswell, 2012). As the key instrument in this study, the researcher was responsible for designing the data collection instruments and protocols which best outlined a plan to gather data that addressed the studies research questions. Bold (2012) recommended the interview data collection process when interested in examining experiences. Accordingly, the researcher designed two interview protocols. The first protocol (See Appendix A) included one-on-one interviews conducted and recorded via Zoom and a digital voice recorder to ensure the data were secure and maintained. The interview questions were intended to encourage the participants to explore and re-tell stories of their personal experiences that may have disrupted or terminated their journey to an executive leadership position in a community college.

The second interview protocol (See Appendix C) also included one-on-one interviews conducted and recorded via Zoom and a digital recorder. The purpose of the second interview was to share emergent themes, notable quotations, and the experiences of all participants. The participants were given an opportunity to share additional thoughts and remarks as well. Additionally, the researcher inquired about any differences and similarities in the participants shared experiences.

Data Collection

The first interviews followed a semi-structured format. Semi-structured interviews are characterized as adaptable plans where the exact wording and the order of questions are not pre-determined (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This format enables the participants to share extensive details of their stories and experiences. Furthermore, this format allows the researcher to immediately act in response to the participants communication and deeply explore the meaning of the experiences (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Open-ended questions, designed to illicit narrative-responses were used to enable the participants to voice their experiences unrestricted by influence from the researcher (Bold, 2012; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

Following approval from the Darden College of Education and Professional Studies Human Subjects Committee, contact information for the participants was obtained from the staff and faculty directory on each institutions' website. Invitations to participate in the study were emailed (see Appendix D). The researcher allowed approximately two weeks to receive responses from the invitation. Once a response was received, the researcher worked with each participant to schedule an interview. Participants also received information regarding preparation for the interview process via email (See Appendix E). Attachments to that email included the following: a consent form that outlined the purpose, benefits, and risks of the study (see Appendix F), and the Participant Demographic Form (see Appendix G). Pseudonyms for each participant, as well as their institution, were assigned to keep all identities anonymous.

The first interview lasted approximately 60 minutes and was video and audio recorded. Transcripts of the interviews were generated using the audio transcript function on Zoom. Researcher field notes which contained participant observations as well as the researcher's thoughts and feelings, were augmented and typed as each interview was being transcribed.

After transcription, the researcher conducted a thorough review of the transcript to ensure its accuracy. Simultaneously, the transcripts were supplemented with relevant fieldnote information and notes describing the tone, inflection and emotion of the participant during the interview. Using the enriched transcripts, the researcher completed the first cycle of coding using descriptive, process and in vivo coding. To prepare for data collection during the second interview, the researcher provided each participant with a summary of their interview which highlighted emergent themes and key quotes.

During the second interview, the researcher reviewed the experiences and standout quotes that were voiced by the participants during the first round of interviews. The participants were asked to comment on the standout quotes and describe in detail any similar experiences. The participants were also asked to describe any experiences which resulted in feelings similar to those described by the other participants. Additionally, the participants were given the opportunity to share any other information that could be relevant to the study. The second interview was also video and audio-recorded using Zoom and recorded using a digital voice recorder. The second interviews lasted approximately 20 minutes.

Data Analysis

Bold (2012) stated that “the purpose of analysis in qualitative research is to enquire deeply into the meaning of different situations and different people’s understandings of the world” (p.120). To impact practice or theory, researchers must present studies in which others have confidence in the methodology and the results. The studies must provide insights, perceptions and conclusions that are believable (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Like most qualitative research analysis, this study involved a small pool of participants, intended to address a specific purpose which may result in advancing social change (Bold, 2012).

Also, like most narrative analyses, the analysis in this study had a heavy reliance on interpretation, which required restricting and rewriting many times before the final presentation (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Although narrative inquiry researchers have no standard format in which to analyze and present findings (Bold, 2012), the most common method of narrative analysis is a thematic approach (Butina, 2015). The thematic analysis process for this study consisted of five stages: (a) data organization and preparation, (b) absorbing the information, (c) the coding process, (d) theming the data, and (e) interpretation of data.

Step One: Data Organization and Preparation

The field texts from the interviews were initially transcribed using the Zoom transcription application. At the same time the researcher manually transcribed all field notes. Thereafter, the researcher performed a thorough review of each transcript and video recording by simultaneously reviewing the visual/audio recording and the transcripts. The zoom transcriptions were enhanced to include notes denoting relevant observations, inflections, emotions and tone of voice that were important to capture the context of the narrative that was shared during each interview. An individual folder was created for each participant, with an assigned pseudonym and all references to a college campus removed to maintain anonymity.

Nvivo, a Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) was used to assist with data organization and management. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) report that the automation of tedious qualitative analysis work permits the researcher to “creatively observe the possible links and connections among the different aspects of the data” (p. 223). Nvivo categorized the data as interviews transcripts, and the researcher assigned descriptive notations including location, age, years of experience, and job title.

Step Two: Absorbing the information

The researcher read the field texts and field notes multiple times to familiarize herself with the content. When further clarity was necessary the researcher reviewed the audio recording of each interview. Additionally, the researcher reviewed the research questions and the theoretical framework of the study.

Step Three: The coding process

Creswell and Guetterman (2019) maintained that when coding narratives “the identification of themes provides the complexity of a story and adds depth to the insights about understanding individual experiences” (p. 522). In qualitative research, a code may be a word or short phrase that is assigned to portions of the data that facilitates categorization of significant data elements (Saldana, 2009). Butina (2015) affirmed that “the coding process consists of re-reading the transcripts and identifying recurring words, ideas, or patterns generated from the data” (p. 194). A time-consuming process, coding assigns labels to words, or phrases that respond to the research questions and theoretical framework of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The data set was coded using a two-cycle coding method.

The analysis began with an open-coding strategy. In open coding there are no predetermined ideas about categories or themes (Hays & Singh, 2012). Coding is the assignment of words or phrases that indicate concepts relative to the research questions and the theoretical frameworks of the study (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Saldana (2009) stated that sole methods of coding may restrict the researchers’ perspective, and it is prudent to be prepared to intermingle coding methods. Hence, three coding techniques were used in the first cycle coding: 1) descriptive coding; 2) process coding; and 3) in vivo coding. Descriptive coding, which provides a summary of the basic topic, is intended to assist the reader with seeing and hearing

what the researcher saw and heard (Saldana, 2009). Process coding, particularly useful in studies exploring action, and interaction in response to an event, uses gerunds ('ing' words) to indicate action in the data. In Vivo coding is appropriate when the participants voice is a priority, and there is a need to comprehend what is important to the participant (Saldana, 2009). The researcher used NVIVO to facilitate the organization of the codes.

The researcher then prepared individual written summaries of the coded field texts. These summaries were emailed to each participant for review. The participants were specifically asked to ensure that their story had been captured. They were also asked to consider sharing any additional data that may have been omitted or not discussed during the first interview. A second brief interview was scheduled to review the summary, discuss any follow-up questions, and complete the data gathering process.

The second set of field texts and field notes were transcribed exactly as the first set. With the goal of reorganizing, reducing and reanalyzing the number of codes identified in the first cycle coding, second cycle coding was applied (Saldana, 2009). For this coding cycle, the researcher used pattern coding. Pattern codes are explanatory or inferential codes used to group large amounts of information into smaller, more meaningful units (Saldana, 2009).

The codes and themes that emerged consistently were used to complete the analysis. The assigned codes and themes were entered in Nvivo to assist the researcher with organization and effortless retrieval of data. Nvivo also assisted the researcher by producing a map that highlights the most important aspects of the participants' experiences (Saldana, 2009).

Step Four: Theming the data

Analysis of the emergent themes encompassed identifying, defining, and synthesizing all of the overlapping themes while constantly considering the best allocation of the theme(s) to the

research questions of the study. This was a time consuming and arduous process, which required the researcher to reconceptualize and reevaluate the data many times. Eight major themes, and four subthemes emerged as the findings of the study. Upon completion, a codebook was created (See Appendix H).

Step Five: Interpreting the data

The final stage of analysis consisted of narrating the emergent themes. With a focus on the context and language, the researcher narrated each theme and subtheme by retelling the participants' storied events and experiences. Rich, thick descriptions and direct quotes from the interview texts are included to illustrate the actions and choices that influenced any experiences that led to the disruption or termination of the journey to a presidential position at a community college.

Researcher Positionality

The researcher of this study is an African American woman who has worked in higher education for 14 years. Upon transitioning from a career on Wall Street, the researcher entered higher education as an adjunct faculty member and per diem employee in the Student Affairs division of a mid-size community college. Over the years she ascended through mid-level administrative positions to eventually hold the executive position of Vice President of Student Services at the same institution.

Throughout the researcher's tenure in the business and higher education arena, she was subjected to a myriad of experiences which gave rise to feelings of uncertainty relative to her future career aspirations. Feeling adequately prepared to ascend in both work environments, the researcher often found herself wondering about the lack of opportunities and the persistent need to prove her worth. As the researcher became more engrossed in the mission and goals of

the community college and communicated with other African American women in the higher education field, her inquisitiveness about the lack of African American women in executive leadership in community colleges increased.

The researcher is interested in the stories of other African American women. As a community college leader, she is interested in leadership diversity, and understanding how social norms influence the experiences of other African American leaders in community colleges. Her goal is to provide essential knowledge that may facilitate an increase in the number of African American females in the community college presidential pool.

To prevent compromising the trustworthiness of the data, the researcher took field notes during each interview. Additionally, the researcher maintained a research journal throughout the dissertation process. In the journal she reflected on her assumptions and the influence that those assumptions may have on the research process.

Trustworthiness

Several strategies exist for qualitative researchers to enhance the trustworthiness of their studies. Here, the researcher engaged in thick description, member checking, and reflexivity.

Thick description

Thick description involves painting a picture of the context, behavior, and intentions of the actions and experiences (Hays & Singh, 2012) Direct quotes from the participants are included in the presentation of the findings to ensure that the voices of the participants are heard and not the opinions and feelings of the researcher. Additionally, detailed descriptions of the participants and inferences to the meaning of the data are provided.

Member checking

Member checking is the process of actively involving the participants to ensure that their intended meanings are portrayed (Hays & Singh, 2012). The researcher provided each participant with a summary of the interview. This summary, which included the emergent themes resulting from the first cycle coding as well as prominent quotations, was designed to verify that the researcher had captured the participants' intent. Furthermore, the summary was intended to identify any elements that needed clarification.

Reflexivity

Researcher reflexivity, one of the benchmarks for establishing trustworthiness, is the self-reflection of the thoughts and actions of the researcher during the research process (Singh & Singh, 2012). Field notes containing the researcher's reactions and emotions during the interviews were included in the data. The researcher also kept a journal during the entire research project to reflect upon assumptions, and how they might influence the research process.

Limitations

Limitations of a research study are the elements that can impact a study that the researcher cannot control (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Several limitations exist in this study. One limitation is the small number of participants. The participants are African American women who serve or have served in senior level administrative positions at community colleges in the New York Metropolitan area. The job titles held by these women are: Dean, Academic Department Chair, and Vice President. Excluding Directors, Executive Directors and tenured faculty impacted the size of the population. Another limitation is the restriction of participating community colleges to those located only in the New York Metropolitan area. Finally, the

inability to verify the truth in the narratives presented by the participants in the study is another limitation.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter the researcher addressed the methodological decisions of this study. The participants include African American women that hold or have held the following positions at a community college located in the New York Metropolitan area: Dean, Academic Department Chair, and Vice President. Semi-structured, one-on-one interviews were conducted with each participant via Zoom. The participant had the option to be on their campus, in their office, or at home in a private room. Video and Audio files of each interview were transcribed using the Zoom transcription application. Each interview was also recorded using a digital voice recorder to ensure the maintenance of the data. The interview transcripts were enhanced with field notes, inflections, tones, and emotions expressed during the interviews.

After the completion of open-cycle coding, the researcher provided each participant with a summary of their interview. The participants were asked for feedback on the summaries, which included emerging themes and key quotations, during the second interview. After the completion of a second interview, the analysis process was completed. The findings, eight major themes and four subthemes, were associated with the relevant research questions.

In Chapter Four, the researcher discusses the findings of the study. The researcher shares the experiences and the perceptions of the experiences that disrupt or terminate the journey to presidential positions for the participants in this study. The findings are organized by themes, and subthemes, and presented using direct quotes and thick descriptions from the transcribed texts of each participant to answer the research questions of the study.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

African American women continue to be underrepresented in faculty, senior level administrative, and college presidential positions in higher education (Davis & Maldonado, 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 2017). The primary focus of research on African American women in community college leadership has centered on the challenges and barriers to entry and retention. Moreover, extant research that addresses the complexities of the lived experiences and social realities of African American women in authoritative positions at community colleges is scant (Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Lloyd-Jones, 2009; Stanley, 2009). To gain a more thorough understanding of the experiences of African American women leaders, the intersection of multiple social constructs must be considered (Key et al., 2012; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010).

The purpose of this narrative inquiry was to better understand the experiences that disrupt or terminate the journey to a presidential position for African American women in senior level positions at community colleges in the New York Metropolitan area. Participants described the lived experiences that disrupted or terminated the journey toward executive leadership. Additionally, participants discussed being uniquely situated in two disadvantaged social constructs, namely race and gender. Participants also described the impact of the intersectionality of race and gender on their lived experiences.

This chapter will present the findings from the study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven participants from six different public community colleges in the New York Metropolitan area. Two sets of interviews were completed. The second interview, which lasted approximately 20 minutes, was designed primarily for member-checking and clarification of any outstanding questions. All of the interviews took place between November 2020 and January 2021.

A five-step thematic approach was used for data analysis. The evaluation included: (1) data organization and preparation, (2) absorbing the information; (3) the coding process; (4) theming the data; and (5) interpreting the data. The eight emergent themes resulting from the analysis are (a) persistence of power and privilege, (b) development of strategies to survive, (c) community college president's roles, responsibilities and impact, (d) fighting the fight against stereotypes, (e) invisibility (f) evaluating quality of life, (g) racism and discrimination, and (h) a journey of faith. This chapter is organized around the three research questions. Each section incorporates the relevant themes as well as the retold stories of participants that relate to the inquiry.

Community College Demographics

All of the community colleges in this study are located in the New York Metropolitan area. Three of the colleges are in suburban areas, and three are in urban areas. The size of the college is based upon the student enrollment during the fall 2019. One of the colleges is small, with student enrollment of less than 5,000. Two of the colleges are designated medium-sized, having student enrollment between 5,000 and 10,000. The remaining four colleges are large with student enrollment exceeding 10,000 (NCES, 2019).

Each participant depicted a campus where White people held the majority of the senior level administrative and tenured faculty position, while the majority of the student body is comprised of African American or Hispanic students. Over eighty percent of the faculty was White in three of the six community colleges. In one community college, 70-75% of the faculty was White, and at the remaining two community colleges White faculty was approximately 50% of the total (College Factual, 2020).

Participants Demographics

Each participant identified as an African American woman who was employed or had ended her employment within the past 18 months, at a public community college in the New York Metropolitan area. The participants roles included Vice President, Academic Department Chair, and Dean. These women represented Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, College Advancement, and Diversity Equity and Inclusion divisions. Two participants worked in the student affairs division, and two participants worked in academic affairs. The remaining participants reported directly to the President. All of the participants have doctorate degrees.

Three participants worked at community colleges located in the urban communities. Two participants worked at the same suburban community college, and the remaining two participants worked at different suburban community colleges. At the time of the study four participants had experience in their current role between one and five years. Two participants had between five and ten years of experience, and only one participant had more than 10 years' experience in her current position. The majority of the participants ages ranged between 50 and 55. Only one participant was less than 50 years old.

Table 2 details general information, as well as the pseudonyms that are used for each participant and the relative community college pseudonym. Although not included in the study, the participants' marital status and number of children were questions included in the participant demographic study form. At the time of the interviews, three participants were married, two were divorced, and 2 were single, having never been married. Also, at the time of the interviews, two participants had 2 children under the age of 18, four participants had one child under 18, and one participant had no children.

Table 2*Participant Demographics*

Pseudonym	Community College	Age	Current Position	Years of Experience in current role
Deborah	Clarksville	50-55	Dean	1 -5
Imani	Allentown	50-55	Dean	10+
Dara	Pierpont	50-55	Dean	1-5
Danelle	Greenburg	50-55	Chair, Academic Department	1-5
Aliyah	Johnstown	50-55	Dean	5-10
Mikayla	Allentown	50-55	Dean, Academic Department Chair	1-5
Jamila	Crestwood	40-45	Vice President	5-10

Participant Profiles

The participant profiles were developed to provide context for each participant. The data were obtained during the interview process. Each interview began with the participant describing their academic and professional background. A summary of each of the seven participants' backgrounds as well as additional descriptions and characteristics follows. Pseudonyms are used in place of the participants names and their respective community college names.

Deborah

Deborah appeared to be a tranquil yet serious woman who has spent her entire career in higher education in a Student Affairs position. At an early age Deborah's parents impressed upon her the importance of getting a college education. A first-generation college student, Deborah earned her undergraduate degree from a Historically Black College. There she learned the edict

of practicing the talented tenth. This edict is a commitment to go back and help others to succeed once you have reached a certain status in life or achieved a significant goal. Since that time, she has worked for four-year private and propriety institutions, as well as public community colleges. Irrespective of the situation or circumstance, Deborah sees herself in every student. She constantly thinks about the needs and desires of students, and how best to serve them.

In addition to her genuine concern for students, Deborah loves the energy that Student Affairs brings to the college environment. She describes herself as very social, and she needs to be in an environment that is lively and dynamic. For Deborah, the community college meets these requirements. Of concern to her, however, is what she describes as differential treatment of leaders in the Student Affairs division versus those in Academic Affairs. She noted challenges in securing professional development relevant to her role and responsibilities, while faculty seemed to be able to travel anywhere, at any time, with little to no inquiries or restrictions.

Deborah is a servant leader. She believes that everyone on a college campus serves from where they are situated, and that is how she chooses to lead. She never asks anyone to do anything that she would not do and tries to always set a good example. Very family oriented, she works to maintain a balance in her work and family life. Disheartened by leadership that continually displayed behavior that contradicted her personal morals and values, Deborah recently transitioned from her position at Clarksville Community College.

Imani

Imani consistently displayed confidence, sensitivity and forthrightness during the interviews for this study. She is the only participant who began her undergraduate studies enrolled at a community college. Now, approximately 20 years later, she believes she has come full circle. Disillusioned by the sexism that she saw while pursuing a career in a different

discipline, Imani entered higher education on the recommendation of an academic program counselor. After working at a private, not-for-profit, 4-year university for a short time, Imani joined Allentown community college in the Student Affairs division.

Imani is motivated by the impact that she is able to make on the lives of others. She described several situations where she successfully worked outside of her prescribed duties to assist a minority student that was struggling to navigate the system. She considers this her responsibility and is proud of her ability to make a difference. Conversely, she is fatigued by the politics, racism, and sexism that consistently infiltrate her experiences. Despite being in her early 50s, Imani contemplated whether or not she is at the end of her career in higher education. She has held a leadership role at Allentown Community College for over 20 years.

Dara

Dara, who initially appeared uneasy, quickly demonstrated her confidence and cleverness. Choosing her words carefully, she recapitulated her story and the role that education has played in it. Dara was a poor, first-generation college student when she attended an elite, PWI, public institution for her undergraduate studies. She recalled how ironic it was that she was smart enough to be admitted to the University, yet she required remediation before she was deemed prepared to take upper-level college courses. During the summer break after her freshmen year, she attended a local community college for the developmental instruction. Returning to the university she successfully completed her undergraduate degree. She openly shared how a degree from an elite university has served as a calling card for her, and definitely changed her life.

Dara did not seek out a career in higher education. Her successes in other public service arenas led her to a community college. Reflecting on her personal education journey, the

progression of the typical community college student, and other leadership experiences, Dara perceives some inherent injustices in the community college system. Specifically referencing remedial coursework and its low pass rates, Dara is concerned that higher education is reflective of this country's social stratification. Despite these beliefs, Dara understands the importance and the role of community colleges in the higher education landscape. For this reason, she is committed to the work of the community college and is determined to have her work be impactful. She feels that the community college is the place for her.

Reporting directly to the President, Dara offered a different perspective of the community college than those associated with Student Affairs and Academic Affairs. She considers herself to be an experienced leader that exercises good judgement and provides good counsel to others. She described her leadership style as inclusive, acknowledging that she learned that style from others that were effective when leading her. At the time of the study Dara was employed at Pierpont Community College. Despite some challenging moments at Pierpoint Community College, she remains optimistic about her future. Believing that women leaders bring something extraordinary to leadership roles, she envisions continued leadership in her future.

Danelle

Danelle is a self-described introvert that exhibits a calm spirit. She demonstrates self-assurance and an unwillingness to devote energy to conditions that she cannot change. Although she was always expected to go to college, she asserted that she had to work hard to achieve her academic success. Her pathway to a community college included a detour of her choosing which ultimately ended her pursuit of a career in the medical field. When her desire to teach grew very strong she explored employment in the community college sector. The community college offered a more stable financial environment, which was an important factor for Danelle.

Danelle described her department as being quite troubled and full of nonsense when she was first hired. A relatively small unit of the college, the department was ravaged by distrust, lack of guidance and favoritism. Accusations of racism had created a stagnant, decaying environment, which gave rise to immense faculty turnover. There were no eligible candidates to complete the tenure and promotion process for more than ten years. With little guidance and direction, Danelle earned tenure. Subsequently, she assumed the leadership role of department chair.

Danelle specifically chose Greenburg Community College because of its diverse student population. Danelle believed that some of her students would re-enter their communities and work to create positive change and live better lives. Now with over 10 years at that institution, Danelle declared that she loves her job. Despite having to manage residual occurrences of bias, Danelle's position offers her the right mix of teaching, research and writing. She is amazed that she has found a job that fits her and who she is so well.

Aliyah

Aliyah described herself as a smart, courageous, but quiet woman. Like Imani, she never planned to work at a community college, yet she has been a community college employee for over 20 years. After completing her undergraduate degree, Aliyah was vigorously seeking employment. Led to accept a clerical level position, her abilities were recognized by others and she was encouraged to pursue higher level positions. Over the next several years Aliyah has successfully climbed the ranks, accepting more responsibility and greater leadership demands with each new position.

Admittedly, Aliyah said that at times, she has had her own doubts about her talents and proficiencies. To address her concerns about her abilities, Aliyah enrolled in leadership programs

to assess her deficiencies. Surprised by the results of the assessments, she committed to doing the work that was necessary. Now she feels more confident and prepared to embrace new opportunities. She believes she is a visionary and one that leads by example.

Aliyah loves helping people and is careful to treat everyone with respect. She is accommodating to the needs of others and worries that this may be viewed as weakness. Focused on student success, she has been known to spend vacation time working. She voiced her dismay at the lack of recognition she has received for this commitment. Aliyah worked at Johnstown Community College at the time of this study.

Mikayla

MiKayla is an academic affairs professional who has consistently risen up the ranks in higher education leadership. She displays a no-nonsense, intense demeanor. Always having a desire to teach, Mikayla only envisioned herself actually teaching after encountering an African American woman in that role. That was the impetus for her to complete her bachelors, masters and doctorate degrees. Prior to joining Allentown Community College, the same institution where Imani works, Mikayla served in a variety of positions, including Faculty, Associate Director, and Associate Vice President.

Mikayla loves leading as it provides her with the freedom to create learning environments that are conducive to success. She described the ideal environment as nurturing and safe, free from bias and power imbalances. She expressed her willingness to confront situations that require her attention but stressed that she is not confrontational. She prefers to invoke data, teaching, and patience into her interactions. Through a lens of the marginalized she has dedicated significant time to policy review and re-evaluation. Troubled by recent changes in the racial

climate of this country, Mikayla contended that the campus setting could be ripe for conflict if people are not hearing one another.

Jamila

Jamila, the youngest participant in this study, had a serious, yet charming disposition. She is very focused on her work and her career trajectory. A first-generation student, Jamila thoroughly enjoyed her undergraduate student life experience. Consequently, she abandoned all previous career aspirations, and devoted herself to student affairs. She has vast experience in most areas of the Student Affairs division, both in a large public institution and the community college. Although Jamila no longer works in the Student Affairs division she lights up when discussing students and the work that the division encompasses.

Although enjoying her role as a Vice President at Crestwood Community College, Jamila finds herself at a crossroads as she considers the next steps in her career. At times she finds it difficult to abandon student services forever, but voiced concerns about becoming a serious presidential contender with only a student services background. Jamila is committed to the mission of the community college. She boasted at the fine work and student success that is occurring on the campus at Crestwood.

She has vowed to remain at a community college and declared that she will never work anywhere else. Jamila has encountered difficult racial situations but acknowledges that the issue is the offenders, not hers. She is well grounded in her faith in God and determined to do the work that is necessary to achieve her career goals.

Data Analysis

A five- step thematic approach was used to analyze the data. The evaluation included: (1) data organization and preparation, (2) absorbing the information; (3) the coding process; (4)

theming the data; (5) interpreting the data. The eight emergent themes were then arranged by the relevant research question. Each section incorporates the themes, subthemes and thick descriptions that relate to the inquiry. Table 3 illustrates the association of the emergent themes with the research questions.

Table 3

Themes Relative to Research Questions

Theme	Experiences of Leaders	Experiences that influenced pursuit of Executive Leadership	Influence of Race and Gender	Impact of Social and Cultural factors
Persistence of Power and Privilege	X			
Developing Strategies to Survive		X		
Community College President's Role, Responsibilities and Impact		X		
Fighting the Fight Against Stereotypes			X	
Invisibility			X	
Evaluating Quality of Life				X
Racism and Discrimination				X
A Journey of Faith				X

The researcher explored the following questions:

1. What are the experiences of African American women leaders at community colleges in the New York Metropolitan area?
 - 1a. What experiences influenced African American women at community colleges in the New York Metropolitan area to reexamine the pursuit of executive leadership positions?
2. In what ways did race and gender influence the experiences of African American women in senior level positions at community colleges in the New York Metropolitan area?
3. What do the stories of African American women in senior level positions at community colleges in the New York Metropolitan area reveal about how social and cultural factors impact the retention and promotion of African American women pursuing executive positions at community colleges?

The stories and themes that follow illuminate the meanings of the experiences of African American women in administrative positions at community colleges in the New York Metropolitan area. Thick descriptions and direct quotes were used by the researcher to re-tell the narratives that the participants shared. Through analysis and interpretation, the researcher correlated each emergent theme with the relevant research question.

Research Question 1: What are the experiences of African American women leaders at community colleges in the New York Metropolitan area?

Analysis of the data resulted in the emergence of one overarching theme relative to the first research question regarding the experiences of African American women leaders at community colleges: the persistence of power and privilege. Three subthemes emerged from deeper analysis of the persistence of power and privilege theme. These subthemes are (a)

diminished authority (b) lack of opportunities and (c) called to protect and encourage the African American community.

Theme 1: The Persistence of Power and Privilege

Each of the seven participants shared a story that demonstrated the exertion of power and privilege by the dominant race in their respective community college environments. These encounters left the participants feeling discriminated against, either because of their race, gender or both. Even though some of these recollections were from events that took place several years ago, the retelling of the stories caused a resurgence of fresh emotions. These emotions included anger, grief, and frustration. Still, other participants felt fatigued, ineffective, and sad.

Organizational structures are typically representative of the internal levels of power and authority. Power and authority generally rest with individuals holding administrative titles such as Dean, Academic Department Chair, Vice President, Provost and President. Privilege, as described by the participants in this study expands beyond the typical administrative personnel. It surfaces in encounters with personnel at every level as well as with students and their parents.

Dara asserted:

And people think that they're doing God's work, you know, helping the black and brown first gen, DACA students, all that stuff and they still come at it from a place of privilege...White privilege just runs deep. It is just so deep.

Diminished authority

Expanding on the consequences of power and privilege, three participants discussed experiences that left them with their authority diminished. One participant affirmed that the power is not solely based on job title, but rather on ones' positioning with another person or another group. In response to a student complaint, Mikayla began an investigation of a college

policy which on the surface appeared to be discriminatory and was affecting students' ability to progress. Thorough in her examination of the issue, she retrieved current data and conversed with other professionals not affiliated with the college regarding the legitimacy of the policy. When she presented her results, which supported a change in the policy, the faculty members, who were all White, outright refused to consider a change, citing that the policy was legitimate and had been in place for a very long time. As the Dean of the department, Mikayla was empowered to ratify this change. Yet, the faculty disregarded her position and its accompanying power. Her authority as the Dean was totally devalued and ignored. When a stalemate ensued the Vice President of Academic Affairs was forced to intervene. Agreeing with Mikayla, the Vice President informed the faculty that Mikayla was exercising her authority and was indeed authorized to speak for the college. Moreover, the language had to be removed. Although Mikayla was victorious in implementing the policy change, the behavior of the faculty suggested a degree of entitlement that allowed them to disregard the wishes of their superior. Moreover, the damage to MiKayla's spirit had already been done.

Deborah's experience gave rise to similar sentiments of appropriated power. Deborah recounted a story that not only stripped her of her authority, but also stripped one of her direct reports, as well as the Vice President to whom she reported. Like Deborah, the other two employees are also African American women. As the Dean, Deborah was responsible for sanctions related to violations of the college's code of the conduct. After delivering sanctions to the student, the action was overturned by Executive Leadership, a White male. Deborah stated:

In the email that the President sent to the student to reinstate everything that was taken away from her, he stripped the three African American women in that same email without a discussion, without taking into consideration how we came to this decision or

For those outside of academic affairs, this makes it incredibly hard to envision a senior vice president or presidential position.

Deborah's experiences supported those voiced by Dara. Deborah, who has worked in student affairs her entire career, has been introduced to very few opportunities for professional development and ascension within her institution. She described the majority of her professional development as personal, having had to take the initiative on her own. Recently, an attempt to engage in professional development funded by her institution left Deborah experiencing the privilege afforded to faculty. She was continuously bombarded with questions and concerns regarding the relevancy of the professional development to her job, while faculty was granted permission to travel with her with no questions asked.

Expounding on this, Deborah expressed her belief that African American women simply are not given the same kind of platforms that others are given. Observing her White colleagues in academic affairs, Deborah declared that their Whiteness has afforded them the ability to coast in their positions, an advantage that never would have been afforded to an African American woman. Deborah expressed that she never has an opportunity to slide, as she is constantly asked to prove who she is and what she knows.

Imani also has worked in student affairs her entire career. Like Deborah, her institution does not promote professional development and she has not pursued it. Having experienced the power structure that permits White men and White women to give Black women all the work, and have Black women do it, Imani called Black women the "workhorses at the college." Seeing this inequity and feeling bogged down by the amount of work she is tasked to complete, Imani has determined that there is just no time for professional development, despite it being an area of improvement often cited on her annual evaluations. She professed:

There's just no time because you spend all your time doing all of this other stuff. I just never had the time to, you know, do anything outside of the college that would help me professionally. And it shows, it really does show for me because I've been - I've been in the same place for all these years.

Imani, unlike Deborah, did have an opportunity to serve as the Vice President, albeit for a short period of time while a formal search was being conducted. Even though she did not find the work overwhelming, she defined the whole experience as annoying. She declared “there were too many politics, too much racism, too much sexism.” Having completed her doctoral degree, Imani proclaims that it doesn’t mean anything in terms of advancing her career within that institution. Aside from her personal fulfillment, and being called doctor, she has seen no other real recognition. Moreover, she is concerned that she has spent too much time at one institution. The idea of leaving what she knows and is familiar with is not appealing at this stage in her career.

Aliyah and Jamila had different experiences regarding advancement opportunities. The people with the perceived power and privilege at their community colleges served as mentors and confidantes who helped them advance their careers. Aliyah chose the college president, a White man, to be her mentor. He permitted her to attend senior leadership meetings, despite others questioning the appropriateness of her being in attendance. He also provided the sponsorship for Aliyah to attend a leadership conference which she says was fundamental to her leadership development. Similarly, Jamila revealed that prior to joining her current institution all of her mentors were White men. Maintaining the prior relationships, Jamila is now also mentored by a Black female at Crestwood Community College. These relationships have pushed her forward, opened doors for her, and given her advancement opportunities.

Danelle offered yet a different experience relative to advancement opportunities. When she was placed into the department chairmanship by the president of the college, she was not seeking an advancement opportunity. Inheriting the position from a long-serving White male, her predecessor did not hesitate to demonstrate his disfavor. Completely discounting her credentials and achievements he maliciously told her “you know you only got the job because you are an African American.” Danelle shared that prior to this experience she had not felt “specifically racially profiled or discriminated against” at Greenburg. Yet, the mere fact that he felt emboldened enough to say it to her face validated his sense of power and privilege. Danelle further asserted:

It comes in micro, you know, it's those microaggressions that make you question yourself, that make you not feel as confident, that make you feel like you've got to overcompensate and over do. So, I definitely have whatever syndrome that is - like working. I out work, you know, just about everybody...having that feeling that you have to do that as a Black person.

Mikayla voiced concern that the opportunities for advancement for African American women don't generally have much to do with abilities and experience. She shared:

I'm fixated on the fact that if you do what's right, if you have the potential, if you - if you play the game this is how you get promoted. No! I've literally had to leave every institution to be promoted. I've never been promoted within. Never! I was always told wait.

Dara's experiences aligned with the viewpoint expressed by Mikayla. She believes that too often an opportunity surfaces when someone leaves a job and the leader grants favor to the person that they think can best do that job without granting full consideration to others. She said:

And next thing you know it, they are on their path - that was their path to becoming a president. That just does not happen - I don't see that that happens in the same - with the same frequency with people of color. You just - at least you don't hear about it...We (African American women) all have very challenging experiences, trying to rise.

Called to protect and encourage the African American community

Most of participants discussed how they maneuvered to protect and encourage the African American members of their campus community. Though their motivations may have varied, it was apparent that they accepted this concept as part of their duty and obligation.

Imani shared several stories of how her intervention transformed outcomes for Black people. Some were students, friends, and co-workers. Others were acquaintances that she had just met when she made the decision to intervene. With a sense of pride, she began to tell the story of how “it just so happened that we had a Black student, and I needed to help him.” Imani disclosed how she worked outside of her job responsibilities to help this student who was facing disciplinary action for a situation that she believed was being overblown. After carefully editing a student’s statement to remove any references that she thought would lead to him being negatively stereotyped, she masterfully coached the young Black male on how to communicate the justification for his actions. When the hearing was finished the professor understood his stance and all charges were dismissed.

Mikayla is motivated to protect and encourage African American students because she still vividly remembers her own frightful first grade experience. Born in the 60s, Mikayla was bused to a school where she was the only Black student in her class. Her parents had told her that she was in school to learn, not to be liked. They also advised that the teachers are not going to like you all the time. One day, Mikayla explained, the class was taking a spelling test. Labelling

herself as always being somewhat anal, Mikayla instinctively went to erase something that was on her paper, despite being advised by the teacher not to use the eraser. The teacher ran to Mikayla, yelled at her, ripped the pencil from her hand and bit the eraser off. Mikayla explained how scarring this encounter was:

I don't remember what I got on that test. I don't remember anything after or before that day. I just can remember that encounter and being scared out of my mind. And if nothing else, probably feeling like I have to be perfect - you don't get another chance - you're not going to be able to erase anything. First thing out the gate, it has to be perfect.

Not realizing the impact that this would have on her at the time, Mikayla now realizes that her drive to create safe learning spaces is fueled by that experience. She said, "I'm thinking about all of the encounters that I've had (with) students where I felt like I had to save them or rescue them from toxic environments." Additionally, she asserted that the impact of these type of actions may never be known because of the hierarchy in our country, unless there is a safe space where the muted voices of the subjugated people can be heard.

Dara, who does not have a lot of direct contact with students, has found an alternative way to be a student advocate. Portraying herself as "very much a defender of the marginalized" Dara is resigned to speaking up about it. Reviewing data relative to student achievement, Dara uses her voice to question the validity of the data and the manner in which it is presented. Concerned that the message pertaining to the Black students was devaluing, she sought amendments and changes. She shared the consequences of her efforts saying, "And so, it was very hard because I spoke up about what I saw, and I was marginalized for it."

Dara also has tried to uplift colleagues. She recalled an ongoing encounter with a Black man who appeared to be struggling with fitting in at the mostly White college. A large man, with

a deep voice, he began to look and walk as if he was trying to shrink his physical appearance.

Dara encouraged him to show up as himself. Sadly, she noted:

Because he can't change his skin color, he can't change his, the deepness of his voice. He can't change his size, you know. It's almost as if, you know, he was a mistake. And he, you know, and he is not. But he just has to find the right place for him. And I don't know if it's - how much longer it will be Pierpont - but under my leadership, I - I want him to feel like that's exactly where he's supposed to be and others who are unable to deal with who he is - it's their problem and not his.

Without sharing any particular remembrances, Deborah and Danelle made it clear that they are concerned about the welfare of Black students. Deborah admitted that she has a special connection with the African American students and disclosed that she is always willing to “help those that look like me.” She further asserted that “Every time I look at an (African American) student – in whatever capacity I see them - I still see me. I haven't gotten to that point where I don't see me.” As a consequence, she is constantly thinking about how she can reach back and help them advance.

Danelle was the only participant who indicated that the opportunity to advocate for the disenfranchised played a role in her decision to join the college where she works. Recognizing that she could potentially touch and teach many African American students at Greenburg, Danelle welcomed the chance to join the Greenburg faculty. Instructing and encouraging students to advocate for their physical and mental health, Danelle is hopeful that she will be instrumental in bettering the lives of others.

Research Question 1a: What experiences influenced African American women at community colleges in the New York Metropolitan area to reexamine the pursuit of executive leadership positions?

Two themes emerged relative to research question 1b regarding the experiences that influenced participants to reexamine the pursuit of executive leadership positions: (a) developing strategies to survive (b) the community college president's role, responsibilities, and impact.

There were no subthemes for this research question.

Theme 2: Developing strategies to survive

Developing strategies to survive is an all-encompassing topic that captures the different measures, thoughts, and actions that the participants developed in order to continue to endure at their respective workplaces. The strategies were revealed by the participants when the researcher asked them to describe their worst experience at the community college. The experiences that were shared all referenced an element of discrimination or racism. Moreover, the need to develop a survival tactic represented a tipping point, where participants began to reassess remaining at their institution, as well as the pursuit of an executive position. All of the participants had developed at least one strategy that was helping them to survive.

Removing the blinders that had obstructed her view of racism was very painful for Mikayla. Realizing that a person would not want to do something for her because of her skin color was "a real hard pill to swallow." Yet, once her vision was clear she accepted that fact that "racism does exist, and it exists everywhere." Survival for Mikayla meant learning how to deal with the racism and interact with the racists. She said:

I had to accept people for who they are. I don't have to like it, but I had to be willing to say you're going to be in spaces with people who do not like you, because of the color of your skin.

Mikayla's initial strategy was to try to change people. She soon discovered that tactic did not work. She explained:

They might not be ready. And if they're not ready...I'm not going to pull off that scab before it's ready. Because when you pull off scabs before the healing takes place you cause a rebleed and you increase the risk for infection. Now, the person can die from sepsis. And I think mentally it's the same thing. When a person is not mentally ready to deal with something and you force them to deal with it, they can have dissociation problems - mental health issues.

Now her strategy involves data sharing, calm conversation, and patience. A strategy that she calls "moving around them," Makayla invokes conversations that focus on the mission, vision, and values of the institution. When actions do not support the mission, vision and values of the college, she asks "what are you willing to do about it?" Her goal is to get the other person to recognize that their actions are spawned from "personal biases and personal views" without her having to tell them. Makayla found this task to often be difficult.

Imani's primary survival tactic is directly correlated with the first research question subtheme entitled called to protect and encourage the African American community. Discouraged by the discrimination and racism that she has seen, Imani created what she calls 'the underground railroad.' This covert operation is her advocacy tool and helps her "get things done." She described it as "a whole system that White leadership is unaware of – which is why it works." She explained:

To have that underground network pull those students through, pull other people through and say this is how we're going to do it, otherwise, it doesn't work...That's the only way to survive.... That's the sort of thing I always have to do. And it's not just with students. It's with every single thing I do - underground. Underground 100%.

Imani's underground railroad is comprised of many of the Black people on campus, in various office, regardless of their position. With a sense of camaraderie, the Black employees, "look out for one another." She discussed how they inform each other if "somebody is coming for me or coming for somebody else." She also said, "I know what's going on." When a student gets kicked out of class or is running the risk of getting arrested, she gets a covert notification so she can quietly and discreetly try to remedy the problem before it escalates.

In contrast to Imani, Dara does nothing underground. Believing that her proximity to executive leadership requires her to be above ground with all that she does, she acknowledged that "somewhere along the line that hurt me in one way or another." Her method of surviving the injustices that she has encountered at Pierpont was to find her "co-conspirators," those that she could talk to and share with.

Unlike Imani's underground network, Dara's network at the college did not include only Black people. Finding her co-conspirators meant talking "about it a little bit to people to try to figure out - do people see? Does everybody see what I see?" It also meant that she had to figure out how to curtail judgment on those who were unwilling to "put themselves out there in a safe way." Imani considers herself fortunate that she also had developed an external large village of smart people that kept her "engaged and flourishing" in areas of higher education unrelated to her position at the college.

Finding your inner circle was another survival tactic discussed by four of the participants. The inner circle is different from typical mentoring relationships designed to enhance skills and improve performance. It is also different from the good old boy network, an all-male club which typically affords favor and information to members only. The inner circles discussed by the participants are more like sisterhoods. These relationships provide safety, encouragement, healing, therapy, and restoration. These interactions offer opportunities for the participants to “debrief”. Debriefing, often time consuming, distracting, and sometimes painful, is facilitated by telling and retelling stories in an effort to gain meaning of the experience.

Imani introduced how her circle has helped her endure when she recalled a phone call that she had with a student’s parent. This parent, unaware that Imani is African American, finally admitted to Imani that she called to voice her concern about “too many black people” in her son’s class. Filled with emotion at this recollection, Imani blurted out:

What do you do with that? What am I supposed to do with that? So, of course I just hung up the phone on her, but it still doesn't negate how it makes me feel right? It still doesn't. I still have to process it. I've got to call 14 people, retell the story over and over. I don't get to work because I'm too angry. I've got to go eat a piece of cake. I've got to send the student aid down to the cafeteria to get me a cookie and some cake because I can't process it because I have no processing skills whatsoever. Then I've got to tell my sister and I've got to call my mother, and I've got to tell everybody I work with. Then the next day I have to keep talking about it until I'm able to process it all out. That could take a couple of days for me.

Deborah, Aliyah, and Jamila have not yet turned to food to help them process or endure like Imani has, but they all agreed that they have only been able to persevere because of people

that they can have “straight talk” with. Jamila added that often it’s the “simple things” that are most important. Just having someone in your corner to say ‘hey, you may want to work on this’ is helpful. She shared:

And so, you need honest people around you and you need a circle that you can step into and they can say to you listen sis, this, this isn't for you. Or they can say to you ... you know, Jamila - because folks call me Dr. J., or they call me J., they're like, you know what J, that was a little harsh, that was a little too much Jamila. Okay, you may want to fluff it up a little. Like all right, you know, and sometimes you don't want to hear it, but they're like, ‘this is it.’

Deborah noted that her circle excludes her significant other, because like most men, his first notion is to try to “fix the problem.” Knowing there is no quick fix for the biases she experiences, she chooses to decompress on her commute home. She disclosed:

Like I have girlfriends who are clinical, so I can call them and say, I need a therapy session and they all understand.... they listen and then we start going through the questions of what's important and what's not important.

Similarly, Aliyah also commented:

You do have to have a network of people that will support you, So, find it! I don't know where it may be - not be in the same place for everybody, but you have to have those couple of people that are going to tell you the truth, and that you can bounce things off of. For me some of that was those other presidents that I had met and then some of it was girlfriends, and then some of it was community members who now end up being girlfriends. Right, right at this moment there's a lot of sorority members.

Danelle was advised by a college president that she should not take anything personally.

This has become her mode of survival, especially when navigating issues of conflict. She stated:

The longer I'm in this position, the more I see about what's going on in the world, it just makes sense on so many levels. And (it) helps me to stay grounded...Because by not taking things personal(ly) and not feeling personally attacked it allows you to look at that other person's perspective.

Furthermore, Danelle contends that what she says is never going to change the other person's viewpoint when they approach an issue informed by who they are as a person. As a result, she feels like she avoids physical conflicts and “banging her head against a brick wall.” Regarding a specific experience she remarked:

I'm not taking it personal. I'm not, you know, trying not to be - have certain feelings about her as a person because she does things differently than I do, is racist or is as elitist as they may be. But I'm just trying to focus on the task at hand. So, I think that's the best because there's going to be so many things that happen and for your own mental well- being and to continue to do well in your job and you just can't take it personally.

Theme 3: The community college president's role, responsibilities, and impact

In the discussions of career aspirations and future goals, all of the participants cast light on their perceptions of the impact, role, and responsibilities of community college presidents. Additionally, they discussed their understanding of the competencies necessary to successfully do the job. These experiences furthered the reexamination of the pursuit of executive leadership.

Danelle is totally content in her present position and cannot imagine adding any more responsibility or stress to her daily activities. She is very serious about her health, and her earnestness about it grows as she continues to age. A divorcee, with one adult child, she is

careful about what she commits to doing. Her view on executive leadership is that it involves a lot of talk with limited to no action. She said:

I don't know... I'm still clear about like my limitations and that I need sleep, and I have to exercise.... I don't know...I don't like being in positions where we talk, talk, talk about things and we know the problem, but we don't really address the problem. So, I think if I felt like being in those positions would place me in lots of situations where we were talking about the same thing over and over again and not really making changes. I think that would frustrate me and stress me out.

Mikayla's experiences led her to concentrate on her skillset, as well as quality of life concerns. She can envision herself in the role of a Provost because she views it as "a seamless stretch" from the work that she is doing now. As for a college presidency, she is open to considering it in the future, but right now that is not her focus. She shared:

When we talk about a presidency - that to me is a whole different ballpark. My expertise in higher ed has been leading, yes, but as someone who's leading the curriculum or the academic side of the house. So being a president, you need to look at not just the academic side of the house, but the student services as well. And I guess because I've never led in that area that that would probably be a stretch for me. Not something that's insurmountable, but nevertheless, a stretch.

Relative to work life balance she added:

Because I like the work life balance as much as possible. I always think as president, that's it. That's your job, that's your life, and I don't know if I want that.

Aliyah's career trajectory has always come as somewhat of a surprise to her. Never fully believing in her ability to successfully climb the ladder until she stepped on each rung, she demonstrated that same apprehension when discussing executive leadership. She explained:

I've always, as I look back, there's a lot of times where I say that there's things that I can't do. So, I look at other people's jobs like oh, I could never do that-that's crazy. And then I ended up being in that job...So, the current thing that I can't do, on my can't do list, is be a college president. But then, I've said that for my last three or four jobs. So that's some place in the back of my mind, um I'd say it's not even that far back. It's kind of middle to somewhere closer to the front...I've actually looked at, you know, I've looked at qualifications to see how many things I check off the list.

Two participants, Deborah and Jamila considered how being a president might lessen their direct contact with students and their impact on student success. Deborah remarked:

What holds me back is that the population that I ultimately want to serve - I don't know how well they would be served at that level, because it no longer - it's about the student - but it no longer just becomes about the student. It's about the institution and making money for the college and the policies and procedures...How many of those students will actually be served as a result of some of the decisions that come down? If the position is just titular - so other people make the decisions the county, the state, the federal... how many decisions do you actually get to make and implement for students so they have a better experience? So that's where I'm feeling it out at.

Jamila, who still loves being immersed in student affairs and bonding and relating with students commented on her experience working with a President who has a student-centered agenda.

The buck stops with the President. (The) decision stops there... You are really the chief fundraising officer as well, like you have people in these roles, but the job is yours to go out and close the deal. And well, you know, we, I have a very student-centered President who is involved...going to as many student events as she possibly can. But emergencies happen. Things come up. Other demands are, are on her time. And so, it's really, really hard to stay connected and stay with students. And you're so far removed in that role from students sometimes it's very hard for students to feel like they can even connect with you.

In addition to her thoughts pertaining to students, Jamila admitted that the idea of letting go of her dream of being the Vice President of Student Affairs has her at a crossroads. Everyone around her is encouraging her to let that go, and to begin to create a path toward a college presidency. She remarked:

And now I have folks that are behind me saying No, I think you can let that go now. Let's look at this new avenue... So right now I'm in a crossroads in my career and a crossroads in my head as to do I want to go ahead and seek a presidential position, or do I want to be the Vice President of Student Affairs.

For Dara the decision has already been made. She firmly stated, "I want to be a college president." Much like Jamila, others have encouraged her to do so. She remarked:

I've been told for most of my career that I (would) make a good one. And I started to believe it over time as I was thinking about my own leadership in, in the various roles that I have had. So, when I think about the end of my work life I do see ending as a college president for me would be the-a great way to end my career.

Devoted to being impactful, Dara admits that there are actually better places to have greater impact than a college campus. Nevertheless, she considers the ability to have impact on people that can see you every day is meaningful. She reflected:

So, why not me... I think that there is something pretty special about women leaders. The sensitivity that they bring- that doesn't make them, you know, soft, in any way...but that empathy is really necessary. Particularly in a community college setting where these students are as brilliant as anyone else, but they just have other challenges...You know, you see all today all these college presidents that have had no higher ed experience. I mean, what the hell? - that's crazy...But if you're smart enough to really create a good team, you know, put together a good team and you're willing to and you can acknowledge what you know what you don't know, you absolutely can, can do it. So, why not me, you know, when I think about it that way. And I have experience sitting at the leadership table.

Imani has well over 15 years of experience at the leadership table. When she began working at Allentown Community College, she said all she wanted to be was the president of a school. That was the primary goal. Now, Imani is unable to overlook the racist and discriminatory experiences that she has had at the college. She is also unable to forget how they made her feel. These experiences have had a great influence on her career aspirations. She stated:

No way. Not interested. Who cares? I can't be bothered with this. It's too much work - too many politics - too much racism- too much sexism. That can't be my story. It can't be my life and it can't be my story. I cannot spend the rest of my life fighting. So that went out the window.

Research question 2: In what ways did race and gender influence the experiences of African American women in senior level positions at community colleges in the New York Metropolitan area?

Each participant was asked to describe how their race and gender may have impacted their experiences at their workplace. The emergent themes are: (a) fighting the fight against stereotypes and (b) invisibility. A subtheme of fighting the fight against stereotypes is build your brand. Diminished authority, a sub-theme of theme one, has re-emerged as a relevant sub-theme of invisibility also.

Theme 4: Fighting the fight against stereotypes

Believing that there are systems, doubts, and suspicions associated with African American women, the participants discussed the need to constantly ‘fight.’ Although never engaging in anything physical, these fights are battles against stereotypes that have long been associated with Black women. Collins (2000) noted that the denial of humanity toward black women is built upon the foundation of stereotypes. Moreover, a major component of Black Feminist Thought is to challenge and dismantle the oppressing and controlling images that influence the perception of Black women. The participants shared their challenges and just how the effects of these struggles are manifested in their daily behavior.

The angry Black woman stereotype characterizes Black women as hostile, aggressive, sassy, domineering and bad-tempered. It is based in racism and can lead to additional forms of oppression known as tone policing. Tone policing is a method of stifling the communication of the marginalized and is often used to silence the voices of African American women.

Jamila described her struggle with being labeled an angry black woman and tone policing in this manner. Admittedly she is not one to run around “bubbly.” Instead, she is about the

business of the college and is rather straightforward. Sometimes her tone is not one that others would consider very friendly. Although these characteristics may be favorable for White men or White women, Black women like Jamila have to intentionally change who they are to avoid the angry Black woman marker. People in her inner circle have helped. She said:

But we've had that conversation, or we've had a conversation about, you know, Jamila, you, you, your ideas come across very lovely, but you sound defensive when you're presenting them and maybe you need a softer approach when you're presenting them. And so those conversations have been had with me behind closed doors by supervisors or one would, one had a habit of emailing and saying, Hey, it's great today, but remember what we talked about - the face, you know, and it would be like, okay. I mean, there's nothing else I could do about my face. It is my face, you know! But I could work on tone and I can work on delivery and I get that. And so, you know, those conversations have been had with me a couple of times.

Imani's fight against the angry Black woman stereotype has resulted in her adjusting the manner in which she leads. Her response to the interview question invoked a spinoff of her "underground" survival tool. She stated:

I think that it definitely has influenced me. The way I operate is I'm never in the front of the line. I'm never at the front of the line. I never have my arm in the air, saying, you know, fight for power and equity. I'm always behind the scenes, underground. That is the only way I can get my agendas pushed forward. So, I'm never in the front. You never see me on the front lines. I'm never complaining. I'm not - I don't do anything publicly - I always wait until after the meeting to talk to the people.

Imani further explained that she also shies away from sharing ideas.

So, you might decide not to talk so much, which is how we silence ourselves, which of course, I do that all the time. I have every great idea. I'm like, very good at coming up with ideas. But guess what, I'm also good at - not sharing those ideas because that means that someone else is going to take credit for it, or you're going to have to do it. Bottom line is, sometimes you have to, you have to be, you know, not in the forefront. You can't be at the front of the line.

Imani's experiences fighting against a stereotypical label have silenced an important voice of the college's leadership team. Regrettably, Imani believes that overtime, other Black leaders in the higher education space, where administration is predominately White, will discover the need to operate in a similar manner.

Aliyah finds herself fighting two Black woman stereotypes: (1) the strong Black woman, and (2) the mammy. The concept of the strong Black woman maintains that Black women can withstand mistreatment because they are strong, emotionally reserved, and self-sacrificing. Aliyah shared her experience where she repeatedly requested the removal of a staff member that was not meeting her job responsibilities. At that time, her boss was a Black man, and the staff member was also a Black woman. According to Aliyah, the problematic situation persisted for years. In the beginning her boss continued to insist that "two black women should be able to work it out." Feeling like her leadership was not trusted, her requests to terminate lessened. Finally, unexpectedly her boss announced that they were going to make a change. When she asked what took so long, she remembers him saying, 'you're strong, you can handle it.' Still enraged by this response Aliyah said:

I should have to suffer because I'm strong? And (he) saw the strength and said, you can handle it? And it didn't matter what I was going through, how much I had to complain or

say anything. It was because I was a strong Black woman, that's why I had to endure and why he believed that I could endure.

The mammy stereotype depicts African American women as overweight and dependent, who give but never take. For Aliyah, she feels that her "chubbiness" sends a different message about her than it would about a White person. She explained:

I think that they see really a chubby Black woman who doesn't have enough discipline not to eat too much ... like I wasn't in control of all facets of my life.... or you just must be poor and impoverished because you don't eat the right foods....it's a form of discrimination...Because there's extra pounds around the hips there's something wrong in the brain...I don't look the part, it's like, Oh, she can't represent us....she can't be smart enough.

She concluded by saying:

So that's, um, how I believe I have been viewed. And this might just be all in my head, but I find that, you know, someone else gets a better response.

Build your brand

The subtheme of build your brand also expresses concern about stereotypes, physical appearances and how one appears on paper. Conceding that there are stereotypes out there that we all have to fight against, Jamila feels that the expectations are different for Black women. Agreeing, Imani alluded to never wanting to be seen "out there" as volatile, complaining or always associated with a problem, for once you have been branded in that manner, no one can see you in a different light. Certain that Black women have to work harder and longer hours than their White colleagues, Jamila talked at length about the measures that she takes to ensure that her appearance is flawless every day. She said:

You will never see me not in a suit, not dressed in heels, not dressed a certain way.

Because I feel you have to look the part. I come in and don't care - no one here, no one here but Jamila, I'm still in a suit or dress, stockings and heels. That's it. That for me is my uniform, and I'm not changing that. No pandemic, epidemic - anything. I am still going to be in my uniform. Because for me, it's about the part and looking the part and dressed the part because you know no one's going to be like Oh no, why are you looking like that coming in here today? That's never going to happen.

She also commented on how her inner circle supports her in this endeavor:

So, I have a very good friend who helps me with my headshots and helps me with my CV and looks at it, edits and rewrites it for me – countless, countless times. She just rewrote my bio...but you need somebody who's going to be on your side to work on the image and tell you this is what it is. Right, so I wear braids 90% of the time and you know, because I have natural hair...So, it's about okay, here's the protective style that'll look good. Here's some styles for natural here that we can do. This will make you look good on the headshots. This will not make you look good.

Theme 5: Invisibility

Several of the stories recounted by the participants expressed the inability of others to truly see them. Some participants felt rendered invisible. Hence, colleagues could not perceive or fathom that these women were credentialed professionals, experienced leaders, experts, or authority figures. Another participant felt that her blackness blinded her colleagues, inhibiting them from understanding her value to the organization and the true nature of her character.

Imani noted that there were quite a few experiences that illustrated this thought. She said, “you know, I've got story, upon story, upon story, upon story.” She shared two of them. First, she

discussed an encounter that happened a long, long time ago. Unable to forget it, she repeatedly said, “she can’t let it go”, and she remembers it like it was yesterday. She recalled the day when she needed to enter a new building and she had forgotten her key. She had to call a public safety officer to let her in. She recounted:

So, the public safety officer comes, and I showed her my ID. And I said, I have to get to my office. And I even tell her I'm Dean Abrahams, and she says to me is Dean your first name? I was so upset, like I couldn't - and I still can't get over it. I was so upset that she said it. Then after she said is Dean my first name, she said, I have to call this in. And I said, Well, I'm not sure why you're calling it in. That's the ID card that this college gave me with my picture on it. What are you calling in? I'm telling you who I am. She said, I have to call it in. So, she calls it in. And she says, you know, I have someone named Imani Abrahams here, she says she's the Dean. She doesn't describe me - she doesn't say I – at the time I had braids in my hair – she doesn't say I have braids in my hair, that I'm Black, she doesn't even describe me. And whoever was on the other end said yes, sure let her in. So, it's not even that she could look at the picture and let me in - it's that she had to call someone who didn't even know what I looked like. I could have been anybody. And I just was so angry for so long and I just said, you know, like that's the beginning of me having to constantly prove who I am, show receipts for what I do, make sure that people recognize me, and I can't do it anymore. I've had enough.

The second story that Imani shared was about a campus event with approximately 400 people in attendance. She had counted only about 3 Black people in the room. She walked into the room and began to look for the table that she had been assigned to. She said:

So, when I got to the table there was nobody there. I said, 'oh, no one showed up to my table?' And I'm looking at all the people. I looked at all the seating. I said, Oh, who's sitting with me? I can't? Oh, I wonder who's going to be sitting with me. And I look around and I see all of the VPs are sitting together and I see this woman. She had quit - she quit! But she was sitting with all the admissions people and my friend the other black woman, she was sitting with her boyfriend and all of her department. So, I'm like, well who's sitting with me? ...And finally, people start to trickle into my table. Here comes the President's Secretary, and the person running the event, who works for facilities! Facilities, you know, the custodian practically. And I, and I'm just like, 'Why are you sitting me at this table? What? All the other Vice Presidents, Dean's, they're sitting with people, you could have even squeezed me into another table. But they sat me at that table and I just said, I cannot believe this. I can't, I can't believe this. This makes no sense. And I still haven't - it's funny, it's been, it's been a long time for that....and I still don't know. Can I say something? I can't fight that fight anymore. I can't tell you that, given my title - you shouldn't have put me at that table... But that's the type of thing when you add it all together is more than I'm willing to deal with for the for the remainder of my career.

Aliyah has also felt the sting of invisibility. For her this has occurred countless times during interactions with her peers. She detailed those moments like this:

I'm in the room with them. And now I say something and it's like was I on mute? (She is looking around like who is talking?) You know, it's like - nobody heard it! And then 10 minutes later, someone else will say the same thing. 'Oh really, that's a great idea'. And I'm like, but isn't that what I just said? And so, I've had that - I've had that happen.... And it is more powerful when someone else tells the story than if I tell the story.

Danelle's experiences differed from Imani's and Aliyah's. Nevertheless, Danelle's experiences resulted in feelings of invisibility. Danelle's struggle does not include being physically unseen, but rather represents the failure to comprehend or consider who she is as a person. She feels like "there are times when they (White people) don't understand. There are things that they say that I just don't get or things that I say that they don't get." She also shared one thing that she thought was telling and perfectly illustrated the challenges of being seen for her character, not just her race and gender:

So, when all the race stuff started popping off.... she called me up to say - to apologize, which was interesting because she had never had any indication that there was any need for her to apologize...So, I had to actually clarify like exactly what are you apologizing for? And she apologized for the way she treated me, and you know kind of beat around the bush. But the bottom line was, she was apologizing for assuming, because the issue wasn't even between the two of us... It was him and his behavior...But she had taken on his issue automatically without ever even having a conversation with me...She was recognizing that that was racism and that was her belief about who I was as a person based on the color of my skin.

Diminished authority

The subtheme diminished authority is also relevant to this research question. Mikayla and Deborah described diminished authority experiences that were not solely influenced by power and position. The encounters that Mikayla and Deborah experienced led them to recognize the influence of race and gender on their ability to act with authority in their workplace. For them, race and gender prohibited their colleagues and supervisors from seeing value in the leadership and expertise that they provided. Consequently, there was no recognition of the authority

associated with their respective positions. Reflecting on Mikayla's experience with faculty regarding a campus policy she said:

I have to consider the extent to which my color influences some people to say you don't get to tell me what to do. I'm not going to listen to someone like you. I have heard that before. So, I mean, I know it exists. Just because someone doesn't actually say it. Sometimes you can tell by the language and by the fact that when you say it - I'm not doing it. And then when someone who's White and looks like them says it, it's like - oh, okay.

Research question 3: What do the stories of African American women in senior level positions at community colleges in the New York Metropolitan area reveal about how social and cultural factors impact the retention and promotion of African American women pursuing executive positions at community colleges?

Three themes emerged relative to the social and cultural factors that most greatly impact the retention and promotion of African American women pursuing executive position in community college. The themes relative to social factors are: (a) evaluating quality of life and (b) racism and discrimination. These themes have opposing impacts. The theme relative to cultural factors is: (c) a faith journey. There are no subthemes for this research question.

Theme 6: Evaluating quality of life.

Employment in a senior level administrator position offers a quality of life that is very appealing to some of participants in this study. The social factors relating to quality of life that impacted the retention and promotion of the participants included wealth accumulation, education level, work and leisure time, and social support and connections.

Education level is a key factor in determining social status. Each participant in this study has earned a doctoral degree. Although not a question that was specifically asked, four participants disclosed that they completed their doctoral studies during their time as an administrator at their current community college. The ability to make a decent wage, attain a terminal degree and maintain exceptional healthcare was a motivating factor for Imani. Taking a positive stance, Imani shared why she continues to stay at Allentown:

The other reason why I stayed so long is because it's easy. They made it - the work part of it I have a direct supervisor, who's, you know, in different buildings away from me. They don't give me a hard time when I have to leave, come in late, leave early, you know, call in sick for a week. None of that is an issue. They pay me just enough to keep me. Not a lot, but just enough. Like if it was a penny less, I would leave...in three years, I will be able to have free medical care for the rest of my life...I don't have any kids so I probably would need to have that free medical care, because I'm going to obviously need a nurse... So, that's the type of stuff that's kept me.

Imani also discussed her personal social capital within the campus community. Having been at Allentown for so long, she has longstanding friendships that are important to her:

But the people there, you know, despite the racism and sexism. If you can, if you can scoot those people out and deal with the genuine people, the people who are your friends.... The Black people there... we have such a connection and such a, a - it's just - we're just, we're more than a family. I mean, these are people I've known for 20 years. It's really a great, great systemit's a great network that I have and it's where I get my social capital. So, of course, you know, if I quit, which I am going to eventually ...but if I quit ...I'm really going to struggle. Like, who am I going to talk to? What am I going to

do? That's where, I mean even today, we're off today, I've already spoken to three people from the College.

Jamila, who is married and has a family, did not discuss her current compensation or the need for healthcare. Instead, she considered how suitable her college is for her and the reasons why she may stay:

And so that's where I mean about community. And folks who are just beautiful people who love this place, and they care about each other and they show it every day. And that's part of the love that I have for this institution - is that everyone, whether it's, you know, we've had our bad press, we've had our ups and downs... But it's just the community that folks built here. It's the love that they have for each other here. It's if one person is down, we're bringing everyone up. It's also that we come, and we surround our students. We may be accused of coddling them, but everyone that I encounter at this institution, love their institution, love what they do here, love the mission of the institution because they see that we're making a difference...And so, you know, there's so much to be proud of and there's so much to connect to. And that I feel great here, right. And I come in here every day and I know the work that I'm doing makes a difference.

Danelle made the decision to work at a community college in part due to the financial stability that the position would offer. Extending beyond that, Danelle's focus is how the social factors of wealth accumulation, and education level have afforded her the capacity to make healthy decisions. As previously mentioned, she is committed to curtailing her stress level, and mindful of what may over- extend her. Danelle is elated to be in a position that provides a respectable quality of life and offers her the right combination of her three interests: writing,

teaching, and research. Like Imani and Jamila, she cited the importance of her work friendships, portraying them as “really important.”

Theme 7: Racism and Discrimination

The impact of racism and discrimination negatively influences the retention and ascension of African American women pursuing executive positions at community colleges. Recognizing the historical existence of racism and discrimination, Mikayla discussed the contemporary influences on our society. She said:

I think with the political environment it kind of filtered through and emboldened some individuals and some groups, where I think racism is always existed, but it was contained. And I believe with the political polarization of everything that's happening it kind of allowed people to be more vocal and say and do things that were racist...So, some of the social reasons for leaving for me. I believe, and some of my colleagues and we discuss it - racism, discrimination. That's probably the biggest reason that jumps out. So, but I do believe that everything that happened last year and with the President and his policies, especially in October, when he signed the executive order about not being allowed to talk about bias, you know, if you get federal funding. That kind of really made people, it was almost like an empowering movement. Like see, you can't make me do this and you can't tell me this, and this is fake news. It's not true. We've had Obama. So, there's no such thing as racism now. You know, so it actually put us back.

Dara's conversation regarding social factors impacting retention and promotion supported the concept of racism and discrimination. She views White people as the “gatekeepers,” who control the access to a myriad of things that affect retention and promotion. She explained her thoughts in terms of educational attainment. Recognizing that White people

have the most PhDs, she claims that access to positions is discriminatorily denied to those with lesser academic credentials. Given that the majority of hiring managers are White, they effectively get to determine “who is deemed worthy, competent, intelligent enough” for certain positions. This form of ‘gatekeeping’ has permitted those who don’t have “those letters or didn’t come from a particular school” to be viewed as less knowledgeable, and less credible, thereby keeping them from job opportunities and job promotion. Believing that most people’s experiences and views of Black women in the higher education space is all about credentialing and viewing certain schools as better than others, Dara noted that attaining a PhD for a Black woman is a rarity. She further shared that it is a privilege to be able to get a PhD, a privilege that is not readily available to people of color for a variety of reasons. She recalled a conversation that she had with a previous boss:

I remember asking my boss or president at the time. Like what did she think, should I do it? And she said, you know, getting a PhD doesn't mean that you are-that makes you any smarter because she said there are a whole lot of dumb ass people with PhDs. But it is your calling card, especially for you as a Black woman. I was like-enough said.

Although not identified as a major social factor impacting retention and promotion by the participants in this study, Imani elaborated on how her education level did impact her ability to see and experience racism and discrimination. She stated:

Now, if you had spoken to me and we had this interview three years ago when I started my doctorate - it's a different - it's a different conversation. I have too much knowledge and too much education and I, and I've spent three years studying micro aggression and racism in Black women. So, I have a different, I'm in a different place in my life. It's not, so I can't unsee all those things that have happened to me. And that's the problem and that

is what honestly, I wish I almost, wish I didn't do the doctorate. I was like in a nice bubble. And now I see everything. Oh my god, I can't unsee any discrimination, racism, so of course I - I saw that.

Theme 8: A Faith Journey

The most significant emergent theme relative to cultural factors that impact the retention and promotion of African American women pursuing executive positions at community colleges was their relationship with God. Participants discussed the importance of God in their lives, and their unwavering trust that God is control of every situation. Despite troubling experiences, it is God that hears their prayers, answers their prayers, and guides them in the right direction. Sometimes God guides them to stay, and sometimes He guides them to ascend.

Imani and Danelle discussed the cultural correlation of being an African American woman and having religious beliefs. Describing her oppression as contemporary, Imani linked the social factor of oppression to the cultural practice of religion. Imani shared:

It really tells you the importance of religion and you always understand why people who are oppressed, you know, they have to have something to believe in. Otherwise, you know, I don't want to get morbid, but they just wouldn't go on...Oppressed people, all groups, they have to believe that there's something better on the other side. And I fall into that that category.

Danelle expressed the relationship this way:

Yeah, so I would say that as much a part of me as being Black and being a woman is being a person of faith...I'm kind of the typical girl with southern roots. So, I grew up in a kind of very religious environment and have had lots of 'religion' in my life.

She further discussed how her relationship with God developed over the course of her life. Now, God is the center of her life and has a major impact on who she is. She added:

And it's only been since I've gotten older, that that has kind of morphed into me having a more spiritual viewpoint of God and understanding of God. But either way, in any environment, any circumstance, anytime in my life, God has always been the center of my identity and who I am.

Likewise, Jamila shared her daily connection with God. Describing herself as a woman of faith, Jamilah said that she gets up every morning and prays. She also shared that she is never reluctant to offer prayer for others. Associating her daily prayer life with work, Jamila shared:

I, I get out of my car when I come to campus twice a week. I'm praying before I get out the car. You know, it's just, I just need strength and I know where my strength comes from. And I'm faithful in that and folks who know me know that. And I'm not shy of talking about my faith. I'm not shy of saying to people I'm praying for you, or I'm going to pray for you, or can I pray for you and with you...And so that comes through in what I do, and in the work that I produce. And so, you know, my prayer is very simple. I always say, I say, God, be the wisdom of my mouth. Allow me to say what is necessary, allow me to say what is truth. Allow me to be honest with my words. Allow me to be careful with my words because they're powerful. Give me strength that I can acknowledge where I'm wrong, or I can be faithful enough to tell someone when they're wrong. Give me strength enough to deal with the difficulty that this day may have.

Aliyah also shared she prays every day. She also acknowledged that God controls her destiny. She said:

I pray every day. I believe God has ordained where my steps are going to be what's going to happen. Um, I have a deep, deep, deep faith. I'm, um, I don't, I don't believe in man as much anymore. I believe in God.

Having faith and believing that God is control of everything, Deborah suggested her morals, ethics, and values are based upon her belief in God. Several of the participants were very forthcoming about their dependence on God to get them through the rough times and deliver them to an improved position or circumstance. Imani said:

You have to have some level of spirituality to get through the day to day. Like you have to believe in some sort of higher power to get through all the drama. So, I think it plays a very important role. Just to, you know, having faith and believing that you're here for a reason and you're doing what you're doing for a reason. And you're enduring and I'll use the word enduring, what you're going through for a reason and that whatever that reason is, and whatever you believe in, there's a reason behind that. There's something better to come.

Dara recalled her reliance on her faith and God during a particularly difficult experience at Pierpont this way:

I'm religious, I'm a believer, so I, I really heard God say you're going to stay there.

I really, I mean I cried. I cried a lot a lot, I prayed a lot... You know, whatever fighting we're doing is to prepare for whatever that thing is that He's preparing us for...

Okay, God, I get it. You know, you were just telling me to chill. You were trying to get me to chill...because there was just going to be something bigger anyway.

Danelle also shared how she managed a troubling experience:

And I think when things got to when things were really bad, it was being able to fall back on, you know, Danelle, this is just, this the physical world. There's, there's so much more that you need to get out of this situation. What does this say about you as a person? What does this say about how you interact with people? Who are you going to, how are you going to treat people? And when I commented about talking to those people my thing was all I need to be able to do is lay my head down at night and feel good with who I am and who God intends for me to be. And I also think that's where my faith and spirituality come in. I understand every single individual has their own kind of path and trajectory and they have things that they need to deal with. And I interact with them you know where they are in that path. And all I can do is speak my truth and try to be who God is calling me to be, but that doesn't necessarily mean that they're gonna do the same thing.... I have to answer to God. That's it.

Mikayla summed it up like this:

I tell you God works in mysterious ways...I just believe that God brought me to where I am today and it wasn't an accident. And I had to go through some of the ugly to get here. And that when I was complacent that was almost like sinful. And things, you know, I had to be shaken up. I didn't know that this was my purpose.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this narrative inquiry was to better understand the experiences that disrupt or terminate the journey to a presidential position for African American women in senior level positions at community colleges in the New York Metropolitan area. Participants described the lived experiences that disrupted or terminated the journey toward executive leadership. Additionally, participants discussed navigating the intersectional identities of both race and

gender. Participants also described the impact of the intersectionality of race and gender on their lived experiences and the perception of these experiences.

Included in this chapter are participant demographics and profiles, a summary of the data collection and analysis process, and the researcher's findings in relation to the study's research questions. Eight emergent themes were discovered: (a) the persistence of power and privilege, (b) developing strategies to survive balance, (c) the community college president's role, responsibilities, and impact, (d) fighting the fight against stereotypes, (e) invisibility, (f) evaluating quality of life (g) racism and discrimination, and (h) a journey of faith.

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with seven women in dean or vice president positions. Six of the seven participants completed two interviews. One participant did not complete the second interview. Criterion purposeful sampling and snowball sampling were used to select the participants from three urban and three suburban community colleges located in the New York Metropolitan area. The seven interviews were initially transcribed by the zoom transcription service. Thereafter, the researcher simultaneously reviewed the visual/audio recording and supplemented the field texts with notes denoting the participants' tone of voice and other relevant observations. The researcher transcribed her field notes manually.

The researcher used a five- step thematic approach to analyze the data. The evaluation included: (1) data organization and preparation, (2) absorbing the information; (3) the coding process; (4) theming the data; (5) interpreting the data. The eight emergent themes were then arranged by the relevant research question. Each section incorporates the themes, subthemes and stories of the participants that relate to the inquiry.

The final chapter presents a summary of the study, a discussion of the findings relative to extant literature, and conclusions of the study. Implications for action, and recommendations for

practitioners, leaders, and further research are also discussed. Concluding remarks are also provided.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Higher education has experienced significant advances in access, curriculum, and educational technology, yet little change has occurred in the level of leadership provided by African Americans (Baxter-Nuamah, 2015; Braxton, 2018; Wolfe & Dilworth, 2015; Wolfe & Freeman, 2013). According to Wolfe and Freeman (2013) the lack of diversity in leadership is one of the most important contemporary issues facing the academy.

The majority of leadership positions at colleges and universities in the United States are held by White males. In 2016, 30% of college presidents were women. In that same year only 5% of all college presidents were women of color, and only 7.4% of community college presidents were African American women (U. S. Department of Education, 2017). The community college student population is diverse in ethnicity, academic ability, college readiness, age, and socioeconomic status. Community college students require capable leadership that reflects the student body, however the executive leadership at the community college often does not mirror the diversity of its students (Braxton, 2018; Hardy, 2019; Schudde & Goldrick-Rab, 2016; U.S. Department of Education. Institute of Education Services, 2017).

African American women in higher education face unique challenges and barriers. Extant research focused on African American women in the academy has identified barriers that inhibit entry and retention in senior level administrative positions (Byrd, 2009; Gamble & Turner, 2015; Selzer et al., 2017). Additional studies identified conflicting leadership characteristics, insufficient professional development, and the lack of authoritative power as significant challenges (Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Petitt, 2009). Select literature emphasized the

deficient knowledge relating to the impact of the intersection of the social identities race and gender (Agosto & Roland, 2018; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010).

Historically, research devoted to female leaders has focused solely on gender identity (Key et al., 2012; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010; Stanley, 2009) and has failed to capture the experiences of African American women. Moreover, there is insufficient research on how the intersection of race and gender influences the lived experiences and perceptions voiced by African American women in higher education (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Furthermore, community college research that concentrates on the complexities of the lived experiences and social realities of African American women in leadership positions is scant (Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Lloyd-Jones, 2009; Stanley, 2009).

The benefits of diversity in leadership and the anticipated surge in vacancies in community college presidential positions requires consideration of the number of African American women in the community college presidential pipeline. This study offers an analysis of the lived experiences of African American women that disrupt or terminate the journey toward executive leadership. Gaining a better understanding of these experiences may result in the development of strategies to address the underrepresentation of African American women in higher education. Understanding the lived experiences of African American women administrators in community colleges can increase student success, create organizational diversity, increase retention, and add women of color to the community college presidential pipeline.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this narrative inquiry is to better understand the experiences that disrupt or terminate the journey to a presidential position for African American women in senior level

positions at community colleges in the New York Metropolitan area. Participants will describe the lived experiences that disrupted or terminated the journey toward executive leadership. Additionally, participants will discuss being uniquely situated in two disadvantaged social constructs, namely race and gender. Participants will also describe the impact of the intersectionality of race and gender on their lived experiences.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study were:

1. What are the experiences of African American women leaders at community colleges in the New York Metropolitan area?
 - 1a. What experiences influenced African American women at community colleges in the New York Metropolitan area to reexamine the pursuit of executive leadership positions?
2. In what ways did race and gender influence the experiences of African American women in senior level positions at community colleges in the New York Metropolitan area?
3. What do the stories of African American women in senior level positions at community colleges in the New York Metropolitan area reveal about how social and cultural factors impact the retention and promotion of African American women pursuing executive positions at community colleges?

Professional Significance

Researchers continue to examine the underrepresentation of African American women in community college leadership positions (Baxter-Nuamah, 2015; Braxton, 2018; Jones, 2013). The findings of this study underscore the meanings of the experiences of female African American senior level leaders at community colleges. The narratives provide crucial insights of

the interrelating emotional, professional, and personal significance of experiences of African American female leaders at community colleges. This knowledge is valuable to community college leaders, practitioners, researchers and African American women aspiring to attain community college leadership roles.

This study provides community college leaders and practitioners with a deeper understanding of the meaning of the unique experiences that African American women in the academy confront. Moreover, findings from this study demonstrate the impact of these unique experiences on potential future experiences. As such, community college leaders and practitioners may utilize these findings as they seek to develop initiatives and programs designed to address institutional retention, cultural exchanges, professional development, and additional supportive agendas that address the needs of African American women.

The current study is also valuable to researchers and scholars, as it increases the literature devoted to understanding the attainment of leadership roles by African American women in higher education. Additionally, African American women currently in leadership positions, or those aspiring to a career in higher education leadership can benefit from this study's findings. As the experiences of African American women are distinctive, sharing those experiences with other African American women is valuable. Sharing experiences facilitates gaining a better understanding of comparable experiences and people's behavior.

Review of Methodology

This qualitative study is designed with a narrative inquiry approach, framed by Black Feminist Thought. Creswell (2012) maintained that qualitative research empowers individuals to share their stories and hear their voices. Likewise, Stanley (2009) affirmed the need to give voice to African American women's unique experiences. The use of narrative inquiry facilitates the

understanding of experiences (Bold, 2012; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

The researcher served as the instrument to promote a collaborative relationship between the researcher and the participants, which encouraged the telling and living of the participants' storied experiences. The Black Feminist Thought framework guided the researcher to identify the distinct experiences of Black women that create differing views of reality and how these experiences impact Black women in senior level positions at community colleges.

The study took place at six community colleges located in the New York Metropolitan area. The researcher chose the New York Metropolitan area for the study because it is anchored by New York City which is the most ethnically diverse, congested, and urban city in the country. Criterion purposeful sampling followed by snowball sampling were used to select the study participants. The seven participants were African American women in senior level positions of dean and vice president in academic affairs, student affairs, college advancement, and diversity equity and inclusion departments.

One-on-one, semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant using the interview protocol established by the researcher. Each interview was audio and video recorded and transcribed verbatim via zoom. Participants received and reviewed a summary of the first interview which included emergent themes and key quotations. Subsequently, brief second interviews were conducted with six of the seven participants to gather additional data and answer any outstanding questions. A five-step thematic approach was used to analyze and interpret the data. The analysis included: (1) data organization and preparation, (2) absorbing the information; (3) the coding process; (4) theming the data; and (5) interpreting the data.

Summary of Major Findings

Eight themes emerged after completing a thorough analysis of the data: (a) persistence of power and privilege, (b) development of strategies to survive, (c) the community college president's role, responsibilities and impact, (d) fighting the fight against stereotypes, (e) invisibility (f) evaluating quality of life (g) racism and discrimination, and (h) a journey of faith. Associated subthemes include diminished authority, advancement opportunities, called to protect and encourage the African American community, and build your brand.

All of the participants shared stories of the dominant race exerting power and privilege during their tenure at the community college. These encounters, perhaps influenced by unconscious bias or a belief in meritocracy by the dominant race, resulted in deleterious experiences for the majority of the participants. For most, advancement opportunities were negatively impacted and a duty to protect and encourage other people of color within their college community emerged. Conversely, two of the participants developed positive mentoring relationships which helped them advance their careers.

The participants reported developing strategies that helped them survive the experiences they encountered at their respective community colleges. Triggered by a racist or discriminatory interaction, development of these strategies represented a reassessment of the institution and the career path to executive leadership. Varied in nature, these strategies included extreme actions, shifting thoughts, and embracing support. In discussing executive leadership, the participants primarily deliberated the role and impact of the community college president and discussed the competencies necessary to attain this position. Only two participants definitely proclaimed their desire to be a college president at the time of the interviews.

Regarding the impact of race and gender on experiences, the participants expressed a continued need to “fight” against stereotypes associated with Black women. To counter-act being labelled ‘the angry Black woman’ or ‘the Strong Black woman’, or to suffer tone policing, participants voiced the need to occasionally stifle a response, as well as concentrate on brand building. The majority of the participants also discussed the failure of non-Blacks to see their value to the organization, their credentials, and their character.

The majority of the participants identified quality of life concerns and racism and discrimination as the major social factors impacting the retention and ascension of African American women in community colleges. Participants discussed the importance of friendships and social capital, adequate earnings, and healthcare. From a cultural perspective, the majority of participants discussed the significance of God and faith in their daily life. Participants discussed their values, morals and desire to be who they believe that God wants them to be. Moreover, they proclaimed that because God is in control of everything their careers are also determined by His divine guidance.

Findings Related to the Literature

The findings of the current study facilitated a better understanding of the experiences of African American women in senior level positions at community colleges in the New York Metropolitan area. The shared narratives attained during the interviews were analyzed and interpreted by the researcher. The findings from the present study related to existing literature are presented in the following section. The section is organized by the eight emergent themes and relevant subthemes.

Theme 1: Persistence of Power and Privilege

In the current study, all of the participants encountered experiences with the dominant race exerting power and privilege. Five of the participants who considered these encounters discriminatory experienced appropriated or diminished power, and limited opportunities for career advancement. A method of marginalization, disempowerment was affirmed in Mosely (1980) and noted as one of the most significant experiences of the participants' in Byrd (2009). Mikayla and Deborah's narratives in the current study support the findings of Petitt (2009) which concluded that any power that African American women believe they have can be eliminated at any time. The limited advancement opportunities discussed by some participants are consistent with the findings in Louis et al. (2016) who asserted micro-aggressive actions inhibit job progression.

Conversely, two of the participants expressed positive outcomes when the dominant race exerted power and privilege to mentor and provide guidance to advance their careers. Aliyah and Jamila told stories of how White men were instrumental in their leadership development ensuring that they were prepared for and aware of advancement opportunities. This result supports the finding in Jones (2013), which stated that mentorship is especially important for African American women in higher education. Beckwith et al. (2016) and Gamble and Turner (2015) noted the lack of influential mentors for African American women in the higher education. This study supports those findings, as less than 30% of the participants in the current study voiced involvement in a traditional mentorship relationship.

The systemic power imbalances noted by the participants are particularly important findings when seeking to better understand the impact of the intersecting social identities (race and gender) on the experiences of Black women in oppressive organizations such as higher

education. Collins (2017) asserted that power imbalances must be examined in order to determine the impact of marginalization on the subordinate group. Moreover, extensive power imbalances, when coupled with race and gender identities that overlap, result in unique, biased encounters. This study seeks to better understand the meanings of experiences of African American women in order to increase the number of women of color in the community college pipeline. The use of intersectionality in this study is appropriate and is supported by Agosto and Roland (2018), who asserted that the use of intersectionality in educational leadership research may produce change that reduces the level of oppression.

Theme 2: Developing strategies to survive

Participants in the present study shared the need to create strategies to help them endure racist and discriminatory experiences in the workplace. The majority of the strategies included the development of a support network unlike the traditional mentoring relationship or the good old boy's network. Participants shared their heavy reliance on 'sister-friends' who provide a safe haven where they could release, de-escalate, and re-group, as well as gain professional advice and coaching. Like the relationships required by the respondents in Grant (2012), the inner circles of the participants in the present study were influenced by gender, race and culture.

Hylton (2012) focused on Vice Presidents in student affairs at PWIs and identified a similar theme: persistence strategies. In response to a question about unique challenges faced at PWIs, respondents in Hylton (2012) included staying relevant with professional associations, maintaining a sense of self, and love for student development. Participants in the present study, similar to participants in Hylton's (2012) research, voiced the need for support networks comprised of a close circle of women professionals, both in and out of the educational sector,

where one can openly discuss everything, as a relevant strategy to combat racist and discriminatory experiences.

The findings of the present study contradicted earlier findings on African American women's perception of the importance of inclusion in the good old boy network. In Waring's (2003) study, exclusion from the good old boy network was noted as one of the top three challenges faced by African American women. Similarly, Byrd (2009) indicated that exclusion from the good old boy network resulted in limiting social connections that could lead to job opportunities, and work-related social activities. None of the participants in the current study identified exclusion from the good old boy network as a barrier or challenge.

A finding in this study that was not found in previous research was the concept of the underground railroad. In the current study the underground railroad was described as a hidden system that was developed not only to assist with completing job responsibilities, but also to provide support and guidance to African American students as they navigated the community college system. Like the underground railroad, which is synonymous with Harriet Tubman, this network works because the White administration knows nothing about it.

Theme 3: The community college president's role, responsibilities, and impact

The participants in the current study discussed their viewpoints of the role of the community college president, as well as the impact and responsibilities of the position. Devoted to student affairs, several of the participants were concerned about the diminished student contact associated with a presidential position. The participants expressed their trepidation about ascending to a presidency if that meant spending less time with students and having less impact on student life. This finding was consistent with Braxton (2018) which determined that career aspirations are influenced by the desire to change the lives of students. The desire to change

students' lives was also reported in Hylton (2012), where the participants expressed their love for working with students and assisting in their personal and academic growth.

Previous studies noted the importance of maintaining a work-life balance for African American women in higher education leadership (Gamble & Turner, 2015; Jackson & Harris, 2007). The present study supported that concept. Several participants in the current study voiced an unwillingness to risk their health, or family stability for work. One participant, a single mother, is keenly aware of her mental and physical health. She is committed to caring for herself now, and limiting what she takes on, so she does not become a burden to her child later in life.

Gamble and Turner (2015) confirmed the difficulty women leaders have in maintaining a household and effectively leading at work. Participants in the current study affirmed the findings in Gamble and Turner (2015). Struggling to manage the tasks associated with being wife, mom, and community college administrator, one participant in the current study boldly stated that her job would be so much easier if she had a wife at home. Another participant in the current study voiced no interest in pursuing a college presidency at this time due to her belief that the college president job would become her entire life, making it impossible to successfully navigate her other responsibilities.

Theme 4: Fighting the fight against stereotypes

The findings of the current study supported previous literature findings of stereotyping experiences of African American women in higher education. The continued pattern of confronting stereotypical images impacts African American women in leadership roles in higher education (Baxter-Nuamah, 2015; Braxton, 2018; Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Waring, 2003). Although the direct impact of the fight against stereotyping differed in the narratives of the

participants, all of the stories depicted how these women have abandoned some aspect of their authentic self during the struggle.

The present study confirmed the findings of Braxton (2018), who asserted that African American women leaders at the community college who are concerned about any threat of stereotyping refrain from being their authentic self, fearing that their image may be damaged. Braxton (2018) further asserted that African American women leaders ensure that they are always well prepared and well dressed. Jamila's narrative describing the importance of her appearance and how she carefully prepared to be flawless everyday supports this concept.

Associated with unwelcoming and hostile environments in the studies by Aguirre (2000) and Braxton (2018), fighting against stereotyping in the current study was not directly correlated with the campus environment. In this study stereotyping was revealed during a discussion about how their race and gender impacted select experiences at their respective community colleges. Furthermore, the stereotyping named by the participants coupled their race and gender, namely, the angry Black woman, strong Black woman and Mammie. This further supports the work of Crenshaw (1989) and Patitu and Hinton (2003), who found that racism and sexism cannot be separated for African American women.

Theme 5: Invisibility

Participants in the current study described the inability to be seen as professional, authoritative, credible and experienced leaders. The feelings of invisibility are harmful to the organization, frustrating, maddening and difficult to forget. One participant described it as having 'her blackness blind her colleagues'. This depiction illustrates the impact of the intersection between race and gender for African American women. Collins (2000) proclaimed that African American women have twin identities that it is impossible to separate. Recognizing

the intersection of race and gender, Davis and Maldonado (2015) called the coupling of race and gender for African American women a double jeopardy.

The present study supported the findings in Davis and Maldonado (2015) and Mosley (1980). Like the participants in the current study, Mosley (1980) declared that African American female administrators are invisible women, “constantly being bumped up against by those with poor vision” (p. 307). The experiences shared in the narrative by Imani demonstrates this clearly. Despite being in plain sight, the individuals that she encountered could not fathom that she was a leader within the college and should be situated right next to the White administrators in the college. The respondents in Davis and Maldonado (2015) reported experiences of invisibility when responding to an inquiry about how race and gender informed their leadership experiences. Invisibility along with other negative experiences dominated the reflections shared in Davis and Maldonado (2015).

The present study does not support the findings in Hylton (2012) which stated that African American women are invisible and extra-visible. According to Hylton (2012) the extra-visibility requires African American female leaders to be mindful that they are being watched by everyone in every situation. The participants in the current study did not share any experiences where they felt they were constantly being watched.

Louis et al. (2016) concluded that African American faculty members often experience challenges to their credentials and credibility by students, faculty and administrators. Jones (2013) and Lloyd-Jones (2009) found that African American female administrators have the same experiences. As the participants in the present study are faculty and administrators, the findings in the present study are similar to Jones (2013), Lloyd-Jones (2009) and Louis et al. (2016). The participants in the present study shared experiences of contested credentials or

credibility by other faculty and administrators. Inconsistent with the findings of Louis et al. (2016) and Pittman (2010), the current study participants did not convey reports about challenges to credentials or credibility presented by students. Perhaps this is a function of the demographics of the student body at the participating community colleges.

Theme 6: Evaluating quality of life

In addition to work-life balance, participants in the current study discussed the nexus between their work environment and their quality of life. Participants discussed the ability to acquire financial resources, the minimum level of stress associated with the work, and sufficient retirement plans. Participants also discussed the social capital that they found after weeding through the racism and discrimination. Three of the participants elaborated on the importance of the friendships that have been established that extend beyond the workplace. Jamila spoke about a community of like-minded people who love and care for one another.

These findings are inconsistent with the findings of Byrd (2009), Clayborne and Hamrick (2007), and Jones (2013) that identified experiences of isolation as a key challenge for African American women leaders in the academy. The participants in the current study discussed building relationships with people they could trust. The participants did not express loneliness or isolation despite sometimes being the only African American woman in a meeting or a group.

Theme 7: Racism and Discrimination

The current study confirmed the findings of Jackson and Harris (2007), Jean-Marie et al. (2009), Oikelome (2017), and Wolfe and Dilworth (2015), asserting that racism and discrimination in higher education impacts the experiences of African American women. These experiences influence the retention, promotion, and position of African American women in the

executive leadership pipeline. All of the participants referenced an experience of racism and discrimination.

Dara's narrative discussed the issue of gatekeeping as a means to prohibit elevation. This notion is consistent with findings in Jackson and Harris (2007) and Wolfe and Dilworth (2015), who reported that racism and discriminatory practices such as gatekeeping are reflected in the daily operations of higher education. These practices prohibit African American women from ascending in the academy. The narrative shared by Aliyah pertaining to her stereotyping experiences discusses her inability to determine whether the resulting discrimination is perceived or factual. This theme aligns with the findings discussed in Jean-Marie et al. (2009) and Oikelome (2017), who asserted that the roots of racism and discrimination are often difficult to discern. Moreover, whether alleged or verifiable, these influences continue to be weighty factors in our society that impact the lives of African American women in higher education.

Theme 8: A Journey of Faith

All of the participants in the current study declared a strong relationship with God and a strong reliance on faith. The participants discussed how this spiritual connection has provided a source of hope while navigating negative experiences in their respective community colleges. Additionally, the participants shared their confidence that God is always in control. Dara noted that she is exactly where she is supposed to be in her career, or He is preparing her for the next stage.

This everlasting trust and dependence on a higher power was not found in earlier research on African American women in higher education. Nonetheless, this belief is consistent with the findings in Baxter-Nuamah (2015) and Hylton (2012). All of the respondents in Baxter-Nuamah (2015) expressed strong religious beliefs that helped them cope during difficult times or

was the master of their destiny. Similarly, the majority of the participants in Hylton (2102) described themselves as women of faith, whose steadfast spirituality was a major factor in their ability to persist.

Discussion

Black Feminist Thought promotes the use of voice to gain an understanding of the influences and experiences that shape the lives of Black women. It is the lens that facilitates understanding the construction, viewpoint, and meaning of the lived experiences of Black women, and how those lived experiences differ from every other person who is not Black and female (Clayborne & Hambrick, 2007; Collins, 2000; Hylton, 2012; Lloyd-Jones, 2009; White, 2001). The current study presented the narratives shared by the participants and provided insight into the meaning of their lived experiences of senior level administrators at community colleges in the New York Metropolitan area.

The findings in the current study illuminated the complexities of navigating racism and discrimination for African American women leaders. With racist and discriminatory behavior manifesting in a variety of ways, African American women often find themselves experiencing encounters that challenge their authentic leadership, silence their voices, and encourage manipulation of their natural physical and verbal presentation. Moreover, African American women often experience appropriated power and authority, and struggle to be recognized as credible leaders. Often, African American women are working in survival mode, which inhibits their ability to lead effectively, develop relationships, and promote creativity.

Analysis of the shared experiences indicates that the consideration of future leadership experiences is heavily impacted by negative past and current experiences related to power, privilege, racism, and discrimination. Despite the passage of several years, it is often difficult for

African American women to move past negative workplace experiences and exclude them from influencing anticipated experiences of leadership in the future. Additionally, in an effort to combat disruption or termination along the path to executive leadership, African American women in leadership design coping strategies to help them process their experiences and continue to persist. These strategies may prove detrimental to the institution, as leaders hide their voice, expertise, guidance, and knowledge. Time consuming and emotionally demanding, survival strategies are generally disparate, with the exception of the sister-circle comprised of other African American professional women.

The findings in this study also facilitated a better understanding of the importance of God and faith in the career trajectory of select African American women. To ease the challenges associated with negative lived experiences, some African American women have developed strong relationships with God. Led by their belief that God reigns supreme and ultimately guides their pathway, this spiritual relationship often offers faith, hope, and comfort. Furthermore, participants expressed a level of self-confidence pertaining to their ability to overcome any difficulties, disruptions, or terminations they may have encountered.

It is worth noting that throughout the current study participants expressed their inability or unwillingness to see the racist and discriminatory behavior at their respective community college work environments. The participants openly acknowledged that racism and prejudice continue to exist throughout the United States. Yet, several the participants shared the difficulty they had in admitting the quantity and impact of racial and prejudicial behavior on their professional lived experiences at the community college.

Select participants reported that research, knowledge, and education led to the removal of blinders which had previously distorted their ability to perceive the magnitude and the method of

racist and prejudicial behavior of others. The presence of blinders impacted the participants ability to process and handle the encounters they had faced. Having completed formal research on micro-aggressions and racism in Black women, and race, power, and privilege, participants acknowledged how this increased expertise empowered them to fully recognize not only the glaring encounters, but the covert occurrences as well. As a consequence, participants re-evaluated some encounters. The results indicated an increased number of these racist and discriminatory events.

Participants also expressed their unwillingness to admit that racism and discrimination was the motivation behind some behavior. One participant found it extremely difficult to ascertain that the White colleagues in her discipline would believe that others are inferior because of their race. In a specialty devoted to the care of others, the participant found this unfathomable. Another participant shared her difficulty in trying to make sense of the cause of the behavior she had witnessed. One moment she would express her ignorance regarding the cause, and in another moment, she would declare it as racist or discriminatory.

A possible reason for this could be the emotional impact of acknowledging personal mistreatment based upon being uniquely situated in two marginalized social constructs. The participants in the present study range in age from 40-55. Although too young to have personally witnessed the violence of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, the participants understand the struggle that accompanies being a person of color in the United States. Throughout the participants' years at their respective community college, they all developed methods of coping with the disturbing encounters they faced in their professional role. Having the ability to lead, collaborate, and fulfill job requirements may have eclipsed the impulse to confront the sting of unwarranted hatred stemming from racism.

It is also important to consider the impact of recent societal challenges in the United States. The racial climate in the United States began to shift during the campaign of Donald Trump. It seems as though an assault on civil rights intensified during Trump's presidential tenure. Equity and equality in this country seemed assaulted by several killings of Black men and women in police custody, challenges to voter suppression at the ballot box, misunderstandings about the Black Lives Movement, and a rise in White supremacist groups. Coping with a constant threat to one's civil rights and positioning in society threatens one's mental and physical health. Reminiscent of 1964 when Fannie Lou Hamer, speaking for African Americans living under Jim Crow stated that she is 'sick and tired of being sick and tired', the participants in the current study may also feel sick and tired. To dismiss such feelings, the participants may have unconsciously determined that ignorance served them best.

From the shared experiences it is evident that community college leaders would benefit from better understanding the impact of the lived experiences of African American female leaders. A better understanding of these experiences could foster increased retention and ascension of African American women. A better understanding may also increase the number of African American women in the community college president pipeline.

A major challenge facing community colleges today is diversification in executive leadership. As community colleges work to create and maintain a diverse leadership pool, it is imperative that community college leaders focus on understanding the meaning and impact of the experiences of African American senior level leaders. It is the experiences of African American female leaders that impact their decision to progress into or remain in the community college presidential pipeline. The next section comprises the implications for practice and the researcher's recommendations for additional research on the topic.

Implications for action

The goal of the present study was to increase the literature on African American women in community college leadership by gaining a better understanding of the experiences that disrupt or terminate the journey to a community college presidency for African American women. The African American women in the present study are credentialed, experienced leaders who have committed themselves to the mission and vision of the community college. They navigate the challenges associated with providing leadership, communicating with external partners, the lack of traditional mentoring relationships, and maintaining a descent quality of life. Exacerbating those challenges are the complexities associated with managing and understanding their commonplace experiences of bias.

First, the findings of the present study suggest implementing actions that would facilitate an increased understanding of why the experiences of African American women leaders differ from others. The experiences of African American women are unique as a consequence of the intersectionality of their race and gender (Collins, 2000). This distinction suggests that those who are not Black and female may be unaware that Black women have different experiences than people of any other race and gender. This further implies that people may not know why these experiences are unique.

The findings of the current study provide insight into the experiences of African American women that were impacted by the intersection of their race and gender. African American women experience the need to fight against stereotyping. These women also experience being invisible, not only to campus peers, but also to lower-level employees. Key to better understanding these experiences is having an understanding of why these experiences are perceived in a unique manner by African American women.

To retain and promote African American women, community college leaders should understand why African American women leaders' experiences vary from the experiences of others. To gain a better understanding, leaders should consider innovative methods to understand intersectionality. In addition to reading and reviewing the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw, one approach may be a series of small group discussions where the participants are encouraged to describe their overlapping social identities and share experiences that have been impacted by the power imbalances associated with the intersection of these identities. This approach should facilitate a better understanding of how intersecting social constructs give rise to the distinctive experiences of African American women. Expanding this approach to include others that are impacted by intersecting social constructs should lead to an increased understanding of the experiences of many and further benefit the campus community.

Community college leaders should also consider implementing creative programming that fuses the history of racism and discrimination in this country and in higher education with the present racial environment. This training may include engaging outside agencies to facilitate a series of conversations to learn from history, discuss racial and gender justice, and recognize white privilege. Other programming may include pairing colleagues of different races together for a period of time to observe and experience the encounters of one another. The debrief and conversations that follow may increase the awareness of the continuance of racist behavior and enlighten many that may think that racism has ended. Moreover, leaders should consider instruction that addresses how history, values, and beliefs influence the experiences of African American women.

Second, the findings of the current study suggest implementing actions to reduce the number of racist and discriminatory experiences of senior level African American women. The

findings reveal that African American women consistently experience displays of power and privilege by the dominant race. These experiences result in insufficient advancement opportunities and suffering through appropriated power. Additionally, the women experience racist and discriminatory behavior which causes changes in their leadership style and the creation of tactics just to survive.

Community college leaders must be willing to understand the organizational and societal phenomena which shape these experiences for African American women. Considering the organizational environment, leaders must conduct an assessment of the institutional climate and address any bias components that arise in order to change the environment and reduce behavior that is perceived as prejudicial. Furthermore, executive leaders must promote the concept of cultural competence within the organization. Cultural competence involves creating attitudes, behaviors and policies that enable people to work in cross-cultural situations. Creating a culturally competent campus may require campus leaders to address white privilege, cultural blindness, microaggressions, and communication skills. Knowing the environmental factors that contribute to the negative experiences of African American women is essential to decreasing them.

Societal pressures and changes are contextual influences on experiences. During the time this study was conducted the United States was facing a myriad of challenges related to Covid-19, the death of George Floyd, a contested presidential election, and the insurrection at the State Capitol. Some African American women feel that the recent climate in the United States has endorsed and bolstered racist behavior. To lessen the number of discriminatory experiences, community college leaders should be aware that societal ills contribute to the experiences of the campus community.

Third, the present study's findings imply actions to better understand the impact of the experiences of African American women on the women and the institution. African American women in community college leadership positions are altering their leadership styles to avoid being perceived or branded in a negative way by the dominant race. These women are silenced from speaking their truth and being their authentic selves. African American women who strive to remain authentic fear retribution in the form of marginalization for speaking out against the injustices that they endure and see. Some African American women have to leave an institution in order to get promoted. Working in an environment that requires you to be inauthentic, and induces experiences of fear, anger, oppression and insecurity is difficult to thrive in. The toll on the mental and physical health of these women is imperceptible.

Community colleges are in need of skilled, diverse leadership that reflects the student population. African American women are underrepresented in senior level positions and the pipeline to presidential positions at community colleges. Community college leaders must consider how the experiences of African American women impact the student body and the campus community. Additionally, it is important that community college leaders also comprehend the impact that the negative experiences have on the retention and promotion of African American women.

Leaders must encourage open and safe spaces which allow for honest communication about the challenges that these women face in their interactions with students and all others on the campus. Communicating openly will provide an opportunity for the women to process the experiences and an opportunity for others to learn from the experience. Leadership must provide support to address these challenges so that African American women experience an environment that is safe, understanding and encouraging. Support may include the establishment of a cross-

institution or system supportive program, or funded lunch and learn opportunities for African American women to support each other.

Recommendations for Leaders and Practitioners

The current study offered African American women in senior level leadership at community colleges the opportunity to share stories of their lived experiences. Giving voice to these experiences facilitated a better understanding of the difficulties that they face and how best to address these challenges. The findings of the present study yielded several recommendations for community college leaders and practitioners. The recommendations include: (a) Designing and implementing a ‘check your privilege’ campaign; (b) creating and underwriting the assessment and development of a culturally competent campus; and (c) securing mentoring and supplemental support initiatives.

Design and implement a ‘check your privilege’ campaign

Understanding why African American female experiences are unique is crucial to the retention and promotion of African American women in community colleges. African American women in leadership often find themselves alone and misunderstood on community college campuses. Managing their lived experiences is difficult when few people around them truly understand the underlying factors that contribute to their experience. These factors not only include the social constructs of race and gender, but also include the history of race relations and the history of education in the United States.

Creative methods to introduce the concept of intersectionality, and the everlasting historical impact of race, power, and privilege on the underrepresented community would benefit the entire institution. Campus leaders and practitioners should be open to designing a campaign that illuminates occurrences of privilege and the aftermath of those encounters as a unique

method of increasing knowledge and understanding. A ‘check your privilege’ campaign should be implemented in each segment of the community college campus. Executive leadership, faculty, administrative staff, support staff and students should engage in a five-to-six-month campaign. During the campaign every person in each of the aforementioned groups is charged with documenting, voicing, and discussing encounters where power and privilege was exerted and influenced a lived experience.

At the beginning of the campaign, a survey should be conducted to determine individuals understanding of power and privilege. Throughout the campaign, campus leaders must engage external partners and trained personnel to facilitate difficult discussions that may arise, as individuals learn about the history of racism and discrimination, racial and gender justice, power and privilege and meritocracy. To keep the campaign in the forefront, faculty should be asked to consider embedding relevant concepts into the curriculum, and students and staff may opt to wear ‘check your privilege’ t-shirts when appropriate. A post campaign survey should be implemented as well, and the data from both surveys should be compiled and disseminated to all, including the college’s governing board.

This campaign should be intentional, challenging, and ongoing. African American female leaders would benefit from knowing that others have gained insight into some of the challenges they face. Additionally, the entire campus should become more aware of the influence of power and privilege on everyone. This knowledge may create opportunities to engage and develop supportive conversations and relationships. By understanding the uniqueness of the experiences, the campus community will also be able to recognize potentially dangerous environments and provide support.

Create and underwrite the assessment and development of cultural competency

African American women leaders would benefit from a decline in the number of experiences that they perceive as racist and discriminatory. Campus leaders must support innovative efforts to develop a campus community that understands the value of personal attributes while supporting skill development and celebrating differences. To facilitate a decline in harmful experiences, community college leaders and practitioners must assess the climate, policies, and practices that align with these lived experiences. One recommendation is to engage the campus Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion professionals to prioritize a campus evaluation of cultural competency. A three- pronged assessment approach would include focus groups, a thorough review of employee and student complaints, and an anonymous survey to document the campus communities measure of cultural competency.

Upon completion of the data gathering, the college president should appoint a diverse committee to create a plan of action to improve the competence of the campus. Short- and long-term measurable goals, and a detailed plan of action should be vetted by the executive cabinet and presented to the governing body. The campus community should be informed of advances, as well as challenges, during the assessment and program implementation process. This measurement of campus cultural competence must become a continuous and ongoing process, as encounters related to discrimination and racism are endless and often relative to the current political and social climate.

Correlated with an assessment of cultural competence is the recommendation to participate in instruction to increase the emotional intelligence of all campus constituents. Emotional intelligence training should provide instruction on how to navigate complicated, difficult relationships which may result from bias. Methods of increasing emotional intelligence

that may be employed include a) teaching active listening skills, b) providing instruction on handling criticism, and c) educating on the importance of being empathic. Learning these skills will facilitate effective communication and may result in a decline of experiences that are deemed racist and discriminatory.

Secure mentoring and supplemental support initiatives

African American women value the mentoring relationships that have helped them succeed and advance in their careers. Most often mentored by White males, African American women leaders stand to benefit from mentoring relationships with other African American women leaders in community colleges who have a better understanding of their lived experiences and challenges. Due to the limited number of African American female senior leaders in community colleges, institutional leaders should secure mentoring relationships with other African American women leaders, even if that means including African American women outside of their campus or system.

In addition to traditional mentoring relations, it is evident that African American women benefit from informal, supportive relationships with other African American women with whom they have extensive similarities. Currently, African American women have found those relationships off campus with sorority sisters, church friends, and family. Leaders and practitioners should support and fund the development of these relationships on campus. Open, small meetings and gatherings with other African American women on campus will facilitate quicker decompression from events of the day and promote collaboration on successful methods to address challenges such as brand creation and maintenance, upward mobility, communication, and authenticity. Innovative ideas include lunch and learns as well as virtual meetings retreats using technology.

Recommendations for Further Research

Community college leadership continues to be dominated by White males. Despite the benefits of diverse leadership, African American women continue to be underrepresented in leadership positions. The decision to persist at the current level or ascend to executive leadership for African American women is influenced by their lived experiences. As the number of vacancies in community college presidencies is expected to increase for the next several years, it is vital to better understand the experiences of African American women in leadership to encourage their entrance and continuance in the community college presidential pipeline.

Further qualitative research focusing on the lived experiences of African American women senior leaders at community colleges would be beneficial. Research should be conducted that focuses on various locations of the country. The current study was conducted in the largest Metropolitan area in the United States, rich in ethnic and religious diversity. This area could present distinct experiences which differ from those in other geographic regions. Another suggested focus for further research is a comparison of the experiences of African American senior level women with those in other races. Identifying any significant differences may further help leaders develop strategies to address the underrepresentation of African American women.

Additional research may also be conducted on African American mid-level leaders at community colleges. Concentrating on mid-level leaders may help to pinpoint a change in the nature of the lived experiences of the senior leaders. This would benefit community college leaders striving to retain and promote African American women. Also, further research may include exploring the impact of additional intersecting identities, such as age and gender identity, on the leadership of African American women at the community college. Finally, further research should concentrate on the impact of lived experiences between African American

women and their supervisors who are also people of color. Two participants in the current study mentioned challenges that they had with direct supervisors who were also African American.

Conclusion

Diversity in higher education leadership is one of the most prevalent challenges facing educational institutions today. Research on African American women leaders in higher education has identified many professional, organizational, and personal challenges that impact the success of African American female leaders. Additionally, research on African American leaders in higher education has recognized the challenges associated with racism and discrimination in the academy. Despite this knowledge, there has been no significant increase in the number of African American women providing leadership at community colleges.

The shared experiences and completed analysis in this study are evidence that there has been little change in the past several decades in the meaning of the lived experiences of African American women in higher education. Extant research supported the majority of the emergent themes identified in this study, albeit from a variety of participant pools. Moreover, some of the emergent themes identified in this study apply to more than one research question. This further suggests the need for a better understanding of the meaning of the experiences.

To fill the projected vacancies in community college presidential positions, it is imperative that the pipeline contain diverse, skilled, and talented individuals. As community colleges continue to grapple with enrollment, retention and graduation rate challenges, it is important that leaders recognize the benefits of employing leadership that mirrors the diversity of the student body. As the majority of students served by community colleges are women and African American or Hispanic, maintaining African American women in the leadership pipeline is essential to student success. Currently, the number of African American women in the pipeline

for a community college presidency is deficient when compared to Whites and males. insufficient.

To address the underrepresentation of African American women leaders in the community college presidential pipeline there is a need to better understand the unique experiences that disrupt or terminate the journey toward the pipeline. To gain a better understanding of these experiences, community college leaders and practitioners should create learning opportunities that focus on why the experiences of African American women are unique and under what circumstances the experiences occur. College administrators should commit to establishing a culturally competent campus environment and provide mentoring and supplemental support initiatives to African American women in leadership. Having a better understanding of the experiences of African American women will impact student success and the retention, ascension, and representation of African American women in the presidential pipeline.

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Appendix A

First Interview Protocol and Interview Questions

Introduction

Hello, my name is Dana Stilley, and I am a doctoral student at Old Dominion University. I am interested in understanding the experiences of African American women that disrupt or terminate the journey toward presidential positions at community colleges. Additionally, I want to examine the influence of the intersectionality of race and gender on these experiences.

Thank you for taking time out of your day to join me for this interview.

Before we get involved in our discussion, I want to share some important information with you.

- 1) I will be audio and video recording the entire interview because it is important that I don't miss any information that you share. In addition to recording via Zoom, I will use digital voice recorder. I will then create a transcript from the recording.
- 2) I will NOT be using your real name, job title, or the real name of your institution in my transcription or in my research paper.
- 3) I have an informed consent form that you will be required to sign before we begin. This form provides brief information on my research study, and ensures that you understand the purpose, benefits, and risks of your participation. You have the right to decline to participate at any time. Please review this document.

If at any time you want to stop the interview, you can do so. The interview will last for about an hour to an hour and a half. I will ask you several open-ended questions. Do you have any questions for me before we begin? If not, I will get started with the first question.

Interview questions

1. Describe your academic and professional background.
2. Tell me why you have chosen a career in higher education.
3. Tell me about your career aspirations and goals.

4. Describe some of the everyday experiences that you faced in your professional interactions here.
5. How have your leadership experiences been influenced by your race and gender?
6. Describe the professional development experiences that directed you to higher level leadership at this institution.
7. Describe some elements that contributed to your retention and ascension in your higher education career.
8. Describe the worst experience that you encountered at this institution.
9. What advice would you give to other women of color struggling with professional persistence?

Closing:

This concludes our interview/focus group. Thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedule to assist me. Once the transcription of this interview has been completed, I will email you to schedule a follow-up interview and send you a copy of the transcription to review. Please contact me at dstill004@odu.edu or 914-441-6113 at any time if you have any questions or concerns.

Appendix B

Interview Summary Email

Hi _____

Attached you will find a brief summary of our interview after the completion of one round of open coding. Please review and confirm that I have captured the essence of our conversation. If you find anything else that needs to be addressed, please let me know. It is my intent to capture and retell the stories that the participants want to be told. As such, I welcome any additional thoughts and comments that you may wish to share.

If time permits can we spend no more than 30 minutes together within the next 5 days or so? That will allow you to share any additional points and answer any outstanding questions that I may have. Please let me know your availability.

Again, thank you so very much for sharing your story with me. Not only have you helped me move forward in my journey, but I believe that these stories will also help many other women.

Appendix C

Second Interview Protocol

Opening

Hello, and thank you for joining me today. I appreciate your time. I have finished collecting all of my first interview data, and I wanted to share with you some themes and prominent quotations that have emerged thus far. I am interested in seeing if your experiences are the same or different.

If at any time you want to stop the interview, you can do so. Today, we should only spend approximately 30 minutes together. Do you have any questions for me before we begin? If not, I will get started.

Interview

Throughout the remainder of the interview the researcher will share the experiences of other participants and engage in a discussion designed to determine if the participant has engaged in similar or different experiences. Additionally, the researcher will review emergent themes and prominent quotations, seeking acknowledgement that the meaning and intent of the data captured during the first interview was accurate.

Appendix D

Invitation to Participate Email

Hello:

My name is Dana Stilley, and I am currently a doctoral candidate in the Community College Leadership Ph.D. program at Old Dominion University. My research is centered on the lived experiences of African American women in upper level administrative positions at community college in New York state. I am interested in understanding the experiences that have disrupted or terminated the pursuit of executive leadership. I am also interested in the impact of the intersectionality of race and gender on these experiences.

If you are interested in participating, I can send you more details pertaining to my study, including an informed consent form which outlines your voluntary participation. Also note, the names, titles, and departments of all participants and the various community colleges in my study will not be identified in my dissertation.

I appreciate you taking the time out of your busy schedule to accommodate this request. The interview will take approximately 90 minutes, but I would like to schedule a meeting for two hours to ensure that we have ample time. Each interview will be conducted via Zoom. Can we schedule an interview time within the next few weeks?

Regards,

Dana G. Stilley

Appendix E

Preparation for Interview Email

Greetings:

Thank you so much for agreeing to speak with me. Our scheduled interview time is (date) at (time). As you begin to prepare for our interview, please review and sign the attached consent form. Also, please print and complete the attached brief Demographic Survey.

I look forward to seeing you in your office. Please remember our time together should last no more than 90 minutes.

Regards,

Dana G. Stilley

Attachments: Informed Consent Form
Demographic Survey

Appendix F

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY

PROJECT TITLE: A Narrative Study of the Experiences that Disrupt or Terminate Entry into the Community College Presidential Pipeline for African American Women

INTRODUCTION

The purposes of this form are to give you information that may affect your decision whether to say YES or NO to participation in this research, and to record the consent of those who say YES. The title of this research project is A Narrative Study of the Experiences that Disrupt or Terminate Entry into the Community College Presidential Pipeline for African American Women. Subjects will participate in one-on-one interviews conducted through Zoom video-conferencing. Digital voice recorders will also be used to ensure the data are captured and maintained.

RESEARCHERS

Responsible Principal Investigator: Dr. Mitchell R. Williams, Associate Professor, Darden College of Education and Professional Studies, Educational Foundations and Leadership
Investigator: Dana G. Stilley, PhD Candidate, Darden College of Education and Professional Studies, Educational Foundations and Leadership

DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH STUDY

Several studies have been conducted that investigate the challenges and barriers that African American women face in higher education. There is a need to further the research that focuses on the underrepresentation of African American women in community college executive leadership roles. The goal of this research is to gain a better understanding of the experiences that prohibit African American women from inclusion in the presidential pipeline.

If you decide to participate, then you will join a study involving research on African American women senior level leaders and their experiences in community colleges. Your responses will allow researchers to determine ways for institutions to better understand the experiences that influence the retention and ascension of African American women leaders in community colleges and promote the development of programs and initiatives that foster diversity in leadership and increase the representation of African American women in executive leadership positions. If you say YES, then your participation will last for no more than two hours through video-conferencing (Zoom) and digital voice recording. A minimum range of five women will participate in separate interviews.

RISKS AND BENEFITS

RISKS: If you decide to participate in this study, then you may face a risk of being linked to your interview responses. Negative responses could be damaging to your professional status. To reduce these risks, the researcher will not identify the participants, their respective job titles, or the community colleges. The researcher will use pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality and protect all identities. The names of the community colleges will be changed, and the geographic location will only be described as being located in one state in the United States. The recorded video-conferencing interviews will be destroyed after they are transcribed. All documentation pertaining to the study will be stored in a password-protected file in the researcher's office.

BENEFITS: The main benefit to you for participating in this study is the opportunity to process the long-term impact your study abroad program had for you. In addition, you may benefit from articulating learning outcomes from your program, a valuable skill for future job interviews.

COSTS AND PAYMENTS

The researchers are unable to give you any payment for participating in this study.

NEW INFORMATION

If the researchers find new information during this study that would reasonably change your decision about participating, then they will give it to you.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The researchers will take reasonable steps to keep private information confidential. The researcher will remove identifiers from all identifiable private information collected. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, and publications; but the researcher will not identify you. Of course, your records may be subpoenaed by court order or inspected by government bodies with oversight authority.

WITHDRAWAL PRIVILEGE

It is OK for you to say NO. Even if you say YES now, you are free to say NO later, and walk away or withdraw from the study -- at any time. Your decision will not affect your relationship with Old Dominion University, or otherwise cause a loss of benefits to which you might otherwise be entitled.

COMPENSATION FOR ILLNESS AND INJURY

If you say YES, then your consent in this document does not waive any of your legal rights. However, in the event of harm arising from this study, neither Old Dominion University nor the researchers are able to give you any money, insurance coverage, free medical care, or any other compensation for such injury. In the event that you suffer injury as a result of participation in any research project, you may contact Dr. Mitchell Williams, the principal investigator for this study, at (757) 683-4344 or mrwillia@odu.edu, Laura Chezan, the current chair of the Darden College of Education and Professional Studies Human Subjects Review Committee at 757-683-7055 or lchezan@odu.edu, and current IRB chair at Old Dominion University, or the Old Dominion University Office of Research at 757-683-3460 who will be glad to review the matter with you.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT

By signing this form, you are saying several things. You are saying that you have read this form or have had it read to you, that you are satisfied that you understand this form, the research study, and its risks and benefits. The researchers should have answered any questions you may have had about the research. If you have any questions later on, then the researchers should be able to answer them:

Dr. Mitchell Williams, (757) 683-4344

Dana Stilley, (914) 441-6113

If at any time you feel pressured to participate, or if you have any questions about your rights or this form, then you should call Dr. Laura Chezan, the current IRB chair, at 757-683-7055, or the Old Dominion University Office of Research, at 757-683-3460.

And importantly, by signing below, you are telling the researcher YES, that you agree to participate in this study. The researcher should give you a copy of this form for your records.

Subject's Printed Name & Signature	Date
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INVESTIGATOR'S STATEMENT

I certify that I have explained to this subject the nature and purpose of this research, including benefits, risks, costs, and any experimental procedures. I have described the rights and protections afforded to human subjects and have done nothing to pressure, coerce, or falsely entice this subject into participating. I am aware of my obligations under state and federal laws and promise compliance. I have answered the subject's questions and have encouraged him/her to ask additional questions at any time during the course of this study. I have witnessed the above signature(s) on this consent form.

Investigator's Printed Name & Signature	Date
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Appendix G

Participant Demographic Form

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. In preparation for our face-to-face interview, please complete the following form. This information will be used in the description of the study's participants. Check the box with the correct answer.

1. Please confirm that you identify as African American

☐ Yes ☐ No

2. How old are you? _____

3. What is your marital status?

☐ Married or in a domestic partnership ☐ Single (never married)

☐ Divorced ☐ Separated ☐ Widowed

4. How many children under the age of 18 do you have?

☐ 0 ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 or more

5. What is the highest educational level you have attained?

☐ Bachelor's degree ☐ Master's degree ☐ Doctoral degree

☐ Professional degree (MD, JD) ☐ Other _____

6. How many years have you been in your current position?

☐ 1-5 years ☐ 5-10 years ☐ More than 10 years

7. If you have vacated one of the required participants, when did you leave?

☐ 0 - 5 months ago ☐ 6-12 months ago ☐ 12 - 18 months

Appendix H

Code Book

Emergent Codes	Definition
African American women stereotypes	References to being stereotyped
Angry Black woman	An example of a stereotype frequently associated with Black women
Building your brand	The process of ensuring that your image is positive
Challenging and Doubting the credentials	Experiences associated with disputing one's expertise
Core Values	Authentic values expressed by the participants
Cultural Factors	Cultural factors that impact retention and ascension
Deterrents to retention	Experiences that negatively impact job title retention
Difficulties with promotion	Factors that impact the ability to be promoted
Disinterest in Executive leadership	Experiences and elements that deter the pursuit in executive leadership
Doing all the work	References to the unequal distribution of work
Spirituality	Devotion to God, Prayer and Faith
Invisible	Feeling unseen, walked over, and ignored
Isolated	Experiences that result in feeling isolated in the workplace
Knowledge is Power	The impact of higher education on the experiences of the participants
Lack of opportunities	Comments related to the scarcity of openings to excel and learn new skills
Lack of respect for the position	Feeling limited in authoritative power relative to the position
Mentorship	Importance of mentorship
Negatives regarding a College Presidency	Negative assumptions about the role and responsibilities of a college president
Presidential preparedness	Skills necessary to become a college president
Playing the game	Skills required to navigate the ever- changing rules of higher education
Power of dominate race	Experiences of control and supremacy by the dominant

	race
Processing the negativity	Skills used to process and overcome negative encounters
Proving my worth	The need to consistently work harder, and achieve more than others
Quality of Life	Factors that affect the quality of life
Racism	Discrimination based upon race
Racism and Discrimination	The impact of the intersection of race and gender identities
Sexism	Discrimination based upon gender
Social capital	Social benefits from the college workplace
Social factors	Factors that impact social status
Stripped of power	Experiences of having your authority removed
Strong black woman	Examples and reflections of being stereotyped as a strong black woman.
Supportive Circle	A circle of like-minded people that offer support that extends beyond the typical mentoring program
Survival	Actions, thoughts and ideas that
Thoughts of being a College President	Impressions of the job of a college president
Today's college president	The skills and requirements necessary to be a college president today
Underground	Hiding your skills, and
Work environment	Descriptions of the work environment

Themes	Emergent Codes
Persistence of Power and Privilege	Difficulties with promotion
	Challenging and Doubting the credentials
	Lack of opportunities
	Lack of respect for the position
	Power of dominate race
	Proving my worth
	Striped of power
Developing Strategies to Survive	Building your brand

	Doing all the work
	Isolated
	Lack of opportunities
	Mentorship
	Playing the game
	Supportive Circle
	Survival
	Processing the negativity
Community College President's Role, Responsibilities and Impact	Disinterest in Executive leadership
	Negatives regarding a College Presidency
	Presidential preparedness
	Thoughts of being a College President
	Today's college president
Fighting the Fight Against Stereotypes	African American women Stereotype
	Angry Black woman
	Strong black woman
Invisibility	Invisible
	Reflections of me
	Underground
	Challenging and Doubting the credentials
	Lack of respect for the position
	Proving my worth
Evaluating Quality of Life	Deterrents to retention
	Knowledge is power

	Quality of Life
	Social capital
	Social factors
	Work environment
Racism and Discrimination	Lack of respect for the position
	Racism
	Racism and Discrimination
	Social factors
	Sexism
	Stripped of power
A Journey of Faith	Core values
	Spirituality

VITA

DANA G. STILLEY
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EDUCATION

PhD, 2021, Community College Leadership, Old Dominion University
MBA, 1984, Finance and Management Science, Columbia Graduate School of Business
B.S., 1982, Applied Mathematics/Economics, Brown University

EXPERIENCE

2020 – Present	Graduate Assistant, Department of Educational Foundations and Leadership, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA
2019- Present	Adjunct Professor, Mathematics Department, Dominican College, Orangeburg, NY
2016- 2019	Vice President of Student Services, Rockland Community College, Suffern, NY
2014 – 2016	Associate Vice President of Student Services, Rockland Community College, Suffern, NY
2010 – 2014	Dean of Enrollment Management, Rockland Community College, Suffern, NY
2009 – 2010	Recruitment Specialist, Rockland Community College, Suffern, NY Vice President of Student Services, Rockland Community College, Suffern, NY

PUBLICATIONS AND PRESENTATIONS

Stilley, D. (2020). Leadership and Partnership, Virtual Summit, Piermont, NY

Stilley, D. (2019). Transformative Leadership, N.E.D. Restoration Summit,

Stilley, D. (2018). Building Bridges to Each Other. Rockland Community College, Suffern, NY