AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION
ADMINISTRATIVE LEADERSHIP: EXPLORING
THE EXPERIENCES AND CHALLENGES
AT PENNSYLVANIA PWIs

A Dissertation
Submitted to
the Temple University Graduate Board

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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May 2022

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative research study explores the challenges encountered by five African American women who serve as high-ranking higher education administrators at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) in Pennsylvania as well as how they contend with these challenges. This study also uses an Intersectionality lens to explore the intersectionality of race and gender and how participants feel this intersectionality, as well as gender and racial stereotypes, has impacted their professional lives and how they are perceived/received by colleagues. As we strive to ascend to a level of increased diversity in higher education professionals that is reflective of our increasingly diverse society and student population, it is essential that we explore what is often uncomfortable territory to create more enlightened, supportive, and inclusive work environments.

Purposive sampling and phenomenological research methods including semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions were utilized to delve into the experiences of the participants. Participants were asked about professional challenges, work-life balance, and how they experience working at PWIs among other topics. The emerging themes were professional challenges, coping mechanisms/support, mentorship, navigating higher education as Black women, and respect or lack thereof from colleagues and subordinates. The ladies were also asked about their views on the future of Black women in higher education and for any advice for Black women currently working as administrators and those who aspire to do so. Though they encounter many challenges, some unique to them as Black women, all the participants recognize the value of their work and plan to continue that work for their students as well as future Black female administrators following in their footsteps.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family: my mother Elaine Mitchell, my father Derek

Chappelle, my grandmother Mary Mitchell, my aunt and uncle Sharon and Robert

Daugherty, and my cousin-sisters Amira and Amina Daugherty. I can't thank you enough

for your love, encouragement, and support.

Special Dedication:

Frazier Mitchell

1935-1986

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I give all glory and thanks to God. Next, I thank the five women who participated in this study and shared their experiences and wisdom with me. Elaine, Mary, Jackie, Naomi, and Katherine, I cannot thank you enough. To my advisor Dr. James Earl Davis and my committee: Dr. Jennifer Johnson, Dr. Joseph DuCette, Dr. Wanda Brooks, and Dr. Crystal Austin, thank you for your guidance, feedback, support, and patience throughout this program and dissertation process. I'd also like to thank my mentor and friend Dr. Melanie Cosby for always offering wonderful advice, being supportive, and encouraging me to tap into my Black Girl Magic.

Last but certainly not least, I would like to thank my family. I will never have the words to adequately thank you for keeping me grounded and lifting me in prayer. When I needed advice, prayer, encouragement, technical help, a good laugh, or a good meal you were always there. This took a village and so, this degree is ours. We did it!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Despite the advances that African American women have made in degree

attainment and as higher education professionals, there is still a relatively small number

of African American women who hold leadership positions in higher education

(Townsend, 2019) with very little research on their workplace experiences as

professionals in academia. In *De-bunking Sapphire: Toward a Non-Racist and Non-*

Sexist Social Science Patricia Bell Scott (1982) states:

> One is almost overwhelmed with the depth and extent of the intellectual void that
> exists among social science scholars concerning the life experiences of Black
> women…Despite the fact that Black women have always played important roles
> in American society, they have been almost totally ignored by students of
> American society and human behavior. The experiences of Black women in both
> a historical and contemporary sense have been examined from a problems
> framework. As a result of this approach, the student begins to see the experiences
> of Black women as being limited in nature (p. 85).

While the literature has begun to shed light on African American students, male

employees, and African American faculty (and the lack of female African American

faculty), Hull et al. (1982) in their anthology *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks are*

Men, But Some of Us are Brave underscore the importance of exploring the lives and

experiences of African American women from a feminist, pro-women standpoint to

"encourage the expansion of African-American women studies as a field of inquiry"

(Howard-Vital, 1989, p.181). In doing so, students of this field of inquiry as well as

higher education professionals can begin to explore and understand who Black women

are, what they experience, and the types of strategies and mechanisms they use to

navigate obstacles they encounter including pay inequity, sexism and racism, and

tokenism. This field of inquiry also carries with it the great potential to yield policies and

actionable change that support female African American administrators in higher education.

Constance Carroll (1982) notes that "Black women in higher education are isolated, under-utilized and often demoralized" and are being left out of the Black and feminist movements while seeing an effort be made to provide their Black male and White female colleagues with equal opportunities (p. 115). Carroll also contends that African American women will continue to be overlooked by both the Black and feminist movements if they do not begin to serve as a link between the two groups. With this in mind, how can we as higher education professionals contribute to the continued growth of this body of research and work toward improving the work experience for Black women in higher education?

First, African American women must be able to express themselves and share who they are and what they have experienced in their own words as Mary Helen Washington (1975) notes in her introduction to *Black-Eyed Susans* that "people other than the Black woman herself try to define who she is, what she is supposed to look like, act like, and sound like. And most of the creations bear very little resemblance to real, live Black women" (p. ix). Second, there is a need for "more theoretical construction by and about African-American women" (Howard-Vital, 1989) as well as additional research on the social interactions African American women have and the strategies they use to successfully navigate their work environments (p. 188). Finally, "there is a need for a continuous generation of paradigms, empirical testing of paradigms, and an examination of present paradigms to determine how they illuminate, obscure, or predict

experiences of African-American women in different higher education milieus"

(Howard-Vital, 1989, p. 189).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of high-ranking

female African American administrators at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs). As

a result, this study utilized qualitative research methods to explore how these women

successfully navigate their careers at PWIs while also navigating the intersectionality of

their race and gender. Data were collected via biographical/institutional profiles,

curriculum vitae, and resumes provided by participants as well as in-depth interviews and

field notes. The data collected were then analyzed to discover common themes and each

interview was transcribed, analyzed, and coded for themes. Intersectionality was applied

to analyze and interpret the resulting data.

Research Questions

The central research question guiding this study was: *How do female African*

American administrators experience PWIs? This central research question led to the

following sub-questions:

a) What challenges do female African American administrators encounter in

higher education?

b) What coping mechanisms do female African American administrators employ

when facing challenges in the higher education workplace?

c) How do female African American higher education administrators navigate

their careers while also navigating the intersection of gender and race at

PWIs?

Significance of the Study

"Research that examines the experiences of African American women in academe is limited" (Warren-Gordon & Mayes, 2017, p. 2356) as much of the literature surrounding minorities in higher education focuses on students, male higher education professionals, and the lack of female minorities in faculty positions. However, the literature surrounding the lived experiences of female African American administrators and how they cope with the obstacles and challenges they face is, frankly, inadequate. It is necessary that this gap in the literature continues to be filled as it will allow Black women to relate their experiences and views in their own words, to help those in higher education of other races and genders understand their experiences, to use the literature to develop policies and procedures that can help mitigate the challenges Black female administrators encounter in their roles, and to inform future research that explores the experiences of other marginalized groups in higher education.

This study underscored the significance of storytelling from the perspective of Black women as experts on their own personhood and personal narratives. The Intersectionality framework helped in understanding how they experience serving as administrators at PWIs in terms of their race and gender as well as how they manage challenges that arise in their roles as high-ranking leaders.

Description of the Study

Chapter one is comprised of the introduction, problem statement, purpose of the study, research questions, and significance of the study. Chapter two, the literature review, includes an overview of relevant frameworks (Intersectionality, Critical Race Theory, and Black Feminist Thought), and explores the status of African American

women in higher education and the challenges they face as administrators as well as key studies and articles. Chapter three, the methodology section, details the research questions that guided the study, the qualitative methods and research design utilized, and the measures taken to ensure the validity of the study. Chapter four provides individual participant profiles as well as a discussion of the major themes that emerged during data analysis. Chapter five includes a synopsis of the study findings, discusses study limitations, and provides recommendations for future research and practice.

Summary: Methods and Findings

Chapter three details the research questions that guided this study and focuses on the qualitative methods utilized. Specifically, the chapter discusses the recruitment of five participants from PWIs in Pennsylvania, data collection via biographical/institutional profiles, resumes/curriculum vitae, and individual semi-structured interviews. The qualitative methods and the research design used were crucial in gathering rich data and analyzing and understanding the experiences of the participants as Black female leaders in higher education. Finally, trustworthiness and methodological limitations are discussed to describe the validity of the study.

Chapter four identifies the following major themes: professional challenges, coping mechanisms, mentorship, navigating higher education as a Black woman, and doubt, questioning, and respect or lack thereof from colleagues and subordinates. Although not a primary focus of this study, participants' views on the future of Black women in higher education as well as advice for Black women in higher education are also discussed. The above themes highlight experiences and insights unique to Black

women working as high-ranking administrators in higher education which in turn provides a better understanding of their personal and professional identities.

Definitions of Key Terms

Included below are the definitions of key terms that will be utilized throughout this study. These terms include Predominantly White Institution, African American/Black, and Intersectionality:

Predominantly White Institution (PWI): A university or college at which White/Caucasian students account for 50% or more of the student population.

African American/Black: "These terms refer to participants who identify as having a collective, racialized experience within the United States based upon their perceived African ancestry. This term will include persons of a variety of ethnicities, such as those who have a partial ancestry from any of the native sub-Saharan populations of Africa. This definition includes first or continuing generation immigrants from the Caribbean, Central America, South America, or other nations who self-identify as Black American" (Tyler, 2019).

Intersectionality: "The interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage" (Lexico, 2021).

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter two provides a review of the literature which explores topics related to the experiences of female African American women in higher education, specifically those who serve as administrators at PWIs. While research on this topic has increased over the years there is still a gap in the literature regarding the experiences of female African American college and university administrators (Becks-Moody, 2004). Though this review of the literature does not encompass all aspects of the female African American experience this chapter does lay the foundation for a deeper understanding of these experiences by examining the following: The Intersectionality framework to aid in understanding these experiences; an overview of the status of African American women in higher education; the challenges African American women encounter in higher education; and key studies related to the topic of the study. The Intersectionality framework guided this study and was used to help make meaning of the experiences of participants and explore how the intersectionality of their race and gender informs and impacts their experiences and careers in higher education.

Theoretical Frameworks

To examine and better understand the lived experiences of female African American administrators in higher education data were analyzed utilizing Intersectionality. This theoretical framework allowed for a better understanding of participants' navigation of both race and gender at PWIs as well as how this navigation informs and impacts their lived experiences and careers in higher education.

The term 'intersectionality' was introduced in 1989 by Kimberle Crenshaw, a Black legal scholar, in her essay *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A*

Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics and describes the simultaneous oppression that African American women face. She explains that African American women do not simply experience racism *or* sexism but racism *and* sexism and that these "interlocking oppressions" must be addressed simultaneously to fully understand the lived experiences of African American women and to combat the oppression they encounter. Crenshaw further addresses intersectionality in positing that African American women are frequently left out of racism and sexism discussions as racism talks typically revolve around Black men and sexism talks typically revolve around White women. She notes that "because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated" (p. 140).

In 2017, Crenshaw explained "intersectionality is a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects. It's not simply that there's a race problem here, a gender problem here, and a class or LBGTQ problem there" (para. 3). She further explained that this mindset often discounts the experiences of those who encounter more than one of these problems and intersectionality is sometimes "used as a blanket term to mean, 'well, it's complicated'" which at times is an excuse not to act. However, utilized thoughtfully the Intersectionality framework can help to extend our knowledge and understanding and empower "marginalized groups in the context of management, organizations, and beyond" as "intersectionality continues to wield a breadth, depth, complexity, and nuance in understanding of how work and workplaces are experienced and organized" (Atewologun, 2018, p. 14).

Hill Collins (1998) explains that "rather than examining gender, race, class, and nation as distinctive social hierarchies, intersectionality examines how they mutually construct one another" (p. 62). She underscores the importance of viewing the world in a both/and fashion and considering the intersectionality of gender, race, and class oppression because that is the way Black feminists have always seen the world as that is how they have experienced the world.

Though not specifically applied, it is worth briefly discussing Black Feminist Thought (BFT) and Critical Race Theory (CRT) as BFT focuses on the experiences and viewpoints of Black women and CRT calls for the telling of stories from the perspective of minorities.

Patricia Hill Collins (1990) explained "Black feminist thought demonstrates Black women's emerging power as agents of knowledge" (p. 221). In *Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought* (1986), Collins states, "Black women have long occupied marginal positions in academic settings" and "many Black female intellectuals have made creative use of their marginality- their 'outsider within' status- to produce Black feminist thought that reflects a special standpoint on self, family, and society" (p. S14). She went on to identify three key themes: 1) "Black women's self-definition and self-valuation", 2) "the interlocking nature of oppression", and 3) "the importance of Afro-American women's culture".

Collins says self-definition "involves challenging the political knowledge-validation process that has resulted in externally-defined, stereotypical images of Afro-American womanhood" and self-valuation "stresses the content of Black women's self-definitions-namely, replacing externally-derived images with authentic Black female

images" (pp. S16-17). "The significance of seeing race, class, and gender as interlocking systems of oppression is that such an approach fosters a paradigmatic shift of thinking inclusively about other oppressions, such as age, sexual orientation, religion, and ethnicity" (Collins, 1990, p. 223). Collins also explains the importance of Afro-American women's culture as:

> A third key theme characterizing Black feminist thought involves efforts to redefine and explain the importance of Black women's culture. In doing so, Black feminists have not only uncovered previously unexplored areas of the Black female experience, but they have also identified concrete areas of social relations where Afro-American women create and pass on self-definitions and self-valuations essential to coping with the simultaneity of oppression they experience (p. S21).

In addition to serving as a framework that focuses on the social constructions of gender, class, and race as well as the impact of their intersections, Collins noted BFT had the potential to contribute to various other disciplines and she was correct. BFT has been used in art and literature, religion, sociology, and practiced in medical sciences.

Critical Race Theory (CRT), informed by the 1970s and 1980s writings of legal scholar Derrick Bell, developed as a result of legal scholars, activists, and lawyers' recognition of the curtailment of civil rights advances. According to Demaske (n.d.), "legal scholars, including Bell, Alan Freeman, and Richard Delgado, began developing alternative legal theories and framework for combating racial inequality" and "their approaches combined various other theoretical positions, among them critical legal studies, critical theory, feminist theory, postmodernism, and cultural studies" (para. 4). CRT was cemented as a movement in 1989 at the first annual Workshop on CRT with the involvement of scholars such as Mari Matsuda, Kimberle Crenshaw, Angela Harris,

Charles Lawrence, and Patricia Williams, and has gone on to be applied to various fields of study and has given rise to several other theories.

CRT focuses on studying and transforming the dynamic between race, racism, and power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Parker and Lynn (2002) note that "race and racism is deeply embedded within the framework of American society" (p. 8) and Harris (1993) notes that this "has directly shaped the U.S. legal system and the ways people think about the law, racial categories, and privilege" (p. 8). According to Parker and Lynn (2002) the three main goals of CRT are to tell stories about discrimination from the vantage point of minorities, "to argue for the eradication of racial subjugation while simultaneously recognizing that race is a social construct" (p. 10), and to focus on other differences such as gender, class, and any additional inequities people experience.

In their 2001 book *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, Stefancic and Delgado outline the basic tenets of CRT as the following: first, "racism is ordinary, not aberrational" and deeply embedded in the fabric of our country and the aspects of our everyday lives (education, career, justice system, etc.); second, racism serves an important purpose as it "advances the interests of both White elites (materially) and working-class people (psychically)"; third, race and races are socially constructed and conveniently retired and reintroduced by the elite depending upon "shifting needs" (differential racialization); fourth, one's intersectionality must be considered as "no person has a single, easily stated, unitary identity…everyone has potentially conflicting, overlapping identities, loyalties, and allegiances"; and finally, the voice-of-color thesis posits that "minority status, in other words, brings with it a presumed competence to speak about race and racism" (pp.7-9).

Status of African American Women in the Higher Education Workforce

In the 2018 research brief *Representation and Pay of Women of Color in the Higher Education Workforce,* McChesney considered intersectionality as he explored the representation and pay of women of color in the higher education workforce. He found that women of color have a representation of about nine percent in the higher education workforce and that regardless of race women have less representation across administrative and faculty positions as compared to men. McChesney (2018) also found that women of color are "disproportionately over-represented in lower-paid positions and underrepresented elsewhere" which may be one cause of the pay inequity women of color experience (p. 9).

In 2017 Bichsel and McChesney produced a research brief which explored the pay and representation of racial/ethnic minorities in higher education administrative positions and found that as of 2016 a mere seven percent of higher education administrators in executive or senior-level positions were African American. They also found that minority representation in higher education varies across leadership positions: the chief officers of human resources, student affairs, and legal affairs have better than average minority representation whereas chief development officers have the worst minority representation at just six percent. Unfortunately, the overall data presented in the brief showed that the minority representation gap in leadership positions has not decreased and may in fact be increasing.

In another 2017 research brief Bichsel and McChesney explored the gender pay gap and representation of women in higher education administrative positions. They found that as of 2016 women across the United States accounted for about half of higher

education administrators and that for certain positions in certain areas of higher education, institutions have tried to better represent and compensate women and, in some areas, have even closed the wage gap. Conversely, Bichsel and McChesney note that the representation of women in well-paying, top leadership positions markedly decreases and that less than thirty percent of executive positions are held by women.

Challenges Impacting African American Women in Higher Education

Women of all races face challenges in not only the higher education workforce but in the general workforce as well. Dishman (2015) reports that based on data from a joint Rockefeller Foundation/Thomson Reuters Foundation survey of 9,500 women from nineteen G20 countries there are five common challenges that women encounter in the workplace: pay inequity, harassment, professional development and advancement, and work-life balance. Unfortunately, some of these challenges go hand-in-hand which only compounds the issues they create for the female workforce. Women who struggle with pay inequity or work in low-wage jobs must often work more to keep up with the cost of living (Phadke & Boesch, 2019) which is difficult as they work to create and maintain work-life balance. Dishman (2015) also found that 47% of women surveyed in the United States feel men have better access to career opportunities and professional development. This lack of opportunity and professional guidance also lends itself to the difficulty women encounter in progressing in their careers and therefore closing the wage gap.

The survey data also show that four in ten women feel pay equity is the most important workplace challenge; across all countries represented in the survey work-life balance is seen as the biggest challenge overall earning forty-four percent of the vote;

the perception of difficulty having children while building a career very much depends on the country and the supports provided (extended leave, job security, etc.); respondents felt men had better access to professional development and advancement opportunities; lastly, depending on the country anywhere from twenty-five to fifty-three percent of women reported experiencing some form of harassment yet sixty-one percent rarely or never report harassment. It is also important to note that women also encounter additional challenges in the workplace such as gender bias, lack of role models, issues regarding their appearance, etc.

In addition to the aforementioned challenges many women face in the workplace, African American woman face a host of unique challenges because of the intersection of their gender and race. Rice-Harris (n.d.) pinpoints the following six challenges: 1) "watering yourself down"- altering parts of your appearance such as your natural hair, changing the octave of your voice (using your "White" voice), or using proper English to sound more professional; 2) "literally doing the most"- going above and beyond and feeling the need to work twice as hard to be seen as half as good or worthy as your peers; 3) "being culturally displaced"- being unable to relate to the culture of your colleagues; 4) "being regarded as a Black encyclopedia"- being expected to know and explain "Black" things because you are Black; 5) "dress code double standards"- being held to different standards regarding dress or physical appearance; and 6) "vibeocide"- being avoided by other Black women who feel they must be better than you or that there is only room for one Black woman in your work environment.

Tulshyan (2015) cites Center for Women Policy Studies that found that twenty-one percent of female minorities felt they could not be themselves at work and more than a third of female minorities felt it necessary to "play down" their race/ethnicity to be successful in their careers. She also cites a New York Times article by Facebook Chief Operating Officer Sheryl Sandberg that suggests women of all races have difficulty voicing their opinions or verbally contributing to the workplace ("speaking while female") because they feel they are not being heard or taken seriously. Finally, Purdie-Vaughns (2015) cites a report from the Center for Talent Innovation that posits that the advancement of African American women is constrained by the following: 1) their contributions go unnoticed as twenty-six percent of African American women feel their talents are ignored; 2) African American women do not have mentors or sponsors to advocate for them and the report shows that only eleven percent of female minorities are backed by senior leadership; and 3) African American women are likely to "put their heads down" and "not make noise" in the hopes that their hard work speaks for itself and is enough.

Pay Equity

African American women are now ranked as the most educated population in the United States, however, they have yet to achieve pay equity (Bronner Helm, 2016). The National Center for Education Statistics reports that between 2009 and 2010, African American women "earned sixty-eight percent of all Associate degrees awarded to Black students, as well as sixty-six percent of Bachelor's degrees, seventy-one percent of Master's degrees and sixty-five percent of all Doctorates awarded to Black students" (Bronner Helm, 2016, para. 2). Missy Kline of the College and University Professional

Association for Human Resources reports that women who work in higher education

leadership "earn less than White men; women are underrepresented in higher-paying,

more prestigious positions in American colleges and universities; and minorities are

underrepresented, particularly in high-level higher ed jobs, and underpaid in the majority

of campus jobs" (2018, para. 1). CUPA-HR's 2018 press release for their research brief

Representation and Pay of Women of Color in the Higher Education Workforce also

explains:

> Women of color are paid only 67 cents on the dollar compared to White men in
> the higher education workforce; in three out of four job types (professional, staff
> and faculty) women of color are paid less than White men, men of color and
> White women; women of color are underrepresented in the higher ed workforce
> as a whole compared to their representation in the U.S. population; and women of
> color are represented more in lower-paying staff positions and less in higher-
> paying faculty, professional and administrative roles. This stands in contrast to
> White men whose representation increases significantly with pay and position
> level (McChesney, 2018).

The American Association of University Women (AAUW) study *Barriers and*

Bias: The Status of Women in Leadership (2016) reports that African American women

hold only eight percent of jobs in the private sector and less than two percent of

leadership positions. Despite advances in educational achievement, data from the U.S

Current Population Survey, National Committee on Pay Equity, and the Bureau of Labor

Statistics (n.d.) show that as of 2013 African American women "earned just sixty-four

cents to the White man's dollar, White women earned seventy-eight cents, Black men

seventy-five cents, Hispanic men sixty-seven cents and Hispanic women fifty-four cents"

(Bronner Helm, 2016, para. 6). Data from the National Committee on Pay Equity also

show that White women, who are ahead of Hispanic and African American women, will

not achieve pay equity until 2059 so Bronner Helm (2016) astutely asks where that leaves

African American women.

16

According to the Center for American Progress (2017), in the United States over two-thirds of mothers are either the primary or co-breadwinner for their household which means the gender wage gap is seriously impacting working class families, even more so for minority families. Unfortunately, lower income for all families- particularly families of color where women are the primary or co-breadwinners- often results in less money to cover expenses such as food, health care, housing, education, childcare, and student loans. Kerby (2013) notes that the gender wage gap forces "families to choose between putting food on the table or saving for a college education and retirement" (para. 10).

While some believe that the gender pay gap is either a myth or a result of women's choices (occupation, education, stepping away from the workforce to be a caregiver, etc.), research demonstrates that the gap is very real (Miller, 2017). Some of the contributing factors to the gender wage gap may be type of job, hours worked, race and ethnicity, and time in the workforce. In addition to these factors, Fisher (2015) suggests that there are unexplained causes of the gap. She also notes that "researchers have found that a portion of the gender wage gap is due to other factors" and that "these factors could include the conscious or unconscious gender discrimination that women encounter in their careers" (para. 16).

Farber (2017) believes the motherhood penalty, negotiation, and employer bias are three reasons why the gender wage gap still exists. Regarding the motherhood penalty she states "about 39% of mothers say they have taken 'significant' time off work after having a child—a decision that usually results in those mothers earning an average of 7% less per child compared to childless women" but that the opposite is true for men who tend to earn more after welcoming a child to the family (para. 4). The director of the

17

pension research council at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, Olivia Mitchell, notes that supports such as extended parental leave and subsidized daycares (like daycares in more progressive countries) are needed to help curb the motherhood penalty. Mitchell goes on to explain that women asking for the pay they want would go a long way in helping to close the gender wage gap; however, women have difficulty with negotiation for fear of how they'll be treated. This is known as the "social cost" of negotiation. She recommends that women take negotiation classes to aid them in learning to negotiate up front so as not to lose out on larger sums of money over the lives of their careers.

Finally, conscious or unconscious employer bias may be a result of the undervaluation of women's contributions in the workplace. Farber cites a 2016 Glassdoor study that found that when women and men with comparable levels of education and work experience worked at the same company with the same job title, women were typically still paid less than their male counterparts. In fact, it was found that men earned 5.4% more in their base pay than females and 7.4% more in total compensation (Glassdoor, 2016). Mitchell goes on to note that an education disparity between men and women as well as the overrepresentation of women in lower-paying occupations are also causes of the gender wage gap and that while the gap is narrowing it is doing so slowly which is a challenge in and of itself.

Stereotypes

One of the major challenges women face in the workplace is stereotypes related to their gender as well as additional intersecting characteristics. McCoy (n.d.) notes that the workplace can be rife with stereotypes based on gender (blonde women are less

intelligent or incapable, attractive women advance because of their looks), age (older employees are seen as less technologically savvy, younger employees are seen as lazy), and race (African Americans are stereotyped as lazy or unintelligent).

In addition to previously mentioned stereotypes, African American women also work to avoid unique stereotypes related to the intersectionality of their race and gender. They may often find themselves in the unique position of attempting to contribute verbally at work, respectfully advocating for themselves, and not presenting as the Angry Black Woman (ABW). Tulyshan (2015) quotes attorney and founder of executive consulting firm WordSmithRapport Karima Mariama-Arthur as saying "labeled as divas, angry, bitter, and strong — none of which are considered positive attributes — women of color often find themselves confronted with the unfortunate dilemma of whether to illuminate their voices at all" (para. 10) and that female minorities have a "double hurdle of not being too aggressive and proving, sometimes repeatedly, that we are intelligent enough to warrant an audience for our ideas" (para. 12).

Tokenism

Before discussing tokenism, it is necessary to define the term. Lexico (2019) defines tokenism as "the practice of making only a perfunctory or symbolic effort to do a particular thing, especially by recruiting a small number of people from under-represented groups in order to give the appearance of sexual or racial equality within a workforce". It should also be noted "that intent is important in deciding whether or not a company is engaging in tokenism" (Sherrer, 2018, para. 4). That is to say, if a company or organization has only one or a few staff members who are representative of minority

groups, it is possible the organization is in the beginning stages of increasing diversity within its ranks.

Snell (2017) posits that tokenism is the result of diversity without inclusion and that it "masks inactivity" as diversity statistics do not depict whether under-represented groups, such as African American women, are actually being included at work or meaningfully contributing, innovating, and growing in their roles. Diversity statistics also do not capture the experiences of these groups or the toll that tokenism or feeling like the "other" or "only" takes on minority employees. In the 2016 report *The Day-To-Day Experiences of Workplace Inclusion and Exclusion,* interviewees described feeling isolated by being the "only" or "other" which underscores the assertion made by Catalyst (2018) that African American women (and men) pay an "emotional tax" at work. This emotional tax is a result of experiencing "a heightened awareness of their difference in the workplace which manifests itself in disruption in sleep patterns, reduction of their sense of 'psychological safety,' and diminishment of their ability to contribute fully at work". The Catalyst infographic *It's Not Easy Feeling Different* (2014) suggests that feeling different at work can "result in unique disadvantages" at work such as being less likely to have high-level mentors, less likely to be promoted, and more likely to downsize aspirations.

In *The Experiences of African American Women Faculty and Administrators in Higher Education: Has Anything Changed?* (Patitu, 2002), a study participant who serves as a faculty member noted that:

> Many times, people of color are the sole entity or voice in a department. This sort of lone wolf environment breeds an atmosphere that may further marginalize the person of color. Persons of color should not be forced into situations where they

20

are the representative from the race; this is often the case at many institutions (p. 90).

Serving as the de facto expert on all things Black or Black and female can lead to employees feeling overwhelmed when attempting to juggle not only their primary work responsibilities but also any secondary roles they have assumed because they are deemed one of the few or the "only" who may relate to any issues at hand. To relieve any pressure or isolation Black women may feel because of tokenism, it is extremely important that they are able to connect with other women of color who have had similar experiences and can serve as friends, coaches, sponsors, and mentors.

Relevant Studies & Articles

This section of the literature review provides a summary of previous studies and articles on or related to the topic of the experiences of Black female administrators in higher education.

Becks-Moody's 2004 qualitative study *African American Women Administrators in Higher Education: Exploring the Challenges and Experiences at Louisiana Public Colleges and Universities* is similar to this study as it also explored the challenges Black women experience as professionals in higher education and how they handle said challenges. This study was conducted to learn what experiences and challenges Black female administrators encounter in higher education, what coping mechanisms they utilize, and the differences between their experiences at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs).

Participants were recruited with help from Human Resources directors at public Louisiana higher education institutions and the researcher utilized snowball sampling by asking others in higher education for recommendations of possible participants. The

participants were ten Black women who served as president/chancellor, vice president/vice chancellor, or dean from three HBCUs, three PWIs, and two community colleges. The researcher used oral history as the principal methodology and collected data using open-ended interviews, in-person observation, and the analysis of participant-provided biographical/institutional profiles, curriculum vitae, and resumes. Each participant was observed at their workplace to gain a better understanding of their day-to-day activities, interactions, and so on. They were also interviewed a minimum of three times; the first interview was an introduction via phone, the second interview took place at the participant's institution and was used to discuss participant's professional experiences, and the final interview was one used to follow up and clarify and information or questions.

Becks-Moody utilized Collins' Black Feminist Thought in her data analysis which revealed the challenges identified by participants including "balancing career and family, racism and sexism, lack of respect by colleagues and subordinates, mentoring and networking, isolation and underrepresentation, competency and confidence, and professional satisfaction and community consciousness" (pp. 264-265). The coping strategies these women utilized to handle these challenges were "spirituality and prayer, family, friends, networks, the community and personal activities to successfully manage conflict" and maintaining positive attitudes (p. 265). Finally, Becks-Moody found that one of her participants who had worked as an administrator at and HBCU as well as a professor at a PWI, felt the atmosphere of the PWI was less welcoming. Women at HBCUs did not feel they experienced racism from colleagues at their own institutions but did feel they were treated differently by those from outside institutions and the governing

board. The women at PWIs felt they were less respected than non-African American and women of equal or lesser rank as they were not referred to as Dr. or Ms. but by their first names which they interpreted as a lack of respect. These women felt they were generally received differently as at PWIs they encountered White students and faculty who had not worked with a Black woman who served in a high-level position and people were surprised they held their positions due to their skin color.

In her 2016 qualitative study *Black Girl Magic: How Black Women Administrators Navigate the Intersection of Race and Gender in Workspace Silos at Predominantly White Institutions,* Smith sought to learn what impact "White racially homogenous work environments" had on Black female administrators at PWIs and how these administrators navigated the intersectionality of their race and gender at these institutions. More specifically, the researcher noted "given the support of working alongside other Black women, Black men, and/or servicing students of color that has been outlined in current literature, this research aims to see what are the effects, if any, of not having daily or limited interactions with other Black women, women in general, and other people of color" (pp. 3-4).

Utilizing both purposeful and snowball sampling, participants were solicited via email or postings through various networks and included eight Black women who served as administrators at a four-year PWI in Louisiana. While there were no specific requirements for career length or type of institution, the researcher did specifically seek participants at the level of associate director, director, vice chancellor, etc. Smith used a phenomenological approach with semi-structured face-to-face interviews and reviews of institutional diversity statements to collect data. Participants also completed Jones,

Dawkins, & Glover's (2012) *Black Female Administrator Survey* to provide demographic information and were asked to choose the organizational frame they felt characterized their department/institution. The researcher used SPSS to analyze the results of the survey, reviewed the organizational frames chosen by participants, and used notes and memos as part of the data analysis process. Black Feminist Theory was applied to the data with an Intersectionality lens.

Smith's data analysis revealed four main themes: "increased desire to connect with other Black women", "recognized pervasiveness of intersectional discrimination", "racially-influenced decision-making", and "adherence to spiritual belief" (p. 93). The researcher noted:

> Black women administrators who do not do "diversity work" or see a large number of Black students and/or other Black colleagues have turned to each other for support in hopes of escaping the frequently occurring microaggressions, intersectional discrimination and Racial Battle Fatigue…According to the participants, the support of other Black women at the institution has been instrumental in their retention as Cookie stated she would have been gone in less than six months if it were not for a Black woman colleague who encouraged her to stick it out. The participants shared it is the ability to "pick up the phone, call someone across campus that understands you, and know that you're not alone" (p. 94).

Smith also found that her study participants "chose to be guided and anchored by their spirituality and purposely assert and position themselves as beacons of hope, light, and love in an Ivory Tower that does not always reciprocate those same feelings" (p. 98) and that those who worked on race-related committees would prefer to willingly do so rather than be used as a "token" representative.

In Warren-Gordon and Mayes' 2017 paper *Navigating the Academy: An Autoethnographic Approach to Examining the Lived Experience of African American Women at Predominantly White Institutions of Higher Education*, the authors detailed the

use of an autoethnographic approach to delve into their own lived experiences as Black women working at a Midwestern university and how they navigate their positions. Though both Black women, they were at different stages of their careers as one was tenured associate faculty and the other was at the start of their tenure track career with one teaching at the graduate level and the other at the undergraduate level.

Warren-Gordon and Mayes' decision to write this journal article was born of their many social conversations which fostered a relationship of trust and sense of understanding between the two. They eventually discussed their frustration with being the only Black women in their departments and realized they shared similar experiences. Together, the authors identified themes from prior conversations that could inform their paper and separately wrote about their own experiences. Once completed they worked together to write the remainder of their paper. They also discussed the possible consequences of sharing their "truth" and, noting one of them had yet to achieve tenure or promotion, removed from their writing an experience involving someone in a position of authority who could easily identify themselves in the situation discussed.

Through their writing and shared conversations, Warren-Gordon and Mayes found that "reflecting on our lived experiences as African American women working in Predominantly White Institutions has offered us the opportunity to develop a level of understanding of each other that we have never experienced with other colleagues" (p. 2364). Some of their findings included needing to constantly remind others of their "legitimacy" frustrating; that it was difficult having to regularly remind others they have a voice that should be heard; that "being excluded from social activities where informal conversations about department policy and other significant department issues are

discussed is an acknowledgement that there is no value in our voice"; and that they had to

continually remind others to use their correct title as they do for others at their

institutions. Both authors also struggled with finding their place at work and felt they

were in unique positions as the only Black women in their departments:

> The struggle of finding "our place" within working environments that are not
> always inclusive can lead to added stress in the workplace. Finding ways to find
> "our place" has required us to think outside of the traditional methods to
> overcome the isolation and frustration that we often feel. Finding "our place"
> outside our respective departments has offered us both sanctuary. We have both
> found support and encouragement by working with people outside of our
> departments…We also recognize that being in positions of "being the only one"
> places a spotlight on us that others don't share. We are constantly struggling with
> determining how we will use our spotlight and that when interacting with
> administrators, faculty, and students it is a constant opportunity for someone to
> judge and make assumptions about us (p. 2364).

Warren-Gordon and Mayes hoped their paper would help others to

consider how Black women experience higher education and would lead to the

establishment of mentoring or support networks they themselves did not have on their

journeys as faculty.

Intersectionality in the Workplace

In the 2017 article, *More Than a Buzzword: Intersectionality as a Tool for the*

Workplace, Melissa Abad explained that "the work of intersectionality involves bringing

to the fore those individuals and groups whose perspectives are often devalued in the

workplace; in male-dominated fields, for example, the experiences, talents, and

leadership of the non-dominant group are often overlooked" (para. 4). Abad further

highlighted that recent research from the Clayman Institute identified "barriers that

perpetuate the systemic underrepresentation of women of color in leadership positions"

(para. 4) with women of color relating instances of being criticized for their physical

26

appearance, experiencing isolation and exclusionary/awkward situations, and even sexual assault.

As keynote speaker for the Clayman Institute's Corporate Program meeting, Ella Bell Smith encouraged researchers and practitioners to engage in "deep work" by "assessing the needs of employees and how they fit with their workplace culture, as well as a thorough investigation of the representation data along multiple identity vectors in hiring, retention, promotion, and leadership" (para. 5). She explained this understanding of the experiences of women of color in the workplace can aid in developing resources that will be helpful in terms of workplace culture. Panelists at the meeting also suggested engaging workplace leaders in "incorporating intersectional perspectives through ongoing conversations, education, and training" (Abad, 2017, para. 6) and asking employees to share their stories to help foster understanding of their experiences among leadership as well as women with different racial backgrounds.

Intersectionality in Higher Education

In a 2019 interview with the editors of *Intersectionality and Higher Education: Identity and Inequality on College Campuses*, Scott Jaschik discussed a new volume of essays on intersectionality and higher education. Jaschik explained that many people feel that higher education institutions are designed for people who are White and middle/upper class and higher education leaders have difficulty understanding issues are not just about a specific race or gender as "many people in multiple groups and with multiple identities and needs" face overlapping or intersecting issues. This concept is the focal point of intersectionality and frames the essays discussed.

In their interview with Jaschik, the editors argued while more institutions were paying attention to issues facing historically underrepresented students there was still more that needed to be done. They noted higher education institutions are "small-c conservative; they are slow to change, and they often rely on tradition as a bulwark of their prestige" (para. 4). That being said, many higher education administrations continue to be made up of White males and racial disparities in the hiring and promotion of faculty still exist. Regarding faculty and staff, the editors wanted to include both in this volume and shared that their goal was to present a wide-ranging examination "of how people in different positions experience higher education." They felt that, ultimately, "using a more intersectional lens for higher education shows how inequality is as much of a lived experience as an outcome that our institutions need to take seriously" (para. 12).

In their 2021 article *Hierarchical Microaggressive Intersectionalities: Small Stories of Women of Color in Higher Education*, Young and Anderson explore what they call hierarchical microaggressive intersectionalities (HMI). They define HMIs as "everyday slights found in higher education that communicate systemic valuing (or devaluing) of a person due to the interplay between their institutional role and other identity categories like race and class" (p. 79). Hierarchical signifies how the position someone holds denotes value for those working at the institution, "microaggressive indicates the impact of discriminatory experiences," and intersectionalities denotes "how the women do not just experience microaggressions with one aspect of their identity, but often through many aspects of their identity simultaneously" (p. 79).

Through surveys Young and Anderson were able to gather ten personal stories about microaggressions from female administrators and faculty (three White, seven

people of color) at MSU Denver and identified three ways "HMI indicate structural disadvantage for women and women of color", racial battle and gender fatigue, invisibility, deprofessionalization. Smith et al. describes racial battle and gender fatigue as a "social-psychological stress response (e.g., frustration, anger, exhaustion, physical avoidance, psychological or emotional withdrawal, escapism, acceptance of racist attributions)" associated with being a person of color and the repeated target of racism (2007, p. 552). The authors note invisibility (also known as "intersectional invisibility" per Kimberle Crenshaw, 1991) "is often enacted by others seeing or not seeing marginalized groups" (p. 83). Deprofessionalization in higher education occurs when women, especially those of color, are not treated as professionals despite holding professional degrees and positions. Young and Anderson found that seven of the ten stories referenced fatigue, five referenced deprofessionalization, and five referenced invisibility while six stories referenced two of the three themes and two of the stories referenced all three themes. The researchers note that one of the reasons repeatedly experiencing a combination of these HMIs can be extremely frustrating is because the person experiencing them does not know if it is because of their gender, race, position, or some combination thereof.

Chapter Summary

Chapter two began with an introduction to the chapter and an overview of Intersectionality which is utilized to guide this study in exploring and understanding the lived experiences of female African American administrators in higher education as well as a discussion of other relevant frameworks (Critical Race Theory and Black Feminist Thought). It then moved on to discuss the status of African American women in

education and the challenges they face in the workplace as well as relevant studies and articles. While, according to Becks-Moody (2004), the literature has explored women's leadership in higher education, little attention has specifically been paid to the experiences of female African American administrators in higher education, the challenges they face, or the coping mechanisms they utilize in their roles. However, it was the goal of this study to contribute to filling gaps in the literature and give voice to those who may feel unheard and to further shed light on the obstacles participants encounter as leaders in higher education while navigating their responsibilities and balancing the duality of their race and gender. Chapter three delves into the methodology utilized to further explore this topic.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

As previously stated in chapter one, the purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of female African American administrators at PWIs. As a result, this study utilized qualitative research methods to explore how these women successfully navigate their careers at PWIs while also navigating the intersectionality of their race and gender.

Research Questions

The central research question guiding this study was: *How do female African American administrators experience PWIs?* This central research question led to the following sub-questions:

d) What challenges do female African American administrators encounter in higher education?

e) What coping mechanisms do female African American administrators employ when facing challenges in the higher education workplace?

f) How do female African American higher education administrators navigate their careers while also navigating the intersection of gender and race at PWIs?

To best answer the research questions posed by this study, qualitative research methods were used to not only examine the lived experiences of female African American higher education administrators but to delve into their thoughts, feelings, and opinions. More specifically, a phenomenological approach was taken as per Creswell and Poth (2018, p. 75) and it allowed the researcher to learn more about "'what' they experienced and 'how' they experienced it" (Moustakas, 1994). The qualitative data

collection methods used included individual interviews and document analysis. In addition to qualitative research methods, this study utilized Intersectionality, a term coined by Kimberle Crenshaw "to describe how race, class, gender, and other individual characteristics 'intersect' with one another and overlap" (Coaston, 2019, para. 2). This framework was applied to this study to further explore how participants navigated their roles in higher education while also navigating the intersectionality of their race and gender. The methodology section also addresses data collection and analysis, my role as a researcher, and limitations of the study.

Epistemological Stance

Creswell (2018) notes that "whether we are aware of it or not, we always bring certain beliefs and philosophical assumptions to our research" (p. 15). Consequently, it is essential for qualitative researchers to explore and identify their own epistemological (the nature of knowledge) and ontological (the nature of reality) viewpoints prior to beginning research. It was not until I began to explore research topics of interest that I also began to reflect on my educational and professional career in higher education. It was then that I realized I had simultaneously occupied the roles of student and higher education employee since the age of eighteen. After reflecting on my experiences as an African American student at predominantly White undergraduate and graduate institutions as well as my experiences as an employee at PWIs I realized I have always been interested in issues related to gender, racial diversity, and equity. This reflection helped me to realize that my experiences informed this study and impacted the way in which I construed the data collected.

I was aware that my experiences as a Black female administrator provided me with a unique positionality in relation to this study. It is this positionality that informed the study and allowed me to relate to the participants in some ways. However, because this positionality had the potential to prompt my bias as a researcher to surface, I felt it was important to engage in reflexivity to convey my background and how it informed my interpretation of the information in the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Exploration of my own research position revealed that I subscribe to critical and interpretive epistemological assumptions. Cohen and Crabtree (2006) explain that "by positing a reality that cannot be separate from our knowledge of it (no separation of subject and object), the interpretivist paradigm posits that researchers' values are inherent in all phases of the research process" (para. 2). Cohen and Crabtree (2006), who also refer to the critical paradigm as the realist paradigm, explain that "by positing a reality that can be separate from our knowledge of it (separation of subject and object), the realist paradigm provides an objective reality against which researchers can compare their claims and the extent to which they ascertain truth" (para. 2).

Research Sites and Participants

Those who met the following criteria were selected as participants for the study: 1) self-identified as an African American/Black woman and 2) currently serving as an administrator at a predominantly White Pennsylvania college or university. While length of service as an administrator factored into criteria, campus location was not considered to be important if the campus was located in Pennsylvania. It was expected that participants would vary in age, educational background, work experience, and position as there were no specific requirements related to these factors as part of the selection

criteria. A concerted effort was made to ensure that participants represented various departments within their institutions as well as various administration positions.

Using purposeful sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018), twenty-one potential participants from twelve Pennsylvania colleges and universities were identified and contacted via email following a search of publicly available contact information found on their institutions' websites. The recruitment e-mail explained the purpose of the study as well as what was being asked of participants (the body of the email is outlined in Appendix A "Request for Participation"). While the original goal of the researcher was to secure eight participants, only six potential participants responded with five agreeing to participate in the study.

Participants of this study were recruited from four of the twelve predominantly White colleges and universities (PWIs) identified in Pennsylvania. These institutions were chosen because they are located in Pennsylvania and because of the accessibility of the desired study population. The participants for this study were female African American higher education professionals who served as administrators in executive or senior-level positions for a minimum of one academic year. These positions included assistant vice chancellor, assistant dean, associate provost, provost, and senior vice chancellor.

Data Collection

After agreeing to participate in the study, each participant was emailed an informed consent document (Appendix B "Informed Consent") to confirm participation in the study and asked to complete a Biographical Profile (Appendix C "Biographical Profile"). Participants were also asked to provide their current curriculum vitae and/or

34

resume. Gathering background information from the biographical profile and vitae/resume prior to interviews not only saved time during interviews but also helped the researcher to gain a better understanding of each participant's background and led to additional questions that later informed data analysis and subsequent findings. Participants then took part in one 60–90-minute recorded semi-structured interview via Zoom which helped the researcher "to understand the world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold the meaning of their experience, to uncover their lived world" (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 3). These interviews delved into the experiences of each participant, explored the challenges they encounter as administrators, and how the intersectionality of their race and gender informs their experiences. Detailed field notes were taken during each interview and were used during data analysis. All interview recordings and field notes were appropriately coded using pseudonyms and securely stored. Copies of the data collected were also stored securely in the event the original data collected was damaged.

Data Analysis

Phenomenological data analysis calls for the researcher to utilize horizonalization (Moustakas, 1994) by reviewing interview transcriptions and identifying significant statements and themes that give insight into how participants experienced the phenomenon being studied. To begin data analysis, each interview recording was transcribed using Rev. I then listened to the interviews while reviewing each transcript to ensure the accuracy of the transcriptions and made corrections as needed. Because I asked the interview questions in the same order for each interview, I reviewed the responses to those questions by participant and analyzed and coded for common

language/phrasing and easily recognizable, common themes. A color was assigned to each emerging theme and a separate document was created for each theme to organize related responses by participant. I also reviewed field notes taken during the interviews for additional context and updated the emerging themes as needed. I repeated this process twice more to make note of any obvious patterns related to the initial emerging themes and analyze for any additional themes. A cross-participant analysis of commonalities using the biographical/institutional data participants provided also aided in the overall analysis of the data and understanding of participant responses. Interpretative phenomenological analysis was utilized as it "involves a double hermeneutic as it integrates not only the participant's sense of their lived experience but also the researchers' attempt in understanding how the participant makes sense of their personal and social world" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 82).

To apply Intersectionality, I not only asked specific questions related to the participants' race and gender but also analyzed the transcripts to determine if and how their race, gender, and even class positions as high-ranking administrators factored into their responses. Intersectionality was also applied to better understand how these demographics impact the participants professionally as Young and Anderson (2021) note that "researchers have exposed the multiple marginalities experienced by women of color on campus" who experience microaggressions "often through many aspects of their identity simultaneously".

Trustworthiness

In qualitative research trustworthiness is essential and is established through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Devault, 2018). To ensure

the trustworthiness and validity of the data and this study, all interviews were conducted in private settings to allow participants to speak candidly and to maintain anonymity. All sources of data, such as interview recordings, were devoid of identifying markers and coded using pseudonyms and/or numbers. Additionally, validation strategies from the researcher's lens and participant's lens (Creswell & Miller, 2000) were utilized. The researcher's lens calls for the researcher to employ triangulation and "make use of multiple and different sources, methods, investigators, and theories to provide corroborating evidence for validating the accuracy" of this study (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 328). This lens also requires the researcher to clarify their bias so that from the start readers understand the positionality of the researcher (Hammersly & Atkinson, 1995; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The participant's lens calls for member checking which Lincoln & Guba (1985, p. 314) consider to be "the most critical technique for establishing credibility. Member checking allows participants to review the analyses of the collected data and provide feedback as to "how well the ongoing data analysis represents their experience" (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 206). Study participants were asked to review their participant profiles for accuracy as well as any details they felt were too identifiable. Updates to their individual profiles were made based on this feedback.

<p style="text-align:center;">**Limitations**</p>

As is the goal of any qualitative study, the goal of this study was "to understand the social reality of individuals…as nearly as possible as its participants feel it or live it" (McLeod, 2017, p. 2). More specifically, as a phenomenological study it sought to describe "the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 75). While the results of this study

are not applicable to other populations the results can be used to give voice to those who feel unheard and to inform future research, practice, and policy. However, the study did present with some limitations. The first such limitation was participant sample size. The goal sample size was originally eight participants. While twenty-one potential participants from twelve Pennsylvania colleges and universities were identified and contacted via email, only six potential participants responded with five agreeing to participate in the study. Though three additional participants most likely would not have yielded vastly different findings, additional participants would have contributed more unique points of view which would have further enriched the study. The researcher did not expect to yield a large number of participants but believes there may have been fewer than expected participants due in part to the positions held by potential participants and their busy schedules as well as recruitment and interviewing taking place during the initial stages of the pandemic.

The second limitation of the study was that all participants were Black women. The results represent the experiences and views of, and challenges faced by Black women but cannot be generalized to all Black women, women of other races/ethnicities, or men working in similar positions in higher education. While the results of this study will not necessarily be applicable to other populations the results can be used to encourage others who feel unheard in the future to share their views and to inform future research, practice, and policy. This second limitation also relates to perceived bias on the part of the researcher as I am a Black woman working in higher education. As the researcher I tried to remain conscious of this and not let my personal views or experiences color the interview or writing process but allow the participants to speak for themselves. The third

limitation was the location of the institutions at which participants worked as participants were specifically recruited from PWIs in Pennsylvania. Although narrow, this particular focus gave the researcher the opportunity to not only contribute to the overall literature on African American women in higher education but specifically African American women in the northeastern region of the country.

Despite these limitations, it was extremely important to conduct this study as it gave these women the opportunity to freely speak for themselves in their own words. Being able to contribute to and shape their own narratives also helped to counter many of the stereotypes discussed in chapter two. Finally, this study and its findings can be utilized to aid in developing policies and practices which can contribute to a more open, aware, and supportive climate in the higher education workplace.

Chapter Summary

Chapter three detailed the research questions that guided this study and focused on the qualitative methods utilized. The chapter went on to specifically discuss the recruitment of participants from PWIs in Pennsylvania, data collection via biographical/institutional profiles and resumes/curriculum vitae and individual interviews, and data analysis. The qualitative methods and the research design used were crucial in gathering rich data and analyzing and understanding the experiences of the participants as Black female leaders in higher education. Finally, trustworthiness and methodological limitations were discussed to describe the validity of the study. In chapter four, individual participant profiles and a discussion of the emerging themes discovered through data analysis are provided.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Chapter four details the demographic information of each participant in the form of participant profiles. Each participant was asked to share their resume or curriculum vitae, complete a biographical profile, and take part in individual interviews conducted via Zoom. The profiles provide a snapshot of participants' personal and professional backgrounds, education, and future professional goals. Chapter four also identifies the themes that emerged over the course of individual interviews and explores these themes in relation to the challenges and experiences of African American women in higher education administration positions.

Participant Summary

Table 1

Participant Snapshot

Participant	Current Position	Age Range	Level of Education	Mother's Education	Father's Education
Katherine	Assistant Vice Chancellor	60-70	Doctorate in Progress	High school	Some college
Elaine	Provost	50-60	Doctorate	High school	High school
Jackie	Assistant Dean	30-40	Doctorate	Professional degree	Professional degree
Naomi	Associate Provost	40-50	Doctorate	Some college	Trade school
Mary	Senior Vice Chancellor	50-60	Professional degree	Master's degree	Master's degree

Individual Participant Profiles

Katherine, Assistant Vice Chancellor

"Build coalitions because there are always going to be things that you need to get done that the norm might not necessarily allow you to. But the more voices you have speaking the message that you want to put out there, the greater the likelihood that you have an opportunity to get that done."

Katherine is married with children and currently serves as Assistant Vice Chancellor at a research university in Pennsylvania. She was born in the northeastern region of the United States to a mother who earned her high school diploma and a father who earned his diploma as well as technical school credits. Katherine went on to earn her Bachelor's and Master's degrees and is currently working to complete her Doctorate. Katherine has served in administration for thirty plus years and has several presentations/lectures, awards/honors, and additional credits to her name. Katherine has also served in multiple roles in the higher education setting including director and assistant dean. Regarding her future professional goals, Katherine was recently promoted but noted that if she sticks to her plan she will retire in a few years. She also expressed that she does not have an interest in becoming president of an institution especially now as the responsibilities of the position have become so complicated (she specifically cited the COVID-19 pandemic, racial unrest, faculty demands for free speech, etc.). Katherine did not feel that was a job she would want on a daily basis at this stage in her life.

Elaine, Provost

"I know sometimes people see 'ambition' as a negative word. I look at it as always competing against myself. I'm not trying to compete against anybody. It's always been the case that I've always said whatever is the highest of anything I'm doing- education, career- I'm going to strive for it. If not me, who else?"

Elaine is a mother and currently serves as Provost at a liberal arts university in Pennsylvania. She was born to a mother and father who both earned high school diplomas. Elaine went on to earn her Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral degrees. She has served in administration for about ten years and has teaching experience dating back to the 1990s. Throughout her career in higher education Elaine has also served in various roles including Dean. Regarding her future professional goals, Elaine has her sights set on a presidency position as that is the next level. She then hopes to retire after holding a presidency position and very much wants to create a non-profit organization for women and young girls, especially those of color, which focuses on women's leadership as well as educating, empowering, and mentoring women. If all goes well, Elaine sees her organization having branches in the United States and abroad.

Jackie, Assistant Dean

"You know, racism is just such a fabric of our country and the way things function and the higher ed institution, unless we completely decolonize the institution, it (Black female leadership) will always be the exception."

Jackie is married with one child and currently serves as Assistant Dean and Assistant Professor at a liberal arts college in Pennsylvania. She was born in the northeastern region of the United States to parents who are professionals in the medical field. Jackie went on to earn her Bachelor's and Doctoral degrees and has served in administration for more than a year. She also holds a faculty position at her current institution and has teaching experience dating back to the early 2000s. Jackie has also served as a program director and is a co-author on multiple publications. Regarding her future professional goals, Jackie expressed that she enjoys meetings and her position on

the President's cabinet as well as learning more about what keeps the institution running. While she is not necessarily interested in positions such as Dean of Faculty, she would like to continue her work and ensuring programs are equitable and reaching students in need. Jackie also noted she is interested in consulting on programs at liberal arts schools and Predominantly White Institutions, however, she also considers how she can help Minority Serving Institutions secure additional funding and access and bridge their programs with other schools.

Naomi, Associate Provost

"I do think that there will be more African American women in leadership roles because I do think that our stock is rising if that metaphor isn't too crude. I do think folks are recognizing some of the extreme talent and innovation and work ethic and skill and also boundaries that Black women create."

Naomi is married and currently serves as Associate Provost at a liberal arts college in the eastern region of the United States. She was born in the southern region of the United States to a mother with some college experience and a father with trade school experience. Naomi went on to earn her Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral degrees and views herself as a scholar as she is very invested in the classroom. Naomi has served in administration for about a year, holds a faculty position at her current institution, and has teaching experience dating back to the early 2000s. Naomi has served in various roles including as a facilitator, diversity advocate, and mentor in the higher education setting. Regarding her future professional goals, Naomi shared that she considers the timing of a career move (when is the right time to move on?) and that wanting to be in a specific region also plays a role in her future professional plans. She wants to find a position that

43

makes sense relative to where she is in her life and career and has recently begun to consider applying to positions that allow her to combine her academic and administrative skills and interests. While she is not interested in fully administrative positions, Naomi realizes she has positioned herself for more opportunities for which she can apply.

Mary, Senior Vice Chancellor

"My parents were educators so you're going to school, and it was never a question of 'are you going to college?' It was a question of 'where are you going to college?'"

Mary currently serves as Senior Vice Chancellor at a research university in Pennsylvania. An only child, she was born in the southern region of the United States to a mother and father who both earned their Master's degrees. Mary went on to earn her Bachelor's and Professional degrees and has served in higher education administration for 5 years. Mary has also served in various roles related to her professional degree throughout her twenty-five plus year career. Regarding her future professional goals, Mary is quite happy with her current position, will stay in the position for as long as possible, and does not have any specific future plans. She stated that she is not the kind of person who thinks about what she will do next. Rather, she continues in her position until she feels she is ready to move on and then considers her next move. Mary enjoys a good relationship with leadership and the Chancellor and noted she does not think about moving on to a new job where she does not know the leader as she does not know what the experience would be like. Mary has learned over time that when you get to a certain point in your career, what the team looks like matters more than the what the job is.

Emerging Themes

This section of chapter four focuses on the emerging themes discovered during data analysis and how they relate to or answer the research questions guiding this study. The central research question guiding this study was: *How do female African American administrators experience PWIs?* The following sub-questions were derived from the central research question:

    a) What challenges do female African American administrators encounter in higher education?

    b) What coping mechanisms do female African American administrators employ when facing challenges in the higher education workplace?

    c) How do female African American higher education administrators navigate their careers while also navigating the intersection of gender and race at PWIs?

To answer these questions, participants were interviewed using open-ended questions which allowed them to express their thoughts and feelings and to share their experiences and perspectives in their own words. While each participant has had a unique journey to their current position in higher education, the similarities in their responses, perspectives, professional experiences, and phrasing used led the researcher to identify and explore the following themes: (1) professional challenges, (2) coping mechanisms, (3) mentorship, (4) navigating higher education as a Black woman, and (5) respect or lack thereof from colleagues and subordinates. While not a specific theme discovered during the interview process, the researcher thought it appropriate to include participants' views

on the future of Black women in higher education as well as advice for this specific

population.

Theme 1: Professional Challenges

While most everyone faces challenges in their professional lives, African

American women as discussed in chapter two encounter additional challenges such as

stereotypes that are unique to their personhood (race and/or gender). In a 2018 journal

article Rosette et al., noted that "by far, the most prevalent stereotype attributed to Black

women is dominance, which is distinct from the typical communal qualities ascribed to

the superordinate category of women" (p. 5). Rosette et al., also explained:

> Despite the communal nature of the general female stereotype, stereotypes of
> Black women as overbearing, and domineering have persisted for decades in the
> United States (Pratt, 2012). Popular portrayals of the "angry Black woman"
> (Childs, 2005) or "strong Black woman" (Collins, 2005, Radford-Hill, 2002)
> define broad cultural stereotypes. Perceptions of Black women as angry, hostile,
> and rude have persisted due largely in part to the Sapphire subtype, named
> because of a character on network television in the 1950s (Townsend, Neilands,
> Thomas, & Jackson, 2010). The Sapphire subtype of an "angry Black woman"
> characterizes this intersection of gender and race as threatening, confrontational,
> domineering, and angry (Walley-Jean, 2009, West, 2008, White, 1999) (p. 5).

Elaine discussed effectively doing her job while also facing stereotypes and

implicit biases:

> It's just that whole perception that sometimes people have you coming in again as
> a triple minority. They come in with their own ideas of who you are or what you
> are about. So, it's all about knocking down all those stereotypes they have. But
> there are things you just can't fight, the biases that they have, you know? We
> always talk about implicit biases and people wanting to work with people who
> look like them or treat people who look like them better or whatever it is. Those
> exist. But it's just trying to do your own job and not alienate anybody. I'm
> inclusive in everything I do. I'm friendly. I don't go out of my way to antagonize
> people. I try to work collaboratively with everybody. But I also understand that
> those things are there and all I can do is do my job. And then when you let the
> results speak for themselves and those who are reasonable then look at it and say,
> 'Oh wow'. But there's still others that you can never convince of anything.

Katherine shared that she similarly experiences professional challenges related to her race/gender:

> Just being a Black woman in the academy…there's always going to be somebody who thinks that you don't know what you're talking about, and we move through every space with a healthy dose of imposter syndrome. It doesn't matter how much we know. We think that there's something we're missing, somebody is going to challenge…When I was a program director…and they had not found me a boss I said, I'm going to ask for this position. I said it to my supervisor at the time and they said, 'I can't see them picking you for that position because after all, nobody's going to listen to you, you're short, Black, and a woman'…You know, there will always be challenges. As long as we have a White supremacist and male dominated workspace, particularly in the sciences, in the academy, it'll be that way until we are more of the norm than not.

While not related to herself specifically, Mary noted that her challenges do involve diversity at her institution:

> I would say my challenges are increasing the diversity of my staff in a city that is not particularly diverse, which means the pool of people who are close to you or not is not as robust as you'd want it to be. And two, I think that means it's harder to recruit to this city because when people come, they don't see people who look like them and they can't imagine themselves living here. So, the push to make this a more diverse place becomes hard because the numbers aren't here and because the numbers aren't here, it's hard to make it diverse. I see that acutely on my staff, but I see it in the university writ large.

Rabinowitz (2018) explains that "being a leader is in itself a challenge" (para. 2) and that "leadership poses a host of challenges" of which there are three types: "external, coming from people and situations; internal, stemming from within the leader himself; and those arising from the nature of the leadership role" (para. 52). In addition to challenges related to their personhood, participants also spoke of more general challenges related to their positions. During our interview Naomi noted that because she is a faculty member who stepped into an administration position, she expected a bit of a learning curve, however, handling personnel issues has taken some getting used to:

47

And then I think some challenges specifically related to the position have to do with - I think my own growing edge is not wanting to upset people when I'm having to tell them like 'no, you done messed up' or like 'no, no, no, you really have gone awry'. Like this thing is - 'we've got to start over'. 'Here's a huge mistake you made'. So, I think I struggle with the capacity to do that without putting a whole bunch of flowers on it, or you know, sprinkling it with sugar and whatever. And sometimes, and I find myself in a situation now, sometimes it really does take some very direct, 'no, this is wrong. You have messed up. Here's how you need to move forward. I'm so sorry this is uncomfortable, but let's get it together'. I think that that's a challenge for me in terms of like management. Now it is not a challenge for me when I'm talking about doing the DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) work. Like when I'm saying like, 'okay, you know, this is where the university is messed up. Here's where your department has not done great, but here are the wonderful things you can do'- that I don't even blink at because I think I'm on the side of righteousness, on the side of justice. But when it comes to personnel sorts of things, I think I don't want to hurt so and so's feelings or this is so awkward. So, I think those are some challenges that maybe a stronger person in this role or a person who's maybe more suited to this position probably wouldn't struggle with.

Jackie shared that while she enjoys her position, one of the most challenging aspects is that she is busier than ever which impacts the time she has for her students. However, she continues to be available for her students because she not only cares about them but recognizes they are her reason for being there:

I love them. I love my kids. You know, it's the best part and I think if I lose that connection with them, then I lose why I'm sitting at the table anyway. So, whereas people will be like, 'Oh, eventually you got to give up teaching and just move, you know, go all the way in', I'm like I cannot because then the things I'm saying are not as valuable. I'm getting to spend time and know why my student doesn't want to go home for spring break. I know that this student is smoking weed to study for his tests but still acing them because he probably has ADHD undiagnosed. There are things that I would lose perspective on if I stepped away from the classroom.

Though sometimes difficult, each of the women interviewed meets the challenges they face head-on, and they continue to do their jobs effectively while staying true to themselves and their goals.

Theme 2: Coping Mechanisms/Support

As a natural progression in our interviews, participants and I discussed the coping

mechanisms they utilize when facing challenges in their work lives. Consistent with

previous literature, most mentioned were support systems comprised of friends, family,

colleagues, and even pets. Participants also mentioned hobbies and other things they do

in their personal time to relax. In the journal article *Critical Race Theory and the*

Cultivation, Mentorship and Retention of Black Women Faculty, León & Thomas (2016)

recommend that:

> Faculty of color need support in institutions where they are in the spotlight
> because they are so few, but also need help in dealing with being in the spotlight.
> Since academia is a culture of its own, newly hired minority faculty need a
> mentor to guide and educate them in relation to this culture so that they will be
> successful (p. 15).

They also note that:

> Faculty of color also have to develop a support network outside of the university.
> Often, faculty of color who are used to social interaction among peers of color in
> graduate programs find themselves alone as university faculty members and suffer
> from isolation. Universities who seek to retain faculty of color must be aware of
> and assist in the building of support networks (p. 15).

While these recommendations were made with faculty of color in mind, they can

also be applied to administrators of color as they too require support as one of the few or

the only at their level at PWIs.

Naomi shared that she goes for walks and tries to do things that keep her

grounded and give her personal time. She also said her partner is a great support system

as she shares with them things she is experiencing, and they also enjoy cooking and

traveling together. She also feels having pets is a help because "having dependent

creatures creates another orientation in a way of being in the world. So, they become a

way that I shift, and I recognize actually there's something more important or here's what it means to care for someone or do something else." Naomi also makes sure to connect with family and friends and finds it helpful that whether they are in or outside the world of higher education, they can talk about other things. Mary similarly noted that her partner and her mom are her support systems and taking walks, cooking, and crocheting are ways she takes time for herself.

Jackie expressed that her work friends are a great source of support and that there is a listserv for Black faculty and staff of color. There is also an informal group of Black female colleagues who get together to vent and support each other. She has a great network of allies and notes that she has become great friends with one ally who happens to be White. She feels this ally "does the work so it's also easy for me to vent to them about what's going on." Jackie will sometimes ask them to help edit an email "so it doesn't sound as angry as a rewrite now." She shares they are great for this and other things because of their ability to be an ally even if they do not know the Black woman's experience and they take Jackie at her word that if she says something was a microaggression, it was a microaggression.

Personally, Elaine has always relied on her mom for support and now that her children are grown it is amazing that there are also things she can share with them now. She noted that this applies especially to her eldest child who is "just smart about life" and will sometimes say something that causes Elaine to realize she had not thought about it in that way. Elaine values the input and another perspective. In terms of colleague support, Elaine similarly felt it was helpful to have other people of color in your department and talked about a group for employees of color that gets together to vent. She noted this is

50

helpful because they then realize they are not alone, and they become each other's

protectors. This in turn helps to build a network where colleagues have each other's

backs and let each other know what is going on. Elaine stresses "it's not about being a

mole but it's just telling you, 'okay, here is what people are saying'. You need that

because other people say nothing to you, and you walk into a situation blind, and you

have no clue what's going on and that's a recipe for disaster." Finally, Elaine expressed

that while it is helpful to connect with colleagues of color, she also connects with

colleagues who are not people of color:

> It has been helpful having colleagues that are also people of color that - and when
> I say this, it does not mean that I only rely on people of color. I am the kind of
> person that I work well with everybody. My best friend at a previous institution
> was a White colleague and they still today write letters for me, and it has been
> wonderful having them in my corner. So, it is just having people that I can relate
> to, and we can be friends and share things.

When discussing colleagues as a source of support, a few of the participants also

highlighted the importance of assistants and office administrators who help manage their

calendars, etc. This in turn helps the participants to successfully balance their many

responsibilities and busy schedules. Mary shared:

> I have an assistant who maintains a pretty good schedule for me. I try to make
> sure that I get through my email every day and I prioritize what I think is
> important and try to make sure that my assistant knows what is important so that
> we can make sure I am getting to those things.

Elaine similarly stated:

> They are really helpful in coordinating my meetings and making sure that they
> make sense for me. I have also told them to give me at least an hour a day where I
> can respond to a few messages or just kind of breathe. So, they are trying to build
> in times for me now. It is very helpful.

Mary also noted that she has strong deputies in place, and she makes sure her

team is doing what they need to do and that they are focusing on the right things which

helps her because as she put it, "I'm not trying to do it all myself". She also tries to place

boundaries on her day which is difficult when working from home due to the pandemic.

Naomi noted that meetings were already a large part of her day but coping with that is

different because at least when she had meetings on campus "you just have reasons to get

up and go" but "during COVID, we're literally clicking from one Zoom meeting to the

next. And so, you could find yourself sitting down all day."

Theme 3: Mentorship

In addition to the support previously discussed I asked participants if they have

received mentorship throughout their careers and if they serve as mentors. For many of

the participants, formal mentorship took place during their undergraduate and graduate

school years. Some of this formal mentorship continued after the participants completed

their degrees but as they have progressed through their careers, work-related

"mentorship" has come from co-workers one might view as allies. In her 2014 article *The*

Role of Mentoring in the Success of Women Leaders of Color in Higher Education, Tran

explains that the results of her study:

> Support previous research findings and suggest that not only does mentoring play
> a vital role in the success of women of color in leadership roles, but also serves as
> a catalyst for creating institutional change. While scholars continue to investigate
> the various strategies leading to effective mentoring relationships, it is clear that
> mentoring is a key ingredient to the success of faculty of color in academe (Girves
> et al., 2005; Holmes et al., 2007; Johnston & McCormack, 1997; Sorcinelli &
> Yun, 2007; Stanley & Lincoln, 2005) (p. 312).

Of her experience with mentorship Naomi shared:

> I've definitely had people who, and in particular Black women, look out for me
> and help me think through my decision-making, but also encourage me and
> celebrate the sort of work I do, celebrate the way that I show up in the world.
> That's been an important part of my experience in general but in particular, as a
> person coming into this role, they were like, "girl, good luck", "here's what you
> need to do", "I've been doing this for a while, here's what's important about that".

So, I'm appreciative… my other colleagues who became mentors, the way it happened was they would see my work or hear about some things that I was doing and be like, "let's have a conversation, let's talk". And so, we would develop a connection that way and they would write for me if I needed a recommendation; they would support me.

Naomi also shared how mentorship has been beneficial for her:

I think mentorship has helped in the sense that it provided some clarity around a variety of things that are possible. And even though folks can't solve my problems, I think knowing that it matters to someone else is significant…I think knowing that there are different ways that people respond to things and here's how one person does their scholarship has given me an idea of the ways forward not only in my career but in my life that feel good.

Mary related a similar experience with mentorship:

I have had a number of people who I have encountered along the way who have been excellent if not mentors, allies for me and that's been really important I think in higher education. My counterpart…has been awesome in helping me kind of learn the ropes, not just about Ed but also being a good sounding board as another Higher Ed institution in town…so there's definitely been a lot of people who've been very supportive and very helpful in helping me think through things and being there to help me transition [into higher education].

Throughout the interview process it became obvious that the participants understood the importance and value of not only mentorship but representation. Whether they serve as formal or informal mentors, they all understand that just seeing someone who looks like them doing the jobs they are doing, and doing them well, matters. People, especially students and colleagues of color - women of color - are watching them. Elaine explained:

That's why today I always know that someone else is watching me. There are younger people watching me looking at what I'm doing and the decisions I'm making and that without knowing it, I might also be impacting them. So, I try to make the right decisions… Because I didn't have that I always feel like I need to do more, a little more… I try to be a mentor and a formal mentor, help them understand their strengths. Sometimes people don't even know their strengths. I say 'look, you need to leverage this more'. 'You need to do more in this area'. 'You need to kind of consider this or this is not going to be fruitful'. Just having that conversation or 'have you considered this?', telling them some of the

53

conferences to go to, how to put themselves in position strategically that will help them, how to make themselves more visible so that they can do what they want to do if leadership is what they need. And then personally, just trying to be a good role model. When I see students I stop, say hi, ask them how they're doing.

Elaine also shared a specific instance that helped her to realize that something as simple as her presence on campus matters. While at work, a Black female student shared that Elaine's presence on campus meant so much to them. They shared that they looked up to Elaine and the fact that she was there made them feel as if they could do well and be like her. The student noted there were many other students who felt the same way. Elaine was taken aback as she did not know the student and had never spoken to them. For Elaine, this interaction was something that helped her to understand representation matters and that continued to motivate her to put people in place who will also serve as mentors.

Theme 4: Navigating Higher Education as Black Women

Chance (2021) explains that as a people, African Americans face significant personal and professional adversity, however, rising above this adversity is commonplace. She further notes "Black women; however, are doubly affected when adversity and challenges are rooted in race and gender differences. Identity markers such as being a 'woman' and being 'Black' do not exist independently of each other, thus creating a complex intersection of potential adverse experiences" (p. 45). To further explore how the participants of this study navigate and experience higher education as Black women I asked how they try to present themselves to or interact with colleagues and how they feel they have been received/perceived particularly in relation to their race and gender.

Naomi explained that because she has observed that "Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion" (DEI) work and administrative work can be thankless work, she does her work through the lens of joy and peaceful, positive contribution. As an example, Naomi shared that on the day of our interview she had taken part in a meeting during which a colleague made mention of how he was running his courses. Naomi realized this was not in line with what was originally discussed and reiterated some of the best practices previously agreed upon. A female colleague soon messaged Naomi to praise her patience. Naomi explained that while she was actually losing patience during the meeting, she was not willing to perform that impatience because she knew if she demonstrated her frustration, she would not be contributing anything helpful to the space. Naomi also noted she had met some resistance but not in the sense one might expect. She explained there has been resistance to conceptual frameworks, policies, and ideas but not necessarily her personhood. Naomi has been received quite well and feels this is due at least in part to being both a faculty member (first) and (then) an administrator. Serving in both capacities has created a sort of privilege that she tries to leverage in her work. Naomi does recognize, however, that her identity (her womanhood, particularly her Black womanhood) has an impact but feels it is not the negative impact one might anticipate.

Katherine related her presentation of self to her appearance:

I think that's part of the way that I was raised, you don't show up looking tacky, you don't show up looking crazy. So, I've always been conscious of that and knowing that people are looking to see what you're wearing and how you show up. I've always been very conscious of that. The one change I did make, probably a good 10 years ago I decided to stop fighting the battle with my hair to make it look like everybody else's. So, I started with braids, I did twists. Then when I was done with that, I said 'cut it off, I can't do it anymore. I'm not fighting that battle anymore'…One day…at a senior staff meeting my boss looked at me and said, 'you've changed your hair'. I was like, yep, I did. I don't see that on the agenda, but okay. He's the one to bring it up and point out the obvious. Yes, my hair's

different today. That was a decision that I had to make for my own self-preservation. I can't run back into my office and flat iron my roots; I'm not playing with that anymore and I'm not going out looking crazy, so you get me the way that I choose to present myself, in a way that makes me and keeps me comfortable.

Like Naomi, Katherine felt she had not met much resistance in her position. She attributed this largely to the current and past chancellors who worked to diversify the board of trustees and who she described as being very fair, committed to taking feedback, and open to varying perspectives. Jackie shared that she presents as genuine and approachable but also commands respect and considers this balance to be a fine art. Yes, she holds a doctorate and is a faculty member as well as an administrator, but she is "still cool…not snotty or super bougie". Jackie also felt her colleagues were receptive of her though some (older women interestingly enough) have questioned what her role is, why she is in the dean's office, etc. She doubts, however, that they pose these same questions to her White male colleagues. Mary noted that there are different groups of people she works with so how she interacts with colleagues and presents herself can vary:

> So, I kind of see it as three different groups. There's my team for whom I try to be around, but in a leadership capacity. There's the bigger leadership team of the chancellors for which I'm a part and try to be supportive of everyone. And then there's just this kind of community outreach, community interface with the university community about how I want to make sure people understand how we're going to work, what role we're going to play. And to the extent that we're not playing that role, making sure that people feel like they can come to me and say, 'you know, I feel like you're not giving me enough options'.

Mary did not feel she had met any more resistance than she normally does in her life. She felt she had met more resistance as someone coming from outside the field of higher education than as an African American woman. Mary also felt that because people knew where she came from and that she knew some of those in leadership prior to her appointment, she got more credit which was helpful coming into her role.

Elaine expressed that she is friendly and inclusive in everything she does. She noted that she does not go out of her way to antagonize anyone and that she tries to work collaboratively with everyone. Elaine works to abide by policies that are in place and to avoid favoritism so her decision-making or motives cannot be called into question. She also explained that she feels her competence and people recognizing that competence has saved her but otherwise it can be a tough crowd especially because she is a Black woman. She noted that some people can be dismissive and have an attitude of 'who are you and what can you know?' so there is always pressure to prove yourself and not make mistakes because mistakes will count against you more than they would against others. She feels it is hard to come back from mistakes because mistakes seem to prove that tough crowd right. Elaine said as a minority you must always do better and sometimes feel you need to do more (even if that means ignoring things in your own life) so as not to feed into the perception that you are not on top of things or are lazy as that is a stereotype against people of color. Finally, Elaine shared that anyone who is part of a minority group and in a leadership position who says they do not have to do more or that it is not tough has a "rosy" outlook.

Two sub-themes related to the theme of Navigating Higher Education as Black Women also emerged. These sub-themes were (1) tokenism and (2) balancing act.

Tokenism/The "Only". Tokenism or being the "only" was most discussed in the context of speaking on issues related to Black/Brown communities as a sort of representative for that entire community. The participants felt that as one of the only people of color in the room they often had to be the lone advocate to explain to others

why certain policies were not equitable or why things were problematic for a specific

group of people. Elaine noted that while this often feels repetitive it is necessary:

> You think about it and say, well, you can keep quiet, or you can change it. And
> then for me, I always try to change it. I'm not going to sit there and always feel
> frustrated and know that something is wrong and just keep feeling frustrated. I
> work to change it. But in working to change it, that's where you then feel like, 'Oh
> my gosh, should I always be the one doing this?' And then that burden makes you
> feel like, 'Oh goodness, this is all too much'. But the good news is that once you
> then change things to the point where you feel this is better, this is how we ought
> to be, then maybe you can feel better. That's why I feel like I shouldn't run away
> from that responsibility. I have to try to fix it if I don't think it's right.

Mary expressed similar views and explained that while she feels it is the

responsibility of people in positions such as hers, after having this information

communicated to them repeatedly, others at the table should begin to recognize these

issues on their own:

> But there are often not a lot of people who look like you in those places. And so,
> you have to get comfortable being the only- and a lot of us have been the only-
> but I think you have to understand that for some period of time you may be the
> only, and that means you have a lot of work, right? You have to be the person
> who's prepared to speak up and say, 'well, that's not going to be great for the
> people of color in our community'.,, And I think that is a responsibility that you
> have when you go into those positions that you can't not carry, that you have to be
> that person. You have to bring other people up with you, but you also have to be
> the person who is wanting to try to make it better for everybody else in that
> community, even when it's uncomfortable. And you'd have to figure out how to
> do that in your own authentic way…and I'll be like, look, I am tired of being a
> person who has to answer, who has to raise the 'Oh, by the way, people of color
> will be uncomfortable'. You heard me say this enough. Y'all should be saying this
> now too.

Katherine also noted that "when you think of this country, Black women have

been cleaning up this country forever. You know, since the first of us struggled off a

ship." And so, it seems there is a feeling that somewhere along the way African

American women have assumed the role of the fixer or the responsibility of advocating,

supporting, and taking care of others.

Balancing Act/Expectations. During interviews it became apparent that balancing acts or the balancing of expectations shows up in several ways in the lives of the participants. Jackie and Elaine specifically discussed balancing motherhood with their careers and being intentional when balancing the two. Elaine explained that she loved the idea of higher education and the flexibility of having summers off. This allowed her to be the parent she wanted to be. Jackie discussed balancing multiple roles: homemaker, mom, wife, teacher/faculty and administrator and the difficulty of juggling all these roles at once. She realizes it is nearly impossible and a colleague recently pointed out that times are different now and the level of work has changed so it is ok to let go of the idea of some of these roles or how they should look. Jackie does her best to intentionally set time aside to have mornings and outings with her child and to fit in morning runs. She also specifically sets time aside in her schedule to complete grading in addition to teaching and tending to her duties as Assistant Dean. Jackie noted that it is also extremely helpful that her husband has a more flexible work schedule and is incredibly supportive of her and her career. She pointed out that as you pursue these types of positions it is important that your mate is flexible and secure with your achievements.

Some of the participants who are both faculty and administrators have the challenge of balancing those roles/identities when working with colleagues. They balance all the responsibilities of educating as well as their administrative responsibilities and sometimes find that they must do this simultaneously. Overall, the participants find that this allows them to understand the perspectives of both faculty and administrators and can help to garner trust and support from both groups. They also make it a point to be as

fair as possible in their decision-making and to hold everyone to the same standards in terms of policies, decision-making, etc.

Theme 5: Respect or Lack Thereof from Colleagues & Subordinates

Respect from colleagues and subordinates or lack thereof is another theme that emerged during data analysis. While the participants felt they were largely respected by colleagues and subordinates alike, some participants experienced instances of disrespect, doubt, or questioning. Much like Becks-Moody (2014), the literature reviewed for this study alluded to lack of respect but did not specifically discuss the topic; the literature focused on racial microaggressions.

As previously mentioned, Katherine felt she had largely been received very well at her institution, however, she did relate a specific instance with a subordinate employee:

> Somebody who I've supervised wants to be a greater voice than the position that the person is in actually allows. So, when our new boss came, this person decided that they were going to email our new boss and welcome them and ask them if they could come along with me to my meetings with my boss and couldn't understand why I was upset and [I] had to say, 'you just invited yourself along on my one on ones with my supervisor, number one. I'm trying to establish myself as a leader with this new supervisor, number two and number three, go ask another Black woman how she would feel about the fact that you did that.' So, what was more important to you at that time was that you got some gloss and some glory as opposed to supporting me in stabilizing our collective place as thought leaders in the institution. So that person is now moving on and while I will interpersonally be sorry to see them move on, I'm in the position that I am in. I'm glad that I don't have to keep a side eye on them while I'm trying to do other things, especially in this time period…And they're Black as well, so to have to take that from a Black person in the middle of all of this, it's like, I don't need that from you right now…Thankfully my boss said, 'well, you know, thank you for writing. I'll leave that to Katherine as to whether that should happen'. It's just the fact that they did it and it wasn't the first time they did something like that.

Naomi shared that a female colleague questioned if she was making smart career moves as a scholar:

One colleague, interestingly enough said to me that me making this choice at this point in my career - this White woman said that…it wasn't a smart move for me to make as a scholar at this point in my career to do diversity, equity and inclusion right now. And I think it has to do with a narrative that's generated about DEI work broadly, but about whether or not DEI work is itself academically focused or excellent in a certain way. But I remember being like, 'do you hear yourself?' and also taking a step back to be like, 'wait, am I still a scholar?' I'm still obviously a scholar but that sort of message was really interesting to hear from another woman.

Elaine expressed that the disrespect she has encountered has been in the form of being disregarded, excluded from working groups she should be part of considering the position she holds, having ideas appropriated without credit, etc.

Regarding the appropriation of ideas:

It's like you always have to tread carefully and sometimes people think that they can throw you under the bus and it won't matter. Because who would believe that you are the one who has the right idea or that there are people stealing your ideas? This is the big one for me. I come up with great ideas and come up with good things, but they will take them. Advance them and you're looking at them thinking 'you are the ones in this meeting who opposed this. Now you're acting like this was your idea from the get-go'.

Regarding being excluded from meetings:

Always fighting to be at the table. There are committees of the board where, as the Provost I felt I had to be there. I should be there. I didn't need an invitation, but I have to fight to say, 'why is the Provost not on this committee?' So, some of those things and people making decisions that the boys' network that I'm talking to you about behind the scenes and making important decisions behind the scenes and then informing you instead of including you as part of that decision-making from the get-go. You look at all of that and you understand that it's not because you're not somebody worthy. You ought to be. I mean, the Provost is the second in command at any institution and the handbook says that in the absence of the President, the Provost acts as the Chief Executive Officer, right? So why wouldn't the Provost be there if all the other people are there? I mean, that's the natural person who should be there. And you ask yourself, 'why is this happening?' and all of that and wonder why you have to always make the case before it happens…But I am not shy about making the case for why I ought to be there and asking, 'why wasn't I at this meeting that you all had?'…because if you don't say anything, if you don't do anything, people feel comfortable excluding you. Some of it is gender-based, not race-based, but some of it is a gender thing, the guys thinking that they don't need you here in this discussion.

61

In terms of being disregarded, Elaine shared that this involves women of color being invisible or not having their voices heard or well-regarded. She also noted what I interpreted as this sense that when people or women of color are "included" they should be grateful for what little inclusion or access they are granted:

> For many women of color who are in administration, being invisible or not having their voices not only not heard, but not even well-regarded. Like people just kind of say, 'okay, yeah you said this, whatever'. I don't think it's specific to me, but those that I've spoken to, I know that we all experienced the same thing. Always fighting to be at the table, always fighting to let people know that we are here. That we're not just some decorative thing in the room. And that we have voices and that our voices matter. But too often they think they're doing us a favor. 'Well, you're already part of this'. 'You're part of this group so what else do you want?' And they can go out in the public and make the case that, 'Oh yes, our board is diverse, our cabinet is diverse'. But diversity doesn't end at the numbers. It's not just about having that person. It's about how do you value the person and is the person allowed to speak and does the person's voice matter in the decision-making? That's when you know that you're being truly inclusive, not just trying to make up the numbers. And so that's what I believe that a lot of women and people of color in higher ed might tell you if you ask them and they tell you their story. Sometimes it's about, 'yeah, we've brought you up here, you're part of it now', so, hey, what are you talking about?' 'Our job is done'.

Finally, Jackie shared that while she is in a unique and supportive environment, she has encountered some negativity. In fact, those who were most vocal in a negative sense about why she was in her position were colleagues of color. She also has White colleagues who have the attitude of, 'why do you think they got you to the Dean's office?' When asked if she felt what she experienced was specific to her or if it could be generalizable to African American women in higher education, Jackie felt some of it was general as she is a younger administrator but also that some of it had to do with her being a younger Black woman:

> I think some of it has to do with me being a younger Black woman trying to tell an older White woman what needs to be done. So, there's that dynamic. But I think that a lot of - especially depending on where they're from and what their background is - I think that a lot of White women or White people are going to be

trying to tell me what to do or what needs to be done. But that's a *them* [as in that person] issue and I think it's important for administrators to understand that that dynamic is possible.

Jackie explained that in order to combat these attitudes it is important for those in top positions to recognize and understand microaggressions:

> Because I said explicitly to (redacted), when others use words like I'm 'pushy', that's just language for, I'm 'an angry Black woman', so I need you there. And understanding that someone saying, 'oh, she's a little pushy' is saying she is aggressive. You know, I thought I was doing my job, so you know, that's a *him* or *her* issue. But I think as long as administrators at the top are doing their work on understanding microaggressions and all of that stuff, then it makes it easy for me not to have to put up a huge fight because when somebody goes to complain, that boss reads it for what it is…but I know that other people aren't that lucky to have administrators at the top who are doing that work. So, there's a level of awareness that I think has to come from the absolute top and the VP level to protect administrators who are women of color that are doing their job but are being seen as a problem.

Though participants generally spoke positively about their careers in higher education, they also shared negative or difficult experiences some of which they described as being directly related to their race and/or gender. With these experiences and more in mind, the participants shared their views on the future of Black women in higher education as well as their advice for Black women in higher education in general.

Honorable Mentions: Future of & Advice for Black Women in Higher Education

While not a specific focus of this study, I found the participants' views on the future of Black women in higher education as well as their advice for these women interesting. The participants were generally hopeful and felt progress would continue to be made. However, Elaine specifically mentioned that she has seen frustration cause people to leave their positions and hopes this does not become commonplace:

I just hope more of us don't get frustrated because I see others also getting frustrated and leaving and saying, 'I don't need to deal with this'. And I'm just hoping that more of us are not so frustrated that we think it's not worth it. I've heard stories of people who get in some place, become a leader or become the VP of this or that, and before you know it, they've resigned or something happens and they are frustrated…You know, hearing the stories, people get there and feel that nobody has their back because it's a tough job. And if there aren't people who have your back or other members of your cabinet don't have your back, you can be sabotaged just quickly. And you can be so frustrated that you say, 'this is not worth it' and you resign…But I'm hopeful because I see all the women coming behind us and I think they will be good for this, and we just have to do a good job and they need to see us do a good job. And so hopefully in the next 10 years we'll have a whole lot more and it becomes even more of the norm than we're experiencing right now.

On a related note, when asked if they believed Black female administrators could become the norm rather than the exception, two participants offered interesting perspectives. They both felt that this might not be possible as the higher education institution was not built with this in mind. Jackie shared:

You know, racism is just such a fabric of our country and the way things function and the higher ed institution, unless we completely decolonize the institution, it will always be the exception. It's White…And I don't think it'll ever be the norm for administrators, students, faculty, until the institution is decolonized completely. Ideally, yes, it would be the norm, but realistically it is a White-built foundation institution and so it's not going to ever be normal for that to be color on top or you know, equitable on top until it's not a White built structured institution.

Naomi expressed similar sentiments:

No, I don't think that that's possible. I think higher ed is a context of sort of White masculinity and the role of the institution is to reproduce that thing over and over again. I think when and if Black women became a norm, it would be of something else, some other amazing and radical institution or educational thing. But in as much as institutions of higher education are what they are, no, I don't think that that will be a norm…and I'm not saying that to say I don't think Black women could do it. I'm saying that to say, no, I don't think that's how it works. I don't think that that's what the institution is.

In Lewis-Strickland's 2021 article *Advice from a Seat at the Table: Exploring the*

Leadership Resilience Development of Black Women University Deans, Lewis-Strickland

explains that even though mentoring can be extremely helpful, it "is not the only tool

aspiring Black women can utilize to ascend to leadership" (p. 39). She found that her

study participants "believed that leadership resilience requires inner resources to

overcome challenging situations or experiences" (p. 39) and advised that women in

higher education should engage in "introspection, speaking up, striving for personal

growth, and utilizing feedback" (p. 39) to help build foundational leadership resilience.

Similarly, the participants of this study shared advice that reached beyond engaging in

mentorship. The recommendation that was made most often was to build a coalition or

support network. Participants felt it was extremely important to build coalitions not only

as a coping mechanism when facing challenges, but also as a form of backup. Katherine

explained:

> Build coalitions because there are always going to be things that you need to get
> done that the norm might not necessarily allow you to. The more voices you have
> speaking the message that you want to put out there, the greater the likelihood that
> you have an opportunity to get that done. So, coalition build broadly regardless of
> race, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, whatever. Coalition build, friend
> build, friend make, so that you have people out there pushing your message, but
> also singing your praises so that people know that you have backup. So, if they
> decided they're going to do something shady, there's a whole bunch of people who
> are going to know. So, it's by way of effectiveness, but then also some of
> protection.

Participants noted one should always be well-prepared and be careful as there is

always someone watching. You should also be strategic - choose your battles wisely and

pay attention to your yeses and no's. That is to say, consider why you do or do not want

to do something and work from a place of joy and authenticity. Lastly, Mary cautioned

that you be careful what you ask for as these jobs are rewarding but also challenging. Some of these challenges are subject matter challenges but, as previously discussed, you may sometimes be the "only" in your organization or department and as a result become the de facto spokesperson for an entire group of people which can be a taxing and overwhelming responsibility.

Summary

During the individual interviews, each participant discussed how the importance of education was imparted to them by family and led them on the path to their current positions. They also detailed their "typical" workday, their greatest challenges including work-life balance and working effectively while facing stereotypes and implicit biases and coping mechanisms which included creating balance in their work lives, support from friends and family, and making time for themselves and things they enjoy (cooking, exercise, etc.). Finally, we discussed how they navigate their careers in higher education as Black women, specifically how they present themselves to/interact with colleagues and how they feel they have been received/perceived by colleagues which led to an interesting discussion around doubt, questioning, and respect or lack thereof from colleagues and subordinates. The participants also shared their advice/recommendations for Black women currently working in higher education and those who aspire to do so (build coalitions!) and their opinions on the future of Black women in higher education. While each of the participants has had different experiences and has different viewpoints on working in higher education, there were similarities in their responses and experiences which helped this researcher to understand the value of and need for continued research

involving this specific population to not only allow them to express themselves in their own words but to tap into their unique and insightful knowledge.

Chapter five includes a summary and discussion of the findings in chapter four, limitations of the study, and implications/recommendations for future research and practice.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of high-ranking female African American administrators at PWIs. As a result, this study utilized qualitative research methods to explore how five women successfully navigate their careers at PWIs while also navigating the intersectionality of their race and gender. Data were collected via biographical/institutional profiles, curriculum vitae, and resumes provided by participants as well as in-depth interviews and field notes. The data collected was analyzed to discover common themes and each interview was transcribed, analyzed, and coded for emerging themes. Intersectionality as defined in chapter one was applied to further analyze and interpret the data.

Discussion of Findings

The central research question guiding this study was: *How do female African American administrators experience PWIs?* This central research question led to three sub-questions. The findings and the ways these findings relate to and extend our knowledge on this topic is discussed next.

Sub-question #1: What challenges do female African American administrators encounter in higher education?

This study sought to better understand the challenges African American women encounter as administrative leaders in higher education. During interviews, the participants discussed challenges including creating/maintaining work-life balance and how they navigate their careers in terms of their gender and race when interacting with colleagues or considering how they are received/perceived. The participants also

discussed facing implicit biases and combating stereotypes, tokenism, respect, or lack thereof from colleagues, a perceived lack of diversity at their institutions, and for some balancing their identities as both faculty and administrators.

While issues related to their race and/or gender seem to be inherent and not surprising to the participants, the findings of chapter four highlight that none of the women interviewed found that it impacted their ability to do their best work or caused them to second guess their career paths or goals. In fact, quite the opposite. These women work hard to excel in their careers and take care to maintain their professionalism and composure, disproving stereotypes ("lazy", "angry Black woman", etc.) along the way. They do this not only for themselves but also to set examples for Black female colleagues and students they mentor or who view them as role models.

The findings of this study support the literature on the general challenges of leadership as highlighted in chapter four, theme 1 (Professional Challenges) as well as the challenges (stereotypes, etc.) women, specifically women of color, encounter in the workplace which were discussed in chapter two (Becks-Moody, 2004; Warren-Gordon & Mayes, 2017). The Intersectionality framework was useful as it helped me to make meaning of the experiences of the participants as Black women and whether the participants felt they encountered challenges due to their race and/or gender and how they interpreted and responded to those challenges.

Sub-question #2: What coping mechanisms do female African American administrators employ when facing challenges in the higher education workplace?

The women interviewed described utilizing a variety of strategies when facing challenges at work, some employed directly in the workplace and others outside of the

office. Not surprisingly, the participants are incredibly busy, and it is extremely important that they prioritize and use their time wisely. As a result, many of them try to set aside specific time to respond to emails or give themselves a few minutes during the day to take a break or reflect. Some of the participants also work with assistants who are key in helping to organize their calendars and make sure that their schedules are sensible which helps the administrators to juggle their many responsibilities including meetings, speaking engagements, and faculty responsibilities.

The participants also stressed the importance of having support systems in and outside of work which supports the findings of León & Thomas (2016) and Tran (2014) as discussed in chapter two, themes two (Coping Mechanisms/Support) and three (Mentorship). All the women interviewed for this study make it a point to converse with colleagues (individually or in groups) in and outside of their institution and even outside higher education who hold high-ranking roles and have similar experiences especially as it relates to being a woman or more specifically, a Black woman in a leadership position. The participants also find great strength and support in their friends and family, including their partners, parents, and adult children who offer not only a listening ear but unique and valuable perspectives. Pets are also comforting! These findings are in keeping with the observations of Constantine and Watt (2002) who "speculated that social support may be a culturally salient form of coping, since many Black families socialize their children to use family, close friends, and community members as resources when experiencing hardship" (Shahid et al., 2018, p. 7).

Finally, participants also take time to engage in activities completely unrelated to work. They enjoy spending time alone or with friends and loved ones, traveling, cooking,

reading, going for runs, and doing arts and crafts such as crocheting. The past eighteen months contending with the COVID-19 pandemic have been stressful for everyone and the participants of this study are no different as the pandemic has certainly impacted higher education. However, the ladies continue to use their coping mechanisms to adjust accordingly and lean on their supports systems, even virtually. The changes caused by the pandemic will most certainly call for the continued utilization of current coping mechanisms as well as new strategies, however, at the time of interviews it was unclear what effects the pandemic would have on higher education. When discussing the impact of the pandemic Katherine relayed that she had discussions with faculty of color to ask if they felt they had received what they needed in terms of resources, etc. The faculty members noted that mental health had been "one of the largest issues, just sort of wrestling with the enormity of it all. And then being expected to just go ahead and do your job. It's going to be different. It's going to be vastly different…". Some faculty were also unsure how feasible remote teaching would be or how it would work depending on the subjects they taught. Katherine shared resources were posted online for faculty and staff but because everyone was working from home it was hard to know who was "self-medicating…barely doing their job and just kind of limping along otherwise". They were hoping faculty were mobilizing the resources provided.

Sub-question #3: How do female African American higher education administrators navigate their careers while also navigating the intersection of gender and race at PWIs?

To better understand how female African American administrators navigate their careers while also navigating the intersection of gender and race at PWIs, participants

were asked how they present themselves to/interact with colleagues and how they felt they had been received/perceived by colleagues. As discussed in chapter two, Tulshyan (2015) cited various sources that found that women's gender and race play a part in how they present or themselves at work due to fear of negative impact on their success and there is also a sense of not being heard or taken seriously. To learn more about this, participants of this study were specifically asked about the intersectionality of their gender and race as it relates to their careers to learn if they considered either when interacting with colleagues or if they felt either had been a hindrance in their roles.

The participants generally try to work through lenses of joy, authenticity, approachability, and inclusivity. They are also careful to apply the same rules and policies fairly to remain impartial. While the participants are aware that their gender and race comes into play and may factor into their interactions with colleagues, they feel they have been received/perceived well overall and that any resistance they have met is not necessarily due to their personhood. They attribute positive reception/perception to their competence speaking for itself and working collegially with others. For some of the participants who are both faculty and administrators, this can be difficult, but they have found that being on both sides of the table helps them to better understand their colleagues' positions and helps to build trust that with this understanding they are working for the good of all involved.

Although the participants largely do not feel their personhood has been received negatively, their race does lend itself to tokenism or being "the only" which can be frustrating as Ruby (2020) noted that every time the women she interviewed spoke "they felt that they were speaking for their whole race" (p. 677). Many of the participants noted

72

that as the only or one of the only Black women at their level they are often looked to for explanations of or input on issues involving race. They also feel that they must inform others and speak for people of color constantly and that as time goes on others should recognize these issues on their own and be more vocal. This will be challenging as Black women continue to be underrepresented in these roles which only underscores the importance of others acting as advocates when Black women are not in the room to do so.

This study found that the women interviewed experience work challenges, stereotypes, and so on differently and interpreted interview questions differently therefore their views and responses vary. As a result, these findings compliment the literature on the experiences of Black women in these roles. In her 2004 study, Becks-Moody stated:

> African American women tend to experience different forms and degrees of racism as a result of social class, sexual orientation, ethnicity, region of the country, urbanization, and age. These factors combine to produce a web of experiences shaping diversity among African American women. The interview questions evoked different responses from each of the women, and revealed a lot of information about the ways in which they perceived their world… I found that while African American women, as a marginalized group, have shared the experiences of racism and sexism, each individual woman has a unique response to these experiences depending on the environment she is in and her unique life circumstances (p. 249).

The theory of Intersectionality and the variation of responses to core themes were both useful in understanding that there are many factors that inform the Black woman's experience. Therefore, it is important not to overstate or overgeneralize experiences with race and gender as not everyone has the same experiences.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for Future Research

This qualitative study sought to explore and give voice to the lived experiences of Black women in higher education administrative leadership positions and to contribute to

73

the existing literature on the subject. Though the interviews conducted yielded rich, significant data there are still many questions to ask and much more to learn. The researcher recommends focusing on the following areas for future research: methodology, additional research questions, and research design.

Regarding the methodology, the researcher recommends that future studies utilize multiple shorter interviews rather than one lengthy interview with each participant. This would allow time to review and reflect on the first interview, notice threads or concepts not previously considered, and to ask follow-up or clarifying questions. Shadowing participants in-person would also allow researchers to witness and better understand participants' roles/typical days and office/departmental dynamics. The use of focus groups is also recommended, if possible, as Gundumogula (2020) notes "focus groups are completely different from the other methods in which the data can be collected individually, because they promote interaction among participants with spontaneity" (p. 4). Thomas et al., (1995) also explain that "the type and range of data generated through the social interaction of the group are often deeper and richer than those obtained from one-to-one interviews" (pp. 206-219). It would be interesting as well as informative to gather participants (especially in various stages of their careers in leadership) together and observe their interactions and discussions regarding their views on working in higher education as Black female leaders.

To glean more nuanced information regarding the experiences of Black female leaders in higher education it is recommended that future research builds upon the questions asked in this study using additional questions. Two participants of this study noted negative interactions with colleagues of either the same race or gender which one

74

might not expect. Future studies should seek to learn more about whether Black female leaders feel they encounter more issues or meet more resistance with colleagues of their own race and/or gender or not. On a related note, it would be worthwhile to further explore participant satisfaction with working in leadership at PWIs. In addition to exploring job satisfaction at PWIs it is worth exploring whether Black female leaders would prefer to work at HBCUs (Historically Black Colleges) or MSIs (Minority Serving Institutions) and if they think their experiences would be better, worse, or the same at a different type of institution. While exploring this topic, it might also be worthwhile to further explore the recruitment, retention, promotion, and compensation of Black female leaders at PWIs as it relates to their job satisfaction.

Building from this study it would be interesting for future studies to factor key demographics and characteristics into the research design. This study focused specifically on administrative leaders at PWIs, however, researchers should also explore the experiences of administrative leaders at HBCUs and MSIs and consider comparing those experiences with those of leaders at PWIs to learn how these experiences may differ and why. It is also recommended that participants who work at institutions in specific regions of the country (i.e., institutions in the North versus the South or East coast versus West coast) as well as at specific types of institutions (research versus liberal arts, etc.) are intentionally recruited for future studies. The number of years participants have served in leadership roles, their age/generation, and where they are from should also be considered as these factors may very well impact their experiences and inform their views and opinions.

Finally, though Crenshaw's Intersectionality framework informed this study it was not fully applied as defined by Crenshaw. With that in mind, future studies should utilize Crenshaw's intended meaning of Intersectionality in the data collection and analysis processes to help make meaning of the experiences of study participants and to help inform their recommendations for future research and practice.

Recommendations for Practice

The goal is for future research to contribute to practice that supports Black female leaders in higher education, and it is recommended that future practice focuses on strategies, programs, and policies. Regarding strategy, institutional leaders and allies should begin by using data from current and future research to explore and better understand the experiences and perspectives of Black female leaders in higher education. Said exploration and subsequent conversations should then be utilized to help recognize, understand, and address everyday work challenges as well inequities, biases, microaggressions, etc. Black female leaders encounter in the workplace.

On a related note, programming that provides real-time support and leadership development for Black female administrators should be a priority. More specifically, formal, and informal support and mentorship groups for Black female leaders where they can freely share their experiences, these experiences are validated, and they can learn from and support one another should be created. Davis (2009) underscores the importance of empowering Black women in higher education through mentoring:

> With the increasing enrollment and graduation rate of African American women and the significant percentage of these women in higher education, this creates an opportunity for institutions of higher education to create mentoring programs to advance African American women into positions of leadership (p. 54).

An example of one such program studied by Allen and Joseph (2018) is the Sistah Network at the University of Denver, "an affinity group at a predominantly White institution, with mentoring goals to enhance the educational and social experiences of Black women in master's and doctoral programs and their mentors" (p. 2). Their findings suggested four main themes: "the Sistah Network advances identity and empowerment, contributes to social advantages, affords emotional benefits, and promotes academic success" and "that efforts can be made to implement and sustain variations of mentoring programs for this population of women and other marginalized groups" (p. 10). The benefits of a similar program or group for Black female administrators in higher education would be considerable.

In addition to utilizing findings from the above practices, institutions should examine their diversity efforts related to the recruitment, retention, compensation, and promotion of Black female leaders and implement policies to address inequities in these areas. For example, to aid in the recruitment/hiring of Black female leaders, institutions should review how and where they recruit potential applicants (i.e., job boards, alumni networks, etc. that target African Americans in higher education) and implement necessary changes to their recruitment/hiring policies and practices. Institutions should also review the compensation and promotion of Black female leaders and compare with that of other leaders who are male and/or not people of color who are in similar positions and have similar professional and educational backgrounds. Finally, institutions should utilize Jackson's (2001) *Practical Steps for the Retention of African American Administrators at PWIs* which include committing to the principles of diversity and affirmative action and fostering open lines of communication between administration

77

hierarchy and staff. Creating workshops during which biases, microaggressions, etc. are identified and strategies for addressing them are offered could help to not only foster open and honest communication but also help non-people of color to recognize their own biases, how they can improve, and how they can be allies to their Black and Brown colleagues.

Conclusion

While the women who participated in this study relayed generally positive experiences, they also discussed the challenges they face in the higher education workplace including work/life balance, implicit biases, microaggressions, stereotypes, and issues with institutional diversity. Throughout our discussions they each shared how they meet these challenges head on or find ways to work around them. We also discussed what mentorship if any the participants received on their journey to their current positions and how they seek to serve as mentors or role models for colleagues and students alike. Finally, the participants shared how they navigate higher education at the intersection of their race and gender, their advice for Black women in academia, and their thoughts on the future of Black women in academia.

Though it is certainly encouraging to see Black women in leadership positions at colleges and universities it is important that the number of Black women who hold these positions continues to increase. As previously recommended in this chapter, it is vital that future research that focuses on enhanced methodological, analytical, and design strategies is conducted to further explore the unique experiences of Black women in higher education. Researchers must also delve into strategies, policies, and programs that can serve to support these women in their work and professional growth. This continued

research is also necessary as it allows women to share their experiences and expertise and not only support each other but to support, encourage, and inform those who aspire to work in higher education particularly in leadership positions. Finally, and maybe most importantly, research focused on this specific population is essential to contributing to the existing literature and understanding the Black woman's personal and professional identities and experiences and how they can be better served and supported by their institutions and colleagues. This nuanced understanding is crucial to achieving meaningful change within higher education for Black women and may help in exploring the experiences of other underrepresented/marginalized populations in higher education as well.

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APPENDIX A

REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATION

Dear Prospective Participants,

My name is Courtney Chappelle, and I am a doctoral student in Higher Education at Temple University. I am currently conducting research focused on female African American administrators in higher education as part of my completion of the doctoral degree in Higher Education. This is a qualitative study using interviews as the primary means of exploring the challenges African American women encounter as higher education professionals and the strategies and mechanisms, they utilize to successfully navigate these challenges and their careers. My goal is to contribute to filling the gap in the literature surrounding this population and to help support and strengthen the professional lives of female African American administrators in higher education.

Should you agree to participate I am asking for a commitment of one 60-90-minute interview scheduled at your convenience during the Spring 2020 semester as well as a possible follow-up interview (via phone) to clarify any responses to your interview or biographical profile. Upon completion of the interview, you will receive a $25.00 Amazon gift card as thanks for your time and contribution.

Your response to this request is important to the advancement of my research focused on African American women in higher education administration. Your participation is greatly needed, valued, and would be deeply appreciated. If you are interested in participating, please complete the attached biographical profile and return it as well as your resume/vitae via e-mail one week from today. After receiving your biographical profile and resume/vitae I will contact you to schedule a date/time for the interview.

If you have any questions or require additional information, please feel free to contact me at (610) 731-1797 or courtney.chappelle@temple.edu.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Courtney Chappelle

INFORMED CONSENT

Title of Research	**Working in Academia While Black and Female: Exploring the Experiences of Administrators at Pennsylvania Universities and Colleges**
Investigator and Department	Jennifer Johnson, PhD Courtney Chappelle, Doctoral Student Ed Leadership Higher Education (19031) Policy, Organizational & Leadership Studies College of Education Temple University
Why Am I Being Invited to Take Part in This Research?	We are inviting you to participate in this research project because you identify as a Black or African- American female administrator working at a Predominantly White College or University in Pennsylvania.
What Should I Know About This Research?	·　　　Someone will explain this research to you. ·　　　Whether or not you take part is up to you. ·　　　You can choose not to take part. ·　　　You can agree to take part and later change your mind. ·　　　Your decision will not be held against you. ·　　　You can ask all the questions you want before you decide. ·　　　A $25 Amazon gift card will be offered as compensation for participating 　　　　in this research.
What Happens if I Agree to Be in This Research?	Initially, you will be asked to provide your resume/vitae and to complete a Biographical Profile (10-15 minutes) to obtain biographical and institutional data related to your educational and professional background. Participation also includes one interview: one in-depth interview (60 to 90 minutes) via video-conference technology or telephone. Examples of questions that will be asked include: How did you get to this current position? What is a typical day like for you? You will also be asked questions about your experience as a female African-American administrator at a Predominantly White Institution. Examples of questions that will be asked include: How do you try to present yourself to (or interact with) others in your workplace? What issues, if any, are you confronted with as an African American woman at your level of leadership at your institution?

	Within 4 weeks of your interview, you may be asked to participate in a 30-minute follow-up interview to elaborate or clarify information shared during your previous interview or submitted on your Biographical Profile. You may decline to participate in the second interview. With your permission, each individual interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed professionally via a transcription service. The electronic audio files and transcriptions will remain saved as password-protected accessible to Dr. Johnson and Ms. Chappelle. The total time commitment for participants is 100 -135 minutes across up to two separate interactions over a 4-week time frame.
What Happens to The Information Collected for This Research?	To the extent allowed by law, we limit the viewing of your personal information to people who have to review it. We cannot promise complete secrecy. The IRB, Temple University, and other representatives of those organizations may inspect and copy your information. To protect your identity, you will be able to select a pseudonym for this project. If you do not select a pseudonym, one will be created for you. Your true name, contact information, or other identifying information will not be linked in any way to your transcripts. Your contact information will only be maintained for follow-up purposes and will be saved as a separate file with members of the research team (Ms. Courtney Chappelle and Dr. Jennifer Johnson). Risks associated with communicating and sending documents via the Internet will be minimized by not requiring identifying information in the documents and maintaining information containing your name or email separately from your biographical profile responses and interview transcript(s). Email communications with attached documents will be downloaded, saved as a hard copy, and immediately deleted upon storage. Access to contact information and transcriptions will be limited to Ms. Chappelle and Dr. Johnson. Contact information, electronic audio files and transcription records will be deleted/destroyed once the research is completed.
Who Can I Talk To About This Research?	If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think the research has hurt you, contact the research team at: Ms. Courtney Chappelle, Doctoral Student: 610-731-1797 Dr. Jennifer Johnson, Dissertation Advisor: 215-204-8068

	This research has been reviewed and approved by an Institutional Review Board. You may talk to them at (215) 707-3390 or email them at irb@temple.edu for any of the following: · Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team. · You cannot reach the research team. · You want to talk to someone besides the research team. · You have questions about your rights as a research subject. · You want to give information or provide input about this research

APPENDIX C

BIOGRAPHICAL PROFILE

Part I: Biographical Data/Personal Data

Name_____

_____

Phone (___)

_____Ext_____Birthdate_____Birthplace_____

E-mail

address_____

Age:

• 20-29

• 30-39

• 40-49

• 50-59

• 60 +

Date of Birth _____Place of

Birth_____

Marital

Status_____

Children_____

_____

Siblings_____

_____

Mother's Birthplace_____ Father's

Birthplace_____

Mother's Educational Background (Year & Type of Degree)

None_____

_____

High School_____

Bachelors_____

_____

Masters_____

_____

Doctorate_____

_____

Father's Educational Background (Year & Type of Degree)

None_____

_____

High School_____

Bachelors_____

_____

Masters_____

_____

Doctorate_____

_____

Part II: Institutional & Position Data

Current Institution_____

Street

Address_____

_

Title_____

_____

*Are you the only or one of the only African-Women at your level of

leadership at your institution?

_____

Department_____

_____

College/Division_____

_____

Job Description (Please attach if you have a written one)

_____

_____

_____

_____

Size of Direct Staff

_____

Titles_____

_____

_____

_____

Primary Reporting

Line_____

Secondary Reporting

Line_____

Years in Current

Capacity_____

Years Planning to Remain in

Capacity_____
Comments_____

_____

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1) How did you get to this current position?

2) Do you like what you are doing?

3) What is a typical day like for you?

4) How do you try to present yourself to (or interact with) others in your workplace?

5) Please describe your most rewarding and challenging experience(s) as an administrator.

6) In what ways do you think your experiences are located in your specific context, or are

generalizable to other African- American women administrators in higher education?

7) What are your greatest challenges, professionally and personally? To what do you attribute

these challenges?

8) What are your greatest successes, professionally and personally? To what do you attribute

these successes?

9) What issues, if any, are you confronted with as the only or one of the only African- American

women at this level of leadership at this institution?

10) What coping strategies do you utilize in your position?

11) From what source (s) have you found your support?

12) Who have you considered mentors?

13) At what point in your career did you have mentorship?

14) How did you cultivate mentorship for yourself?

15) How has mentorship helped you/your career?

16) Do you serve as a mentor? If so, what is your goal or mentoring philosophy?

17) Have you ever gotten to the point where you considered resigning from your current position

or previous positions due to some of the issues you face as an African-American woman? If

so, why did you decide to stay?

18) Have you been able to find a balance between the internal motivations and external

expectations? Explain.

19) Of what are you most proud?

20) What do you consider to be major contributions that you have made to higher education? To

the community? For women?

21) Do you view yourself as an agent of significant historical change for African-American

women or any race of women in higher education?

22) Do you view yourself as a role model for other African- American women?

23) How do you believe that African- American women can achieve a professional persona, i.e.,

they can be viewed as the norm instead of the exception?

24) What do you see as factors that serve as obstacles to African- American women's full and

equitable participation, such as structure, policies, and informal practices, etc.?

25) Where do you see African- American women in higher education in the next decade?

Century?

26) What are your future professional goals?

27) What advice can you offer that will help to prepare myself and others to be an African-

American administrator at an institution of higher education?