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Intercultural and Career Experiences of African American Women Midlevel Leaders at Predominately White Institutions

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Walden University
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Abstract

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MA, University of Missouri, Kansas City, 2008

BSEd, Lincoln University of Missouri, 2001

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

African American women leaders positively influence the college experiences of students at predominately White institutions (PWI), but the retention of those women leaders remains an issue. At the time of this study, limited research informed race and gender issues that intersect the career advancement of African American women serving in midlevel leadership positions at PWIs. The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the intercultural and career advancement experiences of these women. Critical race theory, critical race feminist theory, and intercultural communications theory were used as a framework to understand the participants' intercultural and career advancement experiences, perceived influences, and mentorship experiences. A snowball sampling approach with members of a national African American women's organization in higher education led to 9 participants who met the criteria. They were each interviewed twice to generate data to understand their experiences. Results from an inductive exploratory process of data analysis indicated that race and gender influenced their perception of career advancement potential and relationship building in the PWI workplace. Themes that emerged from their experiences were limited advancement opportunities, the effects of intersectionality, intercultural relationship challenges, and the benefits of locating and having a mentor. Support and guidance were paramount to their job satisfaction and retention. This study contributes to social change by providing insight to personnel at PWIs about the experiences of African American women leaders on those campuses and the needed improvement in the environment for retaining current and future women of color.

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Dedication

This study is dedicated to my parents, Roderick and Ruby Stewart, and my sister,

Rachel Stewart. I have danced to my own beat for as long as I can remember. Once my

family realized that I was not going to change, they embraced me for who I am. As a

result, I have lived an amazingly blessed life full of love and support from my family.

They may not want to hear my rant about an article I recently read on the marginalization

of African American women in higher education, or listen to my whining about my final

project for the Advanced Qualitative Research course, but they took interest anyway and

endured right along with me. When I was tired and felt that I could not type another

word, they were right there rooting me on and encouraging me to reach my goal. Without

my family, the past 5 years of this journey would not have been as memorable or as

rewarding. We accomplished this together! This is our victory! Thank you for believing

in me, praying for me, loving me unconditionally, and for letting me be who I am. I love

you!

Acknowledgments

I need to first honor and acknowledge my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. When I began this journey, I think He was the only one that knew what I was getting myself into. We talked frequently whether I was frustrated, happy, disappointed, sad, or just okay. I never would have made it without Him. *I know from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord* (Psalm 121:1)

Next, I must recognize a very special woman whom I have gotten to know well on this journey. There are three things Dr. Alice Eichholz, my faculty mentor and chair, would say to me that I remember so vividly. The first two worked in tandem, "go to it" and "onward"! Most phone conversations, Skype sessions, and e-mails ended with these two phrases. I always felt encouraged, motivated, and I knew that she really believed in me. The last is my absolute favorite that she would say after returning a draft back to me for revisions: "Rabekah, you've really done a great job here. There's not much left for you to do." I would so love to hear (or read) her say that, and then I would open my document and see all of the track changes bleeding throughout the pages. I was tricked every time! Good times! My mentor and my friend whom I respect tremendously for the scholar practitioner that she is, for her patience, her passion, and her dedication, Dr. Eichholz pushed me to dig deeper, find the connections, and develop my scholarly voice. I am thankful for her guidance (and tough love) throughout this process.

Dr. Cheryl Keen is another lovely woman and scholar whom I am thankful for and need to recognize. I met Dr. Keen at my first residency and had no idea that our paths would cross again and she would serve as the second member on my committee. I

continue to be inspired by Dr. Keen as she actively researches and publishes. It was not uncommon to open an e-mail from her and see that she had suggested a new article for me to read or she was directing me to something related to my research topic in the Chronicle. Whenever I needed clarification with the methodology or analysis, she was very helpful and always took time to explain and provide support. She and Dr. Eichholz were my dream team, and I was very fortunate.

I have a host of friends to acknowledge that have been extremely influential during this degree process. I am blessed to have a diverse group of friends that work in varying career fields, have varying levels of education, and live in all different parts of the world. I thank them all for their prayers of support, their patience and understanding with me during this process, and their unconditional friendship. Tiffany Halsell has become one of my dearest friends as we persevered through this process together. Two of my closest friends, really more like family, are Dr. Shana Y. Patrick and Dr. Ronald L. Parker. Having completed doctoral degrees themselves, they knew exactly what I was going through so our relationship was different from the rest. When no one else understood, I called on them for empathy. When I needed scholarly advice, I asked for their expertise. When I wanted to take a break and get away from it all, I could count on them for laughs and enjoyment. When life had me down and I was ready to quit, they were there to pick me up and reassure me that I could make it and everything would be all right. The relationship that we have is one that I do not take for granted and will cherish forever. Thank you for encouraging me, praying with me and for me, and for leaving your footprints for me to follow.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

African American women have not advanced in leadership roles at predominately White institutions (PWIs) at the same rate as their peers from other ethnic and gender backgrounds (Behar-Horenstein, West-Olatunji, Moore, Houchen, & Roberts, 2012; Modica & Mamiseishvili, 2010; Perna, Gerald, Baum, & Millem, 2007). A distinct disparity has existed between the number of European American men and women in leadership roles in higher education and the number of African American men and women serving in the same capacities (Perna et al., 2007. p. 209). Wolfe and Dilworth (2015) examined data reported on the gap in race and gender for African Americans using critical race theory as a lens to help remain focused on cultural issues that may affect their career advancement. In 2012, the United States Department of Education reported that African Americans accounted for 9.4% of higher education administrators across the nation, with 80% of the college presidents being European American and 26% women (Wolfe & Dilworth, 2015, p. 18).

One result of this disparity was that building professional relationships within an intercultural work environment posed a problem for African American women midlevel administrators at PWIs that often resulted in the limited ability to secure mentorships and obtain promotions (Bisbee, 2007; Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007; Harley, 2008; Modica & Mamiseishvili, 2010; Nichols & Tanksley, 2004). Because the larger portion of African American women who have served as educational leaders at PWIs were found to serve in midlevel positions (Frazier, 2011), this study aimed to understand what the experiences were for those serving as midlevel leaders. Those experiences could suggest to colleges

and universities some strategies for recruiting and retaining diverse faculty and staff populations on their campuses.

In this chapter, I present the background, problem statement, and purpose to develop the topic that led to the research questions. An introduction to the conceptual framework and nature of the study then follows. Next, I provide important terms and operational definitions, along with the assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and potential significance of the study. The chapter concludes with a brief summary of the study.

Background

Research in higher education that includes African American women has examined the career paths of those enrolled in graduate programs (Nichols & Tanksley, 2004), those in instructional faculty roles (Holmes, 2008), and those serving as college and university presidents (Alexander, 2010). Findings indicated that African American women face various challenges while in each of those capacities within higher education; they perceived they were not treated in the same manner as others because of their race and gender (Perna et al., 2007). Additional research has focused on the careers of African American women at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs; Jean-Marie, 2006) and at PWIs (Reddick, 2006). The results of these studies showed that African American women advanced further at HBCUs than at PWIs and encountered challenges in their advancement in relationship to their race. The challenges consisted of but were not limited to racially charged scrutiny from White male students (Pittman, 2010), heavy

teaching schedules (Davis, Reynolds, & Jones, 2011), and lower salaries (Engstrom, McIntosh, Ridzi, & Kruger, 2006).

African American women do hold midlevel positions, such as deans, directors, or professorial faculty (Dahlvig, 2013; House, Fowler, & Francis, 2007), but because there are fewer of them at high-level positions, this suggested that a glass ceiling existed for this population (Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009). For example, Absher (2009) had difficulty finding African American faculty to participate in a qualitative study on retention and attraction of minorities to higher education. Only 8% of the respondents identified as African American, Latino American, Asian/Pacific Islander, Native American, or Other (p. 169). Absher noted that the participation was low because the minority faculty and staff held part-time positions. Thus, they were not serving in high-level leadership roles and/or full-time positions.

Studies have explored the career paths of African American women college and university presidents at HBCUs (Alexander, 2010; Dowdy & Hamilton, 2011). These women were breaking new ground, as they were often the first African American women to reach high-level positions in the history of their institutions. The African American college presidents explained that their biggest challenge was that no one had come before them, making finding a mentor impossible (Alexander, 2010). Each woman indicated the importance of a mentor, building relationships, and learning the workplace environment and culture to their success in the role of president (Alexander, 2010; Dowdy & Hamilton, 2011; Holmes, 2008). Essentially, the African American women presidents

were charting the pathway for all those women of color to come behind them on similar journeys in higher education.

Although there were documented experiences of African American college and university presidents at HBCUs (Alexander, 2010), the majority of the research involving African Americans at PWIs has related to their roles as faculty (Agosto & Karanxha, 2006; Behar-Horenstein et al., 2012; Frazier, 2011; Jayakumar et al., 2009). These studies outlined the challenges and hardships that African American women encountered while serving as faculty and adjunct faculty in academia. Research also has addressed a wide range of women in minority groups in United States higher education workplaces (Nguyen, 2013; Rabe & Rugunanan, 2012; Souto-Manning & Ray, 2007; Sule, 2011). These studies covered the higher education workplace experiences of Native American (Costagno, 2005), Latina (Souto-Manning & Ray, 2007), and Asian (Nguyen, 2013) women. Findings also existed on the lived experiences of women from minority groups serving at religious-affiliated colleges and universities and their quest for career advancement and success (Absher, 2009; Dahlvig, 2013; Lafreniere & Longman, 2008). Henry (2010) presented results regarding the lived experiences of African American women staff, not leaders, in student affairs at PWIs. Those results led Henry to draw conclusions about best practices for establishing career success and longevity for African American women working in student affairs.

Although African American women have reached high-level leadership positions in higher education, their experiences have been found to be different than those of men —both African American and European American—in PWIs (Jayakumar et al., 2009).

African American women have been found to experience lower salaries, fewer promotions, and more scrutiny from peers and students in higher education at PWIs (Alexander, 2010; Behar-Horenstein et al., 2008; Cobb-Roberts & Agosto, 2011). Researchers have reported that, for African American women to be successful higher education professionals at PWIs, they must establish a mentor relationship with a senior executive, foster intercultural relationships, and become adept in the culture and norms of the workplace (Absher, 2009; Dowdy & Hamiton, 2011; Hinton, 2010; Jayakumar, 2009; Pittman, 2012).

African American women working in faculty positions, attending colleges or universities, or serving as staff at PWIs have all been found to experience, to some degree, racism and discrimination from their colleagues, students, superiors, and peers (Davis et al., 2011; Edwards et al., 2011; Elliott & Smith, 2004; Henry, 2010; Holmes, 2008). For example, achieving tenure in the academy has been a challenge for African American women in the faculty (Davis & Reynolds, 2011; Griffin, 2013; Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009). African American women have not earned tenure as often as European American men and women (Modica & Mamiseishvili, 2010). In addition, they received lower performance rankings than their European American students (Echols, Hwang, & Nobles, 2002; Pittman, 2010) and were approached less for projects or research initiatives for their college or university (Henry, 2010). African American women faculty have had to adopt coping mechanisms to deal with burn-out and other stressors of low-pay, huge teaching course loads, and limited promotions (Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009; Pittman, 2012). As a result, many have been found to leave their

positions at a PWI, which perpetuates the low rate of retention of African American women faculty (Frazier, 2011; Modica & Mamiseishvili, 2010).

Despite extensive research literature on African American women's experiences in various aspects of higher education (Agosto & Karanxha, 2006; Behar-Horenstein et al., 2012; Henry, 2010; Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009; Pittman, 2010; Souto-Manning & Ray, 2007), there has been little research on the experiences of African American women in midlevel leadership positions at PWIs, particularly with regard to disparities in advancement, intercultural relationship building, and mentorship. The research I conducted for this study addressed this gap in the literature by examining the lived intercultural and career path experiences of African American women working in midlevel positions at PWIs in the United States.

Problem Statement

One purpose of higher education institutions is to enhance the educational and social experiences of their students in preparation for their lives as adults in the workplace and broader world (Echols et al., 2002). Providing a diverse learning environment, including one with African American women working at all levels of service in the institution, has been one approach to meeting that purpose for PWIs. There were units within a college or university such as student affairs and administration where people worked at multiple levels of service, leadership, and power and interfaced with students in a variety of ways (Alire, 2001; Reddick, 2006). For example, some staff served in positions to help students matriculate from undergraduate school to graduate and postgraduate school. Nichols and Tanksley (2004) studied the barriers for African

American women with doctoral degrees. Their study findings indicated that mentorship and support were most important to their success (pp. 181-182). Harper and Hurtado (2007) also found this to be true when they reviewed the results from various research studies on campus climates. Therefore, the faculty and staff who act as mentors largely influence the academic and professional careers of African American women students. According to Clayborne and Hamrick's (2007) 5-year study of the African Americans working at PWIs, the positions held the most by African American women was at the midlevel (2007). The advancement of the careers of African American women had a positive influence on the college experiences of students attending PWIs (Reddick, 2006), but retention of those women as potential leaders remained an issue in providing a broad spectrum of real-world experience for both the student and other faculty and staff in higher education. My study was designed to examine the lived experiences of African American midlevel leaders and their intercultural and career advancement experiences while working at PWIs.

<div align="center">**Purpose of the Study**</div>

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the intercultural and career advancement experiences of African American women midlevel leaders at PWIs. Those experiences suggested to colleges and universities some strategies for recruiting and retaining diverse populations on their campuses. In addition to the benefits for the college or university, this study aimed to give voice to African American women midlevel leaders' experience with intercultural relationship building and understanding workplace culture regarding mentorship at PWIs.

Research Questions

The research questions for this qualitative study were as follows:

1. What are the lived intercultural and career advancement experiences of African American women midlevel leaders at PWIs?

2. What are the perceived influences of intercultural relationships on the career paths of African American women in midlevel leadership positions at PWIs?

3. What are mentorship experiences of African American women in midlevel leadership positions at PWIs?

Conceptual Framework

Critical race theory, critical race feminist theory, and intercultural communications theory were linked together in this study and formed a conceptual framework for the assumptions that (a) African American midlevel leaders at PWIs would share similar experiences because they were African American women and (b) that their presence influenced the higher education community on the PWI campus. Delgado and Stefancic (2012) suggested that critical race theory explained the relationship between race and power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 3). In this study, critical race theory helped to examine the participants' experiences as African American women midlevel leaders as those experiences pertained to the women's intercultural experiences and opportunities for advancement at PWIs. Critical race feminist theory was similar to critical race theory in that it focused on race and power, but it also included the female gender. Wing (2003) added that race and gender both contributed to the sum of a person and should be considered when evaluating someone's experiences, a concept known as

intersectionality (Wing, 2003, p. 7). For this research study, critical race feminist theory expanded the understanding of African American women midlevel leaders at PWIs and considered their race and an added lens focused on gender issues, too. Intercultural communications theory was the last link to this framework. Kim and Gudykunst (1988) and Dodd (1997) explained that diverse groups of people effectively communicating with a shared end goal in mind represented intercultural communication (Kim & Gudykunst, 1988, p. 125). For a study that involved African American women midlevel leaders, ICT helped me to understand the women's experiences in the PWI workplace and determined what role they perceived or had experienced intercultural communication playing in their relationship-building and career placement.

This conceptual framework related to the study's approach and research questions. First, the framework supported the recognition of the phenomenon of African American women midlevel leaders at PWIs. Each of the participants self-identified as midlevel African American leaders who were currently working in a PWI in the United States. Secondly, the theories that comprised the conceptual framework aided in constructing the research questions that shed light on the lived experiences of African American women in midlevel leadership positions at PWIs and the influence that their intercultural relationship experiences have had on them and their institutions.

Nature of the Study

The nature of the study was a basic qualitative exploration using interviews based on Moustakas's (1994), Seidman's (2006), and Merriam's (2009) approaches that focused on building themes related to the shared experiences of the participants. It

included interviews with nine self-identified African American women midlevel leaders at PWIs. Qualitative research was the best platform for this problem because it captured the participants' experiences and documented their challenges, similarities, and differences regarding their careers in leadership at PWIs. In addition, it was more versatile in an educational setting and helped with the interpretation and meaning of the experiences shared by the participants (Merriam, 2009). The data were coded and analyzed using a combined conceptual framework of critical race theory, critical race feminist theory, and intercultural communications theory as the lens for understanding and interpreting the participants' experiences. The analysis included the discovery of emergent themes and repetitive words and phrases that appeared in the interviews that were unrelated to the prescribed framework. Using a qualitative interview approach to the study aided in identifying some best practices both for African American women leaders within administration and for PWIs wanting to diversity their campuses to enhance the college learning and social experiences for students.

Operational Definitions

Career advancement: The act of improving one's professional career by promotion to a new level, for example, a midlevel administrator being promoted to a high-level position such as chancellor, provost, or president.

High-level leader: Someone at a higher education institution likely to have earned tenure with the college or university and to have extensive administrative and managerial experience. These include people with titles such as provost, chancellor, vice-provost, vice-chancellor, chief officer, and president.

Intercultural: The inclusion of people from different cultural backgrounds such as race, gender, religion, or ethnicity (Kim & Gudykunst, 1988) interacting on a college campus.

Midlevel leader: Someone at a higher education institution who self-identifies as such at a college or university. This self-identification of leadership level may be dependent on the size of the college or university that dictates the titles and structure of the various positions for its personnel. These include titles such as dean, assistant or associate dean, director, assistant director, assistant provost, and vice president.

Assumptions

There were several assumptions with regard to this research study. The first assumption was that African American women who were midlevel leaders potentially could be located using professional associations and social media. A second assumption was that all those who agreed to participate would be available and would complete the entire interview process. A third assumption was that each participant would fully cooperate and provide relevant information about their experiences that would be beneficial to the research. Lastly, it was also assumed that African American women who were midlevel leaders at PWIs have had some experience with both intercultural and career advancement issues.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study was established by the research questions and covered only African American women who functioned as midlevel leaders at PWIs in the United States. As a result, some of their experiences may have been specific to just this

population, thus limiting the generalizability to other populations of African American women in other positions or at other institutions outside of the United States. The scope was also established by the focus on the interviews, specifically on intercultural and career advancement experiences. My study was delimited by the possible difficulty of reaching people outside of my geographical area. Exclusions in the study included leaders who were male, entry-level staff at PWIs, other people of color, and those no longer serving in midlevel positions.

Limitations

The specificity of the study's population may have presented a limitation in the lack of potential generalizability to other populations and experiences. Another limitation was that the majority of the participants were located in different cities across the United States, and it presented some challenges in terms of scheduling and completing the interview process. The research design also presented a limitation because only one person conducted the interviews and there was the possibility of some bias in the way that I asked the interview questions at different times and places or as perceived by the participant. In addition, the interviews were conducted over the phone and the opportunity to observe the participants' body language and nonverbal cues was not available. I listened closely to the tone and inflection of their voices and took note of their word choice while responding to the interview questions.

Significance of the Study

This study served as an extension of the platform established in the literature for the advancement of African American women leaders in higher education at PWIs. By

addressing African American women's midlevel concerns with intercultural and career advancement experiences in the higher education workplace, this study allowed their voice to be heard from within the population of African American women at PWIs. Because African American women in midlevel leadership roles at PWIs faced challenges in progressing to high-level leadership, such as chancellor, president, or provost, having studied their experiences in intercultural and career advancement helped identify the barriers and reveal possible solutions for overcoming those obstacles for future leaders. This research was relevant to the field of higher education as the need for diversity is a universal issue in education corresponding to the need for diversification of enrolled students, student services staff, and tenured faculty. The outcomes from this study revealed some underlying institutional challenges in attracting diverse higher education leaders to PWIs and highlighted ways to foster positive culturally diverse workplace environments that promote retention and success of minority employees, specifically African American women, thus increasing the overall visibility of African American women leaders at PWIs. This was a benefit not only to the PWI, but also to the students of color and other African American staff and faculty, who may consider a role in leadership in higher education in the future. The results of the study were used to make recommendations for institutional change regarding diversity and career advancement for African American women at PWIs

Summary

African American women leaders in higher education have been the focus of many studies through the years. Several topics have been researched such as African

American college and university presidents, African American women working as staff on PWI campuses, salaries for African American women, and African American women and tenure, to name a few. In this study, I examined the lived experiences of African American women midlevel leaders at PWIs across the United States. This provided insight on barriers for intercultural relationship building and career advancement in the PWI workplace. Additionally, for the future it may help guide PWIs in their efforts to recruit and retain African American women on their campuses, and increase the diversity in learning for their students.

This chapter included the background of the study, the problem, and purpose for the study. The framework and research questions were included to show the method in which I conducted the study. Lastly, I outlined the limitations and assumptions in order to share the issues considered throughout the process of the study. Chapter 2 contains the review of the literature that supported the need for this study. I describe the conceptual framework meant to guide the research and interpretation of the results of the study as it moved forward. Finally, I identified the apparent gap in the literature and explained how this study helped fulfill the research gap.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter begins with a restatement of the research problem and purpose of the study involving African American women midlevel leaders at PWIs. A concise synopsis of the current research literature that established the relevance of the problem follows, along with a preview of the major sections of the rest of the chapter.

Problem and Purpose

African American women leaders were not as easily retained or promoted at PWIs, and yet they have shown more longevity when others are there to help mentor them (Lafreniere & Longman, 2008; Nguyen, 2012; Nichols & Tanksley, 2004; Reddick, 2006). Harper and Hurtado (2007) found this to be true when they reviewed the results from various research studies on campus climates.

This research study investigated the intercultural and career advancement experiences of African American women in midlevel positions at PWIs. Those experiences suggested to colleges and universities some strategies for recruiting and retaining diverse populations on their campuses. In addition to the benefits for the college or university, this study aimed to give voice to African American women midlevel leaders' experience with intercultural relationship building and understanding workplace culture regarding mentorship at PWIs. The expectation was that, by exploring African American women's experiences with intercultural relationships and career advancement opportunities, determinations could be made about the influence race and gender had for African American women serving at PWIs in midlevel leadership roles.

Preview of the Chapter

In Chapter 2, I have begun by restating the research problem and purpose of this study involving African American women midlevel leaders at PWIs and their lived experiences regarding their career advancement and intercultural relationships. The remaining parts of Chapter 2 include first a synopsis of the current research literature that established the relevance of the problem and literature search strategy used for researching this topic. Then, from the literature and related theory, I develop the conceptual framework. The combination of three theories was central to understanding the intercultural and career advancement lived experiences of the African American women in this study make up the conceptual framework: critical race theory, critical race feminist theory, and intercultural communications theory. Next, I discuss recent research in the areas of race and gender disparities in PWIs, aspects of intercultural relationship building in the workplace, and mentorship's role in career advancement. At the conclusion of the chapter, a summary is provided of the chapter's key sections that are critical for understanding the importance of the topic, the purpose for study, and the literature that supported it.

Literature Search Strategies

The peer-reviewed articles used in this literature review were found using the Walden University Library database system. I used EBSCO Host, ERIC, Education Search Complete, SAGE, Google Scholar, and ProQuest primarily to search and retrieve articles that were relevant and applicable to the research topic. Within these databases, I searched using key words or phrases that would trigger recent articles related to the topic.

I used phrases and key words from phrases such as *midlevel leaders in higher education*,

African American women in higher education, African American educators in higher

education, African American midlevel leaders in higher education, *Black women in*

higher education, *Black women leaders in higher education*, *women and higher*

education, *women and higher education leadership*, *women administrators in higher*

education, *women leaders in higher education*, *Black women and intercultural*

relationships in higher education, mentor and Black women, African American women

mentor and higher education leadership, leadership and black women mentor, and *Black*

women and predominately white institutions.

Conceptual Framework

There were three theories that framed this research study: critical race theory

(Delgado & Stefancic, 2012), critical race feminist theory (Wing, 2003), and intercultural

communications theory (Dodd, 1997; Gudykunst, 1993). In this section of Chapter 2, I

describe the conceptual framework, the basic assumptions and purposes of each theory,

literature-based explanations from previous use of the theories that were relevant to the

current study, and the use of the theories in empirical research studies. The framework

was explained with a rationale to outline each theory's relationship to the research

problem.

Critical Race Theory

Initially, critical race theorists Delgado and Stefancic (2012) set out to understand

the hierarchical structure in society that affects race, discrimination, and power for people

of color (p. 3). Critical race theory is a theory that attempted to explain the connections

between race and power and to influence positive social change that would improve the quality of life for all people of color. This theory emerged in the early 1970s after the civil rights movement of the 1960s. There were lawyers and activists involved who saw racism change and become less overt. As it appeared in subtler ways, they felt the injustice grew towards African American people (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 4). The activists wanted to understand why racism was occurring and how it affected the lives of African American people. Because the activists of the movement mostly had backgrounds in law, they investigated the legal and logical aspects of race relations. Delgado and Stefancic (2012) proposed that there were two different schools of thought regarding racism—idealists and realists. Idealists believed that racism was socially constructed and that the people were in control of the words and actions that made up racism. With this ideology, the people held the power to turn racism on and off. On the contrary, realists believed that racism was born out of slavery and the dominant culture's need to distribute privilege and power. Realists thought there was something much deeper about racism, more than language and behavior. Racism created a system of power within society that was not so easily dismantled (p. 21). Critical race theory also stemmed from critical legal theory and radical feminism that introduced the term *legal indeterminacy,* which meant that there was not necessarily only one outcome for any particular person (p. 5). The theorists borrowed the study of racist patterns of behavior, social roles, and power from radical feminism (p. 6). Not only did the critical race theorists seek understanding, they sought social change and transformation that would

change the way organizations were structured and dominant cultures behaved towards other cultures.

According to Delgado and Stefancic (2012), there were four major tenets of critical race theory. The first major tenet of most critical race theorists was that racism was a normal experience in the culture. They described it as the common shared experience of most people of color (p. 7). The second tenet was that racism or dominance of one race of people over another existed because it served a purpose for the dominant culture. The first purpose that it served was that the dominant culture could keep control by exercising blindness to color. The dominant culture can behave as if race was not a factor in most situation unless the situation was overt and unavoidable (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 8). The second purpose that racism served, according to critical race theory, was to elevate the dominant culture. The dominant culture keeps the power by helping those in that culture and limiting the progress of others (p. 8). Next, the third tenet of critical race theory was the idea that race was a social construct that the dominant culture used to differentiate between people of different cultural backgrounds. The dominant culture created its own definition of traits and characteristics—stereotypes—for the others and could use them to manipulate others and keep the control over the social structure of society (p. 8). Delgado and Stefancic (2012) coined the term *differential racialization* in critical race theory to represent this act of defining others (p. 8). The final tenet was that African American people have their own voice, meaning their own story and culture

separate from the dominant culture. If these people had been able to tell their stories from their own perspectives, then they would have found it easier to coexist with the dominant culture of people, and they would have been free to live and be themselves. However, under racism, their stories had been told by the dominant culture, changed, and falsified. This act increased stereotypes and demonstrated a powerless people.

Critical Race Feminist Theory

From critical race theory, several movements were born to give a platform to various oppressed groups of people with other issues that included race, such as women. Critical race feminist theory (Wing, 2003) was derived from critical race theory and provided criticism for the feminist idea that all women share one opinion and have one voice on all issues (Wing, 2003, p. 7). The premise was the same as critical race theory except with a focus on women's issues specifically. Critical race feminist theorists argued that the unified voice of women only included European American women and African American women were excluded from that unified voice (p. 7). As a form of essentialism, women's collective voice was the only voice heard instead of hearing their individual voices. A second critical race feminist theory approach was an antiessentialist point of view called intersectionality. In intersectionality, there was not one voice for oppressed and marginalized African American women, but instead there were at least three. Their ethnicity, race, and gender intersected with other factors, contributing to their individual personalities (p. 7). One idea that stemmed from antiessentialism was that of multiplicative—only the actual act of discrimination was considered for analysis (p. 7). In

other words, the women's stories only depicted one aspect of their experiences with racism and sexism. Moreover, the plight of African American women was generalized by the critical race feminist theory researchers and only the pain from these experiences was the topic of discussion, thus ignoring their stories of success and triumph.

Critical race feminist theory embodied all of the aforementioned viewpoints, yet intersectionality, the inclusion of interactions that reinforce each other, was at the center of the challenges that African American women faced in seeking advancement. In practice, this meant that African American women entered into the workplace stigmatized for being African American and being women. Intersectionality, or the interaction between race and gender, in the higher education workplace for African American women marginalized them and pushed them to assimilate, "shift" (Hinton, 2010, p. 398), and become subjected to tokenism. In other words, in order to be taken seriously or advance professionally without being judged by either their race or gender; some African American women were forced to become someone they were not. They may have become like the majority as a cover for their true identities and as a way to cope in the workplace. This form of discrimination allowed for one group, a dominant group, to oppress others with no grounds other than race and gender.

Elliott and Smith (2004) used intersectionality to describe direct discrimination (p. 368). Their study of workplace power showed that productivity in the workplace was predicated on the assumptions of the managers that certain racial groups of people would produce more work based on stereotypes, and in this case, their assumption was that White men would produce more than African American women (Elliott & Smith, 2004,

p. 368). In other words, a person's race could predetermine their hierarchy in the workplace, creating conditions that often gave women of color less chance from the beginning. Thus, critical race feminist theory provided a basis to explore intersectionality through the experiences of African American women in midlevel leadership positions who faced challenges in higher education at PWIs.

Intercultural Communications Theory

Although critical race theory and critical race feminist theory involve communications and relationships between different groups of people, intercultural communications theory focused on those varying groups interacting with each other for a common goal. Intercultural communications theory addressed a form of intergroup communication with the participants from different cultural backgrounds (Kim & Gudykunst, 1988, p. 125). This type of communication occurred primarily in person and involved individuals who identified with different groups that shared certain patterns in life (pp. 12-13). Three factors were described here related to intercultural communications theory—culture, communications, and organizational culture.

Culture. To ensure that communication happened, the message was transmitted and received properly, and that there was understanding and a positive outcome, intercultural communications theory suggested culture must be considered in the exchange (Dodd, 1997, p. 37). All workers should have an awareness of the cultural identities of the other so that the intended communication was preserved. Culture was the code that informed a person's behavior, values, likes and dislikes, judgments, and ways of communication (p. 38). A person's culture also included the past that helped to

influence individual personality and relationships (p. 38). Dodd (1997) represented that one's overall being was the sum of their cultural identity that shaped who they were as a person.

Under the vast umbrella of culture, Dodd (1997) named seven systems or facets within each culture that informed their values, practices, and customs. The systems included economic, kinship, political, social control, health management, educational, and religious (p. 49). These systems affected the outcomes of intercultural exchanges, but were useful for understanding some cultural situations. The economic system developed within a cultural group for informal record keeping of property owned and how it was used (Dodd, 1997, p. 50). A more relevant understanding of the economic system, for example, was in an intercultural exchange when one person made assumptions about the other based on material things he or she owned. This was an element that the people within the group understood, was relative, and varied from culture to culture.

Communication. The second of Dodd's (1997) three factors of intercultural communication was communication. Interaction between anyone involved communication, but there were factors that interfered with effective communication. Gudykunst (1995) asserted that there were certain levels of anxiety and uncertainty that people felt when encountering strangers (p. 8). As defined by Kim and Gudykunst (1988), strangers were those people who were present and involved in any situation, but still considered outsiders of the situation because they belonged to a different cultural group (p. 125). Strangers may actually be socialized members of other groups, but they

lacked the same understandings and knowledge held by members of the in-group, thus making them strangers or outsiders to the social norms (pp. 125-126).

Kim and Gudykunst (1988) explained the angst that was often felt between workers representing different cultural identities. Intercultural interactions presented anxiety and uncertainty to those adults in the workplace when they were expected to work collaboratively to meet the objectives of the organization. Regarding working with people from different cultures, the authors addressed the issues of anxiety and uncertainty that accompanied interacting with strangers and how to reduce those emotions so that learning and effective communication occurred (p. 128). When encountering unfamiliar people or territories, the immediate feeling expressed was insecurity (p. 126). Strangers or outsiders feared negative consequences for themselves as well as negative evaluations from the in-group (p. 126). Kim and Gudykunst explained that there were six assumptions about strangers that increased a person's anxiety:

- At least one member of the out-group was approached from one members of the in-group.

- Strangers were not sure how to behave so they experienced extreme feelings of crisis and anxiety.

- Anxiety and uncertainty were separate from intercultural communication as these emotions were only present during new encounters but not with familiar groups.

- The behavior of strangers to the in-group showed an increased awareness of their actions.

- Personal and group factors influenced communication.

- The anxiety that strangers felt caused them to give more power to the in-group than what was actually there. (p. 128)

Moreover, as they continued, these assumptions increased the anxiety and uncertainty of both the stranger and the in-group member because cultural differences controlled the interactions.

To strengthen relationships and attempt to alleviate the anxiety and uncertainty, Kim and Gudykunst (1988) developed 13 axioms. Axioms were discussed as links between two variables that explained the direct effect one had on the other (p. 128). For each axiom, intercultural effective communication and intercultural adaptation were the two variables that helped to describe the causal relationship between the anxiety and the intercultural interaction. For example, the second axiom assumed that if a person had positive thoughts about the interactions with a stranger, disregarding stereotypes or prior experience, then the experience would be positive (p. 133). The outcome for each of the thirteen axioms was that an increase in a positive action on behalf of the stranger or the in-group members resulted in a decrease in anxiety or possible negative feelings towards the other. Confidence was restored in both parties (Kim & Gudykunst, 1988, pp. 130-142).

Organizational culture. The last factor in Dodd's (1997) theory of intercultural communication was developing cultural awareness to foster effective communication in the workplace (p. 6). The higher education workplace, for example, was a specific subculture of a larger cultural unit that held its own in-groups, norms, and practices. The

members of a subculture were members of a larger cultural unit but also identified with the subgroup by self-identification, social norm identification, or behavioral identification (pp. 64-65). Specific occupational roles were also influenced by culture and communication based on those unspoken cultural norms (p. 45). Every organization had a culture within its structure. Organizational culture had specific norms for communication for the members who were all working together to reach the same objectives (Dodd, 1987, p. 114). The culture also explained how the organization accomplished its goals and the thoughts about the work that was done there (p. 114).

Relevant Research

Critical race theory and critical race feminist theory were used in recent research to view the challenges and discrimination that African American women as faculty have faced while teaching in higher education. Sule (2011) employed critical race feminist theory to support the research on African American women faculty and their development of defense mechanisms for combating the degrading behavior and comments their White students would display in class (p. 172). Sule interviewed 10 participants, 7 Black and 3 Latina, and there were 5 from the humanities discipline and 5 from social sciences (p. 173). In the study, Sule discussed the similarity of the women's responses that seemed to indicate the intersectionality and race and gender discrimination that accompanied Black women faculty when they chose to work at PWIs. Sule was able to focus on the women faculty's challenges by using race and gender as the foundation for the argument. For example one participant, Cornelia, remarked that all of her White students started the class negatively stereotyping their class because it was being taught

by a woman of color, and they ended the class with a very different outlook and realized that the race and gender of their teacher was irrelevant (p. 180).

Critical race theory was also used in a recent study to understand marginalization of an already oppressed population. Griffin et al. (2013) studied the difficulties that African American faculty instructors had establishing credit with their students and peers and earning rewards for their merit. The results were viewed through a critical race theory lens in order to explain race as a factor in the negative experiences with advancement and promotion of African American women within the higher education workplace (Griffin et al., 2013, p. 491).

People cannot communicate without first understanding one another and the culture of their environment. Using this conceptual framework aided in uncovering the attitudes, behaviors, and speech that are characteristic of the study's participants in their higher education workplace culture, and revealed potential obstacles to their advancement as university leaders.

Relevance to the Research Questions

The research questions for this study were driven by the three theories: critical race theory, critical race feminist theory, and intercultural communications theory. Since the purpose of the study was to understand the intercultural and career advancement experiences of African American women midlevel leaders at PWIs, using a critical race and critical race feminism lens was appropriate. Their experiences were both gender and race related, which created the relevancy of both theories. Because I investigated the intercultural relationships of African American women midlevel leaders at PWIs of

higher education and evaluated those relationships' purposes and benefits to the women, intercultural communications theory was appropriate to incorporate and used to help in analyzing the lived experiences of the participants.

Literature Review Related to Key Variables

In this section, I discuss the relevant variables of recent studies involving African American women in higher education including: race and gender disparities, intercultural relationship building, and mentorship as the key variables in overcoming obstacles brought about by disparities. In addition, the methodologies used in research reviewed with an overview of the strengths and weaknesses in the approaches to research in each study were discussed. For each variable in the literature review, a rationale was provided for the relevance of this qualitative study, the issues and background that surround each, and an explanation detailing how the variables benefitted from further research. A synthesis of the reviewed research provided a guide to the approach used in this study.

Race and Gender Disparities in Higher Education Workplace

The first key variable in this research study was race and gender disparity. African American women in midlevel leadership positions working at PWIs have been limited over the years (Absher, 2009; Behar-Horenstein et al., 2012; Elliott & Smith, 2004). Historically, African American women and women in general were found in colleges and universities in roles serving and taking care of others (Jones & Palmer, 2011). They were cleaning the buildings with a limited number occupying the offices they cleaned. Harley (2008) explained the shift that occurred after the civil rights movement of the 1960s that was instrumental in encouraging formal education, thus resulting in the possibility for

more educated and career-minded African American women entering academia

specifically (Harley, 2008, p. 21).

Professional development and assistance have been available, such as mentors for

African American women serving in middle management in higher education, but full

support from their institution by way of written and practiced non-bias or discriminatory

policy was critical, too (Pittman, 2012). Hale (2004) proposed that higher education

sought to address the positive contributions and actions made by all the various

ethnicities of people—students and staff—stating "the unique role of higher education

gives it extraordinary leverage to either help or hurt the chances of people of color for

equality of opportunity" (p. 20). Sule (2011) interviewed 10 women of color, including

seven African American women. These women explained that they were made to be

aware of their race and gender by their students and colleagues at every turn. Sule

claimed African American women leaders entered the academy with a keen awareness of

their race and gender, and understood that the expectation of them was that they were less

intelligent than their European American male counter-parts, and would not perform as

well either (p. 174). When the institution demonstrated this oppressive way of thinking

about African American women, Sule's research also showed ways in which the women

empowered themselves to achieve excellence.

Sule (2011) discovered several popular mechanisms the participants used widely

to address diversity issues. The participants first felt they needed to legitimize their

presence as classroom leaders and as the ones holding the power with their students.

They indicated that dressing professionally every day regardless of the relaxed dress code

was one way they were taken seriously and respected (Sule, 2011, p. 174). In addition to outward appearance, the participants reported that they received more respect and credibility when they were able to incorporate works or personal stories that included well-known and reviewed authors and/or celebrities. They were also careful not to perpetuate any stereotypes about angry Black women by not showing emotion or letting the students see them flustered (pp. 174-175).

Another coping mechanism employed by the participants in Sule's (2011) study was that they each challenged the current social structure and the institution's approach to diversity. They felt that "White privilege" (p. 176) was apparent and was being used to hold power and control over people of color, staff, and students. In addition, the participants worked to discuss this with their students to make them aware of the issues and encourage critical thinking (p. 177). The last way that participants expressed a way to address diversity issues in the classroom was to include social and ethical discussion into the curriculum. The participants forced students to think analytically about social and political aspects of their lives such as education, religion, gender, and race.

The African American and Latina women faculty felt that by their position in life and at the university, they had the fiduciary duty to educate others (Sule, 2011, pp. 178-179). In other words, as women of color and professors at a large predominantly White research institution, the participants were acting as the diversity ambassadors to help educate the majority about diversity issues. These behaviors were to mask the participants' identity while they made efforts to blend in with the European American

faculty and hoped that they would garner support from the institution based on merit and not race (p. 175).

Sule (2011) and Pittman (2010, 2012) found that race did seem to matter when it came to institutional support for African American women and the manner in which that support was displayed. Holmes (2008) discovered how race changed the dynamics of higher education with the introduction of affirmative action. When affirmative action entered into the realm of higher education and the workforce, it was meant to make access equal for minorities and people of color. As a result, more women and people of color were admitted into institutions as students, and more were being hired in faculty positions within academia (Holmes, 2008, p. 108). Holmes (2008) interviewed 10 African American women faculty members from two large research institutions that also were classified as PWIs. Of the 10 faculty members, each were interviewed four times (Holmes, 2008, p. 106). One participant noted that she did not get to complete her entire job interview before that interview team stopped her and told her that she was hired because they needed her to bring diversity to their campus (p. 109). This sort of practice ensured that an institution would diversify its faculty and staff; however, Holmes noted such practices could also set up a workplace experience for African American women as a demonstration of tokenism. The African American women leaders among instructional faculty earned their credentials and expected to earn their positions as well—and not be hired or fired based on their race or gender (Sule, 2011, p. 175). Holmes (2008) reported that one African American woman faculty participant expressed that no consideration or thought for her research agenda, her writing, or her intellectual capacity was given to the

decision to hire her at a PWI (p. 110). The university hired her because she was African American and female because they needed to diversify, so her skills and past professional work were secondary to her race and gender at that time and mattered least. Holmes (2008) discovered that the other African American women faculty participants in the study were unaware that they had been hired at a PWI because of affirmative action requirements (p. 109). Moreover, some African American women faculty reported that they thought they were hired based on their credentials and merit, and were surprised to find out otherwise.

Research on the advancement for African American women has also been conducted in other realms of education such as in the secondary education. Keedy, Bjork, Winter, Rinehart, and Ricciardi (2007) examined the role of school superintendents to uncover why women and minorities were rarely in this position of power in one Kentucky school district. The researcher wanted to know if there were no viable candidates for the positions (p. 51). The results from the quantitative survey study indicated the top three reasons African American women in that district were not in the high-level leadership position of superintendent: (a) insufficient opportunities to prepare for advancement, (b) absence of professional mentoring, and (c) women and minorities were not actively recruited to work there (p. 51).

The visibility of African American women leaders is not only important for other African American women and minority populations to see, but equally as important for the development and educational experience of the students on the college and university campuses (Griffin & Reddick, 2004, p. 1042). Griffin and Reddick discovered that

African American women professors were highly sought after by their African American women students for academic and life advice. When mentoring students of other races, the African American women continued to provide the same advice, and based on the participants' accounts, they were serving somewhat as mothers to all the students (p. 1044).

More evidence was provided in additional research that explored the relationships of African American female students and European American male students to their African American instructors (Basow et al., 2013, Dahlvig, 2010; Pittman, 2010; Smith, 2009). The European American male students presented opposition to their African American women instructors in the classroom (Pittman, 2010). When the teacher evaluations of 190 instructors were reviewed, they indicated that African American women were perceived by students to be not as effective, second to African American men, and the value of their courses taught by their African American women professors was rated as low (Smith, 2009). In addition, the African American professors interviewed by Mitchell and Lee (2006) shared that they were often overlooked in the classroom and referred to at the teaching assistant because of their race and gender (pp. 99-100). In studies that involved international women of color from outside of the United States the results were the same. Women of color were not perceived to be as bright or capable as their European American counterparts or men in general (Castagno, 2005; Nguyen, 2013; Rabe & Rugunanan, 2012). Nguyen (2013) explored the careers of women in Asia Pacific countries who were deans in higher education. The six women interviewed about their lived experiences echoed the stereotype that *men* were seen as managers and not

women (p. 125). As a result, this stereotype among other barriers such as obligations to their homes and limited mentorship opportunities, women were marginalized and kept out of leadership positions in higher education.

In addition, workplace issues for African American women in fields other than higher education administration remained similar to the experiences of those within higher education at PWIs (Elliott & Smith, 2004; House et al., 2007; Keedy et al., 2007). For example, Hite (2004) surveyed 276 African American and European American women middle-managers from across the United States who worked in various industries and discovered that European American women perceived African American women to have the same employment opportunities as European American men. On the contrary, African American women perceived themselves to receive fewer promotional opportunities than both European American men and women (pp. 135-136). These perceptions were consistent with the literature reviewed on African American women at PWIs. Lastly, Mitchell and Lee (2006) found that African American women brought their experiences as women of color into their teaching style and approach as well as their understanding of the culture at their institutions (p. 99). These two pedagogical choices can influence the learning experience for their students from exposure to the new and different perspective of their professor.

Modica and Mamiseishvili (2010) discovered that European American men in academia were provided more opportunities for advancement at PWIs than African American women (p. 110) using existing data that was retrieved from the National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSPF) in 1993, 1999, and 2004, including 35,630 respondents

at 1,080 institutions across the United States. The researchers understood from their findings there was a disproportionately low number of African American tenured faculty at higher education institutions. African American faculty earned tenure at rate of 31.8% in 1993 and 31.5% in 2004. European American faculty earned tenure at 50.5% in 1993 and 44% in 2004 (Modica & Mamiseishvili, 2010, p. 115). The gap in career advancement between African American women and European Americans tended to be larger at those institutions that were predominantly European American or research focused. They also examined the attitudes and behaviors of African American faculty regarding their positions and work environment and determined that the African American professionals were unhappier and more dissatisfied with their careers and salaries than were European Americans (p. 116). In fact, the results showed that there was a consistent increase in the standard deviation from the mean level of discontentment for African Americans in overall job satisfaction from 1993 to 2004 (p. 118).

Furthermore, European American participants were asked to rate to what degree they agree or disagree with the statement that female faculty are treated fairly on this campus and ethnic minority faculty are treated fairly on this campus (Modica & Mamiseishvili, 2010, p. 113). From the 3 years of data, 470 African American faculty from various research institutions were used as the sample for this study. In a larger data group, including the participants of all races, participants responded to seven categories of job satisfaction and perception, satisfaction with authority, their workload, salary, and benefits, and overall satisfaction. Participants were then asked about their perception of fair treatment for women and minority faculty (p. 113). The results indicated that African

Americans rated their level of satisfaction lower than that of European Americans. Also, African Americans' perceptions of the treatment of women and minorities was lower (p. 116).

Gilbert and Ivancevich (2011) tested the idea that both African American and European American people had perceptions of the other even before interacting with one another and these perceptions would affect their work or school experiences. The study involved 317 undergraduate business students that included male and female, European American students and students of color as participants. They were shown a series of 50 pictures of instructors and were asked to judge their intelligence and their own ability and willingness to learn from the person in the picture (Gilbert & Ivancevich, 2011, pp. 138-139). The researchers remarked that due to the negative racial stereotypes that accompanied the participants in the study, they would be interested to further study the impact of those stereotypes on the low expectations for African Americans to be successful (p. 144).

Part of socialization and becoming familiar with the workplace culture is understanding the workplace's idea and definition of power. Harley (2008) defined power as "positional privilege" (p. 23). Positional privilege typically means that European American men are given positions of power because they are socially acceptable as the norm and could be used as the benchmark for measuring success, education, economic status, et cetera (p. 23). Positional privilege also means that African American women have to work harder to make themselves more visible at PWIs while struggling to meet the seemingly unattainable standards set by and for European American men (p. 24).

Holmes (2008), Modica and Mamiseishvili (2010), and Sule (2011) showed that Black women faculty in higher education working at PWIs, collectively felt a lack of support from their institutions. The institutional racism and perpetuation of stereotypes that were woven into the culture of these PWIs as they specifically pertained to African American women, was crippling to the well-being of African American women and their career advancement. The purpose of each study was to chart the experiences of the African American woman higher education leaders and help explain their challenges and concerns in their workplace. To summarize, Holmes (2008), Modica and Mamiseishvili (2010), and Sule (2011) discovered that race and gender do matter and can affect the career choice and path, ability to get a job, and opportunities for advancement. Because race mattered and African American women were in the minority, building relationships was a vital step towards upward mobility.

Intercultural Relationship-Building in the Workplace

The second major variable in this research study focused on building intercultural relationships in the higher education workplace. Intercultural workplace environments, such as those experienced by African American women at PWIs, and forming relationships were found to present challenges that often created more issues for African American women's career paths (Echols et al., 2002; Mabokela & Mawila, 2004; Mawhinney, 2011). Zambrana, Ray, Espino, Castro, Cohen, and Eliason's (2015) qualitative study that included interviews and focus groups with 58 men of women faculty of color from 22 research institutions showed that having meaningful professional relationships with mentors early in one's career, often from different cultural

backgrounds, was perceived to improve their professional performance and increase their

marketability (pp. 53-54) . Moreover, their study showed oneself to be versatile, open,

and tolerant are indicators to senior management that an employee was ready for the next

level in their career. However, researchers found that there were often other unwritten

standards that African American women professionals had to also meet before they were

considered for other positions or opportunities within the institution (Clayborne &

Hamrick, 2007; Zambrana et al., 2015). For example, one Latina American women

participant remarked that she felt her mentor was forcing her to assimilate and abandon

her own research interests to please the majority. She was led to think that neither she nor

her research would be taken seriously if she did not comply (Zambrana et al., 2015, p.

56).

Some of the barriers that African American women leaders in higher education

experienced were direct results of their understanding of the social infrastructure in their

workplace that affected their leadership and advancement, as found in a grounded theory

study (Parker, 2002, p. 252). Since the processes for tenure and career advancement were

generally written objectively, everyone should have had a fair opportunity to excel.

However, according to Davis et al. (2011), an African American woman faculty, the only

participant in their study of her interactions with other women faculty, found herself with

fewer opportunities for promotion. Davis et al.'s qualitative study outlined the

experiences of this African American woman faculty leader who was a veteran faculty

member at a PWI in the Midwest by observing and noting the intergroup interactions

between the veteran faculty and the junior faculty women. The observations took place

during a faculty boot camp retreat held by an organization called Sister of the Academy.

Davis et al. (2011) observed the seasoned African American woman faculty member

attending the boot camp and examined the socialization of African American women

tenure- and non-tenure track faculty in higher education and the influence outside

organizational involvement had on their professional experiences (pp. 28-29). Davis et al.

(2011) suggested that a possible reason for African American women being more

engaged outside of the workplace was because their research interests were mostly

gender and race focused and may not have been supported within the general workplace

culture (p. 30). In other words, African American women faculty perceived that they had

to conform to the socially acceptable research topics to be considered for high-level

leadership and tenure.

Another way in which the higher education workplace culture was a hindrance for

some African American women leaders is the culture's restriction of leadership

opportunities and disproportionate distribution of workloads. Pittman (2010), in

interviews with African American women leaders, concluded that not only were women

of color in the minorities as employees in higher education, the women reported they

often served in the least powerful positions and accepted the largest teaching assignments

(pp. 185-186). Pittman (2010) interviewed participants who worked at only one PWI of

higher education in the Midwest. The participants were women of color, all but one of

whom held tenure or tenure-track faculty positions. They included eight African

American women, three Latina women, and six Asian women (p. 187). The participants

had been previously selected as part of a larger pool of participants derived from a listing

of honorees for university award recognition and community diversity contributions (p. 186).

Furthermore, Pittman (2010) concluded that the heavier teaching loads at a PWI for African American women faculty might increase exposure to racial discrimination and bias from European American male students in their classes. The African American women faculty in the study reported that if they addressed the heavy loads formally they were frowned upon by the administration, instead of efforts being made to assist and support them (p. 192). With the padded teaching assignments, racial tension, and angst surrounding them daily, the African American women participants described suffering from high amounts of stress. Stress was found in another study to come from informal workloads. Holmes (2008) described one participant who stated that she had 50% teaching appointment, 40% administrative role, and 10% on a special project. This was 100% of time, but it did not include the extra work she did with every minority student at her institution. As the only minority woman leader, her university department would send all of the minority students to her for informal advising in addition to her regular case load (Holmes, 2008, p. 112).

In addition to the heavy workloads, the unwritten rules within the higher education workplace have caused marginalization and invisibility of African American women who then sought refuge outside of the university culture to counter those experiences by obtaining personal empowerment with outside support networks (Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007). Clayborne and Hamrick (2007) studied the experiences and challenges of African American women midlevel leaders working in student affairs

in higher education Midwestern PWIs. There were six participants; four worked at 2-year institutions, and two worked at 4-year institutions (p. 124). Black feminist thought was the conceptual framework for the phenomenological study. The purpose was to increase understanding about the influence of leadership on the lives, careers, and purposefulness of African American women midlevel leaders in student affairs in higher education (p. 127). The participants self-identified as midlevel leaders in their institutions working primarily with students and student issues, and did not carry responsibilities for major decision-making or policy change on a departmental or institutional level (Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007, p. 126).

The participants in the Clayborne and Hamrick (2007) study were selected through criterion and referral sampling: 25 professionals in higher education were contacted and asked to submit names of African American women they believed would be helpful to their study whom were in midlevel positions and had 6 to 15 years of experience and significant amount of schooling at PWIs (p. 128). The researchers wanted to know if these African American women's experiences revealed connections to their intersectionality of being African American and woman in leadership roles at PWIs.

Clayborne and Hamrick (2007) showed three major emergent themes that characterized the participants' leadership experiences as staff in student services: approaches to leadership, challenges and professional experiences, and support systems (p. 130). The participants each viewed their leadership experiences very similarly in that leadership was a shared responsibility of an entire unit or staff. They also noted that they believed leaders should be caring, compassionate, and "lead from the heart" (p. 131).

When asked about race and gender concerning leadership, the participants reported that they were aware of the challenges for African American women in leadership roles, but felt it was important not to dwell, but to lead by example and respect and include the perspectives of everyone (p. 132). The second theme from the research focused on professional challenges and experiences revealed that the participants were most challenged by the limited decision-making and real influence they had within their institutions. Moreover, they expressed feelings about having to work harder than their White colleagues and ultimately still achieve less (pp. 132-133).

Lastly, the participants were asked about their support systems and what mechanisms they used to cope and adapt in their predominantly White workplace environments. The four interviewees in Clayborne and Hamrick's (2007) work also reported they built spiritual connections to a higher power, and fostered positive relationships with family members and close friends. They expressed that not everyone at work could be trusted, so they were least likely to develop close working relationships for support purposes (p. 135). The researchers concluded from the interview responses, that the participants were combating stereotyped identities that were placed on them by the dominant culture because they were formally educated, African American, female, and in leadership roles. They did so by leading in their own way, finding support from other African American women leaders, organizations, and the church; and representing issues on their campuses that affect oppressed student populations (pp. 139-140).

From Clayborne and Hamrick's (2007) findings, African American women midlevel student affairs workers at Midwestern PWIs inherently felt they needed to find

support outside of the institution and that they had to carve their own path because they were not placed in leadership roles that could affect significant change. Wing also (2003) reported that the student affairs workers were the lowest paid and held no power (p. 42). This was also demonstrated in Elliott and Smith's (2004) work regarding African American women's visibility as leaders in higher education. Finding mentorship and support were key factors that made a difference in the experiences of African American midlevel leaders at PWIs. Next, the research that supports this is addressed.

Mentorship and Career Advancement

The role of mentors in the intercultural and career advancement was the remaining key concept considered in this literature review on African American women midlevel leaders at PWIs. Two studies reported that African American women at PWIs discovered that finding effective mentors in senior leadership was often a laborious task (Nguyen, 2012; Reddick, 2006). However, other findings indicated that it is important for midlevel leaders to have the guidance of a more experienced professional in order to learn the culture of the workplace, gain access to professional development opportunities, and be groomed for high-level leadership roles (Dowdy & Hamilton, 2011; Nichols, 2004). To advance in leadership within the higher education workplace, it was critical to have mentors for guidance who help navigate workplace culture and structure. Patton-Davis (2009) reported from a study of African American women in graduate education and professional schools that mentors were usually in the same or similar field and held high-level leadership positions with many years of experience. Alexander (2010) interviewed recent and current African American women college and university

presidents and found all had caring, sincere, and motivational mentors, male and female, and of the same race who were instrumental in their professional lives (p. 202). The current presidents reported that having the prior example of those other great women that have come before them, such as Mary McLeod Bethune, showed them that success in higher education was possible—that leadership among the dominant culture was possible (Alexander, 2010, p. 199).

Inability to envision oneself as a leader was one barrier that impeded the professional growth of African American women, but was overcome with the help of a mentor (Davis et al., 2011). Mentors assisted with creating pathways to success with the African American female leader and helped her work through the struggles and difficult times by sharing the stories of other similar leaders who had paved the way, (p. 30). Moreover, Patton-Davis (2009) concluded that having a mentor relationship helped alleviate stress, improve self-image, and provide encouragement to continue the process for African American women (p. 512).

While having a mentor was identified as an important part of the leadership process, finding a mentor was challenging for African American women yet still rewarding. Griffin (2013) found that securing a mentor was most difficult for women, but when they did, the mentor helped to create a better understanding of the field and leadership role and could aid in directing the mentee's career in higher education (Griffin, 2013, p. 85). Since finding a mentor on one's own could be a daunting task, it was helpful when the college or university unit had a structured mentoring program to provide support to everyone. Griffin (2013) chronicled her own one-person experience with

earning tenure as a faculty member and understanding the university processes, but explained that she had an advantage by being a part of a formal mentoring program from within her organization (p. 86). For the first 6-months of her tenure-track employment at a PWI, she also felt supported and encouraged by senior administrators. This opportunity also suggested that the race or cultural background of the mentor did not have to match that of the mentee. Her mentor was a woman but not of African American decent (Griffin, 2013, p. 85). Griffin (2013) stated that many people may think that matching race, gender, and cultural backgrounds of the mentee and mentor is best for a positive relationship, however Griffin (2013) showed that, in her case, trustworthiness, honesty, sharing, and having common interests made for a positive mentoring experience for the mentee and mentor alike (p. 86).

Zambrana et al. (2015) sought to understand the importance of mentoring for 55 underrepresented minority faculty this population at 22 PWIs in United States. The participants were primarily assistant professors at their institutions. Each engaged in a semi-structured interview and focus group that focused on the participants' career paths and their perceptions and interpretations of their current positions (p. 45). These minority faculty reported benefiting from having a mentor early in their career, particularly one who understands their specific needs, and who they can observe or shadow if on a similar career path (pp. 52-54).

Nichols and Tanksley (2004) also found mentoring was important. They conducted a qualitative study with 39 African American women higher education administrators who were completing doctoral degrees at PWIs. They interviewed the

women and determined two barriers, in addition to race and gender, to career

advancement for African American women: family obligations and effective mentoring

(pp. 178-180). Nichols and Tanksley (2004) and Clayborne and Hamrick (2007)

indicated that having a mentor helped to combat some of the invisibility and

discrimination that African American women encountered. The mentor provided insight

into the operation of the organization that may not change the situation all together, but

could increase the potential for an improved work environment (Collins, 1998, p. 9).

African American women, however, encountered difficulty obtaining formal

mentorship. Two participants in Holmes's (2008) study reported that they felt slighted

when it came to research or project collaboration, and mentorship and support. The two

reported that senior leaders went out of their way to attend to new White male colleagues,

but failed to provide the same attention to them (Holmes, 2008, p. 113).

To summarize, mentoring has been a major factor in higher education leadership.

The benefits of having a good mentor increase one's opportunities at the institution, assist

in navigating the hierarchical structure, and provided the motivation and support needed

for longevity and success. Davis et al. (2011) described the responses from their single

participant, a non-tenure track African American woman working at a PWI who aspired

to have full tenure; her experiences with the Sisters of The Academy boot camp were

enriching. She felt that her professional career would benefit from mentorship and

friendship with African American women senior leaders (Davis et al., 2011, p. 34). She

considered these women "allies" (p. 34). Since both African American women senior

leaders and faculty in higher education were few in numbers in higher education,

mentoring each other and sharing their stories helped more women of color ascend to higher levels in their careers in higher education.

Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter I first reviewed the problem and the purpose of this qualitative study on African American midlevel leaders at PWIs. I discussed the search terms as well as library resource databases used to explore the literature related to the study. I extensively reviewed the three theories—critical race theory, critical race feminist theory, and intercultural communications theory—that were used for the conceptual framework. In the literature review, I covered research pertaining to race and gender disparities in higher education, intercultural relationships in the higher education workplace, and the importance of mentorship in career advancement. A healthy understanding of the workplace culture was found to be particularly important to African American women's survival and advancement at a PWI.

Of relevance to this study are some factors that were currently known relating to the research topic and some that have yet to be studied. It is known that European American male instructional faculty earned tenure at faster rates than African American women (Frazier, 2011), and mentoring helped women navigate intercultural relationships in the workplace and unfamiliar social and cultural norms (Alexander, 2010; Dahlvig, 2010; Lafreniere & Longman, 2008; Nichols & Tanksley, 2004; Patton-Davis, 2009). It was also known that discrimination because of race and gender was one factor that kept African American women from advancing (Alire, 2001; Castagno, 2005; Cooper et al., 2006; Engstrom, 2008; Jayakumar, 2009; Souto-Manning, 2007; Tull & Freeman, 2008;).

From the literature, I found research on experiences of African American women presidents and the senior management levels at PWIs (Alexander, 2010) but there was limited information about the experiences and perceptions of African American women who are in midlevel leaders in higher education departments outside of student affairs and aspire to senior level roles in higher education leadership. Few studies addressed African American women midlevel leaders at PWIs regarding any aspect of their experience. In this present study, I examined the lives of African American women midlevel leaders and through interviews. I sought to understand their intercultural and career advancement experiences in higher education while working at mid- to large-sized PWIs.

Using critical race theory, critical race feminist theory, and intercultural communications theory as a conceptual framework to view the participants and their experiences, I asked the participants to share their lived experiences in order to better understand African American women midlevel leaders in their intercultural relationships and career advancement. The inquiry included understanding African American women's experiences related especially to the role of intercultural relationship-building in higher education, their career advancement experiences, and what role mentoring played in their career experience in PWIs. As such, issues of race and gender were likely to provide important context for that inquiry. In Chapter 3, I discuss the methodological approach to this study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

In the previous chapters, I discussed the need to know more about African

American women midlevel leaders at PWIs and their intercultural relationship-building

and career advancement experiences. The purpose of this qualitative study was to

understand the intercultural and career advancement experiences of African American

women midlevel leaders at PWIs. In Chapter 3, I present the research design and

rationale, the role of the researcher, the methodological approach (including participant

selection, the interview approach, and data analysis plan), issues of trustworthiness, and

ethics.

Research Design and Rationale

The research questions for this basic qualitative study were the following:

1. What are the lived intercultural and career advancement experiences of

   African American women midlevel leaders at PWIs?

2. What are the perceived influences of intercultural relationships on the career

   paths of African American women in midlevel leadership positions at PWIs?

3. What are mentorship experiences of African American women in midlevel

   leadership positions at PWIs?

A basic qualitative study with interviews concerning common experiences was

chosen for these research questions as the most appropriate. The interview approach to

research (Merriam, 2009; Moustakas, 1994; Seidman, 2006) included the possible

meanings and understandings that accompanied the participants' recounting of their

experience with the realities of being an African American woman midlevel leader at a

PWI. In the interviews I addressed what Seidman (2006) termed the intellectual and emotional connections the participants have to their work and life. During the interview process, the experiences shared were undisturbed (Moustakas, 1994), meaning they were recorded as stated by the participant and I made every effort not to alter them with my personal perception or feeling.

Similar to a basic qualitative study that uses interviews, a phenomenological approach requires the researcher to investigate the shared experiences of the participants as they relate to the same phenomenon (Creswell, 2004, p. 58). In a phenomenological approach, however, the researcher uses the experiences to draw their own explanation of what happened in the lives of their participants. Then, the researcher identifies themes to label and common influential factors (Creswell, 2004, p. 60). Patton (2002) explained that the phenomenological approach allows the researcher an opportunity to listen to the descriptions of the participants' experience with the phenomenon and glean their feelings and perceptions from them (p. 104).

However, in this research, I was most interested in participants' experiences with the intercultural aspects of the workplace environment and their career advancement and how they managed their careers in the PWI environment. In this study there was a partially shared phenomenon as the participants' experiences in their roles at PWIs varied, some more widely than others. While there was an expectation that patterns would emerge, the interview questions were more related to a basic qualitative study with interviews than a phenomenological study.

A narrative approach (Creswell, 2004) was also not selected for this study because, although I listened to the experiences shared by the participants, I did not make interpretations or retell the stories from my own perspective. Grounded theory was also not appropriate for this study either that primary focus was on discovering a new theory based on the understanding of the data collected. An ethnographic study would also not have been a good fit since, according to Creswell, it involves a larger sample, culture-sharing, and direct observation of the participants. Neither was a case study approach (Creswell, 2004) ideal because it would have limit the results using one shared location for one cultural group narrowing the scope of the study presenting a challenge in finding just one or more sites that had the required participants all in one location. Even a multicase study (Stake, 2006) would not have been appropriate given the complexity of each individual's experience at modestly different universities.

Therefore, a basic qualitative study using interviews of selected African American women at PWIs in midlevel leadership positions fit the purpose and scope of this study. For this type of qualitative study, the focus was less on the size of the sample and more on the "richness" (Patton, 2002, p. 245) of the data that was being collected. Interviewing, as suggested by Seidman (2006) and Moustakas (1994), was the most fitting source of data for this study because interviews that include open-ended and an informal style of questioning allowed for first-person accounts and stories from the individuals involved. Ultimately, the purpose of the interviews was to gain understanding of the participants' lived experiences and their perceptions of those experiences

(Seidman, 2006, p. 9) as they pertained to, in this case, their intercultural experiences and career advancement at a PWI.

Role of the Researcher

I am an African American woman working in a midlevel position at one of the largest PWIs in the nation. Although I met the criteria for participation in this study, my role was strictly to be that of the interviewer, transcriber, and data analyst. To identify potential participants and collect and analyze interviews with them, I attempted to collaborate with a professional organization (of which I am affiliated), the American Association of Blacks in Higher Education (AABHE). However, my collaboration was limited to the LinkedIn group, Black Women in Higher Education, and colleagues in higher education directing those interested to the LinkedIn group for participation information. Although I am affiliated with these organizations, I took precautions to ensure that I did not have personal or professional ties to any of the participants selected. In addition, this study did include three participants from my campus, however; none of them worked directly with my department within the institution. I took this precaution specifically in order to limit the possibility of bias.

Methodology

In this section, I explain the methodology for this research, including the participant selection process, the data collection instrument or interview protocol, and the process for recruitment, participation, and data collection. Finally, I outlined the process for data analysis.

Participant Selection Logic

The participants interviewed for the study self-identified as African American women and midlevel leaders at PWIs in the United States in order to be considered for the study. This self-identification of the leadership level may have been dependent on the size of the college or university that dictates the titles and structure of the various positions for its personnel. All participants also self-identified as currently employed midlevel leaders at PWIs. I interviewed nine African American women.

I selected to interview nine African American women for this study for several reasons. The first reason was that conducting two interviews per person was expected to take 60 to 90 minutes each and would have become time-consuming for academic professionals. Also, I believed I could reach saturation with this sample size. By interviewing, I sought rich and in-depth responses from the participants (Patton, 2002, pp. 244-245); therefore, the sample size was smaller to try to increase the meaningfulness and validity of each experience shared. For a qualitative study, the sample could reach saturation with between one and 10 participants according to Patton (2002). In similar studies using an interview approach, I found sample sizes as low as one (Davis et al., 2011) or three (Henry, 2010) and some larger, such as six participants in Clayborne and Hamrick (2007). The first nine who responded to the request and met the criteria were included in the study.

Instrumentation

For this study, I developed an interview protocol that included two sets of interview questions: one set for the initial interviews and another set for the second

interviews with the participants (Appendix). I read studies such as Henry's (2010) and used Seidman's (2006) concerning the interview process to help me construct the questions. Henry examined the lived experiences of African American women working in student affairs at a PWI as they pertained to the challenges faced at the workplace and the women's perceptions of what could be done to improve the conditions. In that study, the participants responded to six open- and closed-ended questions during the interview process (p. 6). My study consisted of five open-ended questions for each interview for a total of 10. Each of the 10 questions had multiple follow-up probes.

Seidman (2006) suggested a three-part interview. However, in the interest of time invested by the participants, who were busy people, I adapted that approach to include two interviews that combined Seidman's three parts. The initial interview proceeded with questions phrased in a way as suggested by Seidman (p. 17) that encouraged participants to share as much as possible about themselves by addressing the context of their experience(s) in higher education leadership while working at a PWI.

The second set of questions in the initial interview engaged the second of Seidman's (2006) stages—phenomenological reduction (p. 97). The questions encouraged participants to share more about their experience as African American women working at a PWI, describing their workplace environment, explaining their perception of race and gender and how they may have impacted their career advancement and intercultural relationships at PWIs.

Seidman's (2006) third set of questions, which addressed the participants' interpretations of the phenomenon, were included in both my initial and second

interviews, particularly with the question probes. I asked the participants their interpretation of their experiences as women of color at a PWI, the challenges and barriers that may be present in the initial interview, and what recommendations they have to change the experience for African American women and increase visibility and advancement for this population at PWIs in the second interview. The additional probing questions allowed me to invite their further reflection.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

My community partner in the research was the AABHE. There was an agreement to post my solicitation for participants to their listserv. However, the invitation was not posted for reasons unbeknownst to me. For this reason, I relied solely on the second part of my IRB approved participant recruitment plan, which was the use of social media.

Because I was unable to reach potential participants through AABHE, I used LinkedIn to invite participants from the group—Black Women in Higher Education. Many professional women use that site to network with others regarding research, recommended readings, and job postings. I also used a snowball sampling strategy and asked colleagues to direct others with interest to the LinkedIn posting and to suggest others in their networks who might be interested in participating in the study. This process provided sufficient contacts to meet the sample size of nine. An informed consent was e-mailed to each woman that responded to the invitation to participate. Once I received consent via e-mail, we proceeded to arrange a meeting for the initial interview. There was no compensation for participation, but I did extend my gratitude for each woman's time and participation in the study with an Amazon Gift Card. Only the

participants who completed the entire interview process received the gift card. This was outlined in the informed consent.

Data Collection

The data collection period began in late July and concluded early in October. I proposed that it would take no more than 3 months beginning in June 2015; however, the recruitment period ran longer than anticipated so data collection did not begin until the last week in July. The interviews were conducted by telephone and recorded. I used this method for the convenience of the interviewees. Afterwards, I transcribed each interview. Once a woman responded by e-mail to the posted invitation and she met the criteria to participate, I contacted her by e-mail, and sent the informed consent and requested a convenient time for the first recorded phone interview. The interviews were all conducted over the phone with participants in various locations across the United States. As leaders on their campuses, I assumed they had busy schedules that made the phone contact the most convenient. Each interview was scheduled for 60 to 90 minutes; however, the participants were eager to respond to the questions asked and were often succinct in their responses, which reduced the expected interview time. Few of the probe questions had to be asked in order to capture the rich data. In the end, the interviews ranged between 40 and 50 minutes each. I used a handheld audio recorder to record each interview, then immediately uploaded the files to my secure hard drive. After the first interview, I transcribed it by hand and provided the typed-written transcript to the participant for her review and checking. Once she returned the transcript, we then set up the second interview time. At the conclusion of the second interview, I repeated that process. After

the participant returned the second transcript, I sent a message of gratitude and appreciation accompanied by the Amazon Gift Card.

The initial interview was scheduled for 60 to 90 minutes; however, the participants provided rich and detailed responses, thus lessening the expected interview time for the initial interviews. The second interviews were scheduled for a lesser amount of time after observing the time needed for the initial interviews. During the first interview, the initial interview questions were the focus (Appendix). At the end of the interview, we agreed on a time for the second recorded phone interview for the second interview questions (Appendix). At the end of the second phone interview, I informed the participants when to expect e-mail correspondence from me with copies of the transcripts for member-checking of the interview transcriptions and last thoughts, lessons learned, or reflection. At the end of the interview process, when the reviewed transcripts were returned I sent a formal e-mail of gratitude for their time and participation, accompanied by the Amazon Gift Card, as indicated in the informed consent. Soon after the dissertation process was complete, each participant received information on how to access the dissertation upon publication.

Data Analysis Plan

This basic qualitative study with interviews was designed to explore the lived intercultural and career advancement experiences of African American midlevel leaders that currently serve at PWIs. The recorded interview transcriptions were analyzed to form a better understanding of the experiences as they pertained specifically to the intercultural relationships and career advancement opportunities that the participants faced at a PWI.

To analyze the data collected, I followed Creswell's (2007) six-step data analysis method. As the researcher, I first identified my personal experience to highlight and then limit personal bias. Next, I scanned the transcriptions for repetitive statements, words, or phrases. I then organized or clustered these words and phrases by similarity and their relevance to career advancement or intercultural relationship experiences. Then, I provided an in-depth description of the experience and outlined how and when it occurred. Lastly, using the conceptual framework and the experiences, I synthesized the information and inferred the meaning(s) of the experience for the participants as it related to their career and intercultural interactions. This method of analysis assisted me in the alignment of frequency and repetition of emergent themes in the data recorded as suggested by Maxwell (2013). Then, the major themes were viewed through the lens of the conceptual framework that allowed me to address the research questions as they pertained to the intercultural relationships and career paths of African American women midlevel leaders at PWIs.

Issues of Trustworthiness

I established trustworthiness in the study by addressing the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the research process and data analysis. As the researcher, it was my responsibility to demonstrate my approach to building and maintaining trustworthiness into the study.

One way that the credibility of this study was established was with the inclusion of particular steps in the method and data collection process. The number of participants involved and the type of participants added to the trustworthiness. Because the

participants were all current midlevel leaders reflecting on their own work experience as a midlevel leader, their memories about them were fresh and easily accessible, thus improving the credibility. The participants also reviewed transcripts of their own interviews for member checking and accuracy.

The two 60 to 90 minute interviews with a national recruitment approach yielded rich and vivid data, thus strengthening the transferability. Using a social media site such as LinkedIn broadened the search and produced participants with a wide variety of experiences at PWIs, although transferability still may not reach beyond experience at PWIs.

The dependability of my study was checked by asking participants to review the transcripts of their interviews to make sure I have understood their responses and captured their experiences accurately. I also used my committee to review my findings as another check on my interpretation of them to avoid having my own experiences influence my analysis.

Lastly, I addressed confirmability by objectively relating the participants' experiences back to the conceptual framework. Some of the experiences of the participants aligned with what the framework suggested for this qualitative inquiry then confirmability will be stronger.

Ethical Procedures

Following approval from IRB at Walden University, I began recruiting participants and collecting interview data using the procedures outlined above and in the IRB application. The current AABHE president agreed to provide access to the

membership through a posting on their listserv to help recruit participants. That letter of cooperation indicated that AABHE understood the terms of what I was asking and that they agreed. These ethical procedures were established at the beginning of the study when the understanding was that the invitation would post to their listserv on my behalf.

The confidential nature of the participants' involvement was relayed to them prior to the start of the interview process through the informed consent agreement. The participants had an opportunity to read the informed consent and ask questions prior to giving consent and beginning the interview process. Entering into this research agreement with me helped limit any ethical or legal issues that could have arisen. The informed consent indicated that participants' information was confidential; pseudonyms were used in discussing results; including those that will be published. Lastly, their participation was voluntary and they could have withdrawn from participating at any time. The informed consent was written using a clear and concise language making it easy to understand and interpret by the participants. Prior to giving consent, they had an opportunity to ask questions or seek clarification.

All recordings and transcriptions of the participants' interviews were stored in a locked file cabinet inside of my home office. Digital and audio versions of the transcripts and analysis were also saved to a password protected computer with external drive in my home office. The only people with access to the data besides me were my committee. Data collected for this study were otherwise be secured for a period of 5 years and then destroyed.

Summary

In Chapter 3, I outlined the research method for this basic qualitative interview study as an approach to inquiry on the intercultural and career advancement experiences of African American women midlevel leaders at PWIs. I conducted a modified two-part interview protocol based on Seidman's (2006) three-part process. Once I received Walden University IRB approval, I sought nine study participants who self-identified as African American women in midlevel leadership positions at PWIs through cooperation a posting in LinkedIn—Black Women in Higher Education. Finally, I devised a plan for data collection, analysis, and storage that included the trustworthiness and validity of the data that was collected. Chapter 4 includes the results from the data collection.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the intercultural and career advancement experiences of African American women midlevel leaders at PWIs. A particular focus was placed on their mentoring relationships and questions regarding diversity experiences of African American women faculty and staff on the campuses of PWIs. In this chapter, I restate the research questions and explain how each helped to guide the study. Next, I describe the setting, participant demographics, and explain the processes for data collection, analysis, and establishing trustworthiness. Finally, I present the results of the research.

Research Questions

The research questions were as follows:

1. What are the lived intercultural and career advancement experiences of African American women midlevel leaders at PWIs?

2. What are the perceived influences of intercultural relationships on the career paths of African American women in midlevel leadership positions at PWIs?

3. What are the mentorship experiences of African American women in midlevel leadership positions at PWIs?

Setting

As outlined in Chapter 3, each participant was interviewed in her own environment as both rounds of interviews occurred over the phone. Each participant was at the time of data collection employed in a midlevel leadership position at a

predominantly White college or university throughout the United States. Below, Table 1

lists the pseudonym assigned to each participant and her institution.

Table 1

Demographics of the Participants and PWIs

Participants (Pseudonyms used)	Position Title	Years in Position	University Region	University Name	Education Attainment
Donna	Director	4	Northeast	Alpha University	PhD
Imani	Director	>1	Midwest	Beta College	PhD
Jennifer	Director	>1	Northeast	Gamma State University	PhD
Kay	Executive Assistant	7	Midwest	Delta University	MA
KQ	Associate Director	4	Northeast	Epsilon College	MEd.
Lee	Assistant Director	3.5	Northwest	Zeta State University	MA
Olivia	Director	1	Eastern	Eta University	PhD
Samantha	Director/Assistant Professor	2	Midwest	Theta College	PhD
Zora	Director	7	Northern	Iota State University	PhD

The table shows that six of the nine participants held the title of director, and one of the

six also had a faculty teaching position. Moreover, six of the nine women held positions

in which their work focused on diversity, and two of those six worked specifically within

an office of diversity. The women also averaged approximately 4 years in their positions

and were primarily from the northeast region of the United States. I did conduct a

nationwide search for participants, yet I received no responses from women in the

southern, southeastern, or southwestern parts of the United States. The education

attainment of the participants is also noted in Table 1. Six of the nine women had earned

doctoral degrees. While the other three had attained master's degrees, two of the three were enrolled in doctoral programs and pursing doctoral degrees.

At the time of data collection, there were negative circumstances that I perceived in the personal and professional lives of eight out of nine participants that could have influenced their responses to the interview questions. In general, by limiting the participants to only those who responded to the invitation on LinkedIn, I may have received responses from just the relatively professionally unhappy people who were using LinkedIn with a primary goal of searching for new jobs. Nonetheless, there was continuity in the negative responses across their interviews regarding the lack of diversity, low-paying salaries, and little to no opportunity for advancement. For example, Donna's supervisor, the vice provost of her unit within her university, changed 1 month prior to our first interview. This change resulted in some angst for Donna due to the unknown consequences for her and her division, yet she was eager to learn the values and vision of the new leadership. Imani was involved in a discrimination case initiated by another African American woman on her campus. Her responses were strong and passionate, which could have been heightened under the circumstances. At the time of the initial interview, Jennifer had only been in her position for 10 months, her first job at Gamma State University. KQ was experiencing organizational and personal stressors during the time of the interview. She was going through a divorce, and her unit within Epsilon College was contemplating a physical move. At the start of data collection, Lee was undecided on remaining in her position at Zeta State University, and by the close of the data collection period she transitioned from the university and moved into another

position at a nonprofit organization. Olivia was under emotional distress as a result of

balancing workplace challenges and the desire to make good decisions for her family.

Zora was currently job hunting because her contract would conclude in June 2016.

Data Collection

When IRB approval was obtained (#07-20-15-0246960), the agreed upon number

of participants that would encourage a collection of rich data for a basic qualitative study

with interviews was nine. Each participant was interviewed twice with a different

objective for each interview. The initial interview was to provide a comfortable

environment for the participants to share substantially about their backgrounds and

experiences in higher education leadership. The second interview questions required

participants to reflect on and share their experiences specific to their intercultural

workplace interactions, their career advancement, and their understanding of those

experiences.

The data collection process ran as planned. I used social media and posted my

invitation to participate on the LinkedIn site in the group, Black Women in Higher

Education. In addition, I used snowball sampling and I asked colleagues in the field to

help target specific women and direct them to the group on LinkedIn to view the

invitation. The invitation was posted beginning in late July, and data collection took place

between August and early October.

Data Analysis

To approach analyzing the data collected, I followed Creswell's (2007) six-step

data analysis process. First, to reduce bias I recognized that I identified with my

participants as an African American woman in a midlevel leadership position at a PWI in the United States. My purpose while collecting data was to generate responses from the participants about their experiences and not to interject with my own. I asked the questions and did not qualify nor validate their responses with my own. As the women and I grew more comfortable with each other, this became somewhat of a challenge as the interviews felt like conversations with old friends. Nonetheless, I maintained my position as the interviewer.

While transcribing the interviews, I tried not to impose my personal feelings on my interpretations of the experiences and reported verbatim what was said. Next, I read each transcription, highlighted, and clustered repetitive statements, feelings, and examples that were apparent in response to each interview question, connecting them to the research questions. From these connections, I was able to develop the themes that emerged from the repetitious and similar words and phrases. I organized the themes using specific words and phrases and aligned them with the research questions to show the connection between the data and the questions that the study set out to investigate.

Themes from Research Question 1. The first research question was focused specifically on the participants' intercultural experiences in the PWI workplace while especially noting details pertaining to career advancement. The women reflected on those experiences and shared details about their career paths, current positions, and career goals for the future. The themes that emerged were *limited advancement opportunities, restricted behavior, effects of intersectionality*, and *manifestations of commitment*. These were the common shared experiences among all of the women even though they were

working at different PWIs. These themes captured the women's most frequent experiences as they related to the emergent themes. The following words and phrases were frequently used and helped develop the themes under this research question: *glass ceiling, promotions received, pigeon-holed, micromanaged, invisible, voiceless, powerless, conforming, level of comfort, cultural differences, empowering other African American women, passion for change,* and *lack of recognition*. These emergent themes based on the relevance and frequently used words and phrases are discussed later in this chapter.

Themes from Research Question 2. The second research question addressed the women's perceptions of the influence of their intercultural relationships on their career paths as current midlevel leaders at PWIs. From the data analysis, the women frequently shared experiences using particular words and phrases that were clustered together to form the following themes: *negative stereotypes, system navigation, self-awareness,* and *intercultural challenges*. The participants' perceptions of these experiences were connected to one of the aforementioned themes using the words and phrases that were repeatedly used to describe their experiences: *angry Black woman, token, subordinate, be the expert, form allies, goal-alignment, strengths, weakness, purpose, self-identity, other African Americans, European Americans,* and *diversity issues*.

Themes from Research Question 3. The third research question pertained to the participants' mentorship experiences while serving as midlevel leaders at PWIs. The women had various types of experiences with mentors that detailed what they perceived to be the following themes I developed: *purpose of having a mentor, the process of*

finding a mentor, and *their experiences with a mentor that included the influence having one had on their careers*. I developed those perceptions into themes after connecting these commonly referenced phrases: *formal mentor, informal mentor, role model, friends, African American women/men, guidance, encouragement,* and *opportunity*.

   Discrepant cases. The only qualifications to participate in the study were that the women self-identified as women, African Americans, and midlevel leaders at PWIs. I did not ask for the interested women to indicate initially the division in which they worked at their PWI. I learned later that two participants, Donna and Jennifer, worked within an office of diversity and inclusion at their institutions. Donna worked for almost 4 years in that department and for 12 years prior to that in another position in the same department but different unit. Jennifer also worked under a diversity office, but only for 10 months at the time of data collection. Donna noted frequently that her experiences might have been somewhat unique regarding any interaction with European American colleagues or students due to the compositional make-up of her unit. There were several times during the interviewing that she mentioned she would not be able to speak to a question because she worked in diversity with a diverse group of colleagues. Although diversity was the primary focus of six of the nine participants, only Donna and Jennifer worked within units that were housed in offices of diversity. For example, KQ worked for the office of admissions at her university, but in the minority recruitment unit. Another participant, Lee, also served in minority recruitment and retention, but not within a specific office of diversity or inclusion. Donna was the only participant who indicated having challenges responding to the interview questions as a result of her position and placement. The

others had some similarities in work experience but characterized them differently.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

For this basic qualitative study with interviews, I followed specific processes in participant recruitment, data collection, data organization, and data analysis to establish trustworthiness. I made a conscious effort to follow the processes necessary to account for the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the data collected.

Credibility

I addressed the issue of the credibility of this study beginning with participant selection. The number of participants was selected in order to allow time to collect detailed data from each of the nine participants. In addition, all of the participants were current midlevel leaders at PWIs and therefore were good fits for the research study, as they could reflect on their own personal experiences as they related to the research questions. The analysis of the data collected was triangulated using theory, recent literature, and constant comparison to establish credibility of the study. Lastly, at the conclusion of both interviews, each participant checked their printed transcripts of their interview for accuracy.

Transferability

To increase transferability, I conducted two rounds of interviews that were 40 to 50 minutes each. My assumption was that between two sets of interviews, the data collected would be rich and thick data that could aid other entities in replication of the data collection and analysis process. The women were recruited using a national online source and brought different experiences and perspectives from their careers at PWIs all

over the United States. As a result, transferability may be possible, but due to the limited number of participants and their experiences being from PWIs, it could be limited. The experiences that the women shared from small, large, private, public, and the varying regions may be different.

Dependability

I approached dependability of my study by requiring that the participants read their interview transcripts to make sure that I recorded their experiences accurately and that there were no discrepancies. I maintained an audit trail that included records of my protocol development process, interview notes, transcriptions with observation notes, and analysis process. I also asked my committee to review the transcripts for emergent themes to be sure that I did not overlook important data and that I did not impose my personal bias.

Confirmability

The conceptual framework and research questions were used to establish confirmability of the study by consistently relating the data back to these structural entities of the study. I kept detailed notes of the conclusions, themes, and inferences I drew during the data analysis that I connected back to the research questions each time for continuity and consistency.

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Results

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I have organized the results as they correspond to the three research questions: (a) the lived intercultural and career advancement experiences of African American women midlevel leaders at PWIs, (b) the perceived influences of intercultural relationships on the

career paths of African American women in midlevel leadership positions at PWIs, and (c) the mentorship experiences of African American women in midlevel leadership positions at PWIs. Under each research question are associated themes that emerged from the data analysis and clusters of words and phrases that frequently appeared in the participants' responses that aided in the development of the themes.

Research Question 1: Intercultural and Career Advancement

Research Question 1: What are the lived intercultural and career advancement experiences of African American women midlevel leaders at PWIs? The associated themes that emerged during the analysis were limited advancement opportunities, restricted behavior, effects of intersectionality, and manifestations of commitment. All of the women in the study shared that they either once had aspirations of becoming teachers at the K-12 level or had previously worked as teachers in K-12 before beginning careers in higher education. The heavy teaching background of the participants could possibly be as result of what they knew of careers in the education field at that time. Another commonality among them was their passion for serving first generation, low-income, and minority students. The interview data showed that while each wished to advance in their careers, three of the nine desired to do so at their current institutions. However, those three reported that they would go wherever they could work in their passion, be respected, and be themselves. One of the women summed it up as, "if you are accepted [then] you stay, if you are not accepted [then] you leave." The others who reported that they wanted to pursue advancement said they would be open to other opportunities at other institutions, private sector, or nonprofit organizations. Samantha stated, "Go where

you can do your work." The women all said that there were obstacles and barriers present in various forms that had negative effects on the process of career advancement for African American women in middle management careers working at PWIs.

The participants shared their experiences with numerous challenges that they perceived to have impacted their career advancement in higher education leadership at a PWI. I grouped the participants' experiences as they supported the themes that emerged from the data as: limited advancement opportunities, restricted behavior, effects of intersectionality, and manifestations of commitment. I used a critical race feminist theory lens and related the participants' feelings of isolation and restriction to conclude that the intersectionality of their race and gender kept them from, in some cases, the knowledge of new opportunities; or from advancement in general. The women perceived that they were stuck in their current positions, passed over for promotion, and had limited to no upward mobility.

Limited advancement opportunities. One major common thread amongst the women interviewed was the perception that advancement opportunities did not exist for them, specifically six women who worked in areas of diversity and inclusion, minority student recruitment and retention, or other areas with similar focuses. They expressed that there was a glass ceiling and nowhere for them to go from there unless they left the unit or the institution, otherwise they continued to work in those types of roles only. When asked about advancement opportunities at her institution Lee stated, "It is a challenge. The kind of roles they want to put you in are all related to diversity, or equity, or inclusion." Another perspective came from KQ who served as the associate director for

recruitment in a college of education and not in a role with specific focus on diversity matters. She indicated that, "I have strategically not taken or looked for positions in anybody's office of diversity and inclusion. Because I feel that we tend to get trapped there within a position and now you're stuck there." KQ indicated at another point during the interviews (that will be addressed later in this chapter) that she still had an underlying responsibility to help minorities—women and people of color. Yet, she felt that if these concerns were the focus of her role at a PWI she could get "stuck" there and be "pigeon-holed" in a position with little to no room for growth, so in order to advance she must stay out of those areas. To echo KQ's point, Lee admitted that she is "stuck" in her position as the assistant director for diversity recruitment. With apparent sarcastic laughter, she stated:

> I haven't advanced anywhere. I know this particular position that I hold, in the past maybe 6 years, of the last five people that have held this position they all have been African American women except for one. So this is kind of the token position, and they leave you here. Everyone has left this position and chosen a different avenue, either a different career path or they have just found work in a different department. [I am] realizing that it is kind of a token position.

In addition to the availability of advancement opportunities, earning and receiving promotion was another aspect of the career advancement experiences that the participants shared. The women expressed their perception of the way promotions are earned at their institutions. The women perceived promotions are earned far less for Black women despite work performance, position, or experience. Lee recounted a time when she and a

European American woman with similar credentials and work experience were considered for promotion:

> We both supervise counselors, but of course I supervise counselors who do multicultural and diversity recruitment. They changed her title and she got to sit at certain tables where I didn't get the same opportunities. I would have had the opportunity to advance or at least get another title as well [if I were also European American].

Jennifer expounded on her similar perception and revealed what she believed happens when African American women seek promotions.

> Even though people will acknowledge that I do great work. . . it's not necessarily enough for someone to . . . want to promote me or sort of help me advance along. . . .They may give you some extra work to do but when it comes to like a promotion, or anything extra that you can get a lot of times, not always; but a lot of times it's more difficult for me to get.

From the participants, the general perception of the available opportunities for African American women leaders to be promoted at PWIs was grim. The opportunities for advancement were few, thus making the chances for promotions for African American women even fewer. The data indicated that earning or receiving promotions was a most prominent professional barrier in advancement and career satisfaction.

Restricted behavior. Not only did the data analysis show that these nine African American women in midlevel positions of leadership did not have positive perceptions of the promotion processes and possibilities at their PWI, it also uncovered that the women

felt they must behave in certain manners in order to be accepted and respected as colleagues or equals in the PWI workplace. After analysis of the interview data, I discerned the frequency of the following words helped me to develop the restricted behavior theme: *micromanaged, voiceless, invisible,* and *powerless*. Eight out of nine women expressed that they felt they could not be their true and authentic selves and have a flourishing career in higher education at a PWI. One woman, KQ, referenced sitting in a meeting and being the only African American woman at the table and that she had to carefully watch her tone when speaking and her body language. Another woman, Olivia, mentioned that after a staff meeting she was approached by a colleague to inquire about her emotional state because she had been adamant in making a point during the meeting and from that he determined she was upset, when she had just been trying to make a point. These experiences caused the women to feel as one women put it, "damned if you do, and damned if you don't" in regards to speaking up. Donna specifically made reference to her personality and character that she perceived to have impacted her acceptance and advancement negatively. She said that she "needed to learn to keep her big mouth shut" and that "it was to my detriment."

> I'm very vocal; that intimidates people a lot. My personality, my style, my tendency to challenge the status quo really was to my detriment. I have not had the supervisor or boss that is the visionary that can encompass me, the visionary. I have worked for very short-termed, short-sighted individuals and that is a challenge and puts a cap on me.

Donna expressed that she understood how her personality could be perceived, and recognized that it could have played a part in her advancement or lack thereof. However, she did stand firm in who she is and would not allow others to micromanage her and stifle her vision because she did not fit into their expectations or vision. Moreover, Jennifer talked about her experiences working in an environment where she was also expected to behave a certain way to conform to the practices within the organizational culture,

> People just really want someone who is going to go along with the get along, and if you were a man that people expect men to speak up and advocate for themselves and have a strong voice. But as a woman, people expect you to hem and haw and say you're not sure and [ask] what do they think. Just having a certain style as a woman and in particular as a Black woman, it definitely can be a barrier.

These experiences appeared to keep the voices of the African American women midlevel leaders silenced, invisible, and rendered them powerless against the cultural constructs of some aspects of the PWI workplace. These examples indicated that the women perceived they were not free to speak their minds, behave in a way that came naturally to them, or to question or have a say in organizational decision-making.

Effects of intersectionality. The participants explained their experiences working in an intercultural environment at a PWI being African American, female, and a midlevel leader. The intersectionality of these three characteristics posed some challenges for them regarding relationship building and learning and navigating the culture of the PWI

workplace. Critical race feminist theory and intercultural communications theory were employed to examine this data and it was determined that the women experienced challenges being true to themselves while trying to fit in or assimilate to the cultural norms in their workplace. In addition, the evidence showed that others from the dominant culture were not comfortable around them, nor were they comfortable discussing topics about race or gender around them. These experiences were clustered under three common words and phrases: cultural differences, conforming, and level of comfort. The women explained how their cultural differences created some separation between themselves and their colleagues. Two of the women remarked about their transition to the city in which their institution was located beginning with the date of hire. There was no assistance offered by colleagues related to their needs for such services as hair care, worship, restaurants, or entertainment. In a town that was predominantly White as well as a predominately White campus, the women found this transition frustrating and stressful. This carried over and caused some discomfort and dissatisfaction with the job. One woman said, "It's just part and parcel to the job."

While these personal struggles with adjustment occurred outside of the workplace, inside the workplace there were cultural differences that affected the women as well. Lee talked about the after work involvement with co-workers: "It's not that I don't want to be a team player, I want to do something that makes me comfortable—something that I can relate to." This demonstrated that the women were fearful that they would not be accepted or their advancement could be jeopardized if they did not participate in social activities with their co-workers to spite their personal feelings.

For some of the women, the things that made them comfortable culturally were not available to them either inside or outside of the workplace. Moreover, when doing the business of the organization, the women encountered people who were uneducated about certain cultural differences that presented challenges when working to move the mission of the institution forward. Donna stated, "You have culture clashes when you are working with partners out there that don't understand or are not a part of the people you are representing. You have to overcome some of their ignorance of the differences." As African American women in leadership positions at a PWI the interview data showed that when difficult conversations arose, they were responsible for educating the others.

In the analysis, the idea of comfort surfaced several times. Imani mentioned that conversations involving race or gender made people uncomfortable and that it wasn't that they needed more information, they were just more comfortable talking about the economic issues without including race or gender. Donna commented on the effects of her intersectionality on others in the PWI workplace,

> A lot of time colleagues and supervisors are unaccustomed to Black females being in any type of position of authority. So, I think oftentimes the attempt to make connections with other people gets initially sidetracked by who and what you are.

The other women talked about their intersectionality similarly. Samantha made reference to nobody else "speaks the same language" in reference to being a junior faculty, young, African American, and a woman. Imani referenced speaking a different language to explain her experience with intersectionality: "We have to be bicultural and bilingual in

many ways. Not that we speak Spanish, but we are bilingual in that we have two different worlds."

Manifestations of commitment. The women continued to provide responses about their experiences as they pertained to their career advancement. One last theme arose—manifestations of commitment. Despite the challenges and barriers they encountered within their PWI, they displayed extreme commitment to their vision and purpose. I examined the data through a critical race theory lens that indicated power was limited for minority groups, and in this case the minority group was African American women midlevel leaders. From the interview data it could be concluded that the women perceived that the best way to gain power was to show a continued display of passion, help hire more minorities, work hard and become an expert, and work for change for themselves and other minority groups. Then they would gain more respect and power in their roles at a PWI. The women's experiences were related to and categorized under this theme using the following repetitive phrases: *passion for change, empowering other African American women,* and *lack of recognition.*

Each woman noted a responsibility for advocating for diversity and helping people of color and other underserved populations on their campuses and in their communities. Kay mentioned that her negative experiences were worth it if it meant her story could help other African American women. Other women shared a similar passion, such as Lee who stated, "I desire to be in a career where I'm influential in helping students of all backgrounds, more intentionally students from historically

underrepresented populations." Their passion and desire to help others was at the forefront and they put aside their struggles to maintain focus on the bigger picture. Imani shared this when asked about her career aspirations:

> I think it's not so much a career per say but how it gets me closer to hopefully being able to really contribute to making like actual, actual change like the achievement gap change or family improvement change especially when it concerns the Black community and people of color.

The opportunity to impact change and empower others was important to the women. As previously discussed, the women were not experiencing much promotion or recognition, but the data showed that they continued to work despite the lack of recognition, but hoped that they would eventually get it. Several women shared in their interview that they were aware that their salary was lower than others in their unit in the same position. Jennifer mentioned that she was brought back to higher education and stayed because her job was fulfilling. Donna talked about changing positions within her unit and stated, "My position title and my programs had nothing to do with the tenants of organization development, [but] that's my education and I'm passionate about that." These examples were evidence that the women continued to do the work that they believed in and that brought them fulfillment despite the limitations that were presented.

The first research question pertained to the intercultural career advancement experiences of African American women midlevel leaders. The themes I developed from the participants' responses were limited advancement opportunities, restricted behavior, effects of intersectionality, and manifestations of commitment. The women described

their experiences in the intercultural workplace as ones where their outlook was less than optimistic for career advancement at their current institutions. They felt they were unable to relax and be themselves as African American women; which they perceived made others uncomfortable. Despite these experiences, the women were overwhelmingly dedicated and committed to the work and the mission at their institutions.

Research Question 2: Influences of Intercultural Relationship

Research Question 2: What are the perceived influences of intercultural relationships on the career paths of African American women in mid-level leadership positions at PWIs? The interview data analysis indicated that the African American women midlevel leaders had certain perceptions of their intercultural interactions within the PWI workplace. I discuss them here grouped together by these emergent themes: negative stereotypes, system navigation, self-awareness, and intercultural relationship challenges.

Negative stereotypes. Each of the women at times faced negative stereotypes while working at a PWI. They described those experiences similarly using the following three words and/or phrases: subordinate, angry Black woman, and image. Using critical race theory, I understand the notion that African American people were judged by their skin color first and their race was the only factor that determined their rank or level of influence (Delgado & Stephancic, 2012). Critical race feminist theory then included gender. The women's experiences supported that theory. Two of the women shared that they were treated like children or that they were expected to serve in a subordinate role. Samantha explained what she experienced as the youngest in her department, a junior

faculty member, and one of few people of color. She stated, "[some] people tend to try to mother or father me, which is weird because I have those and don't need that." Furthermore, she explained how others tried to tell her what to do in order to get along in the organization such as who to listen to, and who to try to get on her team. Jennifer shared a similar experience in that she perceived certain colleagues would belittle her education and experience because she was an African American woman.

> I'm a colleague even if you're my supervisor. I'm a colleague and not in the place of a child, or like a student to your professor. So if they want to have a deeper relationship, that's the relationship they want. [A relationship] with someone who is more like a daughter to them or someone they can treat like a daughter.

Another experience shared by all of the women was being stereotyped for speaking up in a meeting, sharing their opinion, disagreeing with the majority and so forth. Lee responded, "If you raise your voice a little bit then you're angry." KQ said she cannot get unraveled emotionally in a staff meeting or she is labeled the "angry Black woman." Imani stated that she does not want to be thought of as the "angry Black bitch." Jennifer stated that Black women are expected to fit into certain stereotypes and if they don't then that will be reflected in their salaries, workload, relationships, and advancement.

> If you don't fit certain stereotypes like positive White stereotypes like an Aunt Jemima, like a mammy type of role or you're not quiet and you don't acquiesce, I mean how people wish Black women would act; then you're punished for that.

From another perspective, KQ stated, "Most of my colleagues won't see me having a bad day. I do it with a smile and I try to represent my brand and my responsibilities to the best of my ability."

System navigation. In addition to the negative stereotypes that impacted the experiences of the women, the analysis showed that their experiences helped them to learn and navigate the system in the PWI workplace. Similar to the experience KQ shared about responding to stereotypes. The women indicated that there was a cultural structure within the workplace that they had to learn if ever to be successful while working there at the PWI. From an intercultural communications theory point of view, the interview data showed that the women recognized their cultural difference and worked to bridge the gap by learning the system within the organization, finding allies, and by aligning their personal and career goals with that of their unit or institution. The three common phrases that helped to describe the women's perceptions of their experiences with system navigation in the PWI workplace were: *be the expert, form allies,* and *goal alignment*.

The women talked about their experiences being different because they were African American women and the cultural expectations were different for them. Imani noted that she worked longer hours, carried more work, and attended more meetings because they were "always watching." "People always notice you when you are the only one or one of few." Jennifer also explained that it was important that she knew more about her program than anyone else. In addition to doing the work, the interview data showed that the women perceived forming allies as an important act for learning the

system in the PWI workplace. Zora explained that a good way to build allies was to collaborate. She stated:

> You get people to sit at the table with you to discuss, not only what you are doing or what they are doing, but how you can work together to move the goals of the institution forward. Get to them and tell them about what you can contribute to what they are doing. That is what they want to hear.

By aligning personal and professional goals with those of the unit or the institution, the data revealed that this could aid in building relationships and gaining allies in the PWI workplace.

Self-awareness. During the analysis, I uncovered the African American women midlevel leaders' perceptions of being aware of their own words, behaviors, personalities, biases, and mannerisms in the intercultural workplace environment. After applying critical race feminist theory these experiences, it was apparent that the women were inherently self-aware as they understood that as minorities they stood out and as women minorities they were already up against certain stereotypes. There were four words the participants used commonly to describe their experiences with self-awareness: *strengths, weakness, purpose,* and *self-identity*. For example, Donna spoke of being "snatched out" of one position by leadership and placed into another. "I had to reinvent myself. I had gotten burned out. As we all know in an institution like this, you can get set aside and be pasteurized forever." Two of the nine women, Donna and Olivia, also identified themselves as single mothers. Olivia talked about moving frequently for career decisions and having to be "selfish." Her oldest child has lived in seven different states in 14 years.

The data analysis not only revealed the women's strengths but also their personal challenges or weaknesses as well. Olivia continued to share about the intersection of her home life and work life and noted that she suffered with self-doubt. She remarked that self-doubt, "getting in her own way" was probably her biggest challenge. She said that she believed she could have been further in her career by now, if she had not "cut herself off at the knees" with thoughts like, "I thought that there would not be understanding or breaks for the fact that I am raising children." Similarly, Donna noted that after experiencing a divorce and becoming a single parent, she at first did not know what to do, so she kept going back to school to further her education to better her career outlook. Kay, when asked about her midlevel role, said that at first she did not think she was midlevel or a leader, but just an assistant.

In the analysis, the women's experiences with their own strengths and weaknesses were demonstrated in various ways. It also revealed how they identified themselves and their perceived purpose in the workplace. Zora, being the youngest of eight children and the first in her low-income family to earn a college degree, she said that her "world view was being Black and poor." She noted that since she had been serving in a role that focused on women and women's issues she "gained her gendered lens" and said,

> It is coming full circle, and I've been enjoying having this focus. I have come to and understanding that my focus is not solely gender. I've just always had this perspective of having this experience of being poor and Black. Now, I'm just overlapping that with, 'yea, but I'm a woman too'.

Imani found her purpose within her experiences. She expressed that she had a "duty to uphold" which was the responsibility to hire more women and people of color. She said, "It can be suffocating in many ways because you're the only one, and it does not help you personally or professionally, or even psychologically. We need to learn to hire from within our group. It's almost making the invisible visible."

Intercultural challenges. During the interview data collection, the women expressed many intercultural barriers and challenges they faced while working in midlevel positions of leadership at PWIs. Those experiences ranged from interactions with the majority European Americans, but also with other African Americans. Those issues and experiences were analyzed using the following frequently used phrases: other African Americans, European Americans, and diversity issues.

The interviewed participants provided examples of the women's perceptions of their intercultural interactions with other African Americans. Samantha reported that even some of the other African Americans in her department tried to treat her as a subordinate because of her age and gender. Moreover, KQ stated that, "Especially at predominantly White institutions [there are] Black folks competing against Black folks for opportunities. It's kind of a crab in the barrel type of thing, within each unit there are only so many roles and so many opportunities." On the other hand, Kay and Lee experienced that only when a person of color was in senior leadership did they receive opportunities to gain new skills and knowledge that would help to advance their careers in the future. In interactions with European American colleagues and leaders, Imani

shared that she had a responsibility to use her position and "bring the data" to help them understand some of the issues that faced people of color and other minority populations.

KQ was the only woman who identified not only as an African American woman, but specifically as a bi-racial African American woman. She shared her perception of the diversity issues that her office of student recruitment had that included her racial identity and said,

> I do have a sad advantage of being what I call safe—a safe African American woman. I'm fair skinned, I have curly hair, and half of them are not sure if I'm Hispanic or what I am. I'm not necessarily making anyone uncomfortable. This makes me very sad in a lot of ways because if I had dreads, darker skin, or didn't fit a certain stereotype I don't know how that would play differently for me. It's strategic.

The examples shown here demonstrated the intercultural interactions experienced by the women and their perceptions of them.

The second research question was focused on intercultural relationships and the influence these relationships had on the experiences for African American midlevel leaders at PWIs in the United States. Four themes were developed from the data analysis: negative stereotypes system navigation, self-awareness, and intercultural relationship challenges. The women in my study explained their experience as being stereotyped for both African American and female identities. They also expressed their challenges with navigating the PWI workplace, understanding the internal system, and building intercultural relationships. As a result they remarked on the need for heightened self-

awareness in order to control and regulate their own actions, words, and knowledge base while working in their midlevel positions at PWIs.

Research Question 3: Mentoring

Research Question 3: What are the mentorship experiences of African American women midlevel leaders at PWIs? The common phrases that emerged from the interview analysis that corresponded with Research Question 3 were: *finding a mentor, benefits of having a mentor and building a support system*. The experiences described were matched with these phrases that the women used throughout their interviews when they were asked about their mentoring experiences. The women were very eager to discuss mentoring, the lack of it, the need for it, how to find a mentor, the importance of becoming a mentor, and so forth. The analysis revealed that all nine of the women perceived that having a mentor or mentors would improve one's experience working at a PWI. It would help to navigate the intercultural system and would aid in career advancement.

Locating a mentor. From the data analysis I learned that the women indicated that for African American women they knew having a mentor was vital to their career success, but finding one still proved to be a huge challenge. The women's experiences with mentoring were described using the following phrases: *formal mentor, informal mentor, and role model*. Donna talked about her career experiences without a formal mentor and said that it was "probably to [her] detriment," that she would probably have been "snatched out" by now. Her informal mentor, a former supervisor, served in a mentor role for her and from that relationship there were positive outcomes. For the

majority of the women current or former supervisors had become mentors for them and helped them navigate the workplace environment and guide their careers forward. Several women spoke about not having one mentor but pulling people together as resources. Jennifer, KQ, and Zora all recalled that they had developed relationships with certain people and knew at which times to engage their expertise and found these relationships to be of similar nature to mentorship relationships. Jennifer, in particular, expressed that she built a network because it seemed no one wanted to mentor her. With a sarcastic tone she said, "I just kind of felt like, 'well damn, I'm just kind of doing this myself (laughter)'. No one wants to mentor me, sponsor me; no one cares about my career advancement." This sentiment was echoed throughout the women's responses to questions about mentorship.

Benefits of having a mentor. From the analysis of the women's responses there were obvious benefits to having a mentor that the women sought after while working in their midlevel positions at PWIs. Their perceptions of having a mentorship relationship and the benefits of that were categorized using frequent and commonly used words: *guidance, encouragement,* and *opportunity*. Donna said that a mentor would "help to navigate the very few opportunities that are going to present themselves." Imani stated that a mentor was needed "especially when you're in a predominantly White institution, it depends on who opens doors for you." She said that her mentors provided exposure to her and professional opportunities. Kay explained that every position that she has held within the university, she had been asked to apply for. The data indicated that there were many benefits to having a mentor.

Becoming a mentor. Three of the women talked about their opportunities to be mentors to students and the impact those experiences had on their perception of the importance of mentoring. Imani said, "It is important that we as Black people, whatever at the midlevel, high-level, senior-level or whatever; that we are not just the only ones and find ways to mentor from the junior up." One woman talked about a past experience in undergraduate school where the university had a build-in mentoring program and faculty mentored, staff mentored, and college students mentored high school students. She explained that the concept was to encourage people of color, minorities, and other underserved populations in their career and education aspirations. The analysis showed that serving as a mentor could be beneficial as well.

Need for a support system. When the women were asked about their personal and professional networks, they responded overwhelmingly with the importance of having an outside network away from the workplace. The analysis showed what they experienced with their outside network created a safe and positive outlet for the women to seek support and refuge from the PWI environment. Those experiences were described most by the participants with the following words and phrases: *friendships, African American men and women, decompression,* and *networking*. Imani, when asked about her network, proclaimed happily, "I love those guys!" She has an informal group of young African American men and women that was formed during her post-graduate work. They would work together on projects, publishing, and would help each other with professional opportunities. She said their time together served as "mental health" and it helped because they praised each other and shared with one another. Olivia said it is very

important to have a life outside of work and Samantha said she needs a space to be herself. Zora recalled an experience where she was once a part of a network she termed "built-in peer network" group of other men and women who worked in diversity areas of the institution under one administration. They met regularly, talked about their struggles and victories, and strategized. She talked about being moved from that direct reporting line and consequently out of the group. Zora shared how this made her feel and the impact it had on her work experience at a PWI: "They pulled me out of that group! So, I'm by myself with no peers! Why am I being singled out and why am I alone? And now have no peer support?" Zora experienced the isolation that mentoring and support systems had helped the other women to overcome. The women all determined that in order for them to handle the issues they face as African American women midlevel leaders at PWIs, it was imperative that they have a support system to cope.

The third research question addressed the mentoring experiences of the African American women midlevel leaders at PWIs. The four themes that emerged from the interview data included: locating a mentor, benefits of having a mentor, becoming a mentor, and the need for a support system. Each participant placed a significant value on mentoring as a vital component to career success and advancement in the intercultural workplace of PWIs.

There were five major themes that encompassed all of the data and connected to the three key findings that are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5. The five themes were: limited advancement opportunities, the effects of intersectionality, intercultural relationship challenges, locating a mentor, and the benefits of having a mentor. The first

key finding was the emphasis on the intersectionality of the women's race, gender, and position that they perceived was a major hindrance in their career advancement opportunities at PWIs. Secondly, the women all explained how restricted they felt in the intercultural workplace where they were unable to completely be themselves around the dominant European Americans at the institution. They believed that their challenges building intercultural relationships were a direct result of their race and gender. The last key finding pertained to mentoring for African American women midlevel leaders specifically. The participants each indicated the immense struggle to locate and secure a mentor. They understood the benefits of having a mentor that could help guide them through the nuances of the PWI workplace and possibly help with future career opportunities. However, finding mentors was challenging and therefore, this was another limitation on their career advancement at a PWI.

Summary

In this chapter, I addressed the research questions for this study and the results from the interview data collected. I described the setting of the study, including the conditions, the demographics of the participants, and the discrepant cases. Before discussing the emergent themes associated with the three research questions, I explained the data collection process and the credibility, transferability, trustworthiness, confirmability, and dependability of the study. In addition, I summarized the major themes and introduced the key findings of the study.

The research questions focused on the African American women midlevel leaders' experiences with career advancement, intercultural relationships, and mentoring

at PWIs in the United States. The results indicated that the women shared their perception

of career advancement that in a PWI setting there were certain barriers and challenges

that they had to overcome in order to further their careers in leadership in higher

education. The analysis also showed that the women perceived there were ways to

combat these workplace challenges by becoming self-aware, not succumbing to

stereotypes, doing the work, becoming an expert, supporting other African American

women, finding mentors and building a support network. These results reflect the

literature in Chapter 2 as supported by the conceptual framework. The major themes;

limited advancement opportunities, effects of intersectionality, intercultural relationship

challenges, locating a mentor, and the benefits of a mentor were the overarching themes

that connected all of the data collected. The analysis showed that these themes aligned

with the key findings that pertained to the influence of intersectionality, the challenges of

not being one's true self, and the absolute need for mentoring. Chapter 5 includes an

analysis and interpretation of these results and possible implications for social change and

recommendations for further research.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the intercultural and career advancement experiences of African American women midlevel leaders at PWIs. Nine women from various PWIs were interviewed using a two-part interview process where each woman responded to semistructured open-ended questions regarding their intercultural and career advancement experiences at a PWI. The interview data were analyzed using a six-step process (Creswell, 2007) that included an introspective examination of my personal experience to lessen any potential bias. In addition, emerging themes and common threads were identified from the participants' responses and then examined using the conceptual framework to make connections and assign meaning to the experiences. Critical race theory, critical race feminist theory, and intercultural communications theory were used to explain the women's perceptions of their experiences and make recommendations for change in the PWI workplace and for future research.

Summary of Key Findings

The research questions that were the driving force for this study were as follows:

1. What are the lived intercultural and career advancement experiences of African American women midlevel leaders at a PWI?

2. What are the perceived influences of intercultural relationships on the career paths of African American women in midlevel leadership positions at PWIs?

3. What are the mentorship experiences of African American women in midlevel leadership positions at PWIs?

There were three key findings from the analysis of this research study that were in relationship to each research question. The first key finding was that participants perceived that the intersection of their race, gender, and position limited their career advancement opportunities at a PWI. I noted that the advancement opportunities were particularly perceived as limited for the women who served in a diversity unit at a PWI. Of the nine women, six were focused on diversity at their university by nature of their position such as minority retention, recruitment, or student development. A second key finding was that I did not perceive that they had the freedom to be themselves in the workplace, and as a result they felt their intercultural relationships were not as strong as they had desired. Because they all described being subjected to stereotypes both for being women and for being African American, they were challenged to fit into the cultural construct in the PWI workplace in order to thrive or just "sit there and take it," as Olivia stated. A final key finding from this study was the expression of the need for mentoring and the struggle to locate and secure a mentor. All participants identified the challenges they faced finding a mentor who might help them navigate the intercultural environment at a PWI and the disadvantage they experienced when working in that environment without a mentor.

<div align="center">**Interpretation of the Findings**</div>

I used a conceptual framework that included critical race theory, critical race feminist theory, and intercultural communications theory to analyze the data collected from this study and then address these research questions. The analysis showed that race and gender, as proposed in critical race theory and critical race feminist theory, were

indeed factors that contributed to the process of career advancement, power held, and intercultural relationship building for African American midlevel leaders in the PWI workplace. The analysis also showed that building intercultural relationships, including mentorships, was perceived to be critical for gaining power and success in that work environment for African American women.

Critical Race Theory and Critical Race Feminist Theory Interpretations

The foundation of critical race theory was race and the distribution of power assigned by one's race (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Critical race feminist theory extended the theory to include that levels of power were determined by both race and gender (Wing, 2003). The participants identified that the intersection of their race and gender largely influenced their choices, chances for advancement, intercultural relationship building, and their mentorship opportunities. Women of color were scrutinized, made to feel inferior, and were stereotyped as a result of their race and gender. In particular, the women who were working in areas of diversity on their PWI campuses noted that there was no room for upward movement in their careers from their current positions. They remarked that they felt stuck or pigeon-holed—even forgotten. They would become known only for their work on diversity issues. Other women reported that being African American and a woman seemed to make their European American colleagues uncomfortable. The participants in the study perceived that those same colleagues often were afraid to broach topics of race, gender, or discrimination in the company of African American women out of what seemed to be fear of unintentionally being offensive or the anticipation of negative reactions from the women.

This left the women in the study feeling misunderstood and silenced as a result. The women spoke of their awareness of their powerlessness and that they perceived their voices were often overlooked or not heard. They reported that there was a double-edged sword because they would be stereotyped and ignored if they spoke up to contribute in meetings or discussions, but would be pushed over and muted if they did not. The participants mentioned that they were treated as subordinates, childlike in some cases, seemingly because of their race and gender. Samantha spoke of being a junior faculty member and having someone remark on how proud he was of her for speaking during meetings. Her response was, "I'm a faculty member, what [else] do you want me to do?" The women also spoke of the feeling that they had to work harder than others to earn the respect of their peers and leaders and prove their worth. For example, Imani talked about the huge burden that she bore because she felt the pressure to perform as the lone African American woman. She said,

> People don't realize unlike other people we have a lot more burden. We have the same 24 hours in a day, 7 days a week. We have more that we are being called upon especially if you're the only one. And so that means you have then the burden of if you are the only one or one of few, your absence is noticed. And so you find yourself going to things for political reasons, for various things. That to me in many ways can suck up your times.

These examples and more from the data indicated to me that the women's experiences were influenced by their race and gender, and their positions of power were lessened as a result.

Intercultural Communications Theory Interpretations

Kim and Gudykunst (1988) and Dodd (1997) claimed that intercultural communication occurred when people from different cultural groups were able to effectively communicate when it pertained to a shared goal. My analysis of the research data from this study extended this claim with one condition. The women indicated that effective communication occurred most often if they had a mentor who had helped them to understand the various elements of their intercultural environment and who had also helped them to navigate through the nuances of the cultural norms of the workplace. However, the women reported that finding mentors was challenging. Too often they were without a mentor and consequently struggled with communication in the workplace.

The women who worked in diversity areas at their PWI did not report encountering challenges with communication as much as the women who worked in other areas of their institution. One woman reported that she was the expert in her area and only she could handle certain issues. This eased communication. The majority of the women explained that it was as if they were speaking another language in addition to having to fight against stereotypes while being careful to speak and act in a nonthreatening way, which all resulted in what I perceived to be an intercultural communication barrier. For example, KQ mentioned that she would "look for other minorities in the room," and Kay stated that she believed the time she had an African American woman as a supervisor, she felt "better." I understand these examples to mean that the women wanted to lessen the probability of cultural communication challenges or barriers and felt relieved once their interaction was with other African American women

or members of other minority groups. It was possible that the lack of diversity at the

university interfered with the willingness and ability of the women or their European

American counterparts to communicate. The women all remarked that they had to form

their own outside networks and support systems to be able to be themselves and feel

connected and comfortable. These groups were homogeneous and consisted of other

African American women and sometimes men in similar roles at PWIs. The analysis

showed that the women's inability to consistently engage in effective intercultural

communication indicated that intercultural communication was not demonstrated in the

PWI setting for these African American women midlevel leaders.

Current Research

Some of the current studies that focused on African American women leaders in

higher education and at PWIs were supported by the findings from this study. Studies

have shown that the race and gender of African American women lead them to be

prejudged and stereotyped by others before they have a chance to perform; they are

expected to prove themselves and earn the respect of staff, faculty, and students alike

(Griffin et al., 2013; Pittman, 2010, 2012; Sule, 2011). Two of the nine women

mentioned that they were often mistaken for graduate students or teaching assistants

because of their youthful appearance, race, and gender, confirming Mitchell and Lee's

(2006) similar experiences of African American women professors at PWIs. These

samples were definitely more random than the referenced research studies because the

selection of participants was made after a nationwide search for African American

women in midlevel leadership roles at PWIs in the United States. Therefore, the women

that participated were not familiar with the personal experiences of the others. In addition to those race and gender issues, recent studies also showed that advancement for this population was perceivably lower than that of European American men and women. Hite (2004) and Modica and Mamiseishvili (2010) both conducted studies with African American women faculty at PWIs and the results showed that the majority of participants perceived that they were promoted less than their European American counterparts. The midlevel leaders in my study all mentioned that they perceived they were not advancing at the same rates as the European Americans in their departments. They were not advancing and yet their workloads remained heaviest (Holmes, 2008; Pittman, 2010). One woman in my study noted that she did not have time to do the work such as writing grants, articles, or anything else that could help to position her for advancement because her work load was so time consuming. This may be an experienced shared by a number of people in the higher education community, but this participant perceived that her issues with work and life balance were largely due to the extra responsibilities of an African American woman minority on a PWI campus.

The need for building support networks and the importance of mentors was matched in both current research and my study. Clayborne and Hamrick (2007) interviewed African American women working in student affairs at PWIs and, similarly, they indicated that they could not find the support they needed on campus and had to seek outside networks to fill that void. Each of the nine women in my study responded in agreement. The recent literature also reinforced the African American midlevel leaders' perception that finding a mentor was challenging but necessary to learn the PWI

workplace culture and be successful (Dowdy & Hamilton, 2011; Nguyen, 2012; Nichols, 2004; Patton-Davis, 2009; Reddick, 2006).

Limitations of the Study

The limitations for this study were centralized in the study's design. First, the participants were from a very specific sample population from varying cities throughout the United States; however, the majority of the participants were from the northeast region of the country. That may present some challenges with generalizability and transferability with other populations of African American women, as well as with those in other fields of occupation. In similar studies, the participants were from the same institutions or at least from within the same few institutions. My sample was pulled using LinkedIn, a national professional networking site, and therefore was selected more randomly. The results indicated certain commonalities for African American midlevel leaders at PWIs in the United States in general, though no results can be attributed to size of the PWIs, by age of the participants, by their economic status, by their job title, or by their institution specifically. This was not a comparative study based on any of these demographics or qualities.

Next, there was a possibility for bias as I collected all of the interview data, and I share a similar background to the participants. I am an African American woman, and I work in a midlevel leadership position at a PWI in the United States. Three of the participants worked at my large institution; however, we did not work in the same unit and our work was not connected. In order to help limit bias during both interviews, I read the main questions and the probe questions as they were written and previously approved

by my committee. I did not add extra commentary so as to not influence the participants' responses. In addition, I was careful not to qualify their responses with my own opinion or experiences. When transcribing the interviews, I wrote only what the participants said and not my interpretation of what I thought they said. If I was unclear, I followed up with them individually to get clarification. Then each participant reviewed and approved the transcripts for their first and second interview, which showed that the transcript was a true and accurate account of their responses.

Another limitation was that the interviews were conducted over the telephone. While I could not see them to glean tone, mood, or emotion from their body language, I was able to note certain verbal cues such as laughter, long pauses, word choice, and crying, to name a few. All of those cues indicated a different feeling such as sarcasm, sadness, happiness, displeasure, or care. For example, Olivia became emotional during the second interview and cried during her response. She explained that she did not realize she felt that way and surprised even herself. In this case, I did not have to ask or assume the emotion, the participant explained. However, in another example, I inferred from the participant's word choice that responding to a particular question was important to her. Imani began by saying, "Let me write this down because I don't want to forget." That indicated to me that she had a lot to say on the matter and wanted to be sure to be thorough. In other cases, if I was unsure of what a participant meant by a certain phrase or verbal cue such as laughter, I would ask. For example, KQ used the phrase, "nasty gram." I have my own understanding of what this means, but I sought her explanation of it so that I did not assume and possibly assume incorrectly and change the tone and

meaning of her response. There again, I did not impose my personal thoughts on the response of the participant thus limiting bias.

Recommendations for Further Research

There are several recommendations for further research. All of the participants in my study were African American women. I would like to compare the differences and similarities in the experiences of African American women and those of European American women who are midlevel leaders serving at the same PWIs in the United States. The literature was limited regarding studies on African American women midlevel leaders at PWIs or in higher education in general, but I also would be interested to see if a literature review suggested a gap in this way and warranted a study on European American women. The results from this study would either support or refute the race and gender issues, claims of advancement limitations, and need for mentoring to navigate the workplace environment. The data could also reveal any underlying race or gender discrimination that may be present and suggest areas in need of institutional change.

The data suggested that African American midlevel leaders at PWIs could improve their leadership abilities and hone their skills in the field if they were provided adequate time, support, and resources to do so. All of the women reported that there were few, if any, resources available for women of color in leadership at PWIs. In future research, it would be beneficial to interview African American women at PWIs who do have access to funding, conferences, and networks on their campuses that are specific to their demographic. A comparative study could be done to measure the differences in the experiences in advancement, intercultural relationship-building, and mentoring for this

group of participants in relation to the women in my study who said they did not have the resources or resources were very limited.

Each of the women in my study aspired to advance in some capacity (which may have been the reason they volunteered), whether at their institution or not. A longitudinal study that followed these women for the next year, then 3 years would allow for an opportunity to show if and when they advanced, to what positions, and examine their career goals now, from this point. New research questions could be (a) What role do mentors play in the career advancement of former African American midlevel leaders at a PWI? (b) How do race and gender factor into the lived experiences of former African American women midlevel leaders who have advanced in their careers? (c) What are the lived intercultural relationship experiences of African American women leaders who have advanced their careers at a PWI? Such studies could support or refute the findings from my study which addressed similar questions from the current midlevel leader's point-of-view.

Another recommendation for further research was that all nine of the women in this study mentioned they desired a structured mentoring program or an assigned mentor at their PWI. I would suggest that a comparative study be conducted between African American midlevel leaders who have been working with a mentor or in a mentorship program since the beginning of their career at a PWI and those who were left to find their own or work without a mentor. The participants would have to be midlevel leaders in similar positions and working at similar campuses. As mentioned in Chapter 3 in the participant recruitment section, in my study the participants all self-identified as midlevel

leaders but depending on the size and location of the institutions, the position titles varied. A closer comparison it would be important to keep the variables as close to the same as possible. The results of the comparative study could support or refute the research findings and current research that indicates mentoring is among the most valuable tools for career success and advancement. In addition, a study such as this could test the intercultural communications theory with the women that did have mentors and determine the challenges and/or barriers associated still after their involvement with a mentor.

One last recommendation for further research would be to locate a PWI that has a structured mentoring program with a good retention rate of African American women leaders and conduct a case study using that program and the women who participate in it. The findings could reveal some best practices or road map for successful mentoring programs that could be mimicked at other institutions around the United States.

Implications for Social Change

The results of this study could potentially be used by the administration at a PWI to help evaluate their diversity issues and recommendations for change. The results revealed some of the perceptions that African American midlevel leaders had about their relationships, opportunities for advancement, level of power or autonomy, support needed, and mentoring at a PWI. That information could help open dialogue between the leadership at PWIs with their African American women faculty and staff on their campus. There could then be opportunity for African American women to be empowered to voice their concerns and their needs.

This study showed the positive impact that having a formal mentoring program might have on women's perceptions of their intercultural and career advancement experiences. It also indicated the level of importance each woman believed having a mentor was to her career advancement at a PWI. The results of this study suggested that by creating mentoring opportunities for African American midlevel leaders at PWIs, they might become better leaders. They felt that with a mentor they could develop more confidence and build workplace relationships more easily. They felt they would be happier in their positions, and could possibly have greater influence on other African American women in higher education.

Conclusion

At conception, what intrigued me most about this study was that it was going to shed some light on career advancement in the field of higher education for African American women like me. However, once I met the nine women who participated in my study, I realized that their stories were more than notes for advancing one's career. Their experiences were real, emotional, and alive. These compelling women conveyed the five themes within their experience of their limited advancement opportunities, the effects of intersectionality, intercultural relationship challenges, and the benefits of locating and having a mentor. Through their experiences they learned that building relationships were helpful for understanding and navigating the intercultural workplace at a PWI, and that value was placed on what they knew and how they used what they knew to advance the mission of the college or university.

The findings showed that African American women midlevel leaders shared a passion for higher education, a responsibility to help students, a yearning for personal development, and a strong desire to advance education initiatives for people of color and minorities. The analysis revealed to me that this population was not provided the tools for career success and advancement at a PWI. They were ill-prepared yet still expected to perform the same as their European American colleagues. As a result, they indicated feelings of inadequacy, invisibility, and sadness. I deducted from the analysis that it was these feelings that the women struggled with that often contributed to their decision to leave an institution or stay. For those who stayed, they indicated that it was their passion for change that kept them going.

This study highlighted the experiences of African American women midlevel leaders specifically, and uncovered their personal and professional needs for career advancement at PWIs. That information can be helpful to PWIs in hiring efforts, recruitment methods, and retention strategies for African American women leaders at their institutions. A long-term social change implication from this study was that the more African American women were retained on the campuses of PWIs, the more African American women and students of color would follow; thus aiding in diversifying institutions and bringing forth different point-of-views and experiences that could create positive institutional change. One lesson that was reiterated to me through the findings was that support and guidance were paramount for job satisfaction and retention. The women, though they were often few or the only, were driven by their passion to serve

students and were steadfast to reach their goals despite the barriers and challenges with

communication, the PWI workplace culture, advancement opportunities, and mentorship.

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Appendix: Interview Guide

Intercultural and Career Advancement Experiences of African American Women

Mid-Level Leaders at Predominately White Institutions

Initial Interview

Question 1: What is your definition of a leader in higher education?

Probe Question 1a: When you hear or read "mid-level leader", how do you interpret that?

Probe Question 1b: What is your understanding of PWIs?

Question 2: Describe your career path and how it led you to a mid-level position at a PWI?

Probe Question 2a: Share your current role and the length of time you have held it.

Probe Question 2b: What other mid-level positions have you held?

Question 3: What are your career aspirations?

Probe Question 3a: Have you faced any challenges that you perceive have negatively affected your career advancement? Would you share a couple of examples?

Question 4: Have there been any positive experiences that you have had that were influential in your career advancement and success while working at [Insert institution name]? Would you share a couple of examples?

Probe Question 4a: Explain what you think made those experiences positive?

Probe Question 4b: Have you had any influential people that have helped you throughout your career at [Insert institution name]?

Question 5: What challenges or barriers have you encountered regarding diversity issues?

Probe Question 5a: Share your experience working within an intercultural environment.

Probe Question 5b: How do you combat adversity and challenges in the PWI workplace involving intercultural relationships?

Second Interview

Question 6: From your experience, has your race and gender played a role in your ability to build relationships in the workplace? Can you tell me how?

Probe Question 6a: Do you notice differences for ethnic minorities and women on your campus? Could you explain?

Probe Question 6b: Have you encountered any of those differences personally?

Probe Question 6c: How do you cope?

Question 7: From your experience how has your race and gender influenced your career advancement and satisfaction while working as a mid-level leader at a PWI?

Question 8: From your perspective, are there any services or resources that PWIs could offer African American women mid-level leaders that would benefit their career satisfaction?

Probe Question 8a: Are you aware of any professional development programs on your campus that specifically target African American women leaders?

Probe Question 8b: From your experience, when such programs are offered, what is your perception of the response from you and other African American women on campus?

> **Probe Question 8b**-1: Are African American women seemingly receptive to the program offerings? How do you interpret their reaction?

Probe Question 8c: What programs have you participated in and what was your experience? What aspects were most helpful to you as a leader and an African American woman at a PWI?

Question 9: Based on your personal experience, share three pieces of advice you would offer to African American women who are considering and/or seeking leadership at a PWI?

> **Probe Question 9a**: What advice, if any, was shared with you prior to starting a leadership role at a PWI or during your career at a PWI?

Question 10 Are there any additional experiences you would like to share that you think will further enrich this study?