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SPEAKING OUT DESPITE WHITE NOISE: EXAMINING THE LEADERSHIP OF
AFRICAN AMERICAN FEMALE TECHNICAL COLLEGE PRESIDENTS AND VICE
PRESIDENTS

by

ASHLEY N. MORRIS

(Under the Direction of Meca Williams-Johnson)

The purpose of this phenomenological, qualitative study was to explore the experiences of African American female leaders in higher education. More specifically, this study examined the experiences of these leaders who assume the role of presidents and vice presidents at Georgia technical colleges. The study contextualized the experiences of these leaders and illustrated how those experiences influence their leadership methods and the establishment of their leadership presence. The results of this study form a context for understanding the leadership methods of African American female leaders.

INDEX WORDS: Higher education, African American women leaders, Critical race theory and intersectionality

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DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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AMERICAN FEMALE LEADERS

by

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Committee: Ming Fang He
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Electronic Version Approved:
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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my ten month old daughter Isabella Nichelle whose awe filled eyes looking at me as if to say “mom you’re my shero” prompted me to work more diligently to provide for her opportunities to achieve more than I have. I also dedicate this work to my unborn son, Ashton David who surprised mommy with his existence but gave me the motivation to finish the work.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background of Study

“Reclaiming my time” were the words used by Representative Maxine Waters during a House Financial Services Committee hearing on Thursday, July 27, 2017 as she challenged Treasury Secretary Steve Munchin to speak directly to the matter that was presented. Rep. Waters attempted to get a clear answer to the question she posed to Sec. Munchin; however, in an effort to evade the question, he tried to run the clock down with empty rhetoric. Rebuking his tactics, Rep. Waters interrupts his response and forces him to use the time wisely and answer her questions (Rogo, 2017). Her words instantly caught on – shared throughout various social media outlets, immortalized on t-shirts, and becoming an anthem of empowerment for many African American women. These three words – “reclaiming my time” – exemplify the sentiment of many African American women, especially leaders, as they are out-talked and spoken over by white males (and others) and seek to speak out against such oppressive forces. Rep. Waters represents many African American female leaders who use their voice and space in leadership to exude confidence and establish credibility in their leadership methods and abilities.

Most African American women in academia, especially those in leadership, often recognize very quickly that their narratives are much different than their white male counterparts, and in some cases, these women are not respected or heard in their positions: “Black women in academia are doubly bound by discrimination that is related to both gender and race. Thus Black women tend to be over-burdened and under-appreciated in predominantly White institutions of higher education...” (Agosto & Karanxha, 2012, p. 44). The numbers tell us that there are not as many African-American women in colleges and universities as there are white men or even

black men. Over the years, the numbers increased, but there is still work to do to show the presence of African-American women in higher education.

Consider the president of a Georgia Technical College walking into a meeting place; upon stepping into the room, an air of respect immediately permeates the atmosphere. No one rolls his/her eyes, makes snide remarks, or questions the leader's ability to serve effectively as president. Likewise, there is no doubt in the president's mind about the efficiency of his/her leadership. On the contrary, the entire faculty believes in their president. They share ideas openly with the president, welcome collaboration on important projects, and feel secure in the president's vision for the college and leadership strategies. However, this narrative is dissimilar if the college president is a black female. At times, faculty and staff refuse to wholeheartedly believe in her leadership. Although confident, in her innermost thoughts and feelings resides a twinge of doubt. This is the all too familiar story of African American female leaders in higher education.

In all actuality, this need not be some imagined situation. There are cited examples of African American female leaders in higher education at the university level who have faced the exact type of oppression as described above. There are several leaders who exhibit the strong leadership that it takes to successfully lead an institution. Leaders such as Beverly Tatum and Elmira Mangum, who are both past presidents of historically black schools were faced with much opposition because of the gender and their stand on certain issues. Their leadership skills and styles led two respected schools but not without great opposition.

President Tatum began her reign at Spelman College in 2002. Previously she was a professor of psychology and dean of the college at Mount Holyoke College. She was a leader on racism and equal rights for everybody. She led workshops and actively defended women

dealing with race. President Tatum recognizes the marginality of women in various organizations and circles of society. Such marginality is a noteworthy factor of African American women being systematically disadvantaged by race and gender; in essence, although a college President and acclaimed educator and leader, she is still a target of multiple isms – racism, sexism, classism, etc. creating intense and sometimes life threatening effects and environments (Tatum, 2007). Learning to negotiate in such environments prompted Tatum to stand firm on issues of race and identity. This stand on academics and other issues made President a target for a lot of criticism within the HBCU community as a college president. However, despite such, her steadfastness and tenacity ultimately led to a successful tenure as President.

In contrast, Elmira Mangum, the 11th President of Florida A&M University had a much different experience. She served the college as the first woman to permanently hold the position of President from April 1, 2014, until September 2016. According to reports, there were issues with Dr, Magnum and several trustees of the board who were all black men. Criticism arose heavily concerning her hiring practices, travel expenses, spending lavishly to fix up the university president's house. Such allegations brought her leadership capabilities and style into question and bordered on bullying (Mitchell, 2015). Although her leadership had great successes, the criticism out shadowed these leaving what could have been a great legacy in a whirlwind of chaos and scandals. She faced an extreme level of opposition as the first woman to hold the Presidency office at FAMU.

These are just two examples of African American female leaders in higher education whose experienced first-hand the struggle to create space and give voice to their leadership in higher education often exemplified in challenges to their confidence and credibility as leaders.

As Miles (2012) states, “Black women have long understood that the intersection of race and gender places them in a unique position to be continuously misunderstood. Others in society seem to simply ignore the complexity of being both Black and female while simultaneously clinging to its importance in their lives.” This is so true within administration because Black women have two issues-being a woman and being black even within an HBCU. It still seems to resound the fact that the world is not prepared or not open to a woman as a leader. This has been evident even in the recent presidential election in the U.S. These examples present that a woman’s voice is not welcomed in administration and the time is now to ensure that gender nor race is a factor in effective leadership.

The lived experiences of African-American women within the academy often mirrors the social marginality and invisibility that they face in society; such experiences often leave these women silenced within the academy (Molina, 2009). This phenomenon may be best described with the metaphor of a person trying to speak over background noise. Although, the person is talking, no one is listening, and those who are listening cannot hear for the “white noise” in the background. This “noise” is the constant challenging of her confidence and credibility as a leader. Therefore, she, the African-American woman and college president, becomes silenced by the background noise. In a sense, hegemony, bullying, criticism, undermining, etc., within the academy becomes a means of silencing African American women in higher education (Molina, 2009). African-American women have worked hard to find their place in the academic world. It is important for any leader to have a voice and be heard as a leader that will guide the institutions in the right direction.

There has long existed a hegemonic atmosphere in higher education in which whiteness and maleness have dominated leadership (Croom & Patton, 2012). There are countless stories of

African American women in higher education who have worked with determination and diligence to succeed in their careers. These women had to fight tirelessly to overcome negative social constructs to obtain an education and progress through the ranks of their respective fields. Their experiences “reflect longstanding and endemic racism and sexism that still exists and marginalizes them based on aspects of difference” causing inequalities to arise and silence African American women (Croom & Patton, 2012, p.14). Although often left feeling discounted, marginalized, and “out-talked” by their white counterparts, these women are left feeling without a voice or place in higher education (Molina, 2009). Likewise, their confidence and credibility as leaders are constantly challenged. However, these women do possess voices that should be heard, and their place in higher education is valuable. The specific narratives of African-American women in higher education, especially those at technical colleges, are rarely discussed, and too often their stories go untold and unheard. Thus this research will focus on the experiences of African American female leaders in technical colleges and their leadership presence within those leadership roles. Further, it will examine how the unique attributes of their experiences affect the way that they establish their confidence and credibility as leaders and their leadership methods. Allowing African American women to share their experiences and speak their truths adds a much needed voice to the growing American counter narrative. As Zamudio et al. (2010) state, “Counter narratives are important for the way that they help counteract stereotypes and expose the contingent nature of presumed universal truths. However, they are also important for the way that they help provide a sense of place and belonging.” (p.145)

In *Behind the Mask of the Strong Black Woman*, Tamara Beauboeuf-Lafontant describes the space in which many African American women find themselves with the example of a young lady named Crystal:

Despite thwarting her desires to be assisted and nurtured, appearing strong is critically important to Crystal. Her self-presentation as a ‘strong Black woman’ is a well-practiced strategy for personal esteem and protection... Such is the dilemma with strength – to choose appearances unknown to other people, or to choose truth and risk being disregarded by them... Black women commonly face such expectations and participate in similar mismatches between self-assessments and outward self-presentations (2009, p.4-5).

Given such, it becomes extremely necessary to focus on these women’s leadership presence in their own established voice which subverts the prevailing social discourse and meets them in their own space (and on their own terms).

Presence when used in this study refers to the personas, leadership methods, self-perception, and self-presentation (how one presents herself) of African American female leaders based on their prior social and personal life experiences. This leadership presence, then, is inherently linked to the confidence and credibility of these leaders and the inward and outward positions of African American women created by their unique experiences. This confidence and credibility is fashioned at the intersection of their multiple identities and serves as a safe and authentic place from which to speak and lead. Further, this space houses these women’s voice which is a vocalized expression of their lived experiences. African American female leaders in higher education face many challenges. As if being both black and a woman is not enough, these women live uniquely crafted lives that inevitably shape the space in which they lead from and the voice of their leadership. Historically, African American women have experienced life within a matrix of oppressive ideologies of race, gender, and class causing them to be marginalized, stereotyped, hypersexualized, and disenfranchised (Watson, 2012; Jefferies, 2015). The

oppressive forces have often placed African American women in positions of inferiority and silenced their voices. Therefore, it is necessary to truly understand the totality of the experiences of African American women before seeking to analyze the experiences of African American female leaders in higher education. This research explores the presentation and perception of African American female leaders in higher education. Many African American women are characterized as “strong black women” and carry that title with both pride and trepidation.

Problem Statement and Rationale

The experiences of African American female leaders’ permeate every aspect of their lives including their leadership. The problem is that their experience is drowned out by other voices – those that are more dominant and more powerful – those of the white (usually male) leaders. These voices are not representative of the African American females’ perspective and impose themselves upon her experiences. This attitude of white superiority and African American female inferiority infers that the African American female experience is one of mediocrity resulting in a devaluing of the African American female voice and subsequent silencing of it.

Women in academia, especially those in technical colleges, operate daily within a hegemonic structure which may marginalize and silence them. This may happen because of various social constructs based upon race, gender, class, and sexuality. While some women of color do find ways to survive and thrive within the hegemonic culture present within the academy, others never find ways to create a space or fashion a voice for themselves. However, many of women of color in academia serving at technical colleges are often left out.

Although there exist research on women of color in higher education with respect to universities, the problem is that minimal research exists that looks specifically at African American women at technical colleges. African American female leaders at technical colleges

have basically been shut out of mainstream higher educational research. Although African American females fulfill leadership roles within technical colleges, their effectiveness as leaders often hinges on how they establish their confidence and credibility as leaders. In essence, their leadership presence is brought to their roles as leaders: “how you show up, how you connect, how you speak, listen, act – every move you make on the corporate or real stage, combine to create the impact you have” (Halpern & Lubar, 2003, p. 4). Towards that end,, there is no research that addresses the credibility and confidence of African American female leaders in higher education to include when these leaders knew they established credibility with faculty and staff nor what negative stereotypes about black women (self-perceived or perceived by others) that she had to face in order to earn credibility and confidence.

According to Northouse (2013), gender differences affect leadership methods in ways that have made women’s leadership more effective in contemporary society. It is assumed that racial differences and identity may also affect leadership methods. Therefore, it is worthwhile to utilize a phenomenological qualitative study to examine the leadership presence of African American female leaders at technical colleges. The irony of presences for African American women is complicated. What does it mean for an African American women to “look” presidential? More than just physical presence is involved in this perplexing problem; also the perception of the leader in relation to the organization is even more intriguing about the phenomenon. The embodiment of the leader both physically and psychologically is what is considered as presence here and how do African American women establish confidence and credibility to become the effective leaders they envision.

Moreover, much of the existing literature analyzes the barriers that women face but not necessarily at *how* these women gain confidence and credibility as leaders. Thus, the existing

literature never addresses how they establish their presence as leaders. In examining the experience and voice of African American females in leadership, it is also important to examine the space from which they speak. As with many cultures that have been marginalized, as they begin to define themselves outside of a hegemonic power, they carve out a new space which is comprised of discourse addressing their concerns and issues. From this space, African American females are empowered to speak above the background noise and reestablish the value of the African American female experience in higher educational leadership (Johnson, 2009).

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study is to examine how African-American female presidents and vice presidents at technical colleges establish their leadership confidence and credibility. Additionally, the researcher explored how these leaders use confidence and credibility to support their leadership methods. The researcher examined the issues that African-American women have within public institutions to convey their individual voices. The response and acceptance of these leaders by others within their institution was also examined.

Research Questions

The researcher's epistemological perspective is grounded in an advocacy/participatory worldview as she seeks to understand the experiences of African American female leaders. The researcher will examine the phenomenon of African American female leaders at Georgia technical colleges establishing their presence as leaders. Phenomenological studies seek to examine the lived experiences of people and how these experiences are transformed into consciousness (Merriam, 2009).

African American female leaders face a great deal of burdens and barriers specific to their particular situations: terms such as "double bind," "triple jeopardy," and "racial sexism" are

often used when referring to these women (Barriers Encountered by Administrators of Color in Higher and Postsecondary Education, 2009). African American female leaders exist and function within the space of multiple identities. Within this unique space they speak/develop a voice and establish their presence as leaders. Therefore, it becomes important to analyze the specific nuances of this process of establishing presence.

Examining the experiences of three African American female leaders at Georgia technical colleges, the researcher interviewed each participant concerning their past experiences on establishing their voice, and increasing their confidence and credibility as higher education leaders. From this information, the researcher intends to answer the following research questions:

1. What aspects of African American female presidents and vice presidents' at technical colleges in Georgia social and personal life affect their leadership methods?
2. What barriers have they faced in establishing their confidence and credibility as leaders?
3. When did each leader realize that she had established confidence and credibility as a leader?

Theoretical Framework

Critical Race Theory is the overarching theoretical framework that will inform the study. The theoretical framework will allow insight into the experiences of African American female leaders in technical colleges. Often times, it is the educational arena where the impact of racism is most felt especially with colleges as they mirror the racial antipathy of society; with this in mind, it is clear how African Americans have struggled to attain equity in higher education (Wolfe & Dilworth, 2015). This is especially true of African American administrators in higher education. Without representation in higher education, their experiences cannot be voiced:

The theory's expansion into education is significant because it further illuminated race and racism's role in U.S. society (Dixson & Lynn, 2013). As a theoretical construct, critical race explains how traditional aspects of education and the structures supporting educational systems perpetuate racism and maintain subordinate and dominant racial positions on college and university campuses (Patton et al., 2007; Solorzano, Villalpando, & Oseguera, 2005) (Critical Race Theory in Higher Education, 2015)

Therefore, Critical Race Theory becomes an important lens in examining the experiences of African American female presidents and vice presidents at technical college. In fact, as a race centered theory, CRT places the African American experience at the forefront of such discourse and validates them by "expos[ing] dominant norms and assumptions that appear neutral but systematically marginalize, silence, and misrepresent people of color" (as cited in Wolfe & Dilworth, 2015, p.678).

Additionally, intersectionality was used to explore the intersection of race, gender, and culture of higher education. Intersectionality rests upon the theory that people live multiple, layered identities consisting of social relations, history, and the operation of structured power (Crenshaw, 1991). In order to more fully understand the experiences of African American female leaders it becomes quite important to investigate the spaces from which they live, speak, and lead. Such spaces often exist in the margins of society causing the experiences of these women to be discounted. They pay a personal cost for existing and leading from these spaces and have profound experiences when moving within the different "worlds" of higher education (Mirza, 2015).

Significance

Although literature exists regarding African America female leaders at four-year institutions, that literature does not specifically address presidents and vice presidents at the technical college level nor does the literature examine the development of the leaders' space and voice with respect to their leadership methods. This study will help fill the gap that exists in the literature, lay some of the groundwork to build a support system for women of color in higher education, and suggest ways of increasing their leadership presence. Furthermore, the study will bring awareness to the issues that African American female presidents and vice presidents at technical colleges face with respect to the fashioning of their space and voice. Lastly, the study may help to foster the creation of initiatives or programs (i.e. mentoring, advanced preparation) that will help women of color fashion a positive space and voice as leaders in higher education, or at the very least, change the existing narrative of women of color in higher educational leadership.

Delimitations, Limitations, and Assumptions

Participants of this study are African American female presidents and vice presidents at Georgia technical colleges. Since the number of people who meet this criterion is so small, it was challenging to find those who had the availability to participate in the study. To overcome this snowball sampling was utilized to gather participants via referrals. Further, the study is limited to African American female technical college presidents and vice presidents; therefore, due to the unique sample available, results are generalizable beyond the specific population from which the sample is drawn. It is recommended that further research on this topic be explored through the lens of other African American female leaders in other areas. The researcher assumes that African American female leaders have shared/similar experiences before and during their roles

and higher educational leaders and that they have unique experiences that are, in many ways, unlike those of any other group.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following key terms are defined:

Confidence – The ability to contribute fully and significantly to one’s profession and vocation to include contributing as equals in conversations, working closely with multidisciplinary teams, and unashamedly practice capably and competently in various aspects of leadership (Kelly, 2013)

Credibility – The ability, experience, education, and persona which speaks to the leadership performance within a certain role (Kelly, 2013). Further, credibility may be defined as the ability of leaders to gain the trust of their constituents in the leaders’ consistency between words and deeds while representing organizational needs, interests, goals, values, vision, and mission (Kouzes & Posner, 2011).

Space – The area situated at the intersection of multiple constructs or identities, creating a place from which a distinct voice emerges and asserts itself. The space of African American female leaders is developed through an exchange of material and houses their voice. This definition draws on Homi Bhabha’s (1990) definition of the Third Space which “enables other positions to emerge. This Third Space displaces the histories that constitute it and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives...” (p.211).

Voice – The expression, discourse, and language that emerges within a given space representing a particular group’s cultural and social perspectives. African American female leaders’ voice carries the unique attributes and meanings implicit within their experiences. Voice gives life to experience.

Presence – Amy Cuddy (2015) defines presence as “the state of being attuned to and able to comfortably express our true thoughts, feelings, values, and potential” (p.24). Drawing on that definition, presence in this study may be defined as the most authentic manifestation and expression of space and voice resulting from personal and social experiences.

Invisibility – Existing at the margins of society so much so that the experiences, issues, concerns, voices, and spaces are trivialized and ignored; this idea is a “fundamental aspect of being black in a white-dominated society” (Mowatt, French, & Malebranche, 2013, p.645)

Leadership methods – Drawing from Northouse’s (2013) definition of leadership as a process in which an individual influences a group of people toward a common goal, leadership methods may be defined as the method(s) that leaders employ throughout the process of leading.

Chapter Summary

Historically, African American women have been silenced by racism, sexism, and other oppressive forces. While we have struggled to reclaim power and open discourse reflecting their specific experiences, literature that examines the totality of these experiences are almost non-existent, especially with respect to higher education.

African American female leaders in higher education experience marginalization in various arenas. The intersection of their social identities leaves them with a unique space and voice with which they articulate the totality of their experiences. As leaders, this space and voice allows them to establish their leadership presence.

The purpose of this phenomenological, qualitative study was to explore the experiences of African American female leaders in higher education. More specifically, this study examined

the experiences of these leaders who assume the role of presidents and vice presidents at Georgia technical colleges. The study contextualized the experiences of these leaders and illustrated how those experiences influence their leadership methods and the establishment of their leadership presence. The results of this study form a context for understanding the leadership methods of African American female leaders.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

African American Women: A Critical Race Perspective

The literature for this study will include information to support the focal point of this research concerning the role of African-American women and their voice in leadership. Voice and/or space is compromised whenever there is an African-American woman in charge and the challenges she faces stops her from being effective. This literature will support and address the challenges that African-American women face. These women have multiple social identities that are interlocking: “black women... occupy unique social spaces where gender oppression interlocks with racism. Intersectionality posits that it is difficult to research the experience of a black woman without understanding how her racial and gender identities are locked together” (Nakhid et al., 2015, p.190). Using the lens of intersectionality, the focus will be on the shared experiences of these women and how those experiences shaped their leadership methods.

The social identities of these ladies are not only interlocking, but sometimes they are also challenged. African-American women are challenged not only because they are women, but because they are African-American as well. With these challenges, it is more difficult for African-American women to lead in an effective and efficient manner.

It is clear that African Americans face a unique set of life circumstances, and despite being silenced they must find a space and voice from which to speak. This is what makes Critical Race Theory so important in the examination of the African American life experience. Throughout the nation’s history, activists have worked to interrogate, challenge, contest, and rationalize racial stratification and equality. Through this activism came the project of intellectuals now known as Critical Race Theory. Although this great intellectual movement

started in the legal system, it now holds incredible weight as a means to explore racial differences within educational environments (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

In essence, Critical Race Theory places racism and race related issues at the forefront of discourse concerning communities of color. Critical race theory is founded upon five basic tenets (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012):

- ordinariness (lack of acknowledgement of racism leading to difficulties in fixing it) – this tenant hinges on the fact that racism is not directly addressed because it is often overshadowed by misconceptions of equality
- interest convergence (lack of incentive to eradicate racism due to advancement of white-elite agendas) – this feature of CRT may also be referred to as material determinism as racism helps to advance the interests of white elites; therefore, there is no drive to stop racism
- social construction (race and racism exist as social thoughts) – this theme of CRT holds that race corresponds to no biological or genetic reality but that race and racism are inventions of society
- differential racialization (shifting needs in the labor market drive the racialization of certain minority groups) – this tenet focuses on how society racializes different minority groups depending on the needs of the labor market
- unique voice of color (minority status brings a presumed ability and competence to speak about race and racism) - this element focuses on the ability of minorities to communicate the experiences of race and racism to their white counterparts in ways that focus on the unique perspectives of minorities.

Further, Critical Race Theory seeks to not only analyze and discuss the specific experiences of people of color, but also it serves as a catalyst for change pushing back on ideological constraints. Ultimately, Critical Race Theory helps to transform our society's organization along racial lines and hierarchies (Delago & Stefancic, 2012; Howard-Hamilton, 2003).

From the women's movement of the 1960s to today, women have consistently moved forward into top positions in higher education; however, even with such forward mobility, African American women have not experienced the advancements that other women have (Bower & Wolverton, 2009). Although African American women have begun to establish their space and place in various arenas and their visibility has increased in leadership roles, African American women still exist, as they have for centuries, at the margins of society: "in 2009, 22% of the nation's 120 historically/ predominately black institutions were led by African American women, but only 8 predominately white, 4-year institutions have African American women at the helm (Bower & Wolverton, 2009, p.2). Even further, in Georgia, where it seems that the talent and intellect of African American women have been overlooked, in 2010 fewer than 100 African American women served in executive and administrative positions (Gamble & Turner, 2015). It is clear that African American women are still struggling against the hegemonic powers within education and society as a whole.

Women of color in America have grown up with a symphony of anger, at being silenced, at being unchosen, at knowing that when we survive, it is in spite of a world that takes for granted our lack of humanness, and which hates our very existence outside of its service. (Lorde, 1984, p.119)

In order to truly understand the African American female leader's experience in the technical college system, one must delve into African American history.

This history will inevitably shed light on the black family, psychological dimensions of African American women, treatment of African American women in pop culture and its impact, and experiences of African American women in the American Education System. This review will consist of a brief historical overview will start with slavery in America to lay the foundation of the struggles of African Americans; this section will also serve as a gateway into understanding other areas of African American life and the overall plight(s) that many African Americans face. Secondly, the including addressing the Black family for a more in depth look into the effects of the trauma that blacks have endured on the institution of family. Next, the review will expound upon the various psychological factors that affect black women from institutional racism to systematic racism, sexism, and classism.

Cornel West (1990) stated, "To engage in a serious discussion of race in America, we must begin not with the problems of black people but with the flaws of American society-flaws rooted in historic inequalities and longstanding cultural stereotypes" (p.6). Therefore, it is important to note the importance of discussing race as it relates to struggles of African-American women in the educational arena. In an investigation of critical race theory, there is a significance of race and the relationship of cultural studies. Cultural studies high lights the social structures in society by examining the margins that border race, class, and gender. Society still has issues with seeing women as first class citizens especially African-American woman and that concept spills over when women are assuming leadership roles in educational institutions.

Historical Overview

Slavery in America. The chains of slavery left a myriad of psychosocial issues that African Americans are forced to contend with:

Slavery was ‘legally’ ended in excess of 100 years ago, but over 300 years experienced in its brutality and unnaturalness constituted a severe psychological and social shock in the minds of African Americans. This shock was so destructive to natural life processes that the current generation of African Americans, although we are five to six generations removed from the actual experience of slavery, still carry the scars of this experience in both our social and mental lives. (Akbar, p. 3, 1996)

The practices of slavery left African American women with first-hand knowledge of degradation, shame, and brutality often from childhood (Gay, 1999). Black women lived with this knowledge daily which often affected their self-image. Even after slavery, the legacy of cultural oppression toward the bodies of Black women continued with images such as The Mammy, a dark-skinned, large, asexual, extremely nurturing woman who is nothing more than a domestic servant to white slave owners; The Jezebel, a hypersexual, manipulative, animalistic and promiscuous woman who is out of control; The Welfare Queen, a poor woman deemed as “lazy” and nothing more than a baby making machine draining the system; and The Angry Black Woman/ Sapphire, an aggressive, domineering and emasculating behaving woman who is often loud and offensive (Mowatt, 2013; Collins, 2004). These racial stereotypes have had immense psychosocial effects on women, and as they are internalized create lower levels of self-esteem (Mowatt, 2013). These persisting stereotypes have also affected the ways in which contemporary white peers view and treat African American women. Therefore, daily, African American women must deal with the psychosocial consequences of the racial trauma that has ensued from the institutionalized sexual

violence of slavery to the abuse and stereotypes of post slavery from multiple angles (Gay, 1999).

The Black Family. African American women have faced violence and extreme trauma throughout history. Slavery was not just a traumatic event in America's past; rather, it was a series of atrocities committed against the entire black race. It is estimated that 11 million Africans were enslaved, not counting those that died in transport (Gay, 1999). Treated like cattle, men were stripped naked, branded and examined, and women were stripped naked, examined, and often sexually assaulted or raped in the process. This dehumanizing process was essential to the institution of slavery (Collins, 2004). Both were rendered powerless, but especially the women whose bodies were disrespected, commodified, and exploited sexually during slavery as they became subjugated by slave owners and used to reproduce, rear children, and serve as the sexual objects of white males.

Although Black women worked like men doing manual labor, their sexuality and reproductive abilities were capitalized on: "Barbara Omolade describes this gender-specific commodification as one in which the White master used "every part" of the enslaved African woman: 'to him she was a fragmented commodity whose feelings and choices were rarely considered: her head and her heart were separated from her back and her hands and divided from her womb and vagina'" (Collins, p. 55-56, 2004). Black women worked in their slave masters' homes, farms, and beds. The system of slavery was not only focused on using slaves for manual labor, but it extended into the sanctity of the black woman's body, motherhood, and relationships:

Racial oppression tends to flow from the external to the internal: from political institutions, social structures, the economic system and military conquest, into the psyche

and consciousness and culture of the oppressed and the oppressor. In contrast, sexual oppression tends to direct itself directly to the internal, the feeling and emotional center, the private and intimate self, existing within the external context of power and social control. Black women fused both racial and sexual oppressions in their beings and movements in both black and white worlds (Omolade, 1994, p.8).

Black women faced the emotional and physical trauma of having masters who became lovers. Performing dual roles for their master/lovers (in some cases master/rapists) made them reviled by white women as the white women hated the double standard of the lifestyle and often abused and punished black women for their relationships with white men (Omolade, 1994). Black women suffered through violence, humiliation, and sexual abuse. Such treatment left lasting strain and distress on the black family.

The emotional and physical needs of the white family were fulfilled while those of the black family were neglected. Black women were forced to perform wifely and motherly duties for their slave masters and masters' children. Further, relations between black men and black women suffered greatly. "All sexual intercourse between a white man and black woman irrespective of her conscious consent became rape, because the social arrangement assumed that black woman to be without any human right to control her own body," and the intimate connection between black women and black men became strained, to say the least, when their lives were dominated by the white man's power (Omolade, 1994, p.7). This ultimately led to the black community becoming fragmented and wrought by the effects of slavery. The very organization of the black family/community reflect the extreme oppression blacks faced (Collins, 1998). This historic and ongoing strain on the black family impacts the load of a black woman and intensifies the load that she already carries at work. She quite possibly juggles the effects of

the continued oppression of her black male partner, stress of the issues regarding her black child in school or his/her safety in the community, etc. She is burdened before she ever reaches the threshold of leadership at her institution of higher education.

Even so, it is important to note discourse regarding the black family often neglects to address its positive aspects and the black family is often incorrectly characterized as an institution of constant negativity from which no good can come. Often blackness itself is often correlated with the inability to have successful families (Strmic-Pawl & Leffler, 2011). However, despite these negative correlations, Strmic-Pawl & Leffler (2011) “consistently found that Black leaders [...] acknowledged extended and fictive kin, racial socialization and education as primary traits that helped them become successful” (p.159). With this being said, it is evident that the black family possesses positive characteristics that are supportive of successful leadership and promote education as a means to overcoming oppression.

Psychological Dimensions of African American Female Experiences and Their Treatment in Pop Culture

Institutional Racism. Institutional racism is defined by Shirley Better as a set of “patterns, procedures, practices, and policies that operate within social institutions so as to consistently penalize, disadvantage, and exploit individuals who are members of nonwhite racial/ethnic groups” (2008, p.11). The racial disparities present in America are often overlooked and ignored. However, there are many facets of American consciousness when these disparities are extremely noticeable especially when examined through the lens of Critical Race Theory. Within various corporations, organizations, and societal/governmental systems, African American women often face victimization in the form of institutional racism (Belknap, 2012). The life experiences of African American women is drastically different from their white counterparts; for example,

African American women are “disproportionately victims of rape, battering, and sterilization abuse” (Belknap, 2012, p.301). The effects of institutional racism extend into every aspect of the African American female’s life, even the most intimate spaces, and spans throughout generations. This may be attributed to the intergenerational trauma in structural, cultural, community, and situational contexts caused by institutional racism (Belknap, 2012).

More specifically, within higher education, African American are exposed to a large amount of racism and sexism. For example, Patitu & Hinton (2003) describe the issues that African American female higher education administrators face in efforts to perform, retain, and move forward in their positions. In Hinton’s study, one respondent gives her experience with how salient institutional racism was for her: “My race overshadowed being a woman. Being a woman was nothing. I would be surprised if you don’t find that African American women, because of their race, wrestle with issues as administrators that White women do not confront, because we are not seen like they are” (2001, p.126). Being relegated to such roles often pushes African American to the periphery of important decision making processes, active participation in organizational planning, and resources.

Systematic Racism, Sexism, and Classism. In *Racist America: Roots, Current Realities, and Future Reparations*, Joe Feagin (2012, p. 38) outlines key tenets of systematic racism:

- The costs and burdens of racism;
- The important role of white elites;
- The rationalization of racial oppression in a white-racist framing;
- And the continuing resistance to racism

These may be seen in various aspects of American society. Many of the tenets above are quite evident in the Title VII case *DeGraffenreid v. General Motors*. In this case, five black women sued General Motors under the allegations that the company's seniority system supported and sustained past discrimination against black women. Although findings during the courts proceedings lost their jobs through seniority-based layoffs, the allegations were not upheld (Crenshaw, 1989). The rationale for the dismissal of the case was based on a refusal to consider the plaintiffs sex discrimination claim because women, specifically white women, were hired during the time that black women were not hired. The plaintiffs then were caught in a space created by their blackness and femaleness. The distinctness of their experiences were not considered: "where their experiences are distinct, black women can expect little protection as long as approaches, such as that in *DeGraffenreid*, which completely obscure problems of intersectionality prevail" (Crenshaw, 1989, p.143).

Anti-Black images and attitudes are often perpetuated by many governmental agencies and the media portraying blacks as criminal, violent, self-destructive, etc. (Feagin, 2012). These images are often especially depicted in disastrous times. Hurricane Katrina further exemplifies the racial disjuncture that exists within America and continues the conversation of systematic racism and classism while African Americans in New Orleans, Louisiana sought recognition, response, and assistance from governmental officials during the time of their storm. However, in a state of emergency recognition was undetectable, response was sluggish, and assistance was trifling. Even so, one prevailing problem came with the perceptions of the tragedy: while many white Americans viewed the hurricane as a tragic natural disaster with technical and bureaucratic failures, many African Americans saw it not only as an administrative failure, but they saw it as evidence that the African American community, themselves and their issues, were of no concern

to the government (Harris-Perry, 2011). Such varying viewpoints between races continue to compound racial issues and uphold racial disjunctions.

Such stereotypes of post-Katrina, like those of black mothers, framed as refugees as opposed to American citizens/victims, in shameful photographs show the devastating disrespect and negativity that accompanies systematic racism especially for women: “African American women were critical to the post-Katrina disaster experience. As they tempted to survive the storm and its aftermath, black women were often treated in ways that made them feel ashamed and dehumanized” (Harris-Perry, 2011, p. 156). Race and gender shaming is an ever present part of the African American female experience and is prevalent even in moments of national devastation. These moments further exemplify the type of systematic racism and classism that exists toward black women. Framing Katrina as a “black woman’s disaster” affected the nation’s response to it (Harris-Perry, 2011).

In addition to those women of New Orleans, the treatment of the past First Lady of the United States may be examined as a continued piece of the institutional racism conversation. Michele Obama was ostracized about everything from the way she styled her hair to her choice of clothes, but in reality she tackled real issues that the American people wanted and needed to hear such as obesity. In her case particularly, she faced gendered, racial, social, and political discrimination. Existing in these multiple realms of society caused her to be taunted simply because she was an African-American female who also was the First Lady of the United States. Despite such, she had to struggle, like many African American women, to overcome such stereotypes and marginalizing beliefs and attitudes of others.

African American Women: The Intersectionality Perspective

With respect to the African American female experience, “race and gender [are] not experienced separately and [can] not be analyzed independently of each other” which clearly exemplifies the idea of intersectionality (Dayton & Levenstein, 2012, p. 797). Often times, race, class, gender, and nationality are simply demographic categories assigned to individuals and through the use of theoretical models imposed upon the family. However, intersectionality looks at the social locations where these systems meet in order to form a distinct experience (Collins, 1998).

More specifically, Crenshaw (1991) analyzes the intersection of racism and sexism in order to have a clearer picture of Black women’s lives than that which would be provided through wholly looking at the race or gender aspects of Black women’s experiences separately. As Crenshaw (1989) describes intersectionality is necessary because the experiences of African American women are broad and extend beyond the general categories of discrimination discourse. Further, the situations and experiences of these women are uniquely compounded and should not necessarily be absorbed into the collective experiences of Blacks or women:

Black women can experience discrimination in ways that are both similar to and different from those experienced by white women and black men. Black women sometimes experience discrimination in ways similar to white women’s experiences; sometimes they share very similar experiences with black men. Yet often they experience double-discrimination – the combined effects of practices which discriminate on the basis of race, and on the basis of sex. And sometimes, they experience discrimination as black women – not the sum of race and sex discrimination, but as black women. (Crenshaw, 1989, p.149)

The overlapping constructs of race, gender, and even socio-economic status make the African American female experience one that is intricate and nuanced. African American females have experienced decades of racism and oppression which have had multiple effects on every aspect of their identities and their lives. African American women have always faced multiple levels of discrimination from the systematic discriminations of racism and sexism as well as oppression such as classism: such may be represented by the formula of racism multiplied by sexism multiplied by classism (King, 1988). African American female leaders in higher education move within various social spaces and spheres of influence. Given such, it becomes quite important while exploring their experiences to also explore how these experiences are affected when moving between the multiple identities of these spaces (Parent, DeBlaere, and Moradi, 2013). As Cho et al. (2013) explains,

If intersectionality is an analytic disposition, a way of thinking about and conducting analyses, then what makes an analysis intersectional is not its use of the term “intersectionality,” nor its being situated in a familiar genealogy, nor its drawing on lists of standard citations. Rather, what makes an analysis intersectional—whatever terms it deploys, whatever its iteration, whatever its field or discipline—is its adoption of an intersectional way of thinking about the problem of sameness and difference and its relation to power (795).

By utilizing intersectionality in this way, this research will address the multiple, intersecting contexts in which African American female leaders operate. An intersectional analysis helps to reveal the idiosyncrasies of the experiences of African American female leaders through multiple social positions and identities such as race, class, gender, sexuality, age, disability, culture, religion, etc. (Mirza, 2015).

Gendered Oppression

African American women, other women of color, and white women shared commonalities with respect to their legal status, constitutional rights, discriminatory encounters, and sexual victimization; however, there was not complete solidarity between African American women and other women (King, 1988). The solidarity that was supposed to be forged between women of all races was a good effort but was not most effective. African American women were presumed to be a part of this sisterhood; however, they still became invisible to an extent and marginalized in the women's movement (King, 1988).

Few outside African American women's history had grappled with questions regarding the dual impact of sexual and racial violence on African American women and the relative invisibility of these women in the fields of both African American and women's history. (Feimster, 2012, p. 823)

In addition to a myriad of issues that African Americans face racially, they also face an immense amount of gender discrimination and issues.

While women's issues are addressed, African American women's issues fall by the wayside because within many women's organizations, the reality of African American women is denied (King, 1988). A prime example of the stratification of the women's movement is seen in the Seneca Falls Declaration. Although the movement as a whole was in its embryonic stage, the Seneca Falls Declaration was a great triumph for the advocacy of women and their rights. However, the Declaration primarily addressed the concerns of married white women. This became problematic because the Declaration, as Angela Davis observes in her analysis of racism and classism, "... ignored the condition of Black women in the South and North alike [...] the

Seneca Falls Declaration proposed an analysis of the female condition which disregarded the circumstances of women outside the social class of the document's farmers" (1983, p. 53-54).

To a degree, the experiences of African American women are much like those of white women with respect to gender discrimination and oppression. However, there are specific aspects of the African American female experience that greatly differ from the white female experience. While the struggles of white women were addressed, African American women were often silenced and left out of dominant discourse; therefore, it became imperative to respond to hegemonic boundaries that rendered them virtually (Collins, 1998). This lack of representation became the catalyst for Black Feminist Thought (BFT), a framework produced by the experiences of African American women challenging the hegemony of mainstream discourse (Collins, 2000). BFT encourages and opens up space for African American women to develop and redefine their stories and tell them in ways that prioritizes their voice, culture, and experience (Howard-Hamilton, 2003).

Daily, the lives of African American females are threatened by a myriad of social and political forces seeking to diminish their strength, silence their voice, and reduce their power. However, there exists a resolve to survive and thrive despite the forces set against them, and this resolve may only truly be understood through a lens that prioritizes the African American female experience. This means making Black Feminist Thought an important part of understanding the distinct elements of the African American female voice and space.

In contrast to many of the stereotypes placed upon African American women, they fight and struggle to carve out space that redefines their true existence. Doing so is a must; the skewed perceptions of society distort the image of African American women negating the very core of their humanity (Harris-Perry, 2008). Of course, such treatment causes a world of negative

psychological, social, and emotional consequences, but it also forces African American women to develop strategies to *talk back* against stereotypes and shaming as evidenced in BFT.

Although self-definition is an important aspect of BFT, one image that has risen within the African American community is that of the *strong black woman*:

By its idealized description, black women are motivated, hardworking breadwinners who suppress their emotional needs while anticipating those of others. Their irrepressible spirit is unbroken by the legacy of oppression, poverty, and rejection. Whereas the negative iconography of black women as lewd, angry, or unnaturally devoted to their domestic employers is reproduced by the state and in mainstream popular culture, the image of black women as unassailable, tough, and independent is nurtured within black communities. (Romero, 2011, p. 184)

While this self-definition challenges the stereotypes presented by the hegemonic culture, it also prevents African American women from being vulnerably and unabashedly human. The idea of the strong black woman, a shield against negative stereotypes, becomes a self-imposed, unrealistic expectation causing African American women to feel ashamed if they miss the mark of not handling losses, trauma, failed relationships or oppression as a strong black woman should which is with an extreme emotional resilience.

Although each distinct voice may share similarities with another, none except for that of the African American female leader addresses the totality of the African American female leader's experience including her experiences regarding her race, ethnicity, gender, class, ability, and sexuality. Instead of viewing leaders, African Americans, or women as distinct homogeneous groups with separate characteristics, the African American female leader's voice

and space encompasses the overlapping racial, social, and personal identities of African American female leaders as Appendix A illustrates. Mirza (2015) states,

Black women appear to occupy parallel discursive spheres—a “third space” of radical opposition and alternative citizenship (Mirza 1997). Nancy Fraser calls this third space “hidden counter public” spheres; they are arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter discourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs (Fraser 1994, 84). (p.8)

This space, formed through the overlapping of these often conflicting constructs and identities, becomes a place from which African American female leaders may give voice to the experiences they contend with daily. Each voice has certain characteristics differing it from another. The African American female leaders’ voice is unique because it distinctly represents the various aspects of the African American female leaders’ experience. It draws from the African American, female, hegemonic power, and higher education voices, but, to some degree, subverts them allowing for the full expression of the African American female leader. Here, the power of self-definition is placed in the hands and mouth of the African American female leaders. Further as space and voice are created, African American female leaders are able to establish their presence as higher educational leaders.

Experiences of African American Women in the American Education System

American Educational System. In order to effectively analyze the past and current state of African American women in higher education, a discussion regarding the education of Blacks in America must be had. Education has always been an important part of the Black community, serving as a means of liberation and empowerment; however, the institution of slavery robbed them of the opportunities to gain knowledge and grow intellectually (Jones, et. al, 2012). Blacks

had to learn to read and write in secrecy as it was illegal prior to the Civil War to educate those of African descent. Since these men and women were thought to be intellectually inferior and not capable of learning, White Americans thought it fruitless to provide them with a formal education (Collins, 2000).

With the ending of the Civil War, many Blacks gained the opportunity to be educated: many women and religious leaders worked tirelessly to help educate Southern Blacks. This led to the founding of schools for Blacks and later the development of higher education institutions focusing on agriculture, mechanical, and military training made possible through the Morrill Act of 1862 (Jones et al., 2012). However, these institutions often suffered due to lack of funding, students' inability to pay tuition, and limited state appropriations (Schuh, 2003).

Even with the development of historically Black colleges, women had to overcome the commonly held perceptions that they did not need to be educated beyond a basic understanding of how to read and write. During these times, few institutions extended opportunities of higher education to Black women, one being Oberlin College (Jones et al., 2012). In 1850, the first Black woman, Lucy Sessions, earned a literary degree from Oberlin making her the first Black woman to earn a college degree in the United States; similarly, graduating from Oberlin in 1862, Mary Jane Patterson was the first Black woman to earn a bachelor's degree (Collins, A.C., 2001; Evans, 2007). Although Black women experienced extreme adversity and criticism, they still pushed to engage in new avenues of higher education.

Barriers. Although African American women gained access to the *ivory tower*, this access did not necessarily guarantee or translate into equitable career opportunities. When comparing the doctorate degrees conferred upon African American females and males with the attainment of senior level positions, there is a clear lack of racial and gender equality. In 2012-

2013, black males obtained 4,309 doctorates (5.9% of all doctorates conferred), and black females obtained 7,775 doctorates (9.5% of all doctorates conferred) (Kena, et al., 2016).

However, in contrast to these statistics, when assessing the number of black males and females in senior level positions within the academy, black males serve in 4,018 positions, and black females serve in 2,647 of these positions (Snyder, et al., 2016). From this information, it is evident that acquiring terminal degrees alone does not ensure a clear pathway to senior level positions within the academy. Regarding this pathway, white males still the dominate force in both the professorate and `administration serving, in essence, as gate keepers impeding the entry of African American women into entry level positions preventing them from ascending to the presidency (Jones, et al., 2012). Doing so prevents African American women from serving in senior level positions within higher education.

Chapter Summary

African American female leaders in higher education have unique experiences and face unique obstacles that stem from a long history of oppression. Therefore, it is paramount that this history is examined in order to truly gain a glimpse into the space and voice of these leaders. Doing so may be best executed through the lenses of Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality. A critical race perspective allows for the concerns and experiences of communities of color to rise to prominence in social discourse. Using this perspective to analyze the experiences of African American female leaders gives way for the attributes, circumstances, obstacles, and barriers affecting African American female leader's leadership methods to be acknowledge and discussed. Further, the use of Intersectionality moves this discussion further and addresses the overlapping constructs that define and constitute the space and voice of African American female leaders. Looking at the various factors affecting these leaders separately does not address

the totality of the African American female leader's experience; however, utilizing the lens of intersectionality the compounded nature of this experience may be accurately investigated and ultimately interpreted. These perspectives are a starting place from which to explore the historical and psychological influences that compose the African American female leader's experience.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the specific research methods used to complete this study. A detailed explanation of the research design, researcher's role, participants and procedure, data collection and analysis techniques are included. As part of the researcher's role, the researcher now shifts to first person point of view to include myself as part of study but not one of the participants. As such, the writing will maintain a formal approach but will use a first person account throughout the remaining sections of the document. An overview of the qualitative design with a transcendental phenomenological approach is also described in this chapter, to provide background to methods used to deeply explore the stories from the participants. The following section highlights details of how participants were selected and steps for gathering and analyzing data. Lastly, the chapter concludes with a discussion of methods to rigor and illustration of triangulation of data to create findings.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to examine the leadership methods of African American female presidents and vice presidents within the Technical College System of Georgia. Additionally, the study explores how these leaders establish confidence and credibility within their leadership. This study's research questions are as follows:

1. What aspects of African American female presidents and vice presidents' at technical colleges in Georgia social and personal life affect their leadership methods?
2. What barriers have they faced in establishing their confidence and credibility as leaders?

3. When did each leader realize that she had established confidence and credibility as a leader?

Research Design

This qualitative study is framed by transcendental phenomenology research tradition. The intent of transcendental phenomenological research is to understand the lived experiences of the subjects of study with an emphasis on engagement to develop patterns and relationships of meaning (Creswell, 2009). Transcendental phenomenology as conceptualized by Moustakas (1994) is more focused on the experiences of the participants than the interpretations of the researcher. For this reason, transcendental phenomenology is most appropriate for this study as the researcher examined the experiences of African American female presidents and vice presidents in the Technical College System of Georgia. The phenomenological study is focused on experience and how that experience is transformed into consciousness; therefore, the primary method of data collection is interviewing (Merriam, 2009) [See Appendix B for interview questions]. While transcendental phenomenology is often used in psychology, it is relevant here because the researcher focused on the consciousness, perceptions, and inward and outward experiences of the participants in an effort to gain a full understanding of the participants' establishment of confidence and credibility in their leadership.

In order to truly understand the participants' leadership presence, space, and voice, the researcher utilized *The Listening Guide* as the empirical tool for data collection and analysis: “*The Listening Guide* is a method of psychological analysis that draws on voice, resonance, and relationships as points of entry into human psyche. It is designed to open up a way to discovery when discovery hinges on coming to know the inner world of another person” (Gilligan et al., 2003, p.157). As Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2009) describes, *The Listening Guide* is a feminist,

literary, and clinical method which “conceives of the interview situation as an opportunity to elicit multilayered texts of human-social expression” (p.10). This *Guide* allowed the researcher to listen for undertones, viewpoints, and perceptions throughout the interview that help make up the participants’ social reality beyond the prevailing social discourses. This happens in two parts: 1.during the interviews, the researcher is directed, through *The Listening Guide*, to develop a nonjudgmental, responsive position toward the participants and 2. throughout analysis, the researcher should read the text multiple times each while focusing on distinct discourse and voices apparent in the participants’ multi-layered psyche (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009).

Discussion on race and identity are often explored using phenomenology, one example that may be helpful to consider as a beneficial qualitative design is “Race-ing, through the school day: African American educators’ experiences with race and racism in schools.” In this study Jay (2009) broached each interview question with race as a major theme. This technique and the interview questions were based on Seidman’s (2006) structure for in-depth phenomenological interviewing. By asking questions to prompt participants to openly and freely share their experiences of being African American female leaders, the researcher was able to gain full responses. Therefore, phenomenological interviewing is relevant to and appropriate for use with understanding experiences related to race and gender.

Researcher’s Role – Subjectivity and Epistemology

Often in qualitative research, the role of the researcher as the key data collection instrument requires the recognition of beliefs, biases, and personal views (Creswell, 2009). My epistemological approach is grounded in an advocacy/participatory worldview. My perception of African American female leaders in higher education has been shaped by my experiences as an African American female faculty member and dean of academic affairs at Georgia technical

colleges. While serving within the Technical College System of Georgia, I would intently watch my respective institution's African American female leaders as I aspired to eventually become one. These African American female leaders always seemed to be muted, disrespected, and/or overlooked. Upon entering leadership, I received first-hand the treatment that I had witnessed for so long. These observations and experiences of the technical college context enhances the researcher's knowledge base, consciousness, and sensitivity in examining the experience of African American female leaders. However, even with such prior knowledge, the goal of this research is to understand the phenomenon that is the establishment of the leadership presence of African American female leaders.

I did not project her biases, sensitivities, or beliefs on the body of work, and ultimately the work was to be based on the lived experiences of African American female leaders. I interviewed and collected data from three African American vice presidents who work in the Technical College System of Georgia to gain information regarding their experiences in leadership. Specifically, I sought information in relation to their confidence and credibility as leaders. The interview questions were based on each female's experience as it relates to the leaders' past, present, and future in leadership. The researcher identified, from the data collected, poignant points that related to the research questions. Since transcendental phenomenology is highly focused on the description of experiences, I utilized Husserl's concept of epoche (or bracketing) in order to take a fresh perspective toward the phenomenon under examination (Creswell, 2013). To, as much as possible, perceive everything freshly, I worked to bracket out personal experiences and views before moving forward with the experience of participants and made note of whenever a personal memory was triggered.

Participants and Procedure

This study was conducted in various locations across Georgia. The participants in the study were select, current, African American female technical college vice presidents from two Georgia technical colleges. A snowball sampling method was utilized in the process of identifying and selecting participants for this study. The first participant was identified through the researcher's network of current African American female presidents and vice presidents within the Technical College System of Georgia. From the ten emails sent, only one participant made recommendations for other potential individuals qualified for the study; however, this participant identified four other African American vice presidents. The researcher made determinations of which referrals would be included in the study based on how they fit within the scope of the study. The participant's institutions did not require additional review board documents in order to ensure the confidentiality and protection of the institution where the participant is affiliated; therefore, no further information was provided by the researcher.

In phenomenology, researchers have determined specific methods of analysis (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell, 2013). Table 1 outlines the procedural steps in phenomenology and how the researcher executed these steps in this study:

Table 1: Procedural Steps

<p>1. Determine approach for the research problem</p>	<p>The researcher selected phenomenology as the best fit approach for examining the leadership experiences of African American female vice presidents in the Technical College System of Georgia</p>
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2. Identify the phenomenon	Establishing confidence and credibility as leaders
3. Recognize and specify broad philosophical assumptions	Guided by a epistemological approach grounded in an advocacy/participatory worldview
4. Identify and collect data from individuals who have experienced phenomenon	Identified three African American female vice presidents from the Technical College System of Georgia to participate and interviewed the one on one and had one focus group session
5. Asked two broad questions to describe experiences and contexts of experiences	How did you establish confidence in your leadership ability? When did you establish credibility as a leader?
6. Analyze the data	Coded data by searching for significant statements to group into themes using an inductive approach (horizontalization and clusters of meaning)
7. Write description of participants' experiences	Used themes to write a textural description and a structural description; also wrote about researchers own experience for bracketing purposes.
8. Write composite description	Determined and wrote about the underlying leadership presence in terms of confidence

	and credibility of the participants by focusing on common experiences
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As the researcher seeks to grasp the very essence of what it means to be an African American president or vice president at Georgia technical college, a phenomenological design is particularly fitting: “Phenomenologists focus on describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon... the basic purpose of phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence” (Creswell, 2013, p.76). Since phenomenology focuses on a particular experience or identity to be explored, the researcher explored the “leadership presence” of these female leaders. In doing so, it is most helpful to utilize the empirical, transcendental approach to phenomenology. This approach consists of bracketing the researcher’s experiences and collecting data from those persons who have experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). The study sought to understand the leaders’ pasts, how they work in the present, and what they see in the future with regards to their leadership. Such information was used to assess their identity development as leaders and change agents that impacted their leadership presence. Further, the study focused on the perceptions and effects of their presence on their leadership methods and address the various moments that led to the phenomenon of them becoming leaders. I also reviewed the process of the leader obtaining the specific trail that each president or vice president traveled in order to hold the specific positions. There is an adage that says *leaders are born*, however what does that look like for African American women? This research examined the process it takes for some African American women to obtain a leadership position within higher education. I obtained information from each leader’s own personal story and compared and contrasted the different

trails to get some insight into the leadership methods employed by African American female vice presidents in the Technical College System of Georgia.

Data Collection

Data was collected from June 2017 to August 2017. This included one 60 minute semi structured interview with each participant and follow ups with participants when needed. Semi structured interviews consist of a mix of more and less structured interview questions that are used flexibly without any predetermined wording or order allowing the interview to flow with the situation while gaining the specific information desired from participants (Merriam, 2009) [See Appendix B for interview questions]. The 60 minute interview was divided up into 10-20 minute sections each focusing on past, present, and future leadership experiences respectively. Participants will be given the interview guide (Appendix B) in advance so that they have the opportunity to make an informed decision regarding participation.

Interviewing may carry long-term effects for both informants and respondents; there are risks and benefits involved for both parties (Merriam, 2009). Sensitive information may be revealed especially in this case where participants' position and college(s) may be easily recognized. Therefore, in order to protect the participants' rights, the following precautions were implemented: 1) a research application was be filed with the Institutional Review Board 2) research objectives were be communicated to participants both in writing and verbally 3) permission to proceed with the study was be received from the participant 4) participants were informed of data collection procedures, devices, and activities 5) verbatim transcriptions and written interpretations were made available to participants.

In support of the data collection phase, the researcher will utilized a field log including a detailed account of time spent on site, in transcription phase, and in analysis phase. Further, the

researcher developed a field notebook that served as a diary to record details related to observations and chronicle her thinking, feelings, and perceptions throughout the research process.

Data Analysis

Data from the interviews was transcribed directly after each respective interview. In addition to data transcription, field notes were reviewed and analyzed. Data analysis was inductive; thus, instead of predetermined codes, codes were generated from the data. Specific themes and patterns that emerged throughout the interviews (and those that seem to be insinuated) were noted as well. This allowed for data to be coded and organized into categories that summarize the interviews. These codes were arranged in multiple separate categories with supporting sub categories. Utilizing such methods for data collection and analysis provides a clear picture of the experiences of African American female leaders. The above described methodology is a tool to thoroughly investigate the phenomenon at hand. First hand narratives of the lived experiences of these leaders may be best gained through a qualitative, phenomenological study using interviews. Data analysis procedures for empirical, transcendental phenomenology suggested by Van Kaam, Colaizzi, and Moustakas (in Creswell, 2013) should include: identifying the phenomenon of African American female vice presidents becoming leaders, bracketing personal experiences, collecting data, and reducing the information to significant statements or quotes then combining those statements into themes. These themes formed the basis for the development of a textural account of what the participants experienced, and a structural description of how participants experienced it. The textural and structural representations ultimately conveyed the overall essence of African American vice presidents

establishment of their leadership presence in terms of their confidence and credibility in their leadership methods.

Validation of the Study

Validation is a term utilized by Creswell (2013) in replace of trustworthiness. Lincoln and Guba (1985) emphasized the trustworthiness of a study through the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. However, validation refers to an evaluation and assessment of the “accuracy” of the findings as best described by the research and participants: “a distinct strength of qualitative research in that the account made through the extensive time spent in the field, the detailed thick description, and the closeness of the researcher to participants in the study all add to the value or accuracy of a study” (Creswell, 2013, p.250). In an effort to evaluate the worth of the study, the researcher employed multiple validation strategies.

Prolonged Engagement and Persistent Observation. The researcher immersed herself in the culture of leadership within the Technical College System of Georgia as well as studied the extensive body of research regarding African American Female Leaders in higher education. On multiple occasions the researcher took note of these leaders’ behaviors, responses to and in certain situations, and overall role within their respective colleges. Such interactions and observations proved quire beneficial to the study. The benefits of prolonged engagement and persistent observation stem from the ability to build trust with participants, learn the culture, and check for misinformation stemming from falsehoods introduced by the researcher or the informants (Creswell, 2013). Such abilities allowed the researcher to make determinations about what information is relevant to the purpose of the study.

Triangulation. Triangulation is a method of corroborating and validating evidence from various sources to help ensure the trustworthiness of the study and minimize researcher bias (Creswell, 2013). In this study, the researcher drew on multiple viewpoints and sources of information from interviews, field notes, and documents. Doing so created increased researcher confidence in moving toward trustworthiness, accuracy, and credibility in the data collection process.

Chapter Summary

The transcendental phenomenological research design was used to examine the leadership of three vice presidents within the Technical College System of Georgia. Data collection techniques included, interviews, a focus group, and field logs which helped the researcher to gain first-hand accounts of participant's experiences in leadership. Each point of data collection was analyzed using transcript analysis. The researcher analyzed the data of participants searching for common themes and identifiable commonalities. Data was presented in a narrative profile format through the lens of Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality which were used to guide the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

REPORT OF DATA AND DATA ANALYSIS

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of African American women who serve as Vice Presidents in the Technical College System of Georgia. Additionally, the study examined how these leaders established confidence and credibility in their leadership methods. The overarching questions that guided the study are as follows:

1. What aspects of African American female presidents and vice presidents' at technical colleges in Georgia social and personal life affect their leadership methods?
2. What barriers have they faced in establishing their confidence and credibility as leaders?
3. When did each leader realize that she had established confidence and credibility as a leader?

This chapter will discuss the themes that emerged and present an analysis of the qualitative data collected from the participants in the study. As the researcher analyzed the data, information was grouped in emerging themes that were categorized to form major concepts. The concepts form the larger framework for the core of the analysis in efforts to answer the research questions. Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality were the overarching theoretical frameworks that informed the study. The theoretical frameworks functioned as a guide in understanding African American female leaders' experiences in higher education as they served in executive leadership as Vice Presidents. Specifically, Critical Race Theory informed the history, barriers/obstacles, and characteristics that are an inherent part of the African American female leadership experiences and methods. Likewise, Intersectionality laid the foundation to examine the

intersection of race, gender, socio-economic status, and organizational culture in the context of their leadership. This chapter searches the four individual profiles of African American female Vice Presidents in the Technical College System of Georgia and denotes the common themes that emerged across the interviews.

Participants' Characteristics

The participants were selected through both purposeful and snowball selection processes. Participants meeting the criteria of the study, being an African American Female serving in a senior leadership position in a Technical College System of Georgia college, were emailed a request for participation. From this, four respondents were included in the study. All hold the position of Vice President at a technical college in Georgia. Since the names of the participants and their institutions are confidential within this study, the researcher has given the participants pseudonyms indicative of gemstones and has included a summary of each participant's leadership experience. Any information that the researcher believed could potentially identify the participants has been omitted. Table 2 describes the participants as it relates to their age, current positions, educational level, and years of service at their respective colleges. As the table reveals, the participants range in age from 35-40 to 55-60, two participants have terminal degrees, two participants have been in service at their current institutions for less than five years, and two have been in service at their current institutions for ten years or more.

Table 2: Participant Demographic Information

Participant	Age Range	Current Position	Educational Level	Years of Service at Institution
Mrs. Amethyst	55-60	Vice President of Student Affairs	MS	>20 years
Dr. Opal	50-55	Executive Vice President and Vice President of Institutional Effectiveness	PhD	<5 years
Mrs. Turquoise	50-55	Vice President of Student Affairs	MEd	>10 years

Participant Narratives

This section provides an overview of each of the four participants' leadership journeys and experiences especially with respect to their leadership presence. Within this section, the researcher shares an interpretation of the data collected through interviews conducted with each participant. The participant narratives highlight some of the most poignant aspects of the discussions that the participants shared during the interviews. These narratives should provide some insight into participants' individual point of views, leadership beliefs, and experiences.

Mrs. Amethyst. Mrs. Amethyst is between 55-60 years old. She has an extremely long tenure within higher education and the college as a whole. For the past twenty years she has worked within the division of Student Affairs. During this time, she served the college as a recruiter, testing specialist, admissions assistant, admissions director, and within the last year, Vice President of Student Affairs. As the Vice President of Student Affairs her responsibilities are many and varied, she often works hands on with students in an effort to make sure that her division recognizes the importance of being “student first” oriented. She works to abide by the regulations and policies of the Technical College system of Georgia, focuses on enrollment – especially with student matriculation and navigation of the turbulent waters of college, and works to make sure that there is a seamless transition between Student Affairs and Academic Affairs. She stated that she views herself as a coach for herself and the faculty team but also for the students to make them fully aware of their resources.

Leadership Attributes/ Characteristics. Mrs. Amethyst’s leadership has a unique aspect as she rose from among her own peers to become a leader. Many of those that she currently supervises she has worked with throughout her twenty years in Student Affairs. This aspect of her leadership has allowed her to create synergy which she states has been an easy task because she and her team “have learned each other, not only as teammates, not only as professionals, but as comrades, working together for one common goal.” This particular idea of comradery seems to permeate Mrs. Amethyst’s leadership presence. She shared the following:

We are all assigned a certain space and time, wherever we are, and I try to see people not where they are, but where they want to go, or where the potential is I see in them... you know right now, where we’re working with enrollment right not you might not be

comfortable and I know that you're being stretched, but this is for the good of our students and our college, and it's temporary. So if you can work in this temporary space, and we reach the goal, then it's not a third of the college that's celebrating when we reach the goal, but we're all celebrating because we all had a part in the success of the enrollment and the students being able to get the product that they're coming to buy.

African American Femaleness. While describing the specific nuances of “black femaleness” that she sees present within her own leadership identity, Mrs. Amethyst speaks of innate qualities of African American females that she has worked to build upon. She responds, “they have relationships that are straightforward, they are solution minded, when they speak, people listen... some were with a quiet spirit; however, they walk with authority, they were individuals that set a foundation.” She went on to say that throughout her career, she's had many opportunities which have allowed her to reap the benefits that the African American females before her helped pave the way for. Had they not extended themselves to her, she would not have been able to extend herself to others, and she strives to keep this in mind as she serves in her position as Vice President of Student Affairs.

Defining Leadership Moment. Interestingly, one of Mrs. Amethyst's defining leadership moments that she cited happened outside of higher education. Mrs. Amethyst discussed a time where she was more or less forced to rise to the occasion of leadership. Upon initially entering a women's bible study group, Mrs. Amethyst entered “in a posture of learning;” however, before she could get settled in, she was asked to teach the Ladies Bible Study one summer at her church. Although she felt like she was not equipped to teach the study, she worked to grow a deeper understanding within herself and prepare daily to teach the lessons. However, this process taught

her that regardless of what she prepared, she had to “yield all the time to the Holy Spirit.” This experience taught her the importance of preparation and keep her mind open.

Dr. Opal. Dr. Opal is between 50-55 years old. Her service at her current institution includes the past five years and the executive vice president and vice president of institutional effectiveness. The vast majority of her career was spent on the non-credit side of higher education: specifically workforce development. She spent time working with the Technical College System of Georgia doing adult education and GED testing and has previously served as faculty on a community college campus. Her current position gave her the opportunity to gain experience on the “credit side of the house” as well as administrative experience. Although challenging, she was able to successfully learn the nomenclature, understanding the reporting requirements, and become familiar with the specific nuances of accreditation for the college and has achieved a great measure of success in her current position.

Leadership Attributes/ Characteristics. At one point during her interview, Dr. Opal stated, “There was a song in my childhood that said, ‘May the work I’ve done speak for me... so I think when you perform and you do and you produce, that provides space for a voice.’” Although this may seem as an odd leadership philosophy, Dr. Opal believes that despite roadblocks or barriers, consistency in work ethics and production will yield or open up a space at the table. Albeit she says that every time a person performs they may not get a space at the table, but she believes that employers will be agnostic about talent. She goes on to say that one way to speak voice is in what you (leaders, workers, etc.) are able to accomplish... “Not by yourself, so to speak, but what you’ve been able to produce. That’s the way that you can exert your voice once you have, you have kind of a proven record of your, not ability, but of your

contribution....” Dr. Opal’s leadership is centered on performance and the importance of performing to the best of one’s abilities in order to open doors toward future leadership opportunities and influence.

African American Femaleness. After thinking for a short period of time, Dr. Opal discussed what aspects of “black femaleness” that she sees reflected in her leadership. She stated that African American females have a “kind of relational, sister girl” aspect (she purposefully did not use the word phenomenon because she said it’s more common than not), but it is the relational piece that has a great impact on her leadership. While she enjoys building the relationships and working through the challenges that doing so may bring, with African American women, there may also be a lack of relation that is sometimes difficult to deal with. Further, she stated that African American women have the ability to speak in multiple languages and code switch.

Defining Leadership Moment. Dr. Opal described one major defining leadership moment which was from her childhood. Oddly enough, the particular moment when she realized that she was a leader happened during her middle school years while playing kickball with classmates. She recounted peers saying to her “We’re gonna do it your way.” As she thought back, with a bit of laughter, she stated

Really? That didn’t make sense. Even if I’m leading you down a path of destruction.

We’re gonna, you know, change the rules to kickball, or something like that. So I began to notice – it was noticed external to myself. People would say, ‘oh, [Dr. Opal] is just a natural born leader.’ Because people will think that my idea, or what I want to do is a good idea.

This moment, as Dr. Opal later explains, taught her that she was bold enough to be vocal. She had confidence in herself, and others recognized that confidence and responded accordingly. She stated that this is often a lonely spot, but it is rewarding because it is morally and ethically rewarding.

Mrs. Turquoise. Mrs. Turquoise is the Vice President of Student Affairs at her institution. She has served in the position for a little over three years. As the Vice President of Student Affairs, she supervises admissions, the registrar's office, career services, special populations, military coordinators, testing, two satellite campuses, and high school coordinators. She also serves as the college's conduct officer, so she is quite busy on any given day. Before serving in her current position, Mrs. Turquoise honed her leadership skills as a Dean of one of the college's satellite campuses. She joined the college more than 16 years ago and previously served as a Director of Instruction, Department Head/Instructor for Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), and ECCE Instructor. She has a long tenure in higher education serving in various states, institutions, and capacities.

Leadership Attributes/ Characteristics. On multiple occasions throughout the interview, Mrs. Turquoise recalled that as she was growing up, her mother, teachers, administrators, and others "saw something in [her] that at the time [she] didn't realize maybe [she] had [herself]." In moments when she doubted herself or thought herself to be ill equipped to get into somethings, she was always able to learn it. This is what she said helped to form her leadership. She called herself an "equal partner leader." She went on to explain this concept in the following way:

I don't believe that there's anything that anybody that I supervise or that I lead that they have to do or can do that I shouldn't be able to do. So I'm always willing to push up my sleeves and jump in there, and let's get it done. I don't believe in an authoritarian type of leadership because it's not like my way or the highway... I'm willing to listen to different idea, because I want the best way to come out that's going to be the best for everybody involved.

She made it clear that an authoritarian leadership style is one that she is not comfortable with, and she prides herself on working with her team rather than sending out commands.

African American Femaleness. “There are things about being a Black female that I feel, like, does affect, you know, the way I lead. The way people react to me” is what Mrs. Turquoise had to share about the innate African American female qualities and attributes that permeate her leadership. As she discussed this, she said that often times the way she talks, more specifically the sound of her voice, often puts people on the offense in her presence. As white females may have a softer voice, Mrs. Turquoise, and other black females like her, have a deeper, heavier voice which make people react negatively to what she is saying. Further, although, Mrs. Turquoise made it clear that she does not like to play the race card, she sees clear instances of how colleagues interact differently with her, as an African American female, than they do Caucasian males or females. For this reason she strives to establish leadership first in hopes that they will see her first as a leader rather than an African American.

Defining Leadership Moment. Mrs. Turquoise was able to cite multiple examples of moments in her life that helped to establish her as a leader. Each story had one commonality – her role. She called herself the “clean up woman,” and she described herself as the person who

always had to come in and clean up the mess or put a program or organization together. In one case, she was a young professional and had recently gotten her master's degree. When she started her job at a technical college, she walked into nothingness. There was no program, no syllabi, no clientele, and no customers. She was hired to create a program that would fall under the technical college system. She had to recruit students for the program, create all of the necessary documents, and pull it all together in a relatively short time. Although still in her 20s, she was able to work with her president, contact other schools, and work to get the program up and running. It ended up being a successful project as she was able to grow the program to about 160 students per year. The personal characteristics add more background information to the participants to better situate their views of leadership and how they see themselves as African American women leaders.

Themes

During the interviewing process, there were clear, overarching themes that emerged: (1) influence on leadership, (2) barriers to leadership, (3) overcoming barriers, (4) establishing confidence and credibility. The first theme of influence on leadership discusses the various aspects of life that has impacted and affected the participants' leadership journey. These influences may range from upbringing to mentoring or spirituality. The second theme of barriers to leadership encompasses the obstacles and roadblocks that the participants faced along their leadership journey. The third theme of overcoming barriers addresses how the participants were able to move past and navigate through the barriers that threatened their leadership journey. Lastly, the fourth theme of establishing confidence and credibility discusses how the participants were able to hone in on their abilities to contribute fully and significantly to their profession and gain the trust of their constituents. The themes are reflective of the experiences and interview

narratives of the African American female Vice Presidents within the Technical College System of Georgia. The codes included in the transcripts are listed in Table 3 followed by a more detailed explanation of the codes with excerpts from the transcripts.

Table 3: List of Codes Used in Transcripts

Theme/ Category	Sub-category
1. Influence on Leadership (IOL)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Upbringing 2. Mentoring/ Words of Wisdom/ Advice 3. Spirituality/God 4. African American female leaders 5. Internal Attributes
2. Barriers to Leadership (BTL)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lack of confidence 2. No voice/ voice doesn't matter/ being silenced 3. Other African American female leaders 4. Psychosocial issues/ mindset
3. Overcoming Leadership Barriers (OLB)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Intrinsic motivation 2. Speak up and out 3. Perform up to or beyond standards 4. Reject the negative projections of others
4. Establishing Confidence and Credibility (ECC)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Drawing on African American Female experience and attributes 2. Finding voice 3. Performing/ doing the work 4. Not accepting mediocrity/ Don't celebrate mediocrity

Influences Affecting Leadership Methods

What aspects of African American female presidents and vice presidents' at technical colleges in Georgia social and personal life affect their leadership methods?

A critical focus of this study was to hear the participants reflect on what aspects of their social and personal lives affect their leadership methods. In an effort to gain such material and focus the interviews on the lives of the participants, the interviews began with questions specifically about their positions and influences on their leadership methods. The following section provides the participants perceptions. The participants all shared personal stories of their experiences throughout life that had a major impact on who they are today as leaders. They discussed specific factors that helped to shape their leadership identity and methods which included (1) upbringing, (2) mentoring/words of wisdom/ advice, (3) spirituality/God, (4) African American female leaders, (5) internal attributes.

Upbringing. Upbringing was one influence that all participants discussed as a major impact on their leadership from the interviews. Upbringing encompassed family, educational background, economic status during childhood, familial values, and any events associated with growing up. Each of the four participants indicated that their upbringing played an important role in their leadership identity. Mrs. Amethyst stated that her father influenced her leadership method: “he believed that anything you do, and I believe it as well, you need to do it with a spirit of excellence, no matter what it is. If it was cutting the grass, if it was making up a bed, if it was taking out the trash [...] the expectations were high.” She went on to say that that she uses this example within her leadership to help stress the importance of work ethics. Dr. Opal attributed many of her leadership qualities to the “nexus family.” She said that her parents and the

extended family of her community helped to instill many values into her. However, she spoke most about her great grandmother: “I’ll tell you something that my great grandmother said that will carry me to my grave. She in her vernacular, she said something like ‘Babe, I tell you now, you can’t go wrong doing what’s right, no matter how hard you try.’ That particular mantra kind of guides me.” This piece of advice, Dr. Opal carries with her as she leads. Although she has faced challenges to her ethical and moral values, leaning on her great grandmother’s words has helped her reassure herself that while she may be the only one standing for what’s right, there is a reward, morally and ethically, in being confident and strong enough to stand.

Mentoring/Words of Wisdom/Advice. All of the participants expressed, in one way or another, some important words, advice, or mentoring that they received which impacted their leadership journey. Most of their examples went hand in hand with their upbringing. For example, Dr. Opal’s grandmother’s words illustrate how her family, in this case her great grandmother, gave her specific insight that shaped her leadership method. The same is true of Mrs. Turquoise. She cited old sayings and songs that she learned from her upbringing that have become words of wisdom.

Spirituality/God. The Spirituality/God subcategory was one that emerged throughout the interviews. The terms of spirituality and God were two that the participants used within their interviews. This became a clear thread that was present in all of the discussions. Many of Mrs. Amethyst’s responses were guided by her Christian beliefs. To almost each question, she answered with a focus on her spirituality. For example, when asked “what do you need to do to further achieve the leadership image that you want,” she responded with the following:

I have this leadership bible, and I've had it not for probably about three years, and I refer to it a lot, in all aspects of my life. But this leadership bible, it talks about any and everything, when it comes to working with people, when it comes to encouraging people, when it comes to being a professional in your work, and using it as a blueprint, as a guide for me, I think I need to continue doing that, and just dive into it just a little bit more deeper, and continue to walk the walk that I'm walking...

Similarly, when discussing some of her challenges while serving as a Vice President, Dr. Opal said that she "had a very good faith foundation" and she finds her grandmother's mantra echoed in her "spiritual walk." These keep her on the right path as she navigates her leadership journey. When asked about her future leadership image, Mrs. Turquoise, responded "I'm kinda praying about what direction I need to go in because I won't be in this position much longer... I'm seeking that answer. I'm, like I said, praying on it. I'm just asking God for guidance and direction on what I need to be doing..."

African American female leaders. While all participants discussed attributes of black females, only some of them discussed the influence that particular African American female leaders had on their leadership. Mrs. Amethyst did not discuss a specific African American female leader who had a major impact on her leadership. Dr. Opal told the story of an African American female leader that she worked for; however, the experience was negative and influenced her leadership by showing her what not to do in the future. Mrs. Turquoise did not specifically discuss an African American female leader, outside of family, who influenced her leadership.

Internal Attributes. Each participant discussed some internal force, personality trait, or driving attribute that was either a catalyst for their leadership journey or helped to shape them as leaders. Mrs. Amethyst discussed her willingness to learn and grow. She stated that she is always “open to learn from others,” and she is willing to stretch herself. Dr. Opal cited her voice as one of the major internal attributes that has influenced her leadership. Even from childhood, she was a capable leader because of the ways in which she used her voice to influence others. Mrs. Turquoise described herself as a person who likes to “listen to everything first before [she makes] decisions.” She also said that her humility and standing up for the underdog are two attributes that she brings into her leadership method.

Barriers to Leadership

What barriers have they faced in establishing their confidence and credibility as leaders?

Lack of Confidence. The overarching category of lack of confidence refers to times within the participants’ leadership journey when they have felt insecure, doubted their abilities, questioned their performance, etc. Each of the participants expressed that at some point during their leadership they lacked confidence to some degree. Mrs. Amethyst stated that her lack of preparation for an early leadership role was something that she had to overcome. Although she did not feel equipped, she grew internally and learned to trust in her leadership abilities. Dr. Opal did not give a clear example of when she felt insecure, but she did say that in moments of insecurity she said the following: “Those times, the insecure times that I have to reassure myself, you know, are those times when you stand for what’s right...” Mrs. Turquoise’s lack of confidence was one caused by her immediate supervisor. She described her supervisor as authoritarian and this type of supervisor diminished her leadership presence.

No Voice/Voice Doesn't Matter/ Being Silenced. Mrs. Amethyst did not discuss any instances where she has been silenced during her leadership. Dr Opal, as one who is a champion for doing right, says that she has felt invisible in leadership when she has stood up for what's right. She stated, "you have this kind of invisibility when you know, or understand, what you believe and think is right, but it doesn't seem like you have any champions." Mrs. Turquoise described her experience as such:

I answer to a person who is very authoritarian, who does believe that it's her way or the highway, and I would say the more vocal or the more dominant some people are around me are, the less I'm seen or the less I'm visible."

Other African American Female Leaders. Two of the participants discussed that one of the barriers that they worked through in leadership was interacting with other African American female leaders. Each of them had, in one form or another, negative experiences with African American female leaders. Whether it was jealousy, intimidation, or doubt, the other African American female leaders exhibited some behavior that made participants view the interaction as negative or daunting in some way. Specifically, Dr. Opal described an experience where she unexpectedly received a professional challenge from an African American female leader who was her supervisor. She stated that the woman was old enough to be her mother, and Dr. Opal was looking for not only a collegial relationship but also a mentor or Sherpa to help her navigate the through the "wonderful places where it's easy to climb, Mt. Everest... death peaks." Instead Dr. Opal received "very cruel treatment" even after giving her all and working 12-13 hour days. She eventually had to declare the relationship toxic and walk away.

Psychosocial Issues/ Mindset. The psychosocial issues/mindset subcategory covers a great portion of the discussions with participants because each of them addressed areas of their leadership which was affected by various entities. This subcategory encompasses labels, people's perceptions, psychological chains of slavery, external negativity, within and without each participant. Mrs. Amethyst shared a particular experience during her first time in a Senior Staff meeting. Unaware that people sat in certain spots, she took a random seat. She was asked to move down out of the seat she was in, and forced to sit at the end of the table. Although she stated her mission was to go in and get the job done, she felt that this encounter was a hindrance of her goal. Mrs. Amethyst also discussed that she felt her leadership identity was often challenged by people's perceptions and labels that they put on her. She stated that due to the lens that others use, they "want to put those labels on you, or put you in that box..." Dr. Opal discussed how she found herself a victim of the psychological effects of slavery. She prefaced her statement by explaining the needs that were present in higher education, specifically her institution. The president had presented an initiative that would require the assistance of multiple leaders, so as Dr. Opal put it, "there's enough space for leaders to help." However, people seemed very territorial. She stated: "There's a book that I read. It's over 30 years old 'Chains and Images of Psychological Slavery' by Na'im Akbar, that talks about... even though slavery was abolished there's still psychological chains. And so, I think that I have been a victim to some of that – where there's been that perceived threat that's not real." Dr. Opal believes that this was particular true of her situation with a former African American female supervisor who mistreated her. Mrs. Turquoise illustrated her experience with an example of the way the dynamics of a room full of white males changes when a female, especially an African American female steps in the room:

When a woman that's African American steps in the room, uh oh, here we go. It's a... the total culture changes of the interaction, and I'm not one to play the race card... But I've found that when all is said and done, or when you've looked at every possible angle, the only angle you could come up with is, it was because I was an African American woman..."

The shift in the atmosphere is noticeable to the changes in the interactions within the room. For Mrs. Turquoise it is a clear example of the psychosocial issues that African American female leaders have to face as they establish their leadership presence.

Overcoming Leadership Barriers

Intrinsic Motivation. Mrs. Amethyst relied on her internal convictions to help her push past the barriers and obstacles that she faced in leadership. She described herself as such: "I continued to grow and become more secure. I think I'm one person, and no matter what position or role I am in, and who I am, I share that and I try to walk it out and be an example every day." Dr. Opal took a seemingly odd tangent in the conversation when asked how she established confidence in her leadership abilities. She told of this experience:

A few years back, I took a trip to South Africa, Johannesburg and Cape Town, and went to the housing area. I saw this intergenerational group of students – of children and adults and the living conditions, through my eyes, were just so bleak. The tears began to well up. But as the bus turned the corner, I saw this intergenerational group and I was thinking, 'to me, there's poverty, but to them, there's no poverty of spirit.' And that just resonates with me because even though my upbringing was modest, there was no poverty of spirit.

This detour was the perfect illustration of how her internal convictions motivated her to be an exemplary leader. Although faced with many challenges, Mrs. Turquoise attributes overcoming them and becoming a confident leader to her God given talents. She stated that she's always stood up for the underdog, and there were instances of this happening in elementary school. So as time progressed, it kept building. She continued, "as time went on, it seemed like every step... I'm a firm believer in the Almighty God, and I just believe that, he, those are the talents and the skills within which he gave me."

Speak Up and Out. Mrs. Amethyst focused her conversation on how she uses her voice to encourage and coach her team. Other than this, she did not address speaking up and or out against the barriers that she has faced in leadership. In contrast, Dr. Opal discussed multiple instances when she spoke up and out loud. In the moments where she has felt an attack on her ethics, she has made it a point to speak up and out. She stated in many cases she was the only one that was bold enough to be vocal, and the spotlight was lonely but rewarding both morally and ethically. Mrs. Turquoise admitted that there are certain existing perceptions that do not "give [her] a fair shake" and because her decisions or methods are different does not mean she is not effective. There have been times where she's had to defend her responses to her colleagues. She referenced an old spiritual that says "let the work I've done speak for me" that she sometimes has to depend on to "go back and show that, hey, I am effective. I am making a difference. I am doing this. And sometimes you have to stand up and just say it. It's not always a popular thing. It's not always an acceptable thing."

Reject the Negative Projections of Others. Mrs. Amethyst described more than any other participant about labels placed upon her. When discussing being labeled and put in a box, she

clearly expressed the importance of not accepting those labels. Doing so, she stated, can result in complacency, so leaders should work and are not confined to a space, but stay focused and conscious to the fact that the blueprint of [their lives] was laid out before [they] ever become. Dr. Opal shared many examples of how she had to press past negative perceptions and projections in order to move forward in leadership. She stated that she had to leave a position due to cruel treatment; however, that experience prompted her to do more for young women that want to be in leadership so that they will have better experiences than she did. Mrs. Turquoise shared that as she sees “things happen” and “positive results” under her leadership, she is able to move past those negative encounters and perceptions that seemingly overshadows what she is striving for in leadership.

Perform Up to or Beyond Standards. Mrs. Amethyst stressed that she strives to walk out her leadership journey with integrity, truth, being fair, and not fit into the mold of tradition. This has allowed her to offer more and receive what others have to give and perform to the best of her ability. Dr. Opal stressed performance as a means of overcoming the barriers that African American female leaders face. She not only serves in her role at the college, but she also works with multiple organizations to expand herself and others professionally. One of those organizations is the Georgia Association of Women in Higher Education where she is responsible for professional development. She stated “understanding there is a gap with regard to the ultimate leadership, the C-suite, in higher education, so trying to mitigate those gaps and improve access, retention, and equity among women of color, just in that level” is what she works toward. Mrs. Turquoise stressed the ways that she performed in her various positions. In each leadership role that she had, a conflict was on going or a problem was presented to her, but

she would go into those leadership positions and work tirelessly to perform. Her stellar performance is what opened other doors for her.

Establishing Confidence and Credibility

When did each leader realize that she had established confidence and credibility as a leader?

The following sections will explore the participants' responses to questions surrounding the second critical focus of this study: establishing their confidence and credibility as leaders. This sections explicitly concentrates on the ways in which the participants establish confidence and credibility. Addressing this aspect of the study, the various participants discussed the following topics: (1) drawing on African American female experience and attributes, (2) finding voice, (3) performing/doing the work, and (4) not accepting mediocrity/ don't celebrate mediocrity. The researcher will provide a brief summary of the emerging codes.

Drawing on the African American Female Experience and Attributes. Drawing on the African American Female Experience and Attributes refers to the rich history of African American females, their shared experiences, and the innate qualities that these women possess. As the participants responded to various questions, they all made reference to such qualities of African American women and how those qualities present themselves in their leadership. Mrs. Amethyst described African American women stating, "they were individuals that set a foundation, they set the foundation, and when they set the foundation, then they released it to the people that build from that point, that part." She stated that as she looks over her own career trajectory and leadership journey, she strives to keep the mindset of past African American females and "understand, had it not been for the people before us that extended themselves to us – or to me, then I wouldn't be where I am. And so you have to continue to do that in order for

our community and for people to be in a better place.” Dr. Opal discussed the African American female experience in terms of an organization that she became involved with which allowed her to create opportunities for other African American females:

So I stumbled on this organization and I got interested because I want to, provide avenues for women, African American women, or women in general, and then women of color in particular to have meaningful engagement or meaningful identity, meaningful paths for progression or growth right where you are. And an opportunity and space for – a safe space for discussing something that I think – almost like ‘The Color Purple’ in our community... so I got engaged with this outfit to do just that, and I was just elected as their Vice President for Professional Development and president elect...”

Her goal is to prevent other African American female leaders from having the negative experience that she had with an African American female leader and create better experiences for them. While Mrs. Turquoise did not discuss a particular African American female who directly influenced her leadership, she did discuss how the attributes of African American female leaders often leave them judged or reacted to negatively. The example she used was the voice and lips of African American women: their heavier voice could be taken offensively and their full lips could be taken as pouting. However, despite the negative stereotyping, she stands on who she is as an African American woman and draws on that strength to continue to move forward.

Finding Voice. Although African American female leaders may feel stifled and muted while serving in their various leadership roles, many express a process or moment where they find their voice. During the interviews, the participants each discussed a time in which they found their voice in leadership and tell how they used that voice to shape their leadership

presence. Mrs. Amethyst did not overtly discuss how she found her voice in leadership, but she discussed an instance of how she used her voice in leadership. She views herself as a coach who nudges her team in the right direction so that they may be successful in completing the job at hand. Dr. Opal, on the other hand, discussed in detail the importance of voice and what that meant to her. When asked, “how have you exerted your voice as an African American female leader,” Dr. Opal replied as follows:

...There was a song in my childhood that said, ‘May the work I’ve done speak for me.’ So I think when you perform and you do and you produce, that provides space for a voice. And once the space is there... And you know, I mean, I think your voice – You speak your voice in – not only just verbal, but just also in terms of performance – doing, what you’ve be able to accomplish.

Mrs. Turquoise expressed the sentiment that she makes a conscious decision as to when she will use her voice. She doesn’t always speak on an issue, but sometimes she will process it for a while before speaking. She does this to ensure that when she uses her voice she is giving a knowledgeable and factual response:

I’m gonna listen to everything everybody’s saying before I say anything... a person can see that as a weakness or as, oh well she didn’t have anything to say. Well no. I may have something to say, but I didn’t say it right then at the time. Because that was not... I didn’t feel like that was the time for me to say it. I needed to put all the pieces together...

Performing/Doing the Work. Some of the participants expressed the need to “do the work” as a means of gaining confidence and credibility as leaders. Instead of focusing on being

African American or female, they stressed the importance of performance as a means of attaining the desired leadership presence. Mrs. Amethyst did not really address this point much; however, throughout her interview she stressed hard work and positive work ethics. Dr. Opal was the participant who most emphatically championed performance and doing the work. She stated, “First and foremost, I know that I’m an African American female. I just happen to be an African American female, but I am a darn good professional.” These words began an explanation of her belief that when you are skilled and perform well, it is easier to navigate and be(come) a leader. However she goes on to say the following:

... Individuals or people of color or women will stand behind or use the minority status as the cover and not really do the best job that they could do. And that’s a bit, to me, self-inflicted pain or setback, when you perform – and granted, I’m not saying every time you perform, you get space at the table or you are heard. But if you continue to stay the course and do it consistently, I mean, ultimately, I think employers, people will be agnostic about talent, you know?

Mrs. Turquoise believes much like Dr. Opal, that it is important to try to get beyond race. She said, “I would say that first and foremost, I would say that I try to establish leadership first because I really hope my, my strongest hope and desire is that nobody look at the fact that I’m a female. That I’m an African-American. They just see me as a leader.” Mrs. Turquoise too stressed doing the work and performing at high levels.

Not Accepting Mediocrity/ Don’t Celebrate Mediocrity. Each participant made it clear that although African American female leaders are faced with a myriad of challenges, it is still important for them to work diligently to achieve success. This work is accompanied by a work

ethic of not accepting or celebrating mediocrity. Mrs. Amethyst expressed this when speaking of her father's influence on her leadership; she stated that she and her siblings were expected to give their best and operate in excellence even if the task was as simple as taking out the trash. Dr. Opal in discussing women of color having to perform at higher levels said, "I think that we still have to do that, but at the same time, we cannot conform to any level or degree of mediocrity or less than." She stated that she was against this and believe in performing at the highest levels at all times. Mrs. Turquoise didn't discuss not accepting. Like Mrs. Amethyst, she just discussed working hard.

Chapter Summary

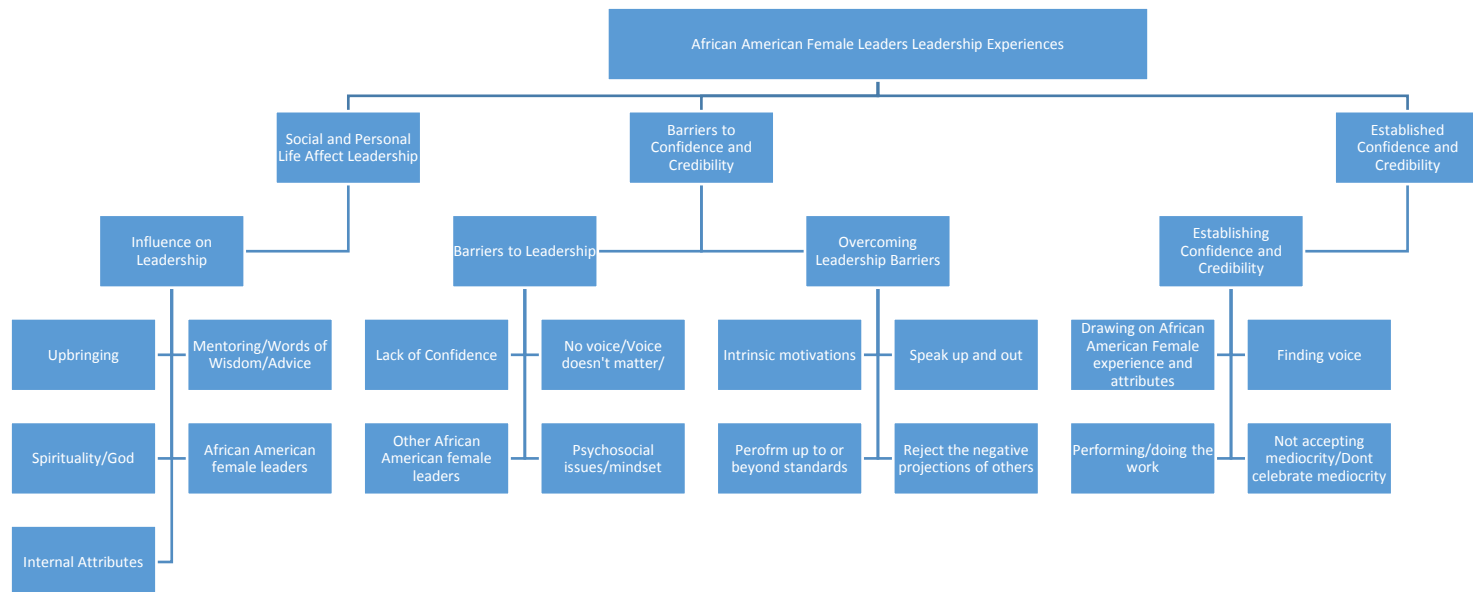
This chapter explored the leadership journeys, identities, and methods of three African American female Vice Presidents at Georgia Technical Colleges. The first section provided general information about and descriptions of each participant in the study. The second section provided participant narratives based on Leadership Attributes/Characteristics, African American Femaleness, and Defining Leadership Moments. The final section was the presentation of data. Many themes emerged from the participants' discussion on their leadership experiences: (1) Influences on Leadership, (2) Barriers to Leadership, (3) Overcoming Leadership Barriers, (4) Establishing Confidence and Credibility. The interview discussions indicated that participants shared certain commonalities within their leadership journeys. As the researcher explored research questions with participants specific sub categories emerged within each theme. The following sub categories were present with each theme:

- Influence on leadership - (1) upbringing, (2) mentoring/words of wisdom/ advice, (3) spirituality/God, (4) African American female leaders, (5) internal attributes.

- Barriers to leadership – (1) lack of confidence, (2) no voice/voice doesn't matter/silenced, (3) other African American female leaders, (4) Psychosocial issues/mindset
- Overcoming leadership barriers – (1) intrinsic motivation, (2) speak up and speak out, (3)perform up to or beyond standards, (4) reject the negative projections of others
- Establishing confidence and credibility – (1) drawing on African American female experience and attributes, (2) finding voice, (3)performing/doing the work, (4) Not accepting mediocrity/ Don't celebrate mediocrity

Figure one provides a conceptual illustration of the research questions, emerging themes, and common categories derived in this study.

Figure 1: Data Concept Map



CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview of Study

Numerous studies have reveal that African American women have unique experiences and face challenges that other groups of people do not (Watson, 2012; Jefferies, 2015; Molina, 2009). Their multiple identities are often locked together creating social spaces where racism and sexism are prevalent (Nakhid et al., 2015; Crenshaw, 1991). This is especially true of African American female leaders in higher education. Many of the African American female leaders are silenced by the white male dominated culture of higher education. However, despite the marginalization, mistreatment, and discrimination they face daily, African American female leaders in higher education offer invaluable counter stories to the discourse of higher education. Therefore, this study explores the experiences of African American female Vice Presidents in higher education. Given the disparity of information existing regarding leaders within technical colleges, the study focuses on leaders within the Technical College System of Georgia. More specifically, the study examines how African American female vice presidents within technical colleges establish confidence and credibility and use the same to influence their leadership methods. In this study, the researcher sought to address the following questions: 1) What aspects of African American female presidents and vice presidents' at technical colleges in Georgia social and personal life affect their leadership methods? 2) What barriers have they faced in establishing their confidence and credibility as leaders? 3) When did each leader realize that she had established confidence and credibility as a leader?

Accordingly, Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality were the theoretical frameworks that guided the study. The frameworks were beneficial as they facilitated the discussions

through interviews of the three participants' experiences of how they established confidence and credibility throughout their leadership journeys. Critical Race Theory emphasizes that racism is embedded throughout various aspects of the nation. In this way, for critical race theorists, race is a dominant structure in society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Zamudio et al, 2011). Clearly, our society is permeated with discrimination, racist acts, racial inequalities, and racism. In the case of this study, Critical Race Theory allows for the unique voices of these women to be brought to the forefront of higher education discourse and their experiences prioritized despite the emphasis placed on these of their white counterparts. Intersectionality addresses the layered identities of people in relation to a structured power (Crenshaw, 1991). Due to the multiple social identities that African American female leaders move within, it is important to explore the intersection of these various spaces with respect to race, gender, and the culture of higher education. In order to fully understand the experiences of these African American female leaders is necessary to understand how their racial, gender, and leadership identities are locked together.

The participants recalled experiences that shed light on their leadership identities and the influence that race and gender has on their leadership methods. As the participants shared their experiences, the researcher gained insight to influences on their leadership methods as well as barriers to their leadership and strategies to overcome the barriers. As they shared specific instances of successes, mistreatment, hurt, misunderstandings, etc., they opened up space for their leadership experiences to be heard, recognized, and validated.

Discussion of Research Findings

Research Question One

What aspects of African American female presidents and vice presidents' at technical colleges in Georgia social and personal life affect their leadership methods?

During the interviews, vice presidents shared the specific social and personal factors that had an impact on their leadership. From their discussions, five major factors emerged: (1) upbringing, (2) mentoring/words of wisdom/advice, (3) spirituality/God, (4) African American female leaders, (5) internal attributes. All of the participants reflected on their upbringing as an influential part of their leadership methods. Each of them had unique experiences that helped them develop into the leaders that they are today. They explained that their family members, communities they grew up in, family values, economic background, or educational background had an impact on their leadership. Although the black family was rippled with the strain and distress of constant oppression, it still often serves as the catalyst for upward mobility of African Americans in society. The experiences of the participants represented the black family in multiple contexts. While one participant expressed a negative upbringing, all others expressed their upbringing in positive terms as an uplifting force for them. Participants' responses are in line with Strmic-Pawl & Leffler (2011) whose study showed that 39 leaders pointed to either extended and fictive kin, racial socialization, or education as important pieces of their familial experience and a positive one which helped them achieve success in their leadership journeys. In addition to upbringing, participants attributed aspects their leadership methods to the advice (to include words of wisdom, mentoring, and mantras shared by others) that they received as well as spirituality/God. Mrs. Amethyst and Dr. Opal held strong to the words of their father and grandmother respectively, and Mrs. Amethyst and Mrs. Turquoise stressed the undergirding of their leadership presence by their belief in God and spiritual convictions. In the midst of ill treatment or discrimination, these women rely on the principles they gained from advice of their faith to help them continue moving forward despite the adversity.

Oddly, the participants did not express an overwhelming influence of other African American female leaders on their leadership methods. They seemed to feel indifferent about the role of other African American female leaders on their leadership. While one participant acknowledged a richness that has been added to her leadership due to relationships with other African American female leaders, she and another participant also expressed the detriment that African American females may cause to one another due to intimidation, jealousy, misunderstandings, etc. This issue may be due to the general oppression that African American female leaders face in higher education. The marginalization and invisibility of African American women left them facing extreme gender discrimination and racial issues (Feimester, 2012). However, seemingly in an effort to rise to prominence, African American female leaders have pushed back not only against systems of oppression, but also each other, creating yet another force that they must contend with in order to establish their leadership presence.

Lastly, each participant discussed aspects of their inner self, from their childhood, that developed into personality traits, characteristics, and /or thought processes that shaped their leadership methods. Dr. Opal and Mrs. Turquoise identify themselves much like natural born leaders and shared that they had been leaders even as early as elementary school. Such attributes are often engrained in African American females as they have worked tirelessly for decades to overcome the effects of gender and racial oppression.

An analysis of participants' influences on leadership through the Critical Race Theory lens is beneficial as it allows for the African American female leaders' experiences to take precedence over others in higher education. As Zamudio et al. (2010) explains, "Critical Race research is clear about what purposes it intends to serve. The intent is to provide analysis which offers competing claims to long standing ideologies (such as colorblindness, meritocracy,

liberalism, cultural deficiency, etc.) while contesting master narratives around public policies such as bilingual education and affirmative action” (119). In the case of these participants by allowing them to share the various aspects that their upbringing has on their leadership ideas such as the dysfunctional black family and stereotypical black female characteristics are debunked.

Further it became increasingly clear from the interviews that the social and personal lives of these vice presidents did play a large role on their leadership methods. As intersectionality posits, the interlocking identities of these women are multiple and varied and span far beyond models of double and triple jeopardy (Crenshaw, 1991; Cho, et al., 2013; Mirza, 2015). The discussions with participants help to systematically reveal this idea in that it allows for “the everyday lives of black and ethnicized women who are simultaneously positioned in multiple structures of dominance and power as gendered, raced, classed, colonized, and sexualized “others” (Mirza, 2015).

Research Question Two

What barriers have they faced in establishing their confidence and credibility as leaders?

As discussions during interviews continued, participants were asked questions regarding barriers to establishing confidence and credibility in their leadership. Confidence and credibility refers to the leaders’ ability to operate fully in various aspects of their role as vice presidents, contribute as equals, and gain the trust of colleagues and constituents (Kelly, 2013; Kouzes & Posner, 2011). Participants revealed many barriers to achieving confidence and credibility in their leadership. These included (1) lack of confidence, (2) no voice/voice doesn’t matter/ being silenced, (3) other African American female leaders, (4) psychosocial issues/ mindset.

All of the participants expressed that they had experienced moments where they have felt less than confident in their leadership. One participant, Mrs. Amethyst, expressed internal barriers with respect to lack of confidence, and the other two participants, Dr. Opal and Mrs. Turquoise, expressed lack of confidence from external sources. Lack of confidence, no matter the source, has a definite impact on leadership. This lack of confidence may be manifested through feelings of voicelessness and being out of place (Molina, 2009). Therefore, lack of confidence and no voice/voice doesn't matter/being silenced fall directly in line with each other. Mrs. Amethyst was the only participant who did not express feeling voiceless in leadership. The others expressed with emphasis that they had felt voiceless or someone tried to silence them at some time during leadership. Dr. Opal's experience, in particular, was one that stood out. She spoke of instances where she's had to stand up for what's right even if it's not popular. Her vocalness in higher education could potentially be a detriment to her career. This attitude represents so many others' who stereotype African American women as angry black women, sapphires, or jezebels, triggering psychosocial effects, low self-esteem, and lack of confidence (Mowatt, 2013; Collins, 2004; Gay, 1999). Both Dr. Opal and Mrs. Turquoise framed their experiences of voicelessness in terms of being invisible. As African American women encounter the various hegemonic structures that left them without a voice, they also lacked space from which to speak; therefore, voicelessness/silencing may definitely be translated into invisibility (Molina, 2009; Mowatt, French & Malebranche, 2013; Collins, 1998).

Regarding other African American female leaders, Dr. Opal discussed her experiences and the challenges that these relationship or the lack there of caused. Gamble (2015) explained that women have reported perceived barriers to obtain mentors. Taking Dr. Opal's experiences into account, this may be due to a perceived threat that protégés pose to mentors which seems to

be even more prevalent among some African American female leaders. These perceptions may also be aligned with the psychosocial issues/ mindset subcategory as it addresses inward, perceived barriers to leadership. With respect to psychosocial issues/ mindset, participants touched on their struggles with external perceptions and judgement of others, psychological chains of slavery that they witness still remain, and negativity from others.

Each participant shared some aspect of psychosocial issues/mindset that she has experienced during her leadership journey. Mrs. Amethyst discussed in depth how she perceived the labels that others have put on her as a barrier to her leadership. A potential threat to her leadership identity, these labels made her feel as though others wanted her to remain stagnant or tried to put her in a box. Gamble & Turner (2015) state the following regarding the mobility of women:

Stereotyping and preconceptions of women managers are primary factors that impede the ability of women to rise to the top of corporations or institutions of higher education (Knapp, 1986). Women have difficulty overcoming these biased perceptions. The images of women presented in books, television programs, and movies overwhelmingly depict women as less competent than men (Faludi, 1991). (p.91)

Essentially, the labels marginalized her in the workplace and could have hindered her career progression. This experience supports Bower and Wolverton (2009) who draw attention to the lack of advancement African American experienced with respect to other women due to them existing at the margins of society (Gamble & Turner, 2015). Further, Mrs. Amethyst and other participants explained that others wrongly judged them and erroneously placed labels on them. This is a common theme among African American female leaders and faculty of color in higher education; they are often perceived negatively or wrongly “based on their multiple intersecting

identities (such as gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation, religion, culture, and socioeconomic status)” (Critical Race Theory in Higher Education, 2015). Dr. Opal is the participant who specifically used the term “psychosocial chains.” She said that her African American female supervisor who she thought would be a great mentor treated her cruelly. Although these women were in different age groups and would likely not compete for resources, companionship, or other life details, there was still a perceived threat on behalf of the supervisor. This is an indicator of a deeper psychosocial issue much like Akbar (1996) speaks of – the slavery of the mind and feeling the need to compete unnecessarily for resources. Mrs. Turquoise expressed the same saying that sometimes as the only African American female leader in the room, she could feel the tension and witnessed the dynamics in the room shift when she walked through the door. Her description exemplifies the nature of higher education especially for some African American female leaders; while illustrating Critical Race Theory in action. Closely examining these experiences provide evidence of the challenges to unwelcomed spaces and positions that women face in their respective institutions (Critical Race Theory in Higher Education, 2015). This unwelcoming and hostile climate that African American female leader’s face are often presented in the form of microaggressions from microinsults to microinvalidations (Critical Race Theory in Higher Education, 2015).

In order to gain a full understanding of the participants’ experiences, I also asked questions in relation to how participants overcame the barriers to leadership that they identified during the interviews. From this discussion, four major subcategories emerged: (1) intrinsic motivation, (2) speak up and speak out, (3) reject the negative projections of others, (4) perform up to or beyond standards. These four categories parallel with the barriers identified earlier in the study. However, many of these methods of overcoming barriers are echoed throughout the

discussion and present themselves in multiple places and capacities. Each of the methods of overcoming barriers represent one of the types of resistance that Agosto et al., (2012) explains: [Solorzano and Delgado-Bernal (2001)] identify four types of resistance: (a) reactionary behavior, (b) self-defeating resistance, (c) conformist resistance, and (d) transformational resistance that is internal or external” (p.46). This theory is grounded in Critical Race Theory and Latino/a Critical Race Theory and challenges other presentations of resistance. When applied to the participants’ responses, it is evident that their methods of overcoming barriers may be situated in one of the above listed resistance types.

Each participant described of some type of internal drive pushing them past the barriers they faced and ultimately making them better leaders. Mrs. Amethyst, who discussed her spirituality, shared that she tries to walk out those values and be an example despite her challenges. Further, she works hard to grow and become secure in her leadership so that the barriers do not hinder or impede her overall leadership goals. Dr. Opal discussed the richness of her spirit despite leadership barriers. Mrs. Turquoise related her intrinsic motivation to her faith in God and God given talents. With just these three participants, there was a definite intersection of race, gender, and spirituality with respect to their intrinsic motivation. At the intersection of leadership, race and gender it is clear that proactive and defensive methods are needed to counteract the barriers to their leadership presence.

Speaking up and speaking out was overtly addressed by three participants. From the shared experiences of the participants, it is clear that at the intersection of race, gender, and leadership, there are clear injustices and inequalities. Instead of falling prey to these injustices, or, in some cases, allowing others to fall prey to the injustices, these women defend themselves by speaking up and making their voices heard. In doing so each pushes back against the

hegemonic structures and systems which work to silence African American female leaders. Such subtle actions when viewed through a Critical Race Theory lens helps to increase African American female leaders' visibility in their leadership roles and dispel racial myths and stereotypes in higher education and society as a whole (Delgado & Stefanic, 2012; Howard-Hamilton, 2003).

Further, in an effort to overcome racial myths and stereotypes two participants discussed the importance of not accepting labels and pushing past negative perceptions. Dr. Opal used the barriers to help others. She took on the mantle of mentor and helps young women in leadership or aspiring to be leaders. This is in keeping with Gamble & Turner (2015) who identify mentoring as an important method of breaking the glass ceiling and responding to the exclusion of the good old boy network. By witnessing the manifestation of her hard work, Mrs. Turquoise is empowered to overcome negative stereotypes and barriers.

Lastly, all of the participants stressed the importance of performance as a means of overcoming barriers. They believed that performing at the highest levels of their abilities and above would inevitably open doors and prove themselves worthy of the leadership positions they serve in. All of the participants stressed the importance of performance as a means of overcoming barriers. None of the participants had a clear path or performance goals to guide their leadership. However, they all stressed that success is gained by not allowing the barriers they face to hinder their performance or career advancement. Each of the women expressed an overwhelming passion for education and the students they serve. Using the Critical Race Theory tenet of commitment to social justice, the idea of these participants taking extra measures to exhibit exemplary performance in order to empower themselves and others toward success is an important factor in understanding their roles in working to eliminate racism and sexism. It is

important to note that these women seemed to stress performance as a method of upholding the tradition of excellence set by African American women who are a part of their rich history.

Research Question Three

When did each leader realize that she had established confidence and credibility as a leader?

The themes that emerged from participants' discussions of establishing confidence and credibility are inextricably linked together. During interviews participants were asked questions regarding the measures that they took to establish confidence and credibility and when they felt that they had achieved confidence and credibility as leaders. Participants expressed that they drew on the rich history of African American women, the innate qualities that African American women possess, and networks of African American female leaders in order to enhance their leadership. Each participant addressed various aspects of African American womanhood that she infuses into her leadership. Mrs. Amethyst discussed how she thinks on the history of African American women and uses it as a point of reference along her leadership journey. Dr. Opal expressed that they interact with networks of African American women in order to (1) mentor others and provide growth opportunities and (2) consult with them for leadership decisions and knowledge enhancement. Mrs. Turquoise discussed using the African American female experience as a catalyst to move forward despite stereotypes and negativity. This discussion truly illuminated the idea of these women as "strong black women." However, they framed this idea in a positive light and not in the oppressive, self-imposed unrealistic expectation manner that Romero (2011) describes.

The participants naturally, in most cases, segued from discussing their reliance on the African American female experience to how they found their voice while serving in the midst of

institutional racism and/or sexism, oppression, and negative stereotyping. Finding and subsequently using their voices opened space from which they could lead effectively. Examining finding voice is quite important especially utilizing a Critical Race Theory lens because it allows African American female leaders to be empowered and place value on their experiences even within institutions that do not prioritize such which is in keeping with Johnson (2015). Finding voice is mutually relatable to performing/doing the work. One participant, Dr. Opal, insistently stressed the importance of performing above and beyond expectations. Her believe and rationale behind this was that performance is hard for others to deny. By performing to the highest levels, African American female leaders move toward removing the labels and stereotypes they contend with daily. Further, they open up space for their voice to be heard.

A large part of performing is not accepting and not celebrating mediocrity. The participants stressed hard work and positive work ethics. Even if not overtly, the participants alluded to the idea that striving to be their best selves is especially important because they are African American female leaders. The participants believe that their confidence and credibility as leaders is linked to their performance. To perform at the highest levels is one method of securing their confidence and credibility.

As previous literature reveals, standing at the intersection of race, gender, and leadership has often left African American female leaders misunderstood and incorrectly judged (Miles, 2012). Given such, it is imperative that African American female leaders employ methods of establishing confidence and credibility. Through their discussions, it is evident that the participants understand what is explained by Harper & Lubar (2004) that as the leaders speak and perform in their specific roles, they are drawing on past experiences and establishing

themselves as leaders. The discussions in the interviews shed light on how they establish confidence and credibility.

Conclusions

A Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality framework for analyzing the experiences of African American female leaders at Georgia technical colleges opens up space for a full and authentic interpretation of their experiences and leadership methods. The re-articulation of the African American female leaders' experiences outside of the master narrative and hegemonic culture of higher education allows for an increase of positive experiences for these leaders.

Garcia (2000) states,

Each person brings a unique central background to their experience. Who you are shapes the types of questions you ask, the kinds of issues which interest you, and the ways in which you go about seeking solutions... The backgrounds [non White women faculty] bring to academia need not take a back seat... They can be placed in the foreground of our work. (p.133)

This study does just that – it places emphasis on the experiences, voices, and leadership methods of African American females.

Given the small sample size, the interpretation of the findings cannot be generalized for a larger population. However, the findings do help with gaining insights into the barriers and overall experiences of African American vice presidents in technical colleges across Georgia. The findings suggests that African American female leaders at technical colleges are subject to many of the same experiences as their university system counterparts. The leaders must contend

with societal, institutional, and personal barriers that threaten their leadership identities. However, the analysis showed that in order to overcome and continue to grow as leaders, the participants employed specific strategies. Again, although these strategies cannot be generalized for a larger population, they can provide a starting point for understanding the experiences of African American female vice presidents at technical colleges across Georgia.

Implications

The ideas revealed in this study, along with others, can assist those in higher education, especially in Georgia, with its history steeped in racism and sexism, in celebrating the contributions of African American female leaders instead of stripping them of the very essence of their selfhood. The marginalization of African American female leaders has been a longstanding issue in higher education and has confined their success and confidence and credibility (Croom & Patton, 2012; Molina, 2009). All of the participants indicated a time in their leadership where they were out talked, silenced, pushed aside, or discounted. As these prevailing attitudes and behaviors toward African American female leaders continue, these leaders remain on the periphery of higher education.

Recommendations

Following this critical analysis and reflecting upon the literature, the results of this study inform several recommendations for aspiring or current African American female leaders in technical colleges as they seek to establish confidence and credibility in their leadership. Those recommendations are as follows:

1. A disparity exists in the studies informing the experiences of African American females in higher education leadership positions; therefore, it is difficult to have a clear account

of the barriers they face or career path followed to ascend to the C-suite (Jean-Marie & Lloyd-Jones, 2011). This is even truer of African American female leaders in technical colleges. Therefore, further, more expansive research with a larger sample population focusing on African American female leaders in technical and community colleges is warranted. This research would help to make generalizations regarding this unique subset of African American female leaders.

2. Findings from this study and the literature reveal that the culture of higher education may not be welcoming to aspiring African American female leaders. Often African American female leaders are marginalized, their experiences are discounted, and their voices are silenced. These findings warrant a need for professional development for higher education administrators so that higher education institutions can investigate and adopt practices that will promote positive relationships with African American female leaders and provide opportunities for them to grow into confident and credible leaders. The support of their institutions would allow African American female leaders the space and voice that they need to forge a successful and strong leadership presence.
3. According to research, mentoring is an important aspect of female leaders attaining success in higher education (Gamble & Turner, 2015). However, the results of this study did not yield overwhelming evidence saying the same. For this reason, it may be beneficial to assess the role of mentoring in the success of African American female leaders in technical colleges and the relationship between African American female leaders.

Dissemination

The findings of this study suggested that African American female vice presidents in technical colleges face a unique set of barriers to establishing their confidence and credibility as leaders, and in overcoming those barriers, they employ specific methods to establish their confidence and credibility. The findings of this study would be best presented at women leadership, black studies, and/or postcolonial conferences. Additionally, the findings will be presented at educational leadership conferences as the experiences of the participants would be helpful for aspiring African American female leaders.

Chapter Summary

It was clear that African American female vice presidents serving in Georgia technical colleges African American female vice presidents serving in Georgia technical colleges faced many barriers throughout their leadership and experienced a great deal while striving to overcome those barriers and establish confidence and credibility in their leadership. Interviews with participants revealed a myriad of factors that impacted their leadership methods. Participants' sentiments indicated that while they worked diligently to establish confidence and credibility in their leadership and leadership presence outside of the stifling constructs of racism and sexism, they are well aware of the perceptions, stereotypes, behaviors, etc. of others that work to marginalize and silence them. The theoretical frameworks of Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality are evident throughout the study and work to analyze these women's perspectives and experiences.

This study addresses a significant gap in the educational research: it distinctly analyzes African American female vice presidents in technical colleges. While there is some research that

exists regarding female leaders in higher education, most of the research exclusively focuses on those at four year universities. Further, this study not only examines the barriers that African American female leaders face and how they overcome those barriers, but it also addresses how those leaders establish confidence and credibility and the effect that the strategies and experiences have on their leadership methods. This study illuminates the presence of racist and gender biased attitudes existing in technical colleges and higher education as a whole. As participants shared specific experiences an awareness was raised of the challenges, issues, and circumstances they face while leading at their respective institutions. As this awareness becomes more widespread, the hope is that African American female leaders will be more readily accepted in leadership and establish confidence and credibility in their leadership without being marginalized, silenced, mistreated, overlooked, or dehumanized in the process.

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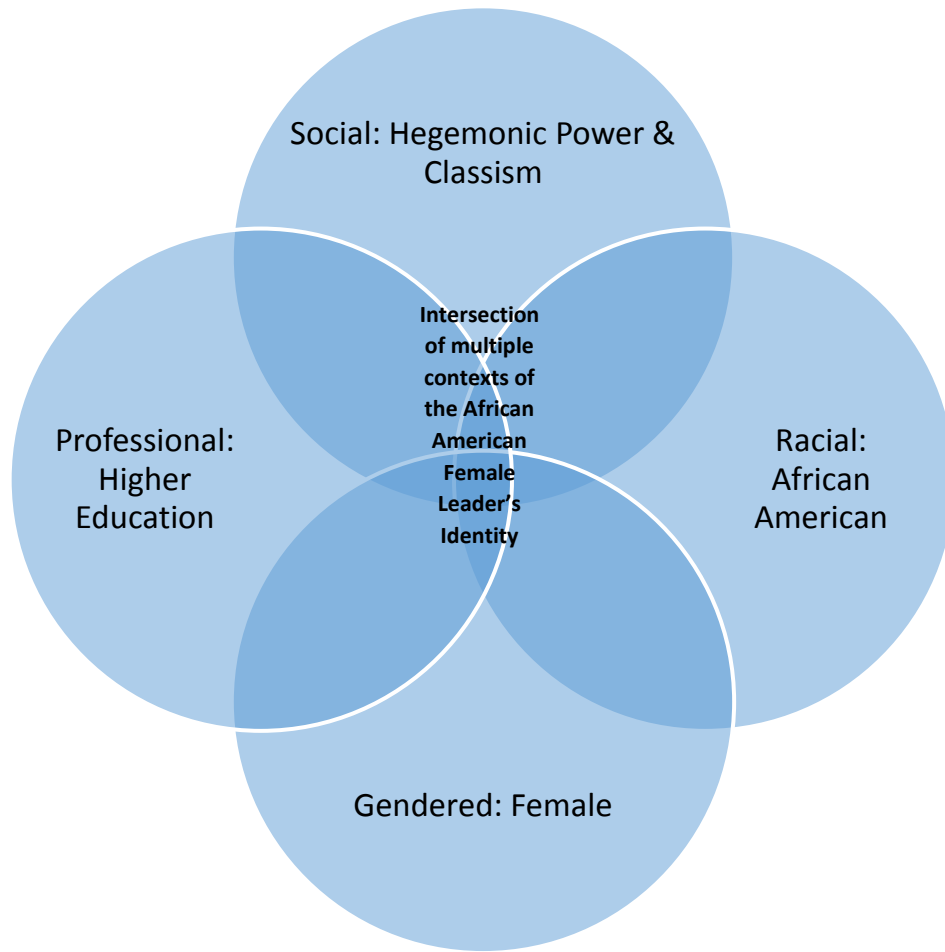
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APPENDIX A - INTERSECTION OF SOCIAL POSITIONS AND IDENTITIES



APPENDIX B - INTERVIEW GUIDE

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research endeavor. I look forward to us sharing about your experiences in higher education, however to ensure that I protect your identity and the identity of others please use pseudonyms as we move forward with the recorded interview.

1. Tell me about your position as a (insert job title).
2. Looking back, who in your life influenced your leadership method?
3. Tell me about a time when you felt insecure and/or invisible in your leadership position.
4. How did you establish confidence in your leadership abilities?
5. How have you carved out space as an African American female leader?
 - a. How have you moved within, negotiated, or mediated spaces within your leadership roles?
6. How have you exerted your voice as an African American female leader?
7. When did you establish credibility as a leader?
8. What challenges have you faced to achieve your leadership identity?
9. What do you need to do to further achieve the leadership image that you want?
10. What specific nuances of “black femaleness” affect your leadership?