

TRANSFORMING THE ACADEMY: BLACK WOMEN LEADERS  
AT PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS IN THE SOUTH

A Dissertation  
by  
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Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies  
at Appalachian State University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

December 2019  
Educational Leadership Doctoral Program  
Reich College of Education

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## **Abstract**

### **TRANSFORMING THE ACADEMY: BLACK WOMEN LEADERS AT PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS IN THE SOUTH**

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The presence of Black women senior-level leaders in higher education is minimal and their presence in leadership positions at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) is abysmal. Further, when and where Black women hold these leadership positions, little is known about their experiences. Consequently, this study centers the lived experiences of seven Black women higher education leaders at PWIs in the U.S. South. Through the intersecting lens using Critical Race Theory and Black Feminist Thought, this qualitative, critical event narrative study examined (1) how race, gender, and culture influenced Black women's journeys toward obtaining a

senior leadership position, (2) the leadership experiences of these leaders, (3) the challenges, barriers, and experiences that have confronted them, and (4) the strategies they have employed when confronting these challenges.

Through moving and deeply personal counternarratives, several themes emerged. The themes included critical events altered the trajectories of the participants' career paths, the salience and permanence of both race and gender, the dearth of mentors and peers, and experiences rooted in disregard and disrespect were common within the group. Also prevalent were motifs surrounding the outsider within and insider without paradox, tokenism, isolation, and invisibilization. The findings revealed several strengths and coping strategies for success among Black women, which included spirituality, familial and community support systems, stepping down/resigning as a form of resistance, as well as leveraging allies and advocates.

This study underscores the importance of exploring Black women's perceptions of their leadership experiences within PWIs. These findings have implications for positive change by increasing awareness among executive leaders in the academy regarding racial and gender inequalities. This awareness has the propensity to decrease workplace disparities for Black administrators and to foster more conducive environments to promote more Black women into senior-level leadership positions.

## **Acknowledgments**

To God be the Glory! I thank God for granting me the strength to endure, carry on, and win this race! I would also like to acknowledge my immediate family (my husband, Anthony, daughters, Mechaiela, Arria, Quiana, and even my niece, Alannah) for accepting me as I am and cheering me on through, the dark times when I thought that I would never persevere. To my sister Donna and my sister-in-law Tonya, thank you for listening to my complaints and whining and then kicking my butt into gear. I also extend my heart full of gratitude to include everyone who has provided my family and me with prayers, advice, and love.

Thank you to my special friends and cheering squad: Anthony “Miss Ann” Evans, Nikki Frazier, Trina Gabriel, Chamane Gilmore, Margaret House, Angela Hunt, Bobbie Jones, Elizabeth Andrews-Standafer, Sherry Switzer, Sahirah al-Uqdah, and Sharon Nash-Sellars. Please know that I could not have done this without each of you!

I want to thank my seven amazing study participants, Drs. Battle, Freeman, Hampton, Jacobs, Lee, Riley, and Ruth. Thank you for being brave enough to tell these stories and moreover, for paving the way for someone like me. I sincerely applaud you for your part in helping me to reach my dream.

Thank you to the many members of my congregation, St. Paul United Methodist Church in Winston-Salem, N.C. who uplifted me in prayer and helped to nourish my soul and renew my spirit. Reverend and Mrs. Jenkins, you were right when you said that God had my

back; thanks for praying for me throughout this project. I owe a special thanks to my surrogate/church Mother and Father, Clara and Roscoe Pouncey, Sr., I still don't know what I did to deserve you. Your love, prayers, and continued support mean more than you will ever know.

I also owe heartfelt thanks to each of my committee members for their support, hard work ethic, and for believing in me! Dr. Brandy Bryson, you were a phenomenal chair! Even though I didn't always see the light at the end of the tunnel, you had a vision and you not only pushed me, you "willed" me along for this ride. Thanks for forcing me to think outside of the proverbial box and for seeing me as a scholar even before I could see it for myself. To Dr. Jewell Cooper, you are truly my SHERO. You have lived and endured many of the experiences unearthed by these narratives, yet you're still standing strong and leading on! I praise God for you, your grace, patience, and wisdom! To Dr. Ericka Patillo, your calm, reassuring demeanor was exactly what I needed at precisely the right times. Thank you for always being "real."

I also offer a special thanks to Dr. Joseph Cooper for reassuring me that this could be done. And, I will be forever indebted to Dr. Susie Boles for being the very best editor that a girl could ask for! If there is anyone else that I have missed, thank you! If your name is not included, know that I extend my grateful heart-felt love to you for everything you've done to help me reach my goal! Please do not hold it against me if I left out your name. As my husband would say, blame it on my head and not my heart!

## **Dedication**

I dedicate this work to my Dad, Donald L. Walser (1939 – 2018). You were the first person who let me believe that I could color outside the lines, yet still be one of the best and brightest. Thank you for letting me know early on that you believed in me and loved me unconditionally! Rest well, Daddy.



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## Chapter 1: Introduction and Significance

*“It’s not about supplication, it’s about power. It’s not about asking, it’s about demanding. It’s not about convincing those who are currently in power, it’s about changing the very face of power itself.” ~ Author Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw*

As early as the 19<sup>th</sup> century Black women<sup>1</sup> in the United States (U.S.) have been participants, contributors, and leaders in higher education (Littlefield, 1997). Black<sup>2</sup> female educational pioneers such as Charlotte Hawkins Brown, an educator and founder of the Palmer Memorial Institute, a Southern preparatory school for Blacks; Mary McLeod Bethune, the first Black woman to be a federal administrator in Washington, DC, and founder of which later became Bethune-Cookman University; and Anna Julia Cooper, an educator, speaker, and activist, all fought to educate themselves and forge the pathways to ensure the education of countless other Blacks (Branch, 2011). Even with the persistent contributions of these and numerous other Black women, the field of higher education continues to see disproportionately low numbers of African American females in senior-level<sup>3</sup> leadership positions at U.S. colleges and universities (Bates, 2007; Branch, 2011; Bush, Chambers, Freeman, Lee, & Walpole, 2010).

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1 Throughout this study, the terms *women* and *females* will be used interchangeably based on the manner for which it has been used in the sourced document.

2 Throughout this study, Americans of African descent will be referenced using the terms *Black* and *African American* interchangeably to denote people of African descent who are citizens of the United States. When using direct quotes or statistical citations from other works, the term will be used in accordance to that of the sourced document.

3 For the purposes of this work, *senior-leadership positions* are defined as positions at the level of Department Chair, Associate Dean, Dean, Provost, Vice Chancellor, and/or Chancellor.

Throughout the Civil Rights struggles and with the introduction of federal programs financially supporting African American students, the 1960s and 1970s saw an influx of Black students attending historically White colleges (Gasman & Conrad, 2013). Current trends indicate there have been consistent increases in undergraduate enrollment and degree attainment for Black women. More specifically, the NCES reports that during the 2016-2017 academic year, Black women earned 67% of associate degrees, 64% of bachelor's degrees, 71% of master's degrees, and 65% of all doctorates awarded to Black students (NCES, 2018b). Additionally, during the 2016-2017 academic year, Black women represented the largest ethnic minority group enrolled in law, medical, and dental schools (NCES, 2018b).

Within the last twenty-five years, there has been an influx of Black female students on predominantly White university<sup>4</sup> (PWI) campuses in the U.S. South (Ross, 2016). One example of this phenomenon exists within the University of North Carolina (UNC) system. When observing the fall 2017 enrollment trends for Black students, within the system's ten PWIs, Black female students outnumbered Black male students at a rate of 63% to 37% (NCES, 2018a). At the system's most populated institution, North Carolina State University, Black women comprised 56% of the total African American population (NCES, 2018b). At its oldest, and most prominent institution, UNC-Chapel Hill, Black women accounted for 65% of the total African American student population (NCES, 2018b). Moreover, at UNC Greensboro, which is widely considered to be the system's most ethnically diverse campus and is designated as a minority-serving<sup>5</sup> institution, Black women account for 72% of the

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<sup>4</sup> *Predominantly White institution* (PWI) is the term used to describe institutions of higher learning in which Whites account for 50% or greater of the student enrollment (Gasman & Conrad, 2013).

<sup>5</sup> A *minority-serving institution* is an institution of higher education whose enrollment of a single minority or a combination of minorities exceeds 50% of the total enrollment (Gasman & Conrad, 2013).

total African American population (Li, 2007; NCES, 2018).

Table 1 provides NCES’s 2017 fall enrollment data for the UNC system’s PWIs.

*Table 1. NCES’s 2017 Enrollment Data for the UNC System’s PWIs*

<i>Institution Name</i>	<b>Grand total of all students</b>	<b>Black or African Am. Total</b>	<b>Black or African Am. Men</b>	<b>Black or African Am. men total %</b>	<b>Black or African Am. Women</b>	<b>Black or African Am. women total %</b>	<b>% Black women of total pop.</b>
<i>Appalachian State Univ.</i>	18,811	707	330	47%	377	53%	2%
<i>East Carolina Univ.</i>	29,131	4,639	1,784	38%	2,855	62%	10%
<i>North Carolina State Univ.</i>	34,432	2,038	895	44%	1,143	56%	3%
<i>Univ. of N. Carolina at Asheville</i>	3,852	176	76	43%	100	57%	3%
<i>Univ. of N. Carolina at Chapel Hill</i>	29,911	2,298	797	35%	1,501	65%	5%
<i>Univ. of N. Carolina at Charlotte</i>	29,317	4,630	1,909	41%	2,721	59%	9%
<i>Univ. of N. Carolina at Greensboro</i>	19,922	5,217	1,445	28%	3,772	72%	19%
<i>Univ. of N. Carolina at Pembroke</i>	6,252	2,136	851	40%	1,285	60%	21%
<i>Univ. of N. Carolina School of the Arts</i>	1,014	96	46	48%	50	52%	5%
<i>Univ. of N. Carolina Wilmington</i>	16,487	858	286	33%	572	67%	3%
<i>Western Carolina Univ.</i>	11,034	687	324	47%	363	53%	3%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>200,163</b>	<b>23,482</b>	<b>8,743</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>14,739</b>	<b>63%</b>	<b>7%</b>

*Source: 2017 NCES (IPEDS) Database*

An additional example exists within the University of South Carolina’s (USC) system; at its flagship PWI, USC Columbia, Black female students outnumbered Black men

at a rate of 64% to 36% (NCES, 2018b). At the system’s second most populous PWI, Clemson University, Black women comprised 52% of the total African American population (NCES, 2018b). Within its third largest PWI, Coastal Carolina University, the rate of Black women to Black men was 70% to 30% (NCES, 2018b). Table 2 provides a graphic representation of the NCES’s 2017, fall enrollment data for the USC system’s PWIs.

*Table 2. NCES’s 2017 Enrollment Data for the USC System’s PWIs*

<i>Institution Name</i>	<i>Grand total of all students</i>	<i>Black or African American total (All students total)</i>	<i>Black or African American men (All students total)</i>	<i>Black or African American men total %</i>	<i>Black or African American women (All students total)</i>	<i>Black or African American women total %</i>	<i>% Black women of total pop.</i>
<i>Citadel Military College of South Carolina</i>	3,717	393	261	66%	132	34%	4%
<i>Clemson University</i>	24,387	1,540	738	48%	802	52%	3%
<i>Coastal Carolina University</i>	10,663	2,023	1,027	51%	996	49%	9%
<i>College of Charleston</i>	10,863	876	267	30%	609	70%	6%
<i>Francis Marion University</i>	3,786	1,500	356	24%	1,144	76%	30%
<i>Lander University</i>	2,849	754	190	25%	564	75%	20%
<i>Medical University of South Carolina</i>	2,985	278	72	26%	206	74%	7%
<i>University of South Carolina-Aiken</i>	3,506	920	259	28%	661	72%	19%
<i>University of South Carolina-Beaufort</i>	2,077	459	108	24%	351	76%	17%
<i>University of South Carolina-Columbia</i>	34,731	3,264	1,182	36%	2,082	64%	6%
<i>University of South Carolina</i>	5,990	1,683	435	26%	1,248	74%	21%



<i>Institution Name</i>	<i>Grand total of all students</i>	<i>Black or African American total (All students total)</i>	<i>Black or African American men (All students total)</i>	<i>Black or African American men total %</i>	<i>Black or African American women (All students total)</i>	<i>Black or African American women total %</i>	<i>% Black women of total pop.</i>
<i>Carolina-Upstate Winthrop University</i>	6,073	1,679	446	27%	1,233	73%	20%
<i>Grand Total</i>	<b>107,910</b>	<b>14,976</b>	<b>5,080</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>9,896</b>	<b>66%</b>	<b>9%</b>

*Source: 2017 NCES (IPEDS) Database*

Yet, even as the landscape of Black women as accomplished students in higher education has shifted, the role Black women play as leaders in the academy continues to move at a much slower pace. Women of Color represent 39% of the nation’s female population and 20% of the entire U.S. population; yet, Black women are underrepresented<sup>6</sup> among the ranks of tenured faculty and full professors, college presidents, and various other senior-level leadership positions in the United States (Bates, 2007; Branch, 2011; Bush et al., 2010). As evidence, of all full-time faculty in degree-granting postsecondary institutions in fall 2017, 41% were White males; 35% were White females; 19% other (this includes: Hispanic, Asian, Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native, and two or more races); three percent were Black males, and a mere two percent were Black females (NCES, 2017a). Additionally, an American Council of Education report informs that in 2017, only five percent of college presidents were women of Color, while 25% were White females (Gagliardi, Espinosa, Turk, & Taylor, 2017).

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<sup>6</sup> *Underrepresented* is defined as having a percentage of the population in a given group that is lower than their percentage/proportion of the population in the country (USDE/NCES, 2016).

## Statement of the Problem

There is a dearth of Black female senior-level leaders serving at PWIs in the U.S. The disproportionate number of Black women leaders in the academy is concentrated in peripheral, nonmainstream leadership roles, that include administrators who oversee minority affairs departments, federally funded TRIO<sup>7</sup> projects, and continuing education programs for example (Crawford & Smith, 2005). Though these positions are important and necessary to meet the needs of students categorized as minority, underrepresented, or at-risk, Black women are overconcentrated in these roles; also, at many institutions, these appointments often lack power and decision-making authority (Bates, 2007; Burgess, 1997; Chambers, 2012). Moreover, existing research has been conducted on women's leadership in higher education; however, very few studies have explored the challenges and lived experiences of Black women leaders working in PWIs located in the South.

Black female leaders on historically White campuses are poorly represented, and often, those who do obtain leadership positions face barriers such as receiving lower pay, having their scholarly work dismissed and devalued, overcoming negative stereotypes, ostracism, and discrimination (Sotello, 2007). The multitude of challenges they face are due in part to their diverse backgrounds and beliefs. Unlike Black males or even their White female counterparts, Black women experience discrimination as a result of their “double jeopardy,” or the conflation of both race and gender discrimination (Beal, 1969; Bush et al.,

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<sup>7</sup>*TRIO projects* are federal outreach and student services programs designed to identify and provide services for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds. TRIO includes eight programs targeted to serve and assist low-income individuals, first-generation college students, and individuals with disabilities to progress through the academic pipeline from middle school to postbaccalaureate programs (USDE/OPE, 2019).

2010). Black females also have had to navigate their various identities as they serve in executive leadership roles (Beckwith, Carter & Peters, 2016).

Many Black women at PWIs report feeling isolated and experiencing race and gender stereotyping and microaggressions (Chambers, 2012). According to Sue (2010), “microaggressions are the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership” (p. 41). Some of the verbal microaggressions experienced by Black women include comments such as “You are a credit to your race,” or “Your speech is so articulate,” or “You seem to be so smart” (Grant & Simmons, 2008). Despite seeming complimentary, these comments are problematic because they assume a generalized deficiency about the capabilities of Black women.

Black women aspiring to obtain upper-level leadership positions at PWIs also face challenges of inadequate self-promotion, advocacy, the lack of effective mentorships, and homologous reproduction<sup>8</sup> based hiring decisions (Brooks, 2013; Brown, Keith, Jackson & Gary, 2003). Empirical research regarding access to mentors and the benefits from mentoring relationships for women leaders of Color in higher education is sparse. In their study, Crawford and Smith (2005) found that while mentoring has been identified as an important factor contributing to the career advancement and personal development of minority female administrators, the lack of mentoring opportunities can cause these administrators to perceive their career choices as circumstantial and unplanned. An additional report indicates that

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<sup>8</sup> *Homologous reproduction* is a phenomenon wherein those with hiring power will reproduce themselves by promoting or hiring individuals similar to themselves physically and/or socially (Regan & Cunningham, 2012).

women of Color in academia are afforded more consideration when competing for jobs at the staff level than when pursuing management and executive-level positions (Brooks-Immel, 2016).

African American women have early history experiences different from White women as well as different from the experiences of Black men. Traditionally, Black women's major roles were housekeepers, cooks, and nannies for the White race and caretakers for their own husbands. Thus, the double oppression of racism and sexism was borne out of African American women when their "subordinate status was assumed and enforced by White and Black men as well as White women" (Howard-Hamilton, 2003, p. 19). Collins (1990) asserts, even as Black women in academic institutions have differing experiences, backgrounds, and beliefs, "they are connected in their struggle to be accepted and respected and to have a voice in an institution with many views" (p. 20).

According to Harley (2008), expressly at PWIs, Black women are overwhelmingly slighted by underprivileged consequences in contrast to their White counterparts who benefit from White privilege<sup>9</sup>. As a result, Black women in higher education institutions tend to suffer from isolation and simultaneously struggle to be included. Hughes and Howard-Hamilton (2003) report the isolation faced by Black women faculty, administrators, and students can lead to stress, feelings of insecurity and invisibility, and the belief that they are voiceless amongst colleagues. Compounding this issue is the fact that the unique leadership experiences and perceptions of Black female senior-level administrators in higher education

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<sup>9</sup> *White privilege* is a term used to identify societal privileges that benefit White people. White privilege refers to both obvious and less obvious passive advantages that White people may not recognize they have. These include cultural affirmations of one's own worth, presumed greater social status, and freedom to move, buy, work, play, and speak freely. The effects can be seen in professional, educational, and personal contexts (McIntosh, 2003).

remain a paradox in the literature. In fact, much of the existing data that examines Black female administrators' experiences is dated pre-2000s. The available studies in the area point to issues of racism, sexism, a perceived lack of qualifications, limited mentoring opportunities, and negative perceptions (Burgess, 1997; Case, 1997). Numerous Black women are so worried about being perceived negatively in the workplace that they manage multiple identities by hiding their true selves, toning down their appearance, softening their demeanor, and being reserved in their conversations (Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007; Karsten, 2016).

While some scholars have conducted extensive studies on issues related to African American women in higher education (Bruner, 1994; Grant & Simmons, 2008; Howard-Vital, 1989), the unique leadership experiences and perceptions of Black women as senior-level administrators in higher education remain silenced in the literature. Moreover, much of the available scholarly research on Black women in higher education has underscored the need for additional and more targeted research on the experiences that Black women face in the academy, especially as it relates to their experiences at PWIs (Holmes, Land, & Hinton-Hudson, 2007). This research is also unique and distinct from previous works in that it looks specifically at populations at constituent PWIs within a prominent, southern, university system.

Thus, the purpose of this study is to amplify the voices and of as well as illuminate the unique leadership experiences of Black women in senior-level positions at historically White institutions in the U.S. South. Because the study seeks to make sense of lived experiences and explore participants' thoughts and feelings, narrative inquiry using a critical event approach will be used to address four research questions:

- (1) How have race, gender, and culture influenced Black women's journeys toward obtaining a senior leadership position at a Predominantly White Institution?
- (2) What are the leadership experiences of Black, female, senior-level leaders at predominantly White institutions within the Southern Regional University System?
- (3) What are the challenges, barriers, and experiences confronting Black women in senior leadership positions in higher education at these predominantly White institutions?
- (4) What are the strategies employed by these leaders when confronting these challenges?

### **Significance of the Issue**

It is crucial that research in this area be conducted so Black women, especially those aspiring to hold leadership positions in higher education, as well as administrators and other individuals across all race and gender lines, can understand the challenges, strategies, and circumstances of Black women in higher education.

Not only does this research underscore the importance of Black women's perspectives, it facilitates a more complete understanding of their situations in higher education. The work will lend voice to the unique leadership experiences of Black women in senior-level positions at historically White institutions in the U.S. South (Harley, 2008; Holmes et al., 2007). The research is also significant in that it has the propensity to advance the body of knowledge in the field of education on cultural and diversity issues and Black women's professional development. It is critical that the views and perspectives of Black female leaders inform the efforts of policymakers.

Moreover, this research can also lead to addressing the underrepresentation of Black women in administrator positions as well as improving the quality of the working conditions therein. Doing so demonstrates a stronger commitment to substantive, versus nominal, diversity and inclusion efforts embedded in the mission statements and core values of many U.S. postsecondary institutions.

### **Personal Rationale for the Research**

I approach this work acknowledging that researchers must especially take account of their own position in relation to their research (Berger, 2015). Temple and Young (2004) explain that positionality can affect research outcomes and interpretations, because “one’s position within the social world influences the way in which you see it” (p. 164). This is especially important when considering one’s positionality as it relates to education, class, race, gender, culture, and other factors, which offer us better tools for understanding the dynamics of researching within and across one’s culture (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). Because bias is a naturally occurring human characteristic, one’s own positionality is often used as a tool for facilitating an understanding of the dynamics of researching within and across one’s own culture (Merriam, 2009). Consequently, in the paragraphs below, I share details about my background and lived experiences growing up Black, significant relationships, educational and work histories, and how I came to care deeply about this research.

I was reared during the 1970s and 1980s in a small, southern, predominantly White populated town. Growing up Black during this period proved challenging for all facets of life. For example, because you were Black, it was commonplace for others to question your integrity, sincerity, ambition, drive, and intelligence. Black women were especially vulnerable and had few career choices. To help sustain their families, most Black females in

our town either performed hard labor at one of the 12 locally owned furniture factories, functioned in a domestic capacity for a wealthy White family, or migrated north, mostly to New York and Chicago, to find better paying jobs, and theoretically, to flee racial hatred. My grandmother often referred to those migrating women as the “Jasiri Women.” I once asked for the meaning behind her reference, as I needed to know from her perspective what had made those women Jasiri, the Swahili word for brave. Her retort was simple, honest, and raw. She reminded me that even as those women left their birthplace, kin, and the only culture they knew, often to work in factory systems similar to those in existence right at home, they were the epitome of hopeful and brazen. Not only were they willing to take a chance on the unknown to find a better life, many of these women were forging the pathway for future generations by providing the fuel and momentum for the Civil Rights Movement. Unknowingly, they were also helping to cement the Black feminist movement and ignited the fire for those seeking to further their education.

Because my grandmother epitomized what a family matriarch should be, was instrumental in championing social and political events in our town such as the bus boycotts in the 1960s, was strong-willed, and was prepared to challenge the status quo, I contend that she offered me my first glimpse in to what a Black female leader looked like. However, with her words, and the sincerity in her eyes, that day I learned in her estimation who Black female leaders were. I have since learned that the experiences of many Black women who migrated north were wrought by a determination to transform a master-servant relationship into an employer-employee relationship, and they led that cause with passion and vigor (Atkinson, 2013). My grandmother’s words resonated with me; during this period, thoughts of race, racism, power, privilege, and life’s inequities dominated my existence.



My concern was always for which path I needed to choose to escape the narrow-minded racist and oppressive ideals of our small town. Both of my parents were proud, educated people and were staunch supporters of education. My father was one of those people who always repeated the old adage, “They can take all your worldly possessions, but the one thing that can never be taken from you is your education.” My parents were examples of individuals who believed that social class was not binary; like Weber (1998), they believed hard work would determine an individual’s economic location. Professionally, my mother was an educator at a local elementary school and my father was the executive director of a government-funded, anti-poverty program. While my mother earned a respectable wage, my father grossed considerably more. Thus, it was no secret to most of our extended family members that our household income exceeded others in our family. Lessons in humility were often instilled in my house, as my father made it clear to my siblings and me that just because he may make more money than somebody else, it did not mean he was a harder worker or that he made better choices.

Because I knew I wanted a life outside of the confines of my county, it was always instilled in me that education was a means by which I could execute the great escape. Thus, it was never a question as to where my priorities should rest; school and all things related to education took precedence. Since we lived in the suburban area of town, there was little to no diversity in our area. There were no other Blacks in my neighborhood, and I attended what were deemed to be the best schools in our county. Looking back, I realize that these schools had the label of being the “best” because they were mostly White populated. As such, these schools’ cumulative test scores were not diminished by results from the county’s Black students, many of whom were products of low-income households. This factor is imperative,

as research indicates that students being reared in low-income families often have fewer educational resources at home (Hernandez, & Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2011).

I was typically the only person of Color in my predominantly White classes. While most of my peers came home to enjoy the latest “after school special” on television, I was studying. I spent most hours after school reading, memorizing spelling words, or tackling math. My work ethic was fueled by my desire to prove that I belonged in the same classes as my White peers. Because I was Black, I always felt as though I had to be better and smarter than all my classmates. In retrospect, I know that a fifth-grade school incident rooted in racial privilege and White supremacy facilitated these feelings and fueled my drive to be better. When covering the theory of evolution, a White classmate named Steve shared that he had been told all Blacks had smaller brains and this was why Whites were so much smarter. It was an uncomfortable time, as again, I was the only Black in the class; however, I remember laughing defiantly. Inside I was ashamed, yet outside I was furious. The teacher asked aloud if I was offended. I announced, “No, why should I be?” I informed her that, “Ignorance must be bliss because I’m sure that can’t be true. If it were, Steve would have better grades than me and that’s something that I never have to worry about!” Save for Steve, the entire class erupted in laughter.

Additionally, I was always grappling with the fact that much of the curriculum I studied as an adolescent was devoid of any minority perspective. Sure, each year during Black History Month we learned about slavery, Black abolitionists such as Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth, and Blacks’ role in the agricultural history of the U.S. through sharecropping and the tobacco and cotton trades. However, there were very little Afrocentric curricula that emphasized the positive contributions from U.S. Blacks or the wide-reaching

benefits of African traditions. For example, I learned from teachings at home that while the Pythagorean theorem is named after a Greek, he, like many other scholars of his time, studied in Africa, which was a great seat of learning. It was my parents who provided me with teachings of Onesimus, the slave and medical pioneer, who introduced this world to the method of inoculation. Thus, almost everything I learned about “my people,<sup>10</sup>” I learned from my people.

What was more concerning for me was the fact that those who presented the lessons never looked like me. Today, as an individual who has earned a high school diploma, bachelor’s, master’s, Educational Specialist credentials, and completed all required classroom instruction for the Educational Leadership doctoral degree, I still have never had the experience of being taught by a Black educator. Cherng (2016) reports that Black teachers can serve as role models to Black students because they are particularly sensitive to their cultural needs. Black educators are also more likely to enhance cultural understanding among White colleagues and students. Critical Race theorists extend this discourse when suggesting that the limited cultural experiences of White teachers with their Black students are problematic, as many White teachers may be unaware of the social and educational realities of Blacks because of their own societal privileges and therefore may unconsciously “distort or omit” realities (Bell, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2013). When considering these findings, I cannot help but to wonder if my own career path would have been different had I experienced more ethnically diverse educators. Is this the impetus for why now as an adult Black woman, I am especially sensitive to the underrepresentation of Black women in faculty and leadership positions in higher education? Moreover, I am particularly concerned for the

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<sup>10</sup> The term *my people* in this text designates Blacks or those with African American heritage.

deficiency of Black female representation in one of the most important areas within the realm of higher education, positions that provide women the ability to make decisions about education, policies, procedures, and in facilitating curriculum design (Masters, 2014).

Later in life, though I was working full-time in corporate finance, I accepted the position as an adjunct instructor at a local community college because I convinced myself that my teaching was a means by which I could give back to my native community. I taught at an institution that maintained an 18% African American enrollment; yet, less than one percent of the faculty were persons of Color (Duda, 2007). That college happened to be in my hometown, a place where I had relocated from some twenty years earlier. Secretly, I also wanted the Black students to see someone who looked like them. Even as I vowed to my family that I would only teach for one semester, I quickly found that working with students in a postsecondary setting was my passion, and I understood early on that working in higher education was what I needed to do on a full-time basis. Consequently, I decided to make a hard career change and seek a terminal degree and focus on Community College and University Leadership. My decision was entrenched in a desire to study higher education systems to gain a healthier understanding of the drivers of the disproportionate rates for which minority students persist in terms of educational attainment and degree completion. Even more, I wanted to be an agent of change by helping to create a more ethnically diverse campus leadership environment. I also took seriously my part-time position as an adjunct instructor and believed that not only could I make an impact in the classroom, I could also become a doctor of Higher Education and represent the underrepresented as an administrative leader.

Throughout my experiences in teaching at the collegiate level, my own recent pursuit of a doctoral degree, and my current work in a university administrative role, I have still encountered only a nominal number of women who look like me. Among the Black women with whom I have developed a rapport, stories of bias, exclusion, and unequal treatment prevail. It is not uncommon for colleagues to report that their voices are often silenced amidst a room of their White counterparts. For example, while working on an important policy development team, an African American coworker whom I will call Marie, was the lone minority on the team. For weeks she had belabored a point she knew to be vital to the success of the policy's development. However, each time her opinion was simply dismissed by others on the team. In third session planning session, a White female counterpart had an epiphany; her revelation was Marie's idea almost verbatim, even communicated with the same intonation and inflection as when Marie presented it. The rest of team lauded the White woman for her "insight," "wisdom," and "preemptive" thinking.

Today, as a Black woman working in higher education, living in the U.S. South, and aspiring to grow personally and professionally, I acknowledge that I, too, have been a "Marie." Like the experiences of many of my counterparts, I have also felt subjugated in a room of all White peers. Many of "us"<sup>11</sup> have long since had our voices suppressed for myriad reasons such as fears of reprisal, being seen as too vulnerable, being labeled as difficult, or one who "plays the race card." Thus, in an attempt to silence my own fears, and face my own vulnerabilities, I am conducting this study on the lived experiences of Black, female leaders at PWIs in the South to lend insight into how racial and gender equity issues have historically and contemporarily plague African American female leaders. This work is

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<sup>11</sup> The designation *us* in this context refers to Black females working in academia.

personal in that many Black female leaders have felt powerless to express their stories. Concurrently, I have also felt powerless to express my own stories. Recognizing all that I have experienced at the intersection of many of my identities, but especially those of race, class, and gender, I am significantly drawn to new tools of resistance which support the use of narratives and oral traditions for Black women, particularly Black Feminist Thought (BFT) and Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Bell, 1992; Collins, 1990).

I hope to conclude this study with newfound information on why Black women have struggled for so long to be seen as strong leaders in the historically White academy. What's more, for those who have ascended, how have historical practices, subjugation, and issues of race and gender affected their ability to lead and enact change? Moreover, this work is vital to my own development and heritage, for I feel compelled to tell the stories of those who have journeyed before me and led every day, even in the face of extreme adversity. After all, these Black leaders may very well be contemporary Jasiri Women.

## **Chapter 2: Theoretical Frameworks and Review of the Literature**

### **Critical Race Theory and Black Feminist Thought**

The theoretical frameworks used to ground this study are CRT and BFT. Both CRT and BFT are critical social theories that address power relationships in the context of major systems of oppression (Abrams & Moio, 2009; Collins, 1990). These frameworks are particularly beneficial, as both have been previously used to explore Black women's lived experiences while studying and working at PWIs (Lennon, 2013; Lloyd-Jones, 2009; Madsen, 2012).

CRT was selected as a theoretical framework because it offers multiple explanations, from varying perspectives, for understanding race and racism and how they are applied to education (Bell, 1987; Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1996; Ladson-Billings, 1995). CRT is often used as a vehicle for explaining the "continued inequities that people of Color in education experience" (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 18). The use of BFT when framing this study is grounded in the research of Patricia Hill Collins' 1990 formative work, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, as it outlines specific ways in which Black women in academia have been marginalized. BFT is especially useful in this research because it emerged out of the lack of attention to and appreciation for the complex identities of Black women. Even more vital to this research is the fact that BFT is concerned with the essential contributions of Black female intellectuals.

### **Background and History of CRT and BFT**

CRT emerged during the mid-1970s, because African American Harvard Law School professor Derrick Bell, and Alan Freeman, a White scholar teaching at the State University of New York System's Buffalo Law School, were concerned that the traditional approaches for

combating racism were becoming less effective and were also frustrated with the slow pace of racial reform in the U.S. (Cole, 2017). An additional proponent for CRT was a progressive team of liberal law faculty, students, and practitioners who formed a social network and initiated the critical legal studies (CLS) movement (Closson, 2010). The CLS team was determined to challenge the traditional legal scholarship in America.

CRT suggests institutional racism<sup>12</sup> exists in the dominant culture and power structures are based on White privilege and White supremacy, which contributes to the marginalization of ethnic minority groups such as Black, Latina/os, Native Americans, and Asian Americans (Bell, 1992). CRT draws from diverse disciplines such as philosophy, especially postmodernism and poststructuralism, and radical feminism Marxism, ethnic and cultural studies, and the black power movement (Abrams & Moio, 2009; Closson, 2010). CRT scholarship challenges claims of objectivity, neutrality, and color blindness of the law and argues that these principles not only normalize but perpetuate racism by ignoring the structural inequities that pervade social institutions (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). The usage of CRT has become increasingly popular in research when exploring issues of racism as it relates to power, privilege, and oppression (Abrams & Moio, 2009).

BFT is an extension of the feminist movement and feminist theory, as it goes beyond the feminist ideology that all women are homogeneous and experience similar struggles (Evans-Winters & Love, 2015). Instead, BFT focuses on the oppression of Black women and argues sexism, class oppression, and racism are inextricably bound together (Collins, 1990).

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<sup>12</sup> Examples of institutional racism include the underrepresentation of Blacks in leadership positions, disparate racial outcomes as a result of legal and educational standards and policies, and differential health outcomes along racial lines.



BFT integrates “ideas produced by Black women who clarify a standpoint of and for Black women” (Collins, 1986, p. 16).

Black women’s feminist history has its beginnings in the early 1800s when realizing the connection between race and sex in their fight for human and civil rights (Grant & Simmons, 2008). During this period, Black women activists and community educators, such as Sojourner Truth, a 19th century abolitionist, author, and women’s rights activist, and Mary Terrell, a 19th century Civil Rights activist and one of the founding members of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), illuminated the challenges of Black women. These and many other women were instrumental in developing the Black Feminist Movement (BFM). The BFM grew out of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and 1970, stemming from groups such as the Black Panther Party (McClaurin, 2001).

Because Black women were marginalized within the mainstream feminist discourse of the 1960s, they responded to this positioning by producing scholarship that spoke directly to Black women’s experiences of systemic, interlocking oppressions (Collins, 1990).

Additionally, national Black feminist organization leaders found that many civil rights and Black power organizations were unwilling to take up causes, such as forced sterilization, legal abortion, domestic violence, and safe and well-paid job opportunities for black domestics, that were central to the lived experiences of Black women (McClaurin, 2001). Hull, Scott, and Smith (1982) further explain Black women’s plight, “Like any politically disenfranchised group, Black women could not exist consciously until we began to name ourselves” (p. xvii).

In the 1970s the terms *Black feminism* and *BFT* were coined. Feminists during this period made the case that socially and politically Black women had to contend with the

concept of the “double jeopardy” which refers to being Black and being a woman (Collins, 1990; Grant & Simmons, 2008). Patricia Hill Collins is largely credited with illuminating BFT by explaining its utility in exploring the ways in which Black women often have a different experience of power, growth, and development compared to the same gender, different race counterparts (Collins, 1990). Collins further strengthened the BFT discourse by insisting on the inclusion of additional identity categories such as class and sexuality (Stanley, 2009). BFT encourages African American women to create self-definitions and self-valuations that support positive and resist negative images (Wheeler, 2002). Given the history of both CRT and BFT, these frameworks bode well when examining the issues and systems of oppressions reflected in the experiences of Black women in higher education. For this purpose of this study, both CRT and BFT will also be used to explore the challenges of Black women and understand how race and gender influence their professional growth.

### **Core Tenets of CRT and BFT**

Both CRT and BFT speak to the hidden realities of everyday racism and the persistence of the misconception that we currently live in a post-racial society. Additionally, each of these theoretical frameworks draws upon the lived experiences of people of Color and uses methodologies such as life stories, biographies, and narratives to capture their experiences (Beal, 1969; Solórzano, 1998). Scholars have outlined several main tenets of CRT; this research features CRT’s core beliefs of: (1) the permanence and centrality of race, (2) intersectionality, (3) the significance of counter-narratives, (4) challenges to the master narrative, (5) whiteness as property, and (6) interest convergence, or the suggestion that White Americans will only support justice for Black Americans when it is in the interest of the White American (Closson, 2010; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Interestingly, many of CRT’s

core tenets also have elements that are echoed within BFT. As such, this study interweaves the commonalities found within CRT and BFT to illuminate the lived experiences of Black female leaders in academia.

Through BFT we can better understand many of the struggles of oppression existing in organizations and structures of power (Holmes et al., 2007; Lloyd-Jones, 2009). Because BFT focuses specifically on and exists to communicate the multiple oppression of Black women, the additional themes within this framework that are essential to this research include: (1) the experiences and oppression of Black women are different from other women, and (2) understanding the premise of Black women as intellectuals and the notion of the “outsider within<sup>13</sup>” (Collins, 1990; Taylor, 1998). In the subsequent sections, I interweave the tenets of CRT and BFT themes to lay the theoretical foundation as a means to better understand the experiences of Black women higher education leaders.

### *The permanence and centrality of race*

Many in the United States believe that racial prejudice and discrimination (racism) will eventually be eliminated from American society. In fact, some of those same individuals argue that we are currently experiencing a post-racial or colorblind society. A post-racial or color-blind culture is thought to be a society wherein racial differences among people are largely irrelevant as it relates to both the laws that govern people in that society and the judgments that members of one race make about those of another (Bonilla-Silva, 2010). These optimists use the election of the country’s first and only Black president as proof of the seeming elimination of race as a foundation for social order in America (Dawson & Bobo,

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<sup>13</sup> The “*outsider within*” concept refers to the state of Black women being denied full group membership in varying arenas within the academy and beyond (Collins, 2000 p. 12).

2009). They generalize racism as a relic or hangover from the past, a belief that was previously inherent, and used to justify slavery (Cotton, 1998). These expectations are held by both Whites and Blacks, as they point to social, economic, and especially political progress, as further proof that the country has made a substantial movement towards racial equality in our society. However, others are deeply pessimistic about the prospects of racism ever ending in the United States.

Accordingly, a basic and core premise within CRT is the belief that racism is not only central but permanent (Bell, 1992). In his book, *Faces at the Bottom of The Well: The Permanence of Racism* (1992), Bell identifies racism as an integral, permanent, and indestructible component of American society. Bell (1992) further credits racism with being one of the founding principles of CRT and a “permanent component of American life” (Bell, 1992, p. 13). CRT proponents insist that the permanence of racism even controls the political, social, and economic realms of U.S. society; racism is seen as an inherent part of American civilization, privileging White individuals over people of Color in most areas of life, including education (Closson, 2010; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Hiraldo, 2010).

Using CRT, Bell (1992) exhorts all to take a realist view of society; he warns that only then can there be a true appreciation for the dominant role that racism has played and continues to play in the American societal structure. DeCuir and Dixson (2004) echo this sentiment as they assert that “the permanence of racism not only includes the racist hierarchical structures that govern all political, economic, and social domains but facilitates White Privilege” (p. 27).

The notion of racism’s permanence is also pervasive in BFT, particularly with what Collins (1986) has dubbed “controlling images” and attributes to the impact of captivity,

bondage, and slavery (p. 17). Collins (1986) informs the first controlling image applied to Black women is that of the “mammy,” the faithful, obedient domestic servant. Black feminists purport that this image was specifically created by White America to justify the economic exploitation of house slaves and sustained to explain Black women’s longstanding restriction to domestic service (Collins, 1986; Taylor, 1998). Still today, the mammy image is the normative gauge used to evaluate all Black women’s behavior. Collins (1990) explains, by loving, nurturing, and caring for White children and family better than her own, the mammy symbolizes the dominant group’s perception of the ideal Black female relationship to elite white male power. Even though she may be well loved and may exercise considerable authority in her White “family,” the mammy still knows her “place” as the obedient servant, and she has accepted her subordination (Collins, 1990, p. 74). Today, this imagery continues to be problematic because it portrays the Black woman as passive, longsuffering, and submissive (Evans-Winters & Love, 2015; Wheeler, 2002).

The permanence of these racist images is deeply rooted in academic settings and permeate systems such as hiring and promoting practices, diversity initiative, policy development, and expectations for classroom interactions (Brooks, 2013). For example, Chambers (2012) conducted a mix-methods study of 26 African American female faculty working at various U.S. colleges and universities and found that 84% of female faculty proposed that the use of negative stereotypes excluded them from receiving tenure and gaining access to administrative positions. In a 2015 qualitative study designed to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the meaning Black faculty construct around their presentation experiences at educational venues, researchers McGee and Kazembe (2016) noted that Black faculty were racially stereotyped at work. This included being generally

expected to entertain and perform for colleagues in ways that were not expected of their white counterparts (McGee & Kazembe, 2016).

Proponents of BFT inform that everyday racism encountered on the streets, at work, and within our own neighborhoods, permeate the political and cultural fabric of modern life and negatively affect Black women (Collins, 1986; Evans-Winters & Love, 2015). While historically, Black women have been positioned as lazy individuals, breeders, sexual savages, immoral, and loose, and these racist ideals still exist today. Contemporarily, many see Black women as welfare mothers, whores, gold-diggers, or even sexually depraved animals who are ultimately responsible for their own abuse and/or sexual exploitation (Evans-Winters & Love, 2015; Harley, 2008).

Additional derogatory stereotypes include the myth of the “angry Black woman” that characterizes African American females as aggressive, ill-tempered, illogical, overbearing, and hostile without provocation (Ashley, 2014). Chambers (2012) found that the women were often viewed as bitter, angry, and lacking intelligence. Redmond (2014) reported that African American female professors were described as “mean” or “difficult,” “overly authoritative,” or someone who takes herself too seriously (p. 22). This negative label is underscored in Harlow’s (2003) qualitative study of faculty working at a large, public, Midwestern U.S. university. Findings indicated that 62% of the Black female participants reported that they had been evaluated by students as “cold,” “mean,” and/or “intimidating” (p. 355). An additional 62% of Black females affirmed that during the course evaluation process, students had deemed them to be “too hard” and “demanding” (Harlow, 2003, p. 355). Current literature reveals that each of these prevalent, negative ideologies especially impact Black women working in PWIs.

According to Moore (2017), PWIs were deemed to be particularly difficult places for Black female faculty, as they face stereotypes that negatively impact perceptions of them as less than capable educators, researchers, and scholars. Black faculty indicated that their expertise and areas of scholarship was often devalued or questioned. Allen, Epps, Guillory, Suh and Bonous-Hammarth (2000) document that Black faculty whose scholarship focused on ethnicity, gender, social issues, or such related topics were frequently dismissed and seen as being “self-serving” (p. 145). In a study at a public research university in the Southeast, a researcher sought to find meaning in the successful qualities of Black female faculty; results indicated that female faculty members of Color were often excluded from collaborative research projects with their peers and lacked sponsorship for research (Edwards, Beverly & Alexander-Snow, 2011). Participants reported that they rarely had access to resources for research that could lead to greater prestige, higher future economic gains, and enhanced job mobility (Edwards et al., 2011). Black professors report that they have been mistaken for the cleaning staff and have witnessed students doing a double-take when they “realize that I am the professor teaching the class” (Ashley, 2014; Brooks, 2013; Moore, 2017). Again, the enduring effects of controlling imagery result in the struggle for others to view Black women as legitimate, viable, and capable leaders.

### *Intersectionality*

Intersectionality, or the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and religion, is a premise that is key to both the CRT and BFT frameworks (Crenshaw, 1989). Legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term intersectionality in her 1989 essay, *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist*

*Politics*. The concept of intersectionality explains the way multiple oppressions are experienced. Intersectionality suggests that not only have socially constructed categorizations been invented, perpetuated, and reinforced by society, they create overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination and disadvantage which is especially problematic for people of Color (Crenshaw, 1989; Gillborn, 2015).

Critical race theorists postulate that understanding intersectionality allows insight into the complexity of the Black woman's lived experiences. They concede that race, class, and gender are indicators of power and are used to reinforce power relations and forms of oppression (Collins, 1990; Jean-Marie, Williams, & Sherman 2005). Because of these multiple forms of oppression and power relations, Black women view the world from a distinct perspective, based on their own social positions and within the confines of the larger social structures of race and gender (Evans-Winters & Love, 2015).

Similarly, Black feminist theorists insist African American women are discriminated against in ways that aren't reflective of singular forms of racism, sexism, or classism, but as an amalgamation of each (Beckwith, Carter, & Peters, 2016; Collins, 1990; Crenshaw et al., 1996). Renowned Black feminist Patricia Hill Collins (2015) most recently defines intersectionality by positing that "race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, ability, and age operate not as unitary, reciprocally-limited entities, but as mutually constructing phenomena that in turn shape multifaceted social inequities" (p. 234). Other Black feminists insist that intersectionality is discrimination, oppression, and domination resulting from various social characteristics that intersect (Crenshaw, 1989, 2014; Davis, 2015).

Stimpson (1974) asserts that Black women are members of inferior classes; therefore, they are faced with multiple issues of discriminatory practices. These varied threats of



discrimination, coined double or multiple jeopardy, are thought to be the crux of that which hinders the professional advancement and facilitates the economic exploitation of Black women (Beal, 1969; Crenshaw, 1989). Thus, becoming a Black woman administrator in higher education requires the professional advancement that these double or multiple jeopardies threaten.

Racism, sexism, classism, and tokenism<sup>14</sup> are common issues that create unwelcoming environments for Black female administrators in higher education (Branch, 2011; Stimpson, 1974). Meyers (1998) maintains racism and sexism are two issues that lead to adversity in the workplace and directly impact hiring and promotion practices for African American women. Racism and sexism hinder opportunities for African American women who are in search of career advancement (Amoah, 1997). According to Bruner's 1994 research, despite the implementation of laws created to end racism and sexism, these specific issues continue to be challenges that prevent African American women from attaining roles as college presidents.

Much of the research reviewed for this study indicates that issues of intersectionality still exist and greatly affect the succession of Black women in higher education. These barriers are a major concern to professionals in academia, and some scholars believe that there should be monetary investments in programs designed to eliminate practices of racism and sexism in higher education (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Evans-Winters & Love, 2015; Harley, 2008). CRT and BFT are theoretical frameworks that facilitate an understanding of the challenges Black women experience during their journeys towards achieving senior

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<sup>14</sup> *Tokenism* refers to the practice or policy of admitting an extremely small number of members of a racial, ethnic, or gendered group, to work, educational, or social activities to give the impression of being inclusive, when in actuality these groups are not welcomed (Niemann, 2016).

leadership positions in higher education in a way that honors their multiple, nuanced, and intersecting identities and oppressions.

*The significance of counter-narratives*

As with many tenets, where CRT and BFT align includes the importance of counter-narratives or counter-storytelling. Counter-narratives are stories told by people in the minority, who are often overlooked in the research literature. Their stories challenge the dominant narrative because they examine, critique, and counter the majoritarian narrative (Harper & Davis, 2012). Counter-storytelling is a method of telling a story that is used specifically to cast doubt on the credibility of accepted premises or myths that are held by the majority (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). DeCuir and Dixson (2004) inform counter-storytelling “is a means of exposing and critiquing normalized dialogues that perpetuate racial stereotypes” (p. 27).

Accordingly, critical race theorists believe counter-narratives are powerful and not only allow insight into everyday experiences of marginalized groups, but also facilitate a better understanding of how Americans view race (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Solórzano & Yosso (2002) argue that counter-storytelling, a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told, can be a useful mechanism to challenge and change racial dominance. Delgado (1989) indicates oppressed groups have known instinctively that stories are an essential tool to their own survival and liberation (p. 2436). It is theorized using counter-storytelling as a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege can shatter complacency, challenge the dominant discourse on race, and further the struggle for racial reform (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

Comparably, Black feminist theorists insist storytelling is viewed as a meaningful tool to give voice to the lived experiences of the oppressed and to offer a truth in the face of analysis that speaks only to the dominant group (Evans-Winters & Love, 2015). Storytelling is especially vital when exploring the theme of intersectionality, as it is rooted in individuals' lived experiences and speaks directly to their multiple social categorizations (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lloyd-Jones, 2009). Utilizing oral narratives to tell stories of Black women is significant because the study and interpretation of their lives typically have been subsumed either under Black male issues or under women's issues (Etters-Lewis, 1993).

The use of counter-narratives is extremely important within this work, as Black women have had few opportunities to tell their stories in meaningful ways to their superiors, peers, subordinates, or potential mentees. Etters-Lewis (1993) suggests there is an assumption that Black women's stories are included in stories about White women and Black men; however, the unique experiences in history, language, culture, and workplace of Black women suggests otherwise.

#### *Countering the master/majoritarian narrative*

An additional benefit of the use of counter-narratives is its ability to contradict the master or majoritarian narrative. In American society in general, and particularly in education, the majoritarian story is White and slanted towards the middle-class. Delgado and Stefancic (2013) defined majoritarian story as the "bundle of presuppositions, perceived wisdoms, and shared cultural understanding of persons in the dominant race" (p. 462). Majoritarian stories are generated from a history of privilege and "...is one that privileges Whites, men, the middle and or upper class, and heterosexuals by naming these social locations as natural or normative points of reference" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 28).

Because the majoritarian stories or master narratives are viewed as normal and natural in American society, the majority forms suppositions about race based on ideals rooted in White privilege.

Stanley (2007) allows that master narratives often defines and limits what is valued as scholarship and who is entitled to create scholarship. This is problematic, because the dominant group in academia writes most research and are often White men (Stanley, 2007). Even more, master narratives often portray Black Americans as passive, lacking both agency and voice (Stanley, 2007). As such, the stories and experiences of people of Color are often distorted or even go unheard. Not only do master narratives fail to highlight the experiences of people outside of White culture, they embody racism with which Blacks are forced to contend. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) asserted, “the ideology of racism creates, maintains, and justifies the use of a master narrative” in storytelling (p. 27). What’s more, majoritarian storytelling infers that ethnic minorities should assimilate to fit within the dominant standard. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) provide, that within the realms of education, master narratives suggests that minorities should “assimilate to the dominant White middle-class culture [in order] to succeed in school and in life” (p. 31). Therefore, to challenge the racist master narratives present in academia and our larger society, educational researchers often use counter-narratives as a means to highlight the experiences of people of Color whose stories are often unheard.

### *Black women as intellectuals*

Despite recent advances in the study of BFT, the notion of *Black women as intellectuals* often remains neglected. Thus, Black feminists insist that contributions of the Black female intellectual are integral when countering the majoritarian narrative. This notion

is of particular relevance to this work, as both historical and contemporary literature points to the constant struggle of Black women in higher education to be viewed as consummate, legitimate, and credible thinkers (Hull, Scott, & Smith, 1982; Jones, 2009; Lloyd-Jones, 2009). Collins (1990) outlined the specific way in which Black women in academic spaces have been marginalized, positing:

Taken together, the supposedly seamless web of economy, polity, and ideology function as a highly effective system of social control designed to keep African American women in an assigned, subordinate place. This larger system of oppression works to suppress the ideas of Black women intellectuals (p. 5).

Denying Black women the credentials to become literate certainly excluded most African American women from positions as scholars, teachers, authors, poets, and critics. Moreover, while Black women historians, writers, and social scientists have long existed, it was only recently these women have held leadership positions in universities, professional associations, publishing concerns, broadcast media, and other social institutions of knowledge validation (McClaurin, 2001). Black women's exclusion from positions of power within mainstream institutions has led to the elevation of elite White male ideas and interests and the corresponding suppression of Black women's ideas and interests in traditional scholarship (Collin, 1986; Taylor, 1998).

Collins (1990) implores all Black, female intellectuals to "aggressively push the theme of self-definition," as speaking for oneself and crafting one's own agenda is "essential to empowerment" (p.36). Collins further allows that resistance to oppression is possible when

intellectual Black women begin articulating “expressions of consciousness,” as these articulations “can be empowering for those who embrace it” (p. 36).

### *A critique of liberalism*

Many systems within higher education hide inequitable practices with their promotion and assertion of a liberal ideology. Conversely, these liberal claims only create an illusion of equality instead of addressing oppressive institutional beliefs and practices that perpetuate disparities (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). As such, CRT attacks the notion of liberalism and provides a critique of liberal views; this critique challenges liberal society’s claims to (1) the notion of colorblindness, (2) the neutrality of the law, and (3) incremental change, or equal opportunity for all (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Hiraldo, 2010).

The notion of colorblindness is the liberal ideology that suggests racial differences do not exist. While it is true that the premise of this argument asserts that race is a social versus a biological construct, this ideology ignores actual social constraints that racist practices maintain (Bell, 1992; Crenshaw, 1989; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Dixson, & Rousseau, 2005). Thus, it is virtually impossible for individuals to contend that they are colorblind because those individuals have still been socialized and influenced by the institutional socialization of structures in which racism is ingrained (Bell, 1992). Critical race theorists assert that liberal ideology enables practices that “justify ignoring and dismantling race-based policies that were designed to address societal inequality” (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004, p. 29). A common example that liberal pundits use to justify this argument is the fact that there continue to be increased numbers of African American students who enter postsecondary institutions. For example, the U.S. Labor Department’s Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) reported that in 2014, of all U.S. high school graduates, 71% of African-American graduating

high school seniors had enrolled in college by October 2014 compared to 67% of Whites. It marked the first time ever the BLS determined through its population surveys that African-Americans enrolled in college at a higher rate than Whites. However, using such trends as a rationale to discard practices that are targeted to increase educational equity, such as affirmative action policies for African American students, under the auspices of liberalism and racial equality is contradictory to establishing true educational equity (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005).

Race-neutral language has been used extensively as a solution or tool to negate race explicit problems in America; however, CRT offers a fervent rejection of racial neutrality of the law. CRT attempts to show that the law, even when it seems neutral and even-handed, in fact, works in the interest of dominant groups in American society and particularly in the interest of dominant racial groups (Abrams & Moio, 2009). CRT attempts to show that the alleged neutral principles are a sort of cover for a deeply ingrained system of racial domination (Cole, 2017). Dixson and Rousseau (2005) assert that liberalism is “far from racial neutrality and being in the best interests of persons of Color; instead, it supports the operation of White privilege” (p. 17). Many Black females in academia argue this very point by contending that laws such as Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, which makes it illegal to discriminate against someone on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, or sex, or the Equal Pay Act of 1963, which makes it illegal to pay different wages to men and women if they perform equal work in the same workplace, were developed by White males, with a reliance on White male norms, customs, traditions, and views and can therefore never be truly race-neutral (Closson, 2010; Lloyd-Jones, 2009).

Moreover, CRT critiques the notion of incremental change because incrementally granting equality is only beneficial to those in power (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). While it is comfortable for those with power to slowly change, doing so prolongs the dehumanization of marginalized groups. Dixson and Rousseau (2006) assert that liberalism is “far from racial neutrality and being in the best interests of persons of Color; instead, it supports the operation of White privilege” (p. 47).

### *Whiteness as property*

While the demographics of the United States are changing to include more racial diversity in higher education, scholars continue to report unwelcoming and hostile climates for racially minoritized persons and groups on predominantly White campuses (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). In this study, a specific tenet of CRT, Whiteness as property, is central to understanding how Black women experience race and racism during their leadership ascension. In this context, Whiteness is not only associated with skin color but also describes social processes that are fluid and forceful (Ross, 2016; Stanley, 2009).

The notion of the inherent benefits of Whiteness has its roots in the practice of slavery. DeCuir and Dixson (2004) argue the legacy of slavery is not simply a system of property law that is distorted by racist themes; instead, the system of slavery established and protected an actual property interest in Whiteness itself (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Harris, 1993). Ladson-Billings, & Tate (1995) explain, because the idea of Whiteness as property stemmed from the objectification of Blacks as property during slavery, it is thus, an asset that only Whites can possess and benefit from it. What’s more, with the essential role of Blacks in the formation of an American social, political, and cultural consciousness, slavery continues to encourage a cult of Whiteness in the U.S. that views Blacks as less than human (Harris,



1993; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Because of the virulent nature of slavery in the US and the extraordinary lengths to which American society went in order to maintain a racial underclass, racism's embedded nature in American society endorses the notion of Whiteness as a property interest (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). These interests include the right of possession, the right to use and enjoyment, the right to disposition, and the right of exclusion (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Patton, McEwen, Rendón and Howard-Hamilton (2007) extend the notion of race as property rights to higher education, particularly as it pertains to the division between student affairs and academic affairs. Research shows that the majority of Blacks who earn their doctoral degrees in education gain them in education administration, therefore; these individuals continue as practitioners and rarely become faculty (Hiraldo, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1998). As a result, most Blacks do not become part of the faculty, which is considered to be the driving intellectual force in higher education. Because professors are viewed as owners of the curriculum, they have the authority for designing their own courses, conducting their own research, and validating (or nullifying) the research and scholarship of others according to their own understanding of their philosophy of knowledge, which can work against ethnic minorities (Patton et al., 2007). Within higher education, this institutional power further reinforces the notion that being White is more valuable and important than being a person of Color (Patton et al., 2007). Within this study, the premise of Whiteness as property is used to identify how racism is not merely an ideology of prejudice and power but how it has resulted in tangible discrepancies, such as tenure trajectories, pay, and promotions,

as well as with non-tangible discrepancies such as unrest and tension between White and ethnic minority leaders (Patton et al., 2007; Ross, 2016).

### *Interest convergence*

Bell's (1980) scholarship in CRT includes the idea of an interest convergence principle which suggests White Americans do not respond to the needs of Black Americans unless it meets their own needs. More specifically, Bell (1980) contends White Americans support issues of racial justice only when those concerns promote the self-interests of Whites (Bell, 1980; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). For example, many critical race theorists claim that White individuals are the primary beneficiaries of civil rights legislation. The rationale used to support this contention is steeped in the fact that early civil rights legislation provided only basic rights to Blacks, and these civil rights were those that had been enjoyed by White individuals for centuries (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004).

An additional example of interest convergence cited by CRT proponents relates to affirmative action legislation. Even as affirmative action laws are continually scrutinized and depicted as a benefit for people of Color, research shows that the major recipients have been White women (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Because White women have the propensity to support households where White men and children live, affirmative action ultimately benefits White individuals in general (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Thus, it is White individuals who benefit from a structure that billed as one designed to offer equal opportunity to Black Americans (Hiraldo, 2010; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Harper (2009) insists that many higher education administrators, faculty, and staff may not readily employ strategies that would improve the academic outcomes for African Americans if they do not see the ultimate value to the overall institution. For example,

colleges and universities must comply with the 1964 Civil Rights Act by maintaining nondiscriminatory practices and broadening access in order to obtain government funds, which serves both Whites and minorities. However, institutional practices, such as legacy preferences in college admittance, that exclude or ignore minorities are still in place presumably because the interests of Whites would not be served by changing them (Taylor, 2009). As such, CRT seeks to identify and expose interest convergence and acts as a means for empowering Black Americans in an effort to eliminate racial, gender, and class subordination (Bell, 1980; Delgado & Stefancic, 2000).

### *The outsider within*

Collins' (1990) idea of "outsiders within" seems apropos when describing the social location of Black female leaders within the context of postsecondary institutions. Accordingly, a BFT premise essential to this work is the notion of the "outsider-within." The term was coined in 1986 by Patricia Hill Collins to classify Black women who acquire identities as outsiders within, because of their placement in these various social and professional locations. Collins (1990) also extended the term to underscore the issues that Black women face in academia because of their unique sexual and racial positions. Collins (1990) explains that a Black woman becomes an outsider within when a dominant group invites her into the folds of their living; however, the Black woman is only allowed limited access to the group, as she is not viewed as a sanctioned member of the group. The Black woman is considered an outsider because despite her presence within the group, she has limited and/or no voice, in the dialogue of the unit or in determining how she exists within the dominant group (Collins, 1986).

The notion of this outsider within is significant in this work, as numerous researchers inform of the difficulties Black women scholars face in reconciling their personal experiences, identities, values, and perspectives with those that dominate academia (Bates, 2007; Collins, 1990). Brown (2012) explains that African American women who enter the academy under a White, male domination are often not afforded the full rights and privileges in hierarchical and cultural structures, as these privileges are controlled by this insider group or dominant group. As outsiders within academia, Black female scholars encounter systems of Eurocentric, male-dominated political and epistemological constraints and “often face the challenge of having their knowledge claims validated or invalidated by a system rooted in a Eurocentric masculinist framework” (Brown, 2012, p. 21).

Even as there are documented benefits of mentoring relationships between women, the overarching challenge of mentoring relationships (especially for African American women) is access to mentors in academia (Rodgers & Cudjoe, 2013; Ruff, 2013). A 2005 qualitative study by Crawford and Smith found that African American women who held senior-level positions such as Assistant Dean, Associate Dean, Vice President, Provost, and Chancellor and did not have mentors understood the importance of having someone to guide them through decisions regarding career advancement. The respondents recognized that their potential and job satisfaction could have been maximized if they had mentors (Crawford & Smith, 2005). The study’s seven participants allowed that because they did not have mentors, their career choices were not guided by “a plan of action nor goals and that their careers were shaped by luck and chance” (Crawford & Smith, 2005 p. 64). In an additional mixed methods study of African American women in mid-level student affairs administration, Clayborne and Hamrick (2007) found that a lack of mentoring corresponded to a lack of

access to crucial opportunities and resources. More than 60% of African American women who succeeded in attaining the level of the academic presidency may have received critical mentoring assistance not available to African American women in similar mid-level administrative roles (Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007). Bates (2007) also offered a glimpse into the role mentors play in the development and ascension of African American females to the presidency and found that identifying mentors early in academic or professional careers may help African American women navigate issues of race and gender while seeking administrative positions in higher education. Holmes et al. (2007) used qualitative interviews when determining that eleven African American women faculty at PWIs experienced a positive relationship between their participation in mentoring relationships and their success in higher education, regardless of the level of mentoring. Two of the eleven participants who were mentored by non-African American mentors felt that having a mentor of the same race would have been more beneficial, as this was perceived to be crucial in teaching them how to function effectively in a White environment (Holmes, et al., 2007).

## **Summary**

African American women working in academia encounter many forms of oppression (Redmond, 2014; Sotello, 2007; Stanley, 2009). Contemporary Black female academic leaders continue to find it challenging to obtain, maintain, and realize growth and development in higher education settings (Bates, 2007). In reviewing the key studies focusing on Black women's experiences in higher education as administrators, it is clear how other factors, such as tokenism, pipeline issues, and the lack of mentoring relationships can be seen as challenges.

Bonebright, Cottledge, and Lonquist (2012) report that many Black female academic leaders can become symbols of diversity and inclusion and role models by default and not by choice (Bonebright, Cottledge, & Lonquist, 2012). Their success is not always appreciated without being linked to historical marginalization, affirmative action, stereotypes, and tokenism, among other stigmas.

Many of these leaders have found that upon asserting their authority, they get accused of being “overly authoritative” and are branded with labels such as “difficult” or “mean” (Redmond, 2014). In other instances, these stigmas, coupled with the personal struggle of having multiple identities, cause Black women to be viewed passive, lazy, and/or aggressive (Beckwith et al., 2016; Burgess, 1997; Chambers, 2012). Black females entering higher education organizations to lead are constantly faced with situations that require them to debunk a myriad of myths or exhibit the stereotypical images society has imposed on them. This leaves Black leaders with little or no room to flourish and self-actualize as individuals (Chambers, 2012; Grant & Simmons, 2008). Even as current literature offers insight into barriers and challenges facing Black women educational leaders, studies detailing portraits and narratives of the lived experiences, work, and impact of Black women in educational contexts at PWIs continue to be limited (Harley, 2008).

As such, this research is especially timely, as it has the propensity to bridge the gap in contemporary literature as it relates to Black female academic leaders at historically White institutions in the Southern U.S., a place that is steeped in a history of racial terror and discrimination. Even as the South’s history of racial strife, intolerance, and resistance to change is widely understood, contemporary studies such as this have the propensity for building a pipeline so that greater numbers of future generations of women of Color can

demonstrate, hone their skills, and forge new pathways to academic leadership at all institutions.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

Methodology is not only the rationale for the research approach, it specifies the lens through which the analysis occurs, generally describes the overarching research strategy, and outlines the means in which research is to be undertaken (Creswell, 2013). Accordingly, this chapter begins with a discussion of the importance of the study's design, addresses the research questions, and rationalizes the selection of the qualitative research methodology, the appropriateness of which is based on the purpose of the study and the qualitative research literature. This chapter also includes a description of the research, setting, participant selection, data collection methods, data analysis and coding, limitations, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations.

#### **Research Questions**

Using qualitative research methods, particularly critical incident narrative inquiry, I completed a study to learn about individual Black female academic leaders who are employed at four-year public PWIs within the SRUS. Research questions are developed with the purpose of outlining what I desire to learn (Merriam, 2009). Accordingly, the following research questions guide the current study:

- (1) How have race, gender, and culture influenced Black women's journeys toward obtaining a senior leadership position at a Predominantly White Institution?
- (2) What are the leadership experiences of Black, female, senior-level leaders at predominantly White institutions within the Southern Regional University System?



- (3) What are the challenges, barriers, and experiences confronting Black women in senior leadership positions in higher education at these predominantly White institutions?
- (4) What are the strengths and strategies employed by these leaders when confronting these challenges?

### **Rationale for Qualitative Research**

The essence of this study is to provide a voice and platform for these Black female leaders to share their voices and stories. As such, qualitative research facilitates an understanding of how the world is constructed from the participant's perspective (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Qualitative research allows the researcher "to get at the inner experience of participants, to determine how meanings are formed through and in culture, and to discover rather than test variables" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 12). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) and Creswell (2013) assert that important to qualitative research are the underpinnings that: (1) realities are multiple; (2) both the researcher and the participant share an influential position during the research; (3) the resulting hypotheses are time and context-bound; (4) the impact of multiplicity on events, people, and reality mean that all inferences and/or explanations of occurrence are continuously being shaped; and (5) because people shape the events, circumstances, choices, and research phenomena in their lives, all inquiry is value-bound.

Creswell (2007) further allows that "we conduct qualitative research when we want to empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participants in a study" (p. 40). Thus, using qualitative research methods is vital in this work, as these methods facilitate the

documentation of the information-rich, lived experiences of these marginalized academic leaders. Corbin and Strauss (2008) contend that by examining the individuals who inhabit higher education settings, qualitative methods allow researchers the ability to seek answers to previously unexplored questions, such as issues related to the double jeopardy Black women experience or concerns about workplace ostracism.

One benefit of using a qualitative methodological approach is that it welcomes reflexivity, or the process in qualitative research of addressing our own subjectivity as it relates to the people and events that we encounter (Berger, 2015). Reflexivity in qualitative research enhances the quality of investigation through its ability to provide balance and understanding of how our own positions and interests as researchers impact all stages of the research process (Berger, 2015). Given that being a Black woman working in academia is my own reality, I acknowledged and conceded that my background shapes my interpretation of these experiences. Thus, to combat my own implicit assumptions and potential biases, I conferred regularly with a dissertation committee member who acted as an advisor. During these sessions, I spoke candidly about my own subjectivities and interpretations throughout data collection and analysis process. In addition, I used self-reflection as a tool that helped me to resolve differences between my own suppositions and the emerging empirical evidence (Berger, 2015; Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

### **Research Design**

The purpose of this study is to examine, analyze, understand, and accurately interpret the lived experiences of Black female senior-level academic leaders at PWIs in the Southern Regional University System. Central to this understanding is allowing these women to have an active role throughout the research process. Thus, I sought a method that would provide

both study participants and me the ability to have a mutual exchange within a collaborative stance. For these reasons, I chose to use a qualitative research paradigm as the methodological approach in this study.

There is an underrepresentation of Black female academic leaders, specifically those who hold senior-level positions such as Associate Dean, Dean, Department Chair, and Provost (Airini, Conner, McPherson, Midson & Wilson, 2011). For example, women constitute 38% of Chief Academic Officers or Provosts, with only three percent of those being women of Color (USDE, 2016). As a result of this low representation, Black female leaders face many different challenges such as experiences with gender, racial, sexual, and cultural bias. Because the challenges Black female leaders in academia face can be described and analyzed, both Black Feminist Thought and Critical Race Theory serve as interpretative lenses for which to frame and further explain the experiences and perspectives of these women. The use of Critical Incident Narrative Inquiry (CINI) also serves as a method and tool to provide counternarratives that illuminate the personal lived experiences of seven Black female senior-level academic leaders.

## **Research Methodology**

### *Narrative Inquiry*

Narrative inquiry in qualitative research seeks to explore the everyday life world of those studied by learning their descriptions of experiences as well as their internalized meanings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As explained by Clandinin and Connelly (2003), narrative inquiry seeks to understand the human experience and details of stories in a historical and social context. Narrative inquiry focuses on individuals' life stories and is presented in the participants' own voices. These characteristics bode well for this study, as

through narrative inquiry, we make meaning out of the multiple layers of leadership experience of Black women, understanding that there are layers to the stories that are revealed as we consider them through different social, political, racial, historical, and gendered lenses.

Additionally, narrative inquiry not only allows for the telling of the women's stories but the actual re-creation and co-construction of their lives (Delgado, 1989). This means the participants must have the opportunity to define their interactions and relationships as they experience them. By having a chance to tell their story, the women construct a narrative that best describes Black women's experiences working in PWIs (Clandinin & Connelly, 2003).

#### *BFT and CRT Informing Narrative Inquiry*

Narrative inquiry is a methodological approach supported and informed by BFT and CRT, as both approaches are culturally sensitive when exploring how the societal influences of race and gender have impacted the leadership styles of Black female leaders at predominantly White institutions (Gillborn, 2015; Harley, 2008). As a Black woman and aspiring leader working at a PWI in a department where there is no ethnic minority representation on the leadership team, it is important for me to understand the challenges and communal experiences of individuals who have forged a pathway to senior-level leadership. Collins (2000) and Grant and Simmons (2008) inform that the BFT framework especially provides a voice to marginalized women in academia, by enlightening that as a group, Black women live in a different world than males and non-Blacks (Collins, 2000; Grant & Simmons, 2008).

Drawing on BFT allows us to place Black women's voices at the center of research to rearticulate subjugated knowledge into specialized knowledge, as well as support

epistemologies and theories about Black women (Collins, 1990). Additionally, through the use of narrative inquiry, or more specifically through counter-narratives, I am able to merge many tenets of CRT.

### *Counternarratives*

Both the BFT and CRT methodologies utilize counternarratives or counterstorytelling as a methodological and analytical framework. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) assert that the experiential knowledge of people of Color (such as, storytelling, family histories, biographies, and narratives) is legitimate, appropriate, and critical to analyzing and understanding the impact of racial subordination. Ramirez (2011) concurs and informs that counterstorytelling is especially critical in examining the experiences of those who are deemed to be “marginalized, less heard, and undervalued” (p. 83).

This study utilizes counternarratives to examine the oral histories of seven key leaders working in PWIs in the U.S. South. For African American women, counternarratives have played a significant role in creating a more expansive and inclusive notion of human rights, especially as it relates to agendas aimed at improving women’s lived experiences.

The use of counternarratives are especially important for this work, as historically, society perpetuates a narrative that often devalues Black lives in general and continues to objectify, silence, and demoralize Black women in particular. The master narratives that often deliver prevailing negative portrayals and controlling images of Black women as aggressive, unintelligent, angry, and incompetent have been contested in this research. These counternarratives dispute the negative ideals that have historically justified the majority’s gendered and racialized mistreatment of African American women (Collins, 1990). The counternarratives in this study are used as a conduit to provide an avenue for Black female

leaders to share their experiences and challenge traditional research paradigms, texts, and theories related to U.S. institutions and in a socio-historical context (Delgado, 1989).

Consequently, these counter-narratives offset the dominant narratives that place White people, White cultural norms, and deficit notions about people of Color at the center and have the potential to empower marginalized people and inform change. Thus, the use of narrative inquiry coupled with BFT and CRT was an ideal approach for this study, as I merged an epistemology and two methodologies together to provide the participants with a means to convey their stories in their own words. Through a counternarrative approach to narrative inquiry, I positioned the lived experiences of these Black women leaders at the center of this study. Wanting to better understand how their racialized and gendered identities shaped their leadership journeys, I utilized Critical Event Narrative Inquiry as a tool to deepen my understanding of their counternarratives.

#### *Critical Event/Incident Narrative Inquiry*

Woosley (1986) described the Critical Event Narrative Inquiry (CENI), also known as Critical Incident Narrative Inquiry (CINI), as a qualitative research technique for collecting information which is factual and about behaviors. Tripp (1993) informs us that “critical incident refers to some event or situation that meant a significant turning point or change in the life of a person, an institution or in some social phenomenon” (p. 24). According to Johnson and Golombek (2002) these critical incidents can be positive or negative events and serve as vehicles to allow educators to reflect on their practice by articulating their stories to themselves or others, because “these stories reveal the knowledge, ideas, perspectives, understandings, and experiences that guide their work” (p. 7). According to Mertova and

Webster (2012), the essence of the CENI method is in the identification of critical events in professional practice of individuals.

*Determination of critical incidents.* The identification of critical incidents is negotiated between the researcher and the participant (Mertova, 2014; Tripp, 1993). Critical events can only be detected in retrospect by gaining perspectives of people involved (Mertova & Webster, 2007). These incidents often create a change in the worldview and the understanding of those involved. Mertova further explains that the use of critical incidents in education research, particularly in teachers and in teachers' lives, is seen from the perspective of the person experiencing the critical incident and its relevance and impact in the person's life (Mertova, 2014).

Tripp (1993) contends that CINI is especially beneficial in educational research. He believes that identifying critical incidents helps educators understand how their personal beliefs, views, attitudes, and experiences influence their pedagogy and underscore why it is important for educators to develop their own theories of leading. When educators interpret critical incidents, it provides them with an opportunity for reflection, thereby allowing them the opportunity for improved practice. Incidents are deemed critical retrospectively by the educator when identified as having significance for their leadership practice (Tripp, 1993).

Critical incidents can be either internal or external in nature, have either a positive or negative influence on the educator's life, and can stem from an occurrence related to professional practice or from personal experience (Mertova & Webster, 2007). Mertova (2013) further explains:

A critical event can only be identified retrospectively, and such an event would have happened in an unplanned and unstructured manner. The causes

of a critical event might be internal or external to the professional practice of an individual, or entirely personal. A critical event has a unique, illustrative and confirmatory nature in relation to an investigated phenomenon (p. 119).

Thus, through identifying a critical event, this research explores the contemporary plight of Black female leaders at PWIs. Moreover, by examining historical events in their careers, we are able to gain a better understanding of their pathways to senior-level leadership positions and can more adequately educate and inform future generations of leaders.

Theoretically positioned within the frameworks of CRT and BFT, which are both ideal frameworks to use when examining the needs of Black women in higher education, these critical event narratives were especially beneficial when yielding stories that counter adaptations steeped in majoritarian ideals (Bell, 1992; Collins, 1990).

## **Research Methods**

### *Setting*

This study features senior-level academic leaders who are currently serving at public four-year historically White universities in the Southern Regional Education System. The SRUS is arguably one of the most prestigious and highly regarded postsecondary public educational systems in the U.S. In fact, many contend that the system offers the best public education in the country. Despite its many accolades, the SRUS is just one example of a postsecondary education system with an underrepresentation of Black/African American female leaders at its PWIs. Boasting more than 15 constituent institutions, the SRUS enrolls nearly 233,000 students annually (USDE/NCES, 2018a). Fall 2017 statistics reveal that the 11 PWIs within the SRUS enrolled over 200,100 students; 12% of those students were of



Black/African American descent, and seven percent were Black/African American females (USDE/NCES, 2018a). However, during this same period, the SRUS had no Black/African American females serving as Chancellor at any institution (USDE/NCES, 2018b).

In 2017, the SRUS's PWIs employed nearly 1,500 individuals who were categorized as "managers"<sup>15</sup> (USDE/NCES, 2018b). Of those individuals, 69 or 4.7% were Black/African American females (USDE/NCES, 2018b). Specifically, within the system's fourth largest PWI, Thomas State University (TSU), (a pseudonym) there were nearly 30,000 students, 10% of whom identified as a Black/African American female (USDE/NCES, 2018a). However, there were eight Black females or four percent who held leadership positions (USDE/NCES, 2018b).

At the system's most ethnically diverse PWI, Lucas State University (LSU) (a pseudonym), nearly 20,000 total students are enrolled (USDE/NCES, 2018a). Of that population, 1,450 identify as Black/African American males, 3,800 Black/African American females, 3,500 White males, 6,600 White females, and more than 4,600 men and women who identify as Asian, American Indian, Hispanic or other (USDE/NCES, 2018a). However, during this same period, LSU had only five full-time Black female leaders, most of whom were serving in department chair roles, and only one of whom was at the level of Associate Dean or higher (USDE/NCES, 2018b).

The system's third smallest PWI, Irvin University (IU), a pseudonym, had a total student body population of nearly 6,300 students, with 1,300 (or 21%) identifying as Black/African American (USDE/NCES, 2018a). However, there was but one Black female

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<sup>15</sup> In accordance with the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics regulations, the "manager" category includes the role of Department Chair, Associate Dean, Dean, Provost, President, and Chancellor at all postsecondary institutions (BLS, 2010).

serving in a senior-level management role (USDE/NCES, 2018a; USDE/NCES, 2018b).

Table 3 below provides an overview of the demographics at the SRUS' constituent PWIs which demonstrates the disparity of Black female leaders as it relates to total Black student and Black female populations.

*Table 3. Institutional Profiles*

<b>University Pseudonym</b>	<b>Univ. Acronym</b>	<b>Total All Students</b>	<b>Total All Female Students</b>	<b>Total Black Female Students</b>	<b>Total All Leaders</b>	<b>Total Black Female Leaders</b>
<i>Barriet State University</i>	BSU	34,432	15,741	1,143	312	21
<i>Monet State University</i>	MSU	29,911	17,174	1,501	207	13
<i>Q. C. Hill University</i>	QCHU	29,317	14,214	2,721	185	8
<i>Thomas State University</i>	TSU	29,131	17,161	2,855	191	8
<i>Lucas Southern University</i>	LSU	19,922	13,302	3,772	131	5
<i>May Technical University</i>	MTU	18,811	10,630	377	97	3
<i>Sierra State University</i>	SSU	16,487	10,457	572	104	4
<i>Evans State University</i>	ESU	11,034	6,289	363	92	3
<i>Irvin University</i>	IU	6,252	3,879	1,285	57	1
<i>Brown-Ray University</i>	BRU	3,852	2,185	100	44	2
<i>Patrice International University</i>	PIU	1,014	532	50	44	1

*Source: IPEDS, 2017 Fall Enrollment Data*

## **Participant Selection**

### *Purposeful sampling*

Patton (2002) informs that purposeful sampling within qualitative research occurs when the researcher attempts to obtain a sample that appears to be representative of the population being studied. Purposeful sampling is the most common sampling strategy. As such, participants are selected or sought after based on pre-selected criteria driven by the research questions (Malterud, 2001). Gay, Mills and Airasian (2012) inform that purposive sampling is “the process of selecting a sample that is believed to be representative of a given population. In other words, the researcher selects the sample using his experience and knowledge of the group to be sampled” (p. 141). Patton (2002) advises that using the purposeful sample method is often beneficial when there are limited resources for the identification and selection of information-rich cases. An advantage of purposive sampling is that the sector is based on the researcher’s knowledge and experience of the group to be sampled using clear criteria to guide the process (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Disadvantages include the potential for inaccuracy in the researcher’s criteria and the resulting sample selection limits the ability of the researcher to generalize the results (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012). The use of purposive sampling is quite common in academic research.

For this study, there were some challenges in relation to the sampling process. First, initially I wanted to interview Black females who were at the Associate Dean level or above. However, there is a limited number of individuals who fit that research criterion serving in the SRUS. This made it initially difficult to determine a true participant pool. I then decided to open the selection criteria to those having positions as Department Chair and above. Subsequently, the participants for this study completed a three-stage process.

The initial method of participant recruitment included the assistance of The National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (NCES, IPEDS) research database. I queried the database to obtain a listing of all PWIs within the SRUS reporting African American women administrators with the title of Department Chair, Associate Dean, Dean, Vice Chancellor, Associate Provost, or Provost. I then created a spreadsheet including each administrator's full name, institution name, email address, mailing address, and official title. As a result, I was able to review and verify the eligibility of several potential candidates. From the names received, I elicited the assistance of a key informant to better determine each person's eligibility.

In order to be considered for inclusion in the study and to ensure the selection of the proper study participants, the following criteria were implemented: (1) identifying as a Black or African American female, (2) serving as a current senior-level leader (including but not limited to Dean, Associate Dean, Department Chair, Vice Chancellor, Associate Provost, or Provost) at a historically White, four-year, post-secondary institution, and (3) holding a senior-level position at a four-year, post-secondary institution located within the southeastern region of the U.S.

#### *Key informant*

I completed a face-to-face interview with a well-respected, highly connected senior-level leader in the SRUS's academic community who acted as a key informant. The term "key informant" refers to the person with whom an interview about an organization, social program, problem, or interest group is conducted. In a sense, the key informant is a proxy for her or his associates (Marshall, 1986). Key informant interviews are qualitative, in-depth interviews with "natural leaders" who know what is going on in a specific community.

Marshall (1996) states that a key informant is an “expert source of information” (p. 92).

Lavrakas (2008) concurs and adds that the use of key informant interviews can be especially beneficial, as these individuals are often experts who are most knowledgeable about a group or issue. Because of their position within a society, key informants can provide more information and a deeper insight into what is going on around them (Marshall, 1996).

The key informant in this instance was an individual with whom I had previously collaborated on several projects. The informant is herself a member of this elite group of senior-level leaders and possesses more than thirty years of experience working and leading in the SRUS. As such, this individual was correctly identified as a subject matter expert and as one who is extremely knowledgeable of the subset of individuals who matched the research criterion.

The key informant was given the spreadsheet listing of possible participants generated from NCES database search results. Upon careful review, the informant then provided me with specific names of those fitting the study’s criteria based on her own knowledge and experience with some of the prospective participants and the participant pool. This process yielded the names of fifteen individuals who fit the selection criteria for this study.

An invitation to participate in the research (Appendix B) was then sent via email to each of the fifteen potential participants at their university email addresses. This invitation process yielded eight responses, of which a sample of seven participants were selected. While the eighth potential participant showed initial interest, after more than eight weeks, she was deemed ineligible, as she failed to submit the required “Consent Letter” (Appendix C).

## **Collective Demographics and Leader Profiles**

This qualitative study involved seven leaders, who all serve at six PWIs in the SRUS. To ensure confidentiality, participants selected their own pseudonyms to conceal their identities. Each is referred to by her pseudonym throughout the study. Moreover, I removed any identifying information during the analysis portion of the work.

The participants represented six different four-year, public, higher education institutions in the U.S. South. All study participants range in age from 40 to 65 years old, having an average of 51.6 years. The participants also had a range of 3 years to 26 years of senior-level leadership experience. Regarding ascension to their respective positions, five of the seven women were promoted to the senior level internally from within their current departments. Moreover, of those individuals promoted internally, only one had actively sought that particular position; others report that they were recommended for the role by various members of their department or sundry members of the university at large.

Five of the seven women have roots in the deep South, one participant was reared in the mid-west, and one participant grew up in the northeastern area of the U.S. Additionally, six of the seven women have been married. Five of the seven leaders have children. All participants reported having good support systems with either their spouses, church family, siblings, close friends, social networks, or a combination of the aforementioned resources. All had at least one parent who was very influential in their decisions to pursue a college education.

Each of the leaders was currently employed at a PWI, and none of the women had ever served at HBCUs. Collectively, they had a total of over 140 years of higher education experience as indicated in the table below.

Table 4. Participants' Snapshot

<i>Participant Name</i>	<i>Years in Higher Education</i>	<i>Type of Undergraduate Institution Attended</i>	<i>Type of Graduate Institution Attended</i>
<i>Dr. Battle</i>	26	PWI	PWI
<i>Dr. Freeman</i>	36	PWI	PWI
<i>Dr. Hampton</i>	15	PWI	PWI
<i>Dr. Jacobs</i>	17	HBCU	PWI
<i>Dr. Lee</i>	19	PWI	PWI
<i>Dr. Riley</i>	23	PWI	PWI
<i>Dr. Ruth</i>	21	PWI	PWI

Source: Participants' CV Submissions

Most of the women's career paths are characterized by having several personal and professional "firsts." For example, four of the women were first generation degree recipients in their families. Two additional participants were the first (and only) Black, female, senior-level leaders at their institutions. Two participants reported being the first Black female ever hired in their departments.

Six of the seven women attended institutions of higher education and pursued undergraduate degrees during the 1980s, a time when the legal barriers were supposedly removed, and Blacks were deemed to have equitable participation in higher education. Three of the leaders assumed their positions of senior-level leadership during the era of the Obama Presidency (January 20, 2009 – January 17, 2017), a time that many deem to mark the official beginning of a post-racial America (Witt, 2018). While the women in this study persevered and subsequently were promoted to administrative positions in higher education, they are the exceptions to the rule, as highlighted by the dearth of representation of Black females senior-level leaders at PWIs.

## **Data Collection**

Malterud (2001) advises that culturally sensitive research approaches use qualitative methods such as participant observations, focus groups, individual and life history interviews, or a combination of these methods to ascertain an understanding of the experiences of those individuals participating in the study. These and other qualitative methods are often used to investigate and capture holistic contextualized pictures of the social and political factors that affect the everyday existence of African Americans, particularly in educational settings (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). To make the data as robust as possible, I utilized five data sources for the present study: individual interviews, resumé or curriculum vitae review, field notes, reflective journaling, and transcriptions.

### *Individual interviews*

One of the most widely used data collection methods to perform narrative inquiry is the in-depth, semi-structured interview (Creswell, 2009). The choice of using interviews as an instrument for data collection was based on the purpose of the study, to reveal the voices of Black female administrators. According to Seidman (2006), the “interview is both a research methodology and a social relationship, [thus], individual interviewing relationships exist in a social context” (p. 95). Rubin and Rubin (2012) inform that qualitative interviewing “is a way of finding out what others feel and think about their worlds” (p. 3). Interviews are “conversations with well-defined purposes” and allow a researcher to gain information from an informant, the interviewee (Berg & Lune 2012, p. 43).

Accordingly, the dominant data collection strategy for this study was in-depth, individual interviews. Once a participant agreed to the study, I contacted her to set up the initial interview. These first encounters served as introductory meetings which were



completed over the telephone. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) note, “at the onset of a life-history study, when the subject and the interviewer do not know each other well, the discussion usually covers impersonal matters” (p. 57). It was during this phase that the participants and I discussed my own professional background and my rationale for conducting the study. Participants were invited to ask me questions about the process and were given the opportunity to note their own expectations and voice any concerns. It was also during this introductory phase that I informed participants I would be asking them to speak openly about their experiences. I encouraged them to be as open and honest as they felt comfortable with their own feelings, perceptions, and interpretations, since the purpose of the research is to reveal their voices.

The purpose of the second meeting was to conduct the formal interview and was designed to focus on the leaders’ professional experiences. With this meeting, I attempted to collect meaningful data in an effort to tell the complex stories of their experiences as strong, yet vulnerable professionals and individuals with multifaceted identities. It was primarily through this formal interview that the participants’ constructions of their realities were expressed. I utilized open-ended interview questions (Appendix A). As a matter of protocol, the interview interactions began by allowing each individual to select the site for our gatherings, thus ensuring the setting selected was comfortable for the participants. All interviews were audio-recorded with the permission of the participants.

Four of the seven women participated in face-to-face, in-depth, semi-structured interviews, and due to scheduling conflicts and time constraints, the additional three interviews were completed via live video conferencing. All interviews lasted from 60 to 125 minutes and were conducted with each participant in a natural setting of her choosing.

All interview questions were presented one by one, allowing each participant to use as much time as she deemed necessary to respond. When conducting the interviews, the sequence of the questions could change as well as the way I asked a question. I had several main issues to raise in the interviews, but when and how it happened could depend on the situation and the natural flow of the conversation. Sometimes it was natural and relevant for me to follow up on what the participants conveyed. For instance, if the interviewees had much to say, I did not follow the sequence in the interview guide as I followed up on their ideas. However, I related the follow up questions to the topics in the guide. All in all, I tried to keep a balance between following up on what they said and maintaining the link to the questions in the interview guide.

Throughout the interview process, I had to fine-tune my listening skills. For example, Dr. Freeman's speaking cadence included periods of thoughtful, reflective pauses. As such, I learned to relax into these pauses, so that I would not interrupt her thinking or impact her candor.

I would be remiss if I did not note that throughout the research progression, I deliberated as to whether or not the interview process would have produced even more detailed responses had the research questions been provided to the participants prior to the formal interview. However, I am now convinced that my process of having the formal interview as the participants' initial introduction to the line of questioning was the correct way to proceed. My rationale is grounded in the fact that all participant responses were not practiced, contrived, or preconceived. Instead, they were uncontrolled, unplanned, unrehearsed, spontaneous, authentic, and raw. This rawness allowed the leaders' deep feelings, heartfelt sentiments, and emotions (including both tears and laughter) to flow freely.

During the entire interview process, it was also helpful for me to hold close Patton's (2002) premise which tells us that successful researchers interview people to find out things that are not easily discernable, such as feelings, thoughts, intentions, and previous behaviors. Thus, during each discussion, my objective was to seek and better understand both the obvious and subtle nuances involved in each person's lived experiences and critical incidents or events. Farrell (2013) advises, by telling their stories, educators can not only reflect on specific incidents within their world but also feel a sense of "cathartic relief, as it offers an outlet for tensions, feelings, and frustrations about teaching" (p.80).

Accordingly, the interview questions were developed so that I could specifically facilitate the leaders readily sharing their self-reflective stories. In designing the research questions, I was hoping that they would help me capture stories that would not only be a rich source of information, but those that would also allow the participants to: (1) reflect on how they arrived at their positions, (2) discuss how they conduct their duties, (3) elaborate on the thinking and problem-solving mechanisms used, and (4) share insight to the underlying assumptions, values, and beliefs that have ruled their past and current practices.

While I did not anticipate having to follow-up with participants, it was necessary in three instances. I conducted these supplemental conversations either by phone, email, or videoconferencing, based upon participants' availability.

#### *Resumé and curriculum vitae*

Once potential participants agreed to contribute, I requested that they also supply me with their extensive Curriculum Vitae (CV) or resumé. This data was used to supplement the personal data gleaned from each interview. This review allowed me to visually and chronologically review the professional track taken by each of the leaders. This information

was also used to facilitate the interview process and provide me with a better understanding of each leader's professional experiences, publications, presentations, and research interests. Based on the interviews, observations, and a review of the CV/resumé, patterns and themes began to emerge.

### *Recordings*

As previously noted, the primary method of data collection included open-ended, semi-structured interview questions. In order to be able to focus on the necessary questions to pose, I digitally audio-recorded each of the interviews. This was done to ensure interview data accuracy. I began each interview explaining the purpose of the study and the objectives of the investigation. These documents also served to identify if the participants had participated in any special leadership programs, mentoring relationships, or other professional development programs.

### *Transcriptions*

As previously noted, entire interviews and conversations were audio recorded. Upon return from the field, I elicited the aid of a professional transcription service to transcribe the audio recordings into a verbatim, Microsoft Word document. After having all of the interviews transcribed, I had a few hundred pages of text that I needed to make meaning of. I read the transcriptions and listened simultaneously to the audio, making sure to edit any errors. Creswell (2009) explains by first reading through each transcription the researcher develops a "general sense" of the overall meaning.

Afterward, I emailed each participant the transcribed interview for her review, verification, and validation. Participants were also prompted to make any necessary changes and reply to additional follow-up questions. One participant wanted the notation of "um," the

sound used to indicate hesitation, to be removed from her transcription. The participants' review of their transcripts is a means of member checking, a qualitative technique used to establish the element of credibility in trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009).

### *Reflexive journaling*

Because researchers are urged to talk about themselves, “their presuppositions, choices, experiences, and actions during the research process,” reflective journaling is a widely accepted process in qualitative research (Ortlipp, 2008, p. 695). Accordingly, I kept a reflexive journal which was organized by date. Using a reflexive journal was invaluable in this study, as my journal served as a record of my evolving understanding of resilience and other themes that began to emerge in the study.

My reflexive journal notes consisted of my own comments, remarks, or observations taken during participant interviews and a subsequent review of documents for the purposes of efficient recall. I included annotations on the feelings they shared about their journey, misgivings about leadership challenges, and concerns about how their roles would impact students and peers. I also wrote about my feelings on the research study at an abstract level. The use of a reflective journal also aided in the data collection process by helping to formulate follow-up interview questions.

Again, the notes served as a collection method to provide as a culmination of my thoughts, perceptions, and biases during and after each of the interviews. However, a major revelation within my reflexive journal surrounded my assumptions about the level of scrutiny and the magnitude of resilience exhibited by the participants.

## **Data Analysis and Coding**

### *Narrative interview analysis*

The act of compiling, condensing, and selecting appropriate parts of their stories to include proved quite a challenge. How was I to best tell these seven stories? I feared that I would over-distill, oversimplify, and lose the grainy interesting bits that would ultimately paint realistic portraits of them. To begin the process, I reflected on Polkinghorne's (1995) logic in that there are two types of data analysis used within narrative inquiry: an analysis of narratives and narrative analysis. The analysis of narratives is based on Bruner's (1984) concept of paradigmatic reasoning, which identifies two ways of knowing or reasoning by identifying themes within each participant's story, as well as those common to all stories. Narrative analysis, the process of using narrative reasoning to attend to the meaning of experience, is based on Bruner's (1984) second way of knowing, narrative reasoning. Therefore, using the data collected from each story allows me to construct a narrative that fits the data while simultaneously bringing order and meaning that is not apparent in the data itself (Polkinghorne, 1995).

An analysis of narratives involves removing themes central to a single story, as well as one belonging to all the stories from the data and then using the narrator's own words to illustrate the theme (Polkinghorne, 1995). However, narrative analysis involves carefully reviewing the individual stories, as the units of analysis, and then writing a narrative that is based on the data gathered in that story. Polkinghorne (1995) insists that when used together, both methods provide a rich analysis of the stories research participants share during their interviews.

Accordingly, for this research, both an analysis of narratives and narrative analysis were employed. Merriam (2009) informs that in qualitative research, data analysis consists of

preparing and organizing text data for analysis and reducing the data into themes through a process of coding. Accordingly, to analyze the collected data, I initially completed an evaluation and review of all the information gathered during the research process. This included a review of the CVs, field and reflexive journal notes, as well as the interview transcripts.

### *Transcript review*

I began the formal analysis process with a review of the transcribed interviews. The second process of data analysis entailed me having an open mind and reading through the transcribed interviews multiple times so that I could uncover any emerging themes. Again, I read and re-read the transcripts to ensure I had an adequate meaning, understanding, and interpretation of the data. Creswell (2008) asserts that developing “hunches, insight, and intuition” are important elements of the interpretation process and thus may require multiple readings (p.174). This facilitated my ability to identify and compare themes, patterns, and experiences. I made notations on each of the transcripts as well as my field notes. I then coded the data as a means for discovering emerging themes as well as to self-reflect and reevaluate my own personal perspectives (Merriam, 2009). As stated in Creswell (2009):

Coding is the process of organizing the material into chunks or segments of text before bringing meaning to information. It involves taking text data or pictures gathered during data collection, segmenting sentences (or paragraphs) or images into categories, and labeling those categories with a term, often a term based in the actual language of the participant. (p. 186).

### *Transcript Coding*

All coding was completed by hand and was extremely time-consuming. I began my initial open coding<sup>16</sup> by individually analyzing each interview by sorting, shortening, and summarizing the data into descriptive initial codes. Open coding was completed by reading through each individual transcription and marking notes in the margins that correlate to what the participants shared as it related to their unique experiences at PWIs. Corbin and Strauss (2008) maintained that the process of reading through the text helps to look for “salient categories of information supported by the text” (p. 150). Throughout the coding process, I reviewed my own reflections and preconceived notions (as indicated in my journal) to ensure that the focus was on the research participants and not my own experiences. I completed several iterations of a line by line analysis of the transcripts and placed my initial thoughts in the right margin. Merriam (2009) states that “without ongoing analysis, the data can be unfocused, repetitious, and overwhelming in the sheer volume of material that needs to be processed” (p. 171).

I developed codes by a process of data reduction by noting significant statements of the participants. I manually highlighted and underlined reoccurring terms, phrases, or sentences in the transcript and field notes and coded my interpretations of the meaning of their experiences. Phrases such as, “*I found it challenging,*” “*I know that my race is the more salient,*” or “*I called him to the carpet*” became large subsections of recurrent themes that I categorized under larger headings such as “barriers and challenges,” “racism,” and “conflict

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<sup>16</sup> *Open-coding* is the “process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data (Strauss & Corbin, 2008, p. 61).



management.” Once prominent themes were established, I looked for connections or patterns between them. I formed categories based on what each participant indicated and my own established codes.

### *Coding Critical Events/Incidents*

Each coded critical incident included a theme, such as “commitment to family” or “desire to impact change,” the general timeframe for when the incident occurred, a description of the incident, the cause for the incident as stated by the informant, and the stated result or outcome of the incident. It is important to note that when the interview transcripts were analyzed, I had to rely on a degree of judgment when coding the critical incidents. More specifically, experiences described by the participants were always considered in the context of what other informants had described; yet, I found it unavoidable to draw some basic, causal inferences. While the participants initially named some critical incidents that informed their leadership journeys, as they told their stories, I also picked up on other critical incidents that seemed incredibly salient. Thus, I used my positionality as researcher to include those incidents or events that they seemed to emphasize as additional critical incidents in my analysis.

### *Written representation*

My third and final step in analyzing data is the writing of the final report. Writing the report was central to interpreting and summarizing the massive amount of complex data collected (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). When writing the research findings, I focused on using solely the narratives shared by each participant as the basis of the findings. I divided and reconstructed the interview data collected from the seven participants, using their stories to identify themes across the data set. Ultimately, all data sources amassed during this research

process, including reflexive journal notes, and CV document analysis were used to fully convey the participants' experience. Additionally, elements of BFT and CRT served as an interpretative lens to frame and explain the experiences and perspectives of the seven Black women leaders at PWIs.

### **Trustworthiness**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) posit that the trustworthiness of a research study is important when evaluating its worth. According to Creswell (2008) trustworthiness represents strength in narrative research. This strength is presented in the form of trustworthiness and plausibility of the collected data from observations and interviews (Mertova & Webster, 2007). A trustworthy study involves multiple strategies involving the researcher and study participants that ensure the authenticity of the study.

One means for ensuring the trustworthiness of this research was carefully describing the research procedures and the specific steps undertaken to obtain the data, thereby ensuring that the procedures are coherent and visible. Corbin and Strauss (2008) confirm that selecting a sample size with no more than 20 participants enhances the validity of the study. Thus, the number of participants involved in this research, seven, enhances the trustworthiness of the study. Various additional strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research include defining one's own subjectivity and positionality, credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and reflexivity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Credibility, the ability to display findings the way participants intended it to be shown and which has also been noted to be one of the most important factors in establishing trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), was established through member checking of transcripts. Transferability, the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be

transferred to other contexts or settings with other respondents (Merriam, 2009), was established through including thick description and purposeful sampling. Beaudry and Miller (2016) inform that the use of thick description and purposeful sampling makes it likely that a reader with an interest in the feminist, racial, and gendered aspect of academia would find this study trustworthy and transferable. The notion of the stability of findings over time (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), was demonstrated via the audit trail. Finally, I also demonstrated reflexivity through journaling.

### *Subjectivity and positionality*

Foote and Bartell (2011) explain that understanding positionality is crucial to understanding the subjectivity of researchers. Subjectivity refers to the life experiences that researchers have had as well as the social, cultural, and political factors that influence an individual and how those experiences and factors contribute to biases and assumptions in the research (Foote & Bartell, 2011).

Positionality is a term used to describe how people are defined by their location within ever-changing networks of relationships (Foote & Bartell, 2011). Therefore, as a Black woman working in higher education, I acknowledge that I share in some of the experiences and perspectives brought to light through this study. For example, like all participants in this study, I've had my authority and intellect challenged when assuming a leadership role on various teams and committees. I too have had experiences wherein my thoughts and ideas have been summarily dismissed when working in large groups, only to have them celebrated as brilliant alternatives to the status quo when a White colleague presented them.

I also acknowledge that my subjectivity came with assumptions and preconceptions

tied to race, gender, class, and social politics. These assumptions and preconceptions were a part of my subjectivity, as according to Creswell (2013), as researchers we each bring subjectivity to our research. Often our subjectivity is unconscious; however, Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose that every researcher examine his or her own subjectivity. While it is impossible for me to cast away my own subjectivity, I managed my bias by viewing myself as a learner and the participants as the experts, given that the participants have the most knowledge about their experiences and practices (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### *Member checking*

Credibility in qualitative research is the equivalent of internal validity in quantitative studies; thus, Lincoln and Guba (1985) allow that credibility is concerned with the aspect of truth-value. As such, member checking was utilized to “not only a test for factual and interpretative accuracy but also to provide evidence of credibility” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 373). Member checking occurs when data, interpretation, and conclusions are tested with members of those groups from whom the data were originally obtained (Merriam, 2009). Clandinin and Connelly (2002) support this thought by emphasizing that the process of member checking is to take the initial data analysis back to participants and ask whether the interpretation is deemed acceptable by the informant.

To strengthen the data collection and analysis, I used member checking at several points in the study. First, during interviews, I described my use of CVs as the basis for constructing the narratives. Participants were asked to confirm or comment on the relevance of the documents. I also inquired about any limitations that might be present in trying to draw conclusions from the use of their CVs.

After each interview, I enlisted the help of a professional service to transcribe verbatim each session. All participants received an emailed copy of their transcriptions to ensure what they shared was accurately transcribed. Participants were asked whether the recording was still an accurate reflection of their lived experiences. Participants were also given the opportunity to expand and clarify, and one did. As previously noted, the participant wanted the notation of “*um*,” the sound used to indicate hesitation, to be removed from her transcription. This process often deepened their recollections and was done in order to maintain the true essence of the data and establish credibility.

#### *Transferability through thick description*

Rubin and Rubin (2012) inform that researchers can facilitate transferability through thick description. Thick description involves not only describing participants’ behavior and experiences but also their context as well, “so that the behavior and experiences become meaningful to an outsider” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 38). Erlandson, Harris, Skipper & Allen (1994) highlight the critical nature of thick description by establishing:

Because transferability in qualitative studies depends on similarities between sending and receiving contacts, the researcher collects sufficiently detailed descriptions of the data in context and reports them with sufficient detail and precision to allow judgments about transferability. Effective thick description brings the reader vicariously into the context being described. By description of specific sights, sounds, and relationships, the scene created in the reader’s mind may be remarkably close to that which would be gained by direct experience. Often, we have found that an individual whose first encounter

with a setting is through an effective thick description [which provides the reader] with a sense of déjà vu upon actually visiting the setting (p. 33).

### *Dependability through the audit trail*

This research utilized an audit trail as an additional method of data collection, as it ensured consistency and dependability in this qualitative study (Merriam, 2009). An audit trail is a transparent description of the research steps taken from the start of a research project to the final stages of development and reporting of findings and is often used for establishing the trustworthiness in qualitative inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As stated by Lincoln and Guba (1985), an audit trail assists readers with the actual accounts of the study and the researcher's thoughts and comments. The incorporation of the audit trail serves three purposes: (1) as documentation of all research activities, (2) track of data collection process, and (3) explanations on why certain data analysis procedures were used (Creswell, 2013). As Merriam stated (2016), "an audit trail in a qualitative study describes in detail how data were collected, how categories were derived, and how decisions were made throughout the inquiry" (p. 223).

### **Limitations**

There were several limitations associated with this study. The first limitation is the constrained sample size for participants. Because all participants are limited to Black senior-level female leaders at PWIs in one higher education system, the data collected reflects only those women who are currently holding these positions. This is deemed a limitation, as it may not be representative of other Black females who have held these positions but have either retired, moved on to other systems, or left the field of higher education. However, in qualitative research, large numbers are not needed to secure generalizability, as meaningful

transferability can occur without a large number of participants (Merriam, 2009). An additional limitation is the potential for bias, or any tendency which prevents unprejudiced consideration of a question (Berger, 2015). Creswell (2008) inform that because qualitative research relies on the skill of human perception, the research will be influenced by one's own human lens and human bias.

Because of these limitations, I focused on collecting thick and rich descriptive narrative data from the participants, which in turn, facilitated my ability to gain more knowledge about Black females in senior-level academic leadership positions (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). According to Creswell (2013), thick and rich descriptions are deep, dense, and detailed accounts of the experiences of the participants that stay as close to their stories and lived experiences as possible. Collecting thick and rich descriptive narrative data also serves as a form of credibility in the study.

### **Ethical Considerations**

I took several steps to ensure the protection of the participants by embracing the core aspect of what Mills and Birks (2017) expressed as “doing no harm” in research. I began the participant recruitment process with the approval from Appalachian State University's Office of Research Protections by completing all required Institutional Review Board (IRB) training, applications, and forms. When human participants are engaged, each study participant must receive an informational letter via email explaining the purpose of the study and how the study would be used. Once participants agreed to participate in the study, I sent each of them the informed consent form to complete and electronically return to me. To acquire final approval and to confirm participation, each participant received a copy of her signed informed consent form based on the standards of the Institutional Review Board

(IRB). I followed all protocol and required guidelines as outlined by the IRB to ensure the protection of human subjects.

### *Confidentiality*

Each of the participants in this study took great risks when sharing their personal stories and trusting me to document the accounts in a way that neither exaggerated nor diminished their meaning and intent. Thus, I felt compelled to actively honor and value the essential contribution made by the participants while simultaneously providing them with a sense of anonymity. Therefore, to maintain the participants' institutional confidentiality, I created pseudonyms for all respective universities. Also, for confidentiality purposes, each participant self-selected a pseudonym as a part of the consent process. These pseudonyms were used for the remainder of the research process. Additionally, participants themselves were identified in the transcripts using only their self-selected pseudonyms. To further ensure the protection of participants, all recordings and transcriptions were stored at two locations: (1) my password-protected personal computer and (2) a password-protected data storage system, which remained locked in a personal filing cabinet when not in use. Again, all methods of document protection are denoted in the IRB guidelines.

### **Summary**

This chapter included an explanation and a justification of the research methodology and design used for this qualitative study. The dearth of Black female senior-level leaders at PWIs continues to be an issue for higher education, as some describe the needs of African American women in higher education and in leadership ranks as a collective, national problem (Crawley, 2006; Ross, 2016). There are seven participants for this study who served at various institutions within the SRUS. Because this topic and the research questions hold



both a personal and societal meaning, the CENI research method was the ideal choice for this study, as it an excellent means to provide insight into the leaders' perceptions of their experiences while ascending to their leadership.

The data were collected by in-depth, semi-structured interviews using pre-formulated questions as a guide. This chapter also includes information related to the interview process based on the research questions. Also included is an explanation of the participant selection, the study's criteria, and the data collection and analysis process. Individual narratives were constructed to represent major common themes. This study attempted to ensure accuracy and trustworthiness throughout by fulfilling the criteria for trustworthiness, dependability, and transferability.

## **Chapter 4: Findings**

This qualitative study was conducted to explore the experiences of Black women serving in senior-level leadership positions at historically white institutions in the Southern Regional University System. The results of this chapter offer the narratives of seven of these women. Each spoke to her perceptions of her career development and advancement experiences while ascending to senior-level leadership positions. These stories are fraught with barriers of inequity they faced and their strengths in pursuing their passions and commitments.

It is clear from these rich and nuanced counternarratives that oppression, racial, and gender bias are prevalent themes that capture the multiple experiences of these leaders. Issues such as negative stereotypes, disregard, disrespect, and demeaning attitudes and behaviors factor greatly into their leadership journey and continue to be contributing factors for undermining their leadership. Even more, the lack of access to Black female mentors continues to be a common cause for concern for some leaders. It is believed that positive mentoring relationships can be especially beneficial to women of Color in higher education, as these mutually beneficial associations can help individuals cope with micro-aggressions, increase positive self-identity and efficacy, and contest oppression and negative stereotypes (Holmes, Land, & Hinton-Hudson, 2007; Ruff, 2013).

The retelling of these stories is designed to illuminate what it looks and feels like to be a senior-level Black female leader at a PWI in the southeast region of the U.S. The data collected for this research resulted from the review of over 170 pages of personal C.V.s, field notes, and many hours of recorded interviews.

The questions guiding the research are:

- (1) How have race, gender, and culture influenced Black women's journeys toward obtaining a senior leadership position at a Predominantly White Institution?
- (2) What are the leadership experiences of Black, female, senior-level leaders at predominantly White institutions within the Southern Regional University System?
- (3) What are the challenges, barriers, and experiences confronting Black women in senior leadership positions in higher education at these predominantly White institutions?
- (4) What are the strengths and strategies employed by these leaders when confronting these challenges?

All stories are written in first-person narrative format, as this perspective facilitates an honesty that makes every story more relatable while giving each participant her own distinct voice. The use of first-person narrative immediately puts the reader inside the narrator's head, which allows for an intimate portrayal of their thoughts and emotions (Wren, 2012). Yosso (2005) informs that the use of first-person narrative in CRT research allows for a critical understanding, analysis, and teaching about racial subordination. The practice of using first-person narratives also aligns with BFT, as storytelling is deeply rooted in African American culture (Delgado, 1989; Wren, 2012).

## **Their Stories/Their Voices**

### **Dr. Pearlie Battle**

Born in a small town in the rural South, Dr. Pearlie Battle is a first-generation college student. Her mother and father earned their living as farmers and reared her in an environment where the importance of hard work was always underscored. She credits her parents with helping to fuel the success of each of their eight children by stressing the importance of higher education attainment. Though her parents were not formally educated, Dr. Battle notes that they were well-respected and considered pillars of the community. For more than 25 years, Dr. Battle has served in a senior-level administrative position at BSU.

#### ***Born to Lead***

*My parents were very influential and active in our local community. They were very impactful in many people's lives. Even as small children, we [my siblings and I] were taught to serve others. They instilled in me the desire to lead and serve. They led by example and taught me what it meant to be a servant leader. My parents also emphasized the importance of giving back even when it was not convenient. My upbringing taught me the value of love, responsibility, and perseverance, but also enabled me to understand that working in education was a wonderful vehicle for honoring one of my core values of helping others.*

*I love academia, and education has always been chief for me. I knew I wanted to be in education and I actually went and got a degree in education. I knew I wanted to teach and work with students and young people. My goal with starting out was not to work in higher education. I originally taught and was an assistant principal at a middle school. Then, I eventually got my master's in counseling. I then came back to my hometown and began working at IU's medical school. Once I got to the medical school, I realized that I liked*

*higher education. I also realized that I liked the idea of administration. Working in administration gave me the opportunity to work hands-on with students but also to make administrative decisions.*

*I began my journey as a leader while working with the minority students at IU's medical school. So [the problem was] every year you could expect to get 11 students, 13 at the most, of underrepresented minorities [in the medical program] and that was typically Black folk or Native Americans. We had those numbers; however, the students were not successful academically or doing well in the coursework. This meant that they weren't progressing from year to year. This also meant that they were not passing the licensure exam. Imagine going through four or five years of medical school and not get a license. So, you had incurred this debt, but now you've haven't completed your M.D. For any student, this could be devastating, but, for a Black student, this is life-altering. You can't do anything with that. My thinking was how do we make sure that we take care of the ones we do have and get them to be successful and at the same time?*

*Thinking back on things, I know this to be a critical point in my career, because it was then I understood that many of the minority medical students during this period were first-generation college attendees. More importantly, a great majority of these students were products of families where many members had never even obtained high school diplomas. Many of the minority students had low GPAs [Grade Point Average] and low standardized scores on the MCAT<sup>17</sup>. Yet, there was no help for them. So, you're already setting them up for failure. My goal was to turn that around. And for those students that we brought in, I was*

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<sup>17</sup> MCAT is the acronym for the Medical College Admissions Test, a computer-based standardized examination for prospective medical students (McGaghie, 2002).

*determined to get them to be successful. Once I proved that they could be successful, then I could start recruiting even more minority students.*

*To turn things around for these students, I decided that we were going to take a more holistic approach on how we recruit and how we admit and then create a program that's beneficial for all students, but particularly [beneficial] for students of Color. We designed programs and support systems. So, even if they would come in with low academic credentials, we put something in place here at the school that helped them to be successful. We were able to put something successful in place that was tremendous. We saw good results from that process and there were excellent results even from the very first class. Then, of course the school wants to take credit for this and sort of beat their chests. Then they began funneling money into the program. But then the medical school's executive leadership team also took notice and offered me the leadership role in directing this student success program.*

*At the time, the landscape of the medical school's leadership team was predominantly middle-age, White men. And there I was, a very young, Black woman in my late twenties. I knew that there typically and historically had been no Black people in this setting. And now I was at the table.*

*Once I joined the leadership team of medical school, I realized that I was helping to impact decision-making. I realized that I actually could have an immediate impact on students and that it could go a long way, I knew that I had some influence. And, more importantly, I was helping particularly with the Black medical students. My focus then became recruiting more minority students and getting those students to be competitive and better able to be successful academically at the medical school. Now, not only was I was recruiting and getting more of them [Blacks] into the school, we were getting them graduated*

*and licensed. This is important because that was not happening before, and I focused on that. I quickly also realized I wanted to continue doing this. I did not have a name for what this was until the Chancellor gave it a name. He said, 'You've got great leadership.' I was like, oh, [this is] 'leadership.' And so that part helped me to understand being a leader.*

*It was an honor and privilege to garner the respect of the executive administrative team; however, moving into a leadership role presented many challenges. I was thankful for having an opportunity to align my skills and interests with my goals of impacting student lives. I also became aware that being a member of the leadership team was an education unto itself.*

*What I mean is that sitting at the Big Table and being a part of the executive cabinet for the university was eye-opening. Eye-opening! I was able to see how the decisions were being made. I got to see them [mostly White males] do all kinds of things that were quite interesting, and I remember saying to someone, if you guys can do this to each other, I can only imagine what you do to people who look like me. So, again, this was an eye-opening experience and made me realize that I didn't want to be absent. I did want and needed to be at the table because if I was there, I could have a bigger impact.*

### ***Negotiating the Intersection of Race and Gender***

*I think that earlier on in my career, gender was probably the most salient one of the two issues. Yes, I'm sure that gender was more salient because this was a very male-dominated environment. I think as I have advanced, race flip-flopped and became more salient. I think it was because, whether real or perceived, there were these expectations of what I was supposed to be as a Black person, not even a Black woman, but what I was as a Black person. Remember, oftentimes I was being called into conversations that were related*

*to race because of that. I mean again, I was speaking for all Black people. It's a tremendous responsibility having to be accountable for your entire race!*

*During the period when I was serving at the medical school particularly, I think I was in denial about the impact of race and gender. I don't know if my identities were as well shaped or that I was aware of those identities, particularly my gender identity. The racial identity was somewhat there but I'm not quite sure about the gender identity. So, it took two things to happen for me to wake me up. One was what a wonderful friend, Dr. Blakley [a pseudonym], a White, middle-aged male M.D., told me one day after multiple meetings that I'd had with this group. He pulled me to the side and asked me why did I continue to allow 'them' [my White male colleagues] to treat me this way? And, as I am in the stage of denial [I] said, 'What are you're talking about? Treating me, like what? What do you mean?' And he says, 'You know they are, and you are letting them basically minimize the value you are bringing to the table. You come to us and you bring this, or you say that, and we tell you no. And then somebody else states it again and the answer is yes. Why do you keep letting that happen?' And I was like, oh my gosh, I didn't know. Again, that was my own denial.*

*I am also cognizant of race when I think about the notion of the colorblind society, because you know this whole notion of being colorblind makes no sense. Someone recently said to me, 'Well, you know, I don't see you like that [as a Black woman].' I said [to him] if you don't see me as a Black woman then something is wrong because that is who I am and that is who I will continue to be. And I'm okay that you see me like that. That kind of mentality raises red flags with me because honestly, when they are saying those types of things it is straight up B.S. I'd rather for someone to say to me, 'Hey Black woman, you get on my last nerves.' I can respect that because then I know where I stand.*



## ***Navigating the Essence of Patriarchy***

*After Dr. Blakley pointed out that my ideas were being disregarded by my White male colleagues, I paid attention at the next meeting. Sure enough, I say something, they knock it down. Somebody else says it: they love it. But that time, Dr. Blakley called them on the carpet. Yes, he called those men on the carpet and it woke me up tremendously to see them backtrack.*

*After this incident, I thought about Dr. Blakley and those men and wondered if when they conceded, they were thinking, let us help this little Black girl. But instead of being offended by it, I flipped the switch. I thought, if that's going to make you feel good, then I'm going to let you feel good and at the same time, give me the information I want. I'm going to get as much from you as I can. It's a win-win because you're going to be happy because you've helped a little Black girl. And I'll be happy too because I got the information I needed, and I can use to carry on. I realized that if I figured out how to navigate the system, I could also learn to deal with having people be pretty patriarchal and learn how to do it in a way that did not put me at the end of the stereotype that I was fighting.*

*These types of experiences not only afforded me the opportunity to grow as a leader, but also helped me to better understand the necessity of optimizing human resources and the importance of cultivating lasting work relationships. I spoke about 'flipping the switch' earlier, and there was a wonderful professor who helped me learn to do that. It was during this time I decided to go back to school and get a Ph.D. While I was in school, this White female professor changed me in ways that I don't think she even realized. She compelled me to take ownership of my own identities. Her advice helped me in class and helped me to navigate working at a PWI. I learned how to take ownership of my own identities and then*

*use those identities to my advantage. It was her [positive influence] and [the negative experience with] those men who doubted me who helped me get stronger.*

### ***Leading While Black***

*My roles at IU taught me what it truly means to lead as a Black woman. They've helped me to become more aware of myself and my own leadership development. Being a Black woman at the head is not easy. After working with these men, I continued to progress; I got stronger and felt more empowered. I also got comfortable with this notion of calling people out. I believed in myself and I began calling a spade a spade. And I was not doing it in a way that was offensive. So, when someone would make, let's say, a comment that I thought was inappropriate or offensive, and it takes a lot to offend me, I would call it out. But, I did it in a way that was more educational than shaming or blaming. That helped them, and it helped me. And without me realizing it, it put me in place with folks where they would come to me and asked me about stuff. They would ask how to go about doing this or that. They would ask, should I do it this way, or should I do it that way? This was particularly true when there were issues dealing with diverse populations. And so unknowingly, I became the go-to person.*

*Interestingly enough, it was also during these times that I also became more aware of the fact that I was often the token. It was clear that I was involved in some conversations because they needed a Black person's voice, a woman's voice. I knew there were many times that was the case and it was the only reason for me being involved. I also knew that I had to learn to use this to my advantage. There were times when I said to myself that this is my chance to be a part of a win-win. I was fortunate in that I could often provide insight on a project or plan that had far reaching implications on minority students. It was also important*

*for me to say [in the groups], 'I know why I'm here' and I got comfortable saying that to people. They needed to hear it and I wanted them to know that I knew. In those instances, I've had people ask me, don't you get tired of being used? But I'm not being used. I know what my purpose is, and I'd rather be at the table and have a voice than to have no one there at all with a voice for 'us' [ethnic minorities].*

### ***Unequal Paths***

*I'm convinced that my path to leadership is quite different that my counterparts. Unfortunately, lots of White women, but not all White women, are individuals who I don't want to mess with. Honestly, I really don't want to mess them because there is a large group of them who really believe that they are the most special people in the world. They must have everything their way. And at this point, I'm very jaded, because if I had my choice, I'd choose to deal with the White male versus the White female.*

*Even though the research does show it, many White females don't want to accept that they've benefited the most from this whole affirmative action thing. But again, they don't want to accept that. Many of them do believe that they have earned everything they've gotten, but [they believe] the reason I'm here is because I fit this mold. So, my conversations with them are much more cutthroat because no one gave me a thing. I didn't get anything because you liked me. I had to earn every piece of it. But some of that crap you have, you didn't earn it!*

### ***The Profound Nature of Racism***

*At several points in my career I've experience blatant racism. There's always going to be this person who doesn't want to have a woman, particularly a Black woman, being their supervisor, their boss, or telling them what to do in any way, shape or form. I have board members right now who don't like me, and I know they don't. [I asked Dr. Battle if she*

thought that this dislike was because of any particular reason]. *I think it's multiple reasons. I think race is part of it. I also think gender is part of it. I've encountered those with the 'who do you think you are' attitudes. I've heard them say, 'You have some nerve you such and such, or you expletive Black woman.'* Yet, they accused me, or at least one of them [a White male], has accused me of being racist because of decisions I've made.

*Yes, I've been accused of making decisions that hurt Whites, particularly decisions that I've made pertaining to White fraternities. They've stated that I'm going after all the White fraternities but insist that I'm not messing with any of the Black folk. They say that I'm not messing with the Black fraternities and sororities, yet I have two Black sororities and one Black fraternity that are currently suspended from this campus. But that doesn't count. They don't see that because they don't want to see it. Yet still, I'm called a racist. But I had to put it into perspective because this is the man who really does not want a Black woman, especially a Black woman who has any sense of competence in a position of authority. Especially if the Black woman doesn't cower down to him. I know this to be true because there is one [Black female] who cowers down to him and he loves her to death. So, with this person particularly, if you bow down and play some of those traditional roles, you're accepted.*

*Then, there are also those individuals who believe that they can say anything they want to say and that I'm going to be okay with them doing so because we happen to have a good relationship. For example, some believe that they can say or make racial, gendered, or LGBT jokes. I'm sure they make those jokes all the time, but you can't make those offensive jokes around me because I'm going to call you on the carpet with them!*

## ***Staring Down Stereotypes***

*During my career, I've dealt with various stereotypes. I know how they [Whites] think. You know, you try hard not to be the 'angry Black woman.' But I can remember times and specific situations where I've talked it over with my husband and we agreed that I needed to walk into the office and let them know that I'm an angry Black woman. We've had this conversation about the fact that sometimes it's okay, it's cool to be her. Recently, in a meeting one of my direct reports said something about being late. He was making this joke and he said, you know Pearl, you are late sometimes. Everyone in the room exploded in laughter. It was fine and everyone laughed. It would have been fine, but he kept going on and on; he wouldn't stop. This went on for a few minutes. Then I said, you know what, this is enough; you have crossed the boundaries because now you're trying to stereotype me. Everybody sitting around the room became quiet. Honestly, a hush fell over the room. For the remainder of the meeting, I watched him try to backtrack, backtrack, backtrack. He was brown nosing to the point that the rest of his colleagues around the table were like, you can stop now.*

*So that also goes back to me feeling comfortable enough to calling people on the carpet for inappropriate behavior. You have to make people accountable for what they do. I also found that when someone exhibits questionable behavior, I get clarification. I'll say things like, what do you mean by that? What were you saying? I tend to just to ask them those clarifying questions, because that's calling them on the carpet without having that right there in your face kind of thing. Particularly in this day and age, people have to be called on the carpet, because we're in a crazy space in time in this country.*

## ***Finding Solace***

*For the most part, most people have been accepting. Even with the negative instances, I don't have a lot of the horror stories that others [minority women] have had. The reason partly is because of the relationships I've built. It's also helpful that I'm local. I'm a native. So, I've had a support system. One of them is my family, and I've developed some relationships with a lot of people who look like me and don't look like me who have lots of influence and power. So those persons have also been a strong support system for me.*

*The other thing that I've started doing more recently, because we don't do this enough particularly as Black women, is support myself and taking credit for my accomplishments. As Black women, we don't take our place. I'm good at what I do, and I've only recently started saying that aloud. I'm effective, so you've got to have a good reason to mess with me.*

*But please know that even with all of this, I've had a great experience here at this institution. And even with the bumps and the bruises, it's been worth it. My experiences here at this institution have helped me truly learn how to navigate the political landscape and various situations. I've learned a lot about myself. I know how by nature I'm a nurturer, and I nurtured these relationships and these friendships. Then I learned how to use those friendships and those relationships to help get things done. I've also learned that I'm a good confidence builder and I like being able to influence change, specifically policy change that could have a widespread impact. That was huge for me because I wanted to try to make sure that I was always in some of those types of roles. Once I came into my own identity, it was empowering!*

## **Dr. Delta Riley**

Dr. Delta Riley was born on the West Coast but moved to the deep South as a teenager. She is the third child in a family of four and is the only female. She was reared in a traditional, two-parent, loving Christian home where high moral principles dominated their existence. Her parents taught her the importance of loving God, working hard, the importance of family, and to honor and serve others. Dr. Riley has always viewed her mother as a woman of great moral superiority, and her father as a well-respected man of faith and solid judgment, whose advice was regularly sought by other African Americans in their community. She credits her parents for instilling into her the ideal that every man should be judged by his deeds and not their color.

Dr. Riley currently serves as a senior-level administrator at a large PWI in the SRUS. Among her many duties, Dr. Riley is also directly responsible for oversight, planning, and the implementation of initiatives that foster professional development and skills enhancement among her faculty and staff of more than 20 individuals.

### ***Traditional Beginnings***

*I came of age in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and my household was extremely traditional. I grew up in a somewhat strict but loving environment. My father was the leader of the household and often it seems as if there was a male-dominated pecking order. My mother was the consummate homemaker who only worked seasonally, in part-time retail sales positions. My father was the breadwinner and earned his living as a government worker. Because he had taken various positions over the years, our family was required to relocate several times during my youth and into my adolescence. Because he [Dr. Riley's father] earned most of the family's wages, he made most of the rules. And, it was rare that anyone stepped outside those rules. If there was ever a debate about anything in the house,*

*even down to what toilet paper should be bought, my father's opinion was what cemented the family's decision.*

*Throughout my childhood, it was not only anticipated but expected that I obtain a college degree. Both of my parents spoke constantly about their benefits in higher education. Back then, the choices [for my siblings and me] were either to get a job, go away to college, or join the military. Each of my brothers chose to do the latter, but the Gulf War was brewing, and I knew combat wasn't for me.*

*My parents fueled the fire for me to complete my degree because they seemed to look to all the people we knew with degrees as being in a different echelon. Along with their love for God, those were the people that they seemed to revere. So, after high school, I went on to college and was the first in my immediate family to earn a college degree. I remember that hot day in May because my parents were so proud when I graduated. I received a bachelor's degree in Political Science but was unsure at the time if I was going to go to law school or work in public service or politics. Because I didn't know what I was really going to do, I went to grad school [at large, public, PWI in the Midwest]. During my master's program, I completed an internship at a local community college and liked it. I decided that I really wanted to teach at the collegiate level and began to pursue my doctorate.*

### ***Taking the Reins***

*Honestly, working in administration was never my plan. I really wanted to teach or work with graduate researchers because I liked having the constant interaction with students. I never wanted to be an administrator. But, when I was completing my doctoral work, an opportunity came about for me to work on a research project related to the social determinants of minority students in higher education. A lot of the focus was on the personal,*



*economic, social, and environmental factors that greatly influence college enrollment and degree completion. It was then I knew that not only did I want to work full-time in academia, but I also wanted to be someone who helped to foster and facilitate a more family-oriented, caring environment for the students.*

*I had seen research informing that the nurturing of some students, especially those who were first-generation college attendees, was not only needed but required if they were going to have sustainable success. The research was also showing that students need to know they will have an advocate during this [degree attainment] process. That resonated with me because I never felt as though anyone at any of my institutions ever really cared about me, my goals, my success, or even if I finished. I'm not sure if it is because the schools were so large and had so many students, or if it was because I was one of only a few Black fish swimming in a large, White pond and it didn't matter to them [the administration] whether I did [finish] or not. That's why I truly believe letting students know you care is key. Honestly, I'm convinced that caring faculty understands, encourages, and supports a student's individuality and is sensitive to their needs, and these qualities are especially essential when dealing with first-generation and minority students. I wanted to help create those types of environments for students. I didn't know what this would entail, but I knew I wanted to try to bring about some change.*

*I think my preparation for leadership was nurtured with my participation in various social and professional networks. You know, my sorority put me in contact with people with Toastmasters and other community organizations. Then, several church groups also helped me to understand the power of giving back, bringing up, and preparing the next generation.*

*These systems, these organizations, these relationships, helped connect me with people and helped prepare me for working in administration.*

*My grandmother always said, 'God puts the right people in your path at just the right times.' She was right, because in hindsight, I realize that receiving my doctorate and participating in leadership roles in the community was important with my transition into leadership. But I also have to give a lot of that credit to Dr. Clay [a pseudonym]. Dr. Clay was an older, white male who was the Provost when I worked with at a liberal arts college in the Northeast. He was the person who forced me to begin considering leadership. Whenever there were specialized training sessions or seminars, he would urge me to participate. If the senior leadership was giving an update, he would make it his business to drag me along. So, when our department chair left the university unexpectedly, he said, 'Delta, you are perfect for that role. You're smart, organized, likable, but direct. Now is the time for you to step up to the plate.' This was the first time that I realized that others saw me as a leader.*

### ***Critical Sacrifices***

*While I am very proud of my success, I can say that this journey has not come about without me having made many personal sacrifices. You know, I've sacrificed spending time with family, travel, which is something that I love to do, and generally doing things for myself. In retrospect, when I think about crucial happenings in my life, my critical event was deciding to put myself and my own dreams first. At the time, my first husband was also in education and we had already moved several times for his career. You know, it seems that no matter what I was doing or how well my job was going, I was always willing to pick up stakes and move to wherever his next role landed us. But, some years ago, a search firm contacted me about a senior-level role at a large, well-known research institution in the*

*South. We both were aware of its [the institution's] enormous reputation in the academic community and agreed that I should take the interview. You know, things [with the interview] went really well, but neither of us thought I'd be offered the role. Low and behold, after more than a month of waiting, I got a call and an offer. But, after I landed the role and he [Dr. Riley's husband] realized that among other things, my income would be higher than his, he then started questioning our moving and what he deemed to be a 'non-progressive area' for Blacks. After that, things just seemed to fall apart for us. While it [going through the divorce] was devastating personally for me at the time, I learned that I'd made the best professional decision. I loved being in a position to make changes for the program and I was right for that administrative role. That job was perfect for me and I learned so much there. I was able to model several initiatives that had huge, positive impacts on the campus. I'm still proud of many of the changes that I helped to design and plan there. I often chuckle and flatter myself, thinking of myself as a true minority pioneer.*

### ***Intersecting Power Systems***

*I believe that both my gender and my race have been very important in my career. When I think about the premise and the term 'interlocking and permanent nature of oppression,' I know that nothing can be truer. There are so many issues that come with being one of only a few Black faculty and leaders on campus. I know that I'm constantly being prejudged by especially my race. I think for me issues of race are more problematic than those of gender or even culture. I say that because I've worked at this level for more than a decade now and I know that my race is seen, noted, and discussed before I even enter the room. A prime example: I have a colleague who I adore but she is at least 10 years older than I am and has even shared with me that she has New Guinean ancestry. What that means*

*is she is dark-skinned and has straight hair. I, on the other hand, have a grandmother who is Caucasian with Irish roots. So, my complexion is a deep caramel color and I tend to wear my hair natural or curly. Her personality is bubbly and outgoing, and I'm often described as reserved or subdued. But, on several occasions, I have been mistaken for her and her for me. It's ridiculous! It is in those moments I'm reminded that my race and ethnicity enter into any room before I do. Now, do I think that this treatment is always intentional? No. But the result was that we both left these encounters feeling like we were on the outside and that we weren't really seen for who we are.*

*Again, the pervasiveness of race and gender has a huge impact on the way I think and even on how I manage. I know for a fact that gender and even my race has impacted my ability to move into certain roles. Years ago, I was working at a small, liberal arts college and there was an internal posting for a newly created position. I'd spoken with the department head and found out the candidate was going to be working with military programs and would have some responsibility with creating, designing, and implementing new curriculum. I had all the qualifications; after all, my father's job with the government supported the military. I'd lived on countless Army, Navy and Air Force bases throughout my life. My three brothers were all lifetime military servants. In an earlier life, while working at a small, liberal arts college, I worked with and helped develop curriculum for a military program. Because I knew I was a strong candidate, I applied and did well with the interview. Still, I did not get the appointment. I later found out that the Dean of the department supported another [less qualified] candidate because he felt that a White male would be better suited for the position. He presumed that most of the military contacts would*

*themselves be White, conservative males. He told another colleague, ‘Those GIs<sup>18</sup> probably wouldn’t play well with an educated Black woman as the head of a program like this.’*

*I know that both my race and gender have impacted my ability to earn equal pay or even comparable in some instances versus White males, females, and even Black males; I’m not I. I believe that gender plays an expansive role in the way leaders are groomed and developed. Men are typically looked at first to lead. Our education system in general bolsters gender disparity and it is very problematic in higher education. This disparity is not only concerning for opportunities and resources but also with compensation and rewards. I know of numerous instances where less experienced, less qualified men are paid more, are given more opportunities at training and leadership initiatives than women. What’s even scarier is that we [women] often have to try to achieve a successful career at the cost of our family life.*

### ***One is the Only Other Company***

*A major challenge [for women of Color in academia] in my view is the sheer lack of diversity in senior administration. The numbers are especially disproportionate at numerous White universities. But the sad part is I have peers located within institutions all around the country and honestly, their stories are the same. They all say minorities, specifically African American females, are underrepresented in senior leadership positions on their campuses too. So, this isn’t just an SRUS problem, it’s problematic all over the United States. Here on this campus, it’s appalling that I can count and even name each of the minority leaders on this campus, and many of whom are Asian or Indian males. Then, I go to conferences and look across the aisles at my system-wide, female peers and see first-hand how Black females*

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<sup>18</sup> *GI* is a military term that is an abbreviation for “government issue” or “general issue,” a term often used to describe a member of the U.S. armed forces (Quick, 1973).

*at the helm are extremely scarce. Our [Black women's] leadership status in the system is critically underrepresented. It's a huge source of frustration because our leadership numbers don't align with our enrollment numbers.*

*Because there are so few Black women serving in leadership positions in the SRUS, we don't have peer mentors, and it is a major barrier for Black women wanting to rise to the next level. Another barrier for many Black women here [in the SRUS] and in higher education in general, there is a lack of sufficient opportunities for those who seek upward mobility to the ranks of administration. Where are the training opportunities for us? Who's going to develop us? How can we ever become leaders if there aren't enough leaders and mentors who look like us?*

*I will be the first one to admit that my journey into administration has been one marked with hard work and also a direct result of God's favor. When I started in that first role it was tough because I knew that my all-White peer group could never understand where I had come from or what my goals were. I honestly wanted to do something good that helped students who had traveled my same path. You know, during my entire time getting the education, it was tough. I was always in situations where I was the ONLY woman, the ONLY minority, and seemingly the ONLY one from humble beginnings. Really, my family was working-class, and we were definitely not privileged. I always did my best [at school] when I surrounded myself with honest and supportive people. This is really why I joined a sorority in college. I needed to be with people who looked like me and felt the same pressure to succeed that I was feeling.*

*When I accepted that first leadership role, I was shocked and disappointed with the lack of support. At the time, I was the only Black faculty member in the department, but I had*

*always stepped up to the plate when there was a need for a committee member or a new project. So, I felt good about my working relationship with the rest of the department. I thought that it would be a smooth transition for me to take the role because I knew that I would have buy-in from those who I'd worked so well with. But things weren't as they seemed.*

*I felt slighted when the announcement informing the others that I would be Chair was sent by email. The announcement for the previous Chair [a White female] happened during a staff meeting where everyone was there. And, they even had a cake for her. For weeks, I felt like an outsider because only two of my thirteen co-workers even acknowledged my new role. Even long after the announcement, I felt like a solo team. Several of the people I use to share casual conversations with no longer stopped by or talked. It was as if I'd gone to a new level and became a new person in their eyes. I saw the sneers when I passed by, and even though none of them said it to my face, I heard [second hand] that some of them [my White peers] thought that I was just what the department needed to make their quotas. Quotas? I graduated cum laude from a very competitive and highly ranked school. This was no quota appointment. This was about ability! They know it and I know it; I was the right person for the job. You know, that sense of isolation and being the odd woman out can be tough because even though going in I knew that I was the most qualified person for the role, there were periods where I doubted myself and my own abilities when I knew I was ready and knew I was more than qualified. You know, it was during those times, I quickly learned to lean on my friends, my mom, and to trust in God. One great friend would always begin our conversation with the words, 'You belong, Sis!' My mom must have had some sixth sense because when I was seemingly at my lowest, I'd call and she'd say, 'God smiled on you today*

*and every day. Don't ever forget it.' My grandmother had been dead at this point for almost a decade, but I would write down things she said and that would help me get through, too.*

*[For example], I had a sticky note beside my computer with a 'grandma-ism' that reminded me to, 'Never fear failure because fear is the only thing that can stand between you and success.'*

### ***Looking Back and Looking Good***

*One great takeaway from my experience in taking a role at this level is that I have developed great leadership skills and now, I am better equipped when I need to collaborate with others. My career path has helped grow me as a person and leader even outside of these halls. I was convinced that good leadership skills were critical to my career rise. Honing my leadership skills has also helped me to be more mindful when I select or nominate other individuals for administrative roles.*

*When I'm looking for new committee members or looking to form special teams, I always consider those who do not require a lot of direction to complete tasks. I also tend to nominate people who have a history of being good collaborators but are not afraid to speak out. You know, I thought about this a few weeks ago, and I'm proud to say that over the years, I can be directly linked to the promotion and tenure of more than a few men and women. I'm especially proud of my hand in helping to develop and catapult the careers of several successful African American women.*

### ***Living in the Future***

*You know, I'm very well aware of the fact that we [Black women] have to deal with a lot of issues. Working on a White campus with White students is challenging. The numbers don't lie. We are ignored, have very few true peers, and must fight hard for respect from*



*students and our colleagues. We get passed over for promotions, are pressured to get published, and must fight twice as hard [as our White counterparts] to gain tenure. Even with this unflattering picture, I'm hopeful. I look at little Black girls in the grocery store, at the mall, and in church and am hopeful for who or what they might be. I also know that I've got to do better myself when encouraging and helping others get a leg up. I would love to form a group of Black women who are willing to begin mentoring and grooming young women in their undergraduate years to become future Ph.D.s, but time constraints and a million other excuses always get in the way. I have to stop making excuses and just do it.*

### **Dr. Clara Freeman**

Dr. Clara Freeman was reared during the 1960s and 1970s in a small, rural, agricultural community in the South. Dr. Freeman was one of two children, and because her father died when she was relatively young, her mother nurtured both her sister and her in a religious home. She credits her church family for being very influential in her life, educational attainment, and career path. Accordingly, her faith has been a mainstay in her life and played a major role in her ascension to senior leadership, but she credits her relationship with God for guiding her to surround herself with positive, like-minded people. She credits many in her church family with fortifying her educational aspirations.

#### ***The Ties that Guide***

*I'm one of those missionary Baptist church children that kind of grew up in the church. I was born in the church and am used to church and church politics because my parents were very, very involved in the church. As do many Blacks, I consider my church as my family because growing up, many of my church family members supported my educational goals. But it was my mother who played the most instrumental role and the*

*person who continued to push me. Even when all I wanted to do was graduate and get the opportunity to work with people with developmental disabilities, she would say, 'When you graduate with this degree, I want you to go and get your master's. And, I don't want you to wait a long time either.' Like my mother wanted me to do, I went on right away and earned both a bachelor's and a master's degree in social work. However, because I was helping to financially support my younger sister and providing care for my mother who was in declining health [after my father passed], it took me nine years to complete my Ph.D.*

### ***Chance Beginnings***

*Having a career in higher education was nothing that was planned. I was a social worker by profession and when I was getting my degree all I wanted to do was to work with people with developmental disabilities. So, I can say that the critical point in my career happened before I joined the university. Again, I never planned on becoming a teacher or even working in education. I was working towards helping my office within the Department of Social Services to help professionalize their workforce because even now you do not have to have a social work degree to work at a Department of Social Services. At the time, one of the things that social workers tended to do is serve as the field contact representative for students completing internships. I was that person in my office. I took on this responsibility because I wanted to help this next generation be successful. So, I trained several students and they completed their internships with me. Then one day somebody called and asked if I would like to teach a class on working with children. I agreed, because I really enjoyed working on pediatric cases. So, for a while, I taught this class part-time. Shortly after, the Dean at the time approached me and said, 'Well, we have what we call a fixed-term position available. Would you like to come and teach with us full-time?' When I considered the offer,*

*I realized that I was fostering the next generation of Social Workers and it felt good. It was rewarding, and so that's how it started. If not for these unplanned events, I would never have started this career that I've been in now for more than three decades.*

### ***The Power of Persistence***

*At that time, the people in those types of [leadership] positions could only stay for seven years. I thought that I would stay for the seven-year term and just get those seven years and have this great experience that I'd be able to add to my resumé. So as time passed, the Dean again came to me and said, 'If you'd really like to stay past the seven years, you must get your Ph.D.' So, it took me a minute to figure out how to do that because at that time there was not a Ph.D. program in the state for social work. That's when a friend of mine who I'd worked with previously was having a midlife crisis. She was leaving her husband and needed something to do. She said, 'Why don't we look at the Ph.D. program at BSU?' Remembering my conversation with the Dean, I felt as though this program would align closely with what I needed.*

*She and I ended up taking one class per semester and since I worked at a [constituent] university, I was able to do it for free. Getting my doctorate was tough and didn't come without some adversity. For the most part, I was going part-time and even took off some time when my mother became really ill. At one point during this period, I was able to get a doctoral reassignment. It was where I went to school full-time for a whole year and they [the university] paid my salary. There was one point where they tried to kick me out [of the doctoral program] two or three times for exceeding the completion time limits. However, I was able to combat it because when I began the program, no one had ever informed us that*

*we'd be mandated to finish within any specified time period. In the meantime, I did it the hard way, it took me nine years to finish but I did it.*

### ***Standing Strong and Leading On***

*After completing the Ph.D. program, I was selected to become the director of a program on campus that worked with undergraduates. I did well in that role and stayed in the position for a while. It was during this period that I ended up getting tenure. Soon after, we had a Dean who only stayed for like four semesters. I've never been clear on all the circumstances for his departure, but somehow or another I ended up becoming the interim director of the school. I did that role for about two years. However, I realized that I was doing all the work and was only getting some of the pay. Again, I was getting some, but not a lot and it clearly wasn't the pay that was associated with others at that level. It was at that point that I told the Dean, 'You need to do a search or send me back to my former role because you aren't going to get any more [free] work from me. I am working for slave wages and I won't continue.'*

*They did the search, and I got the position as the permanent director. I think the search was actually designed so that the internal candidate [me] got the role. So that's kind of how it ended up; it wasn't planned. It was just kind of like, I don't know if I want to say divine providence, but it just kind of happened because I never strategically sat down and planned what I was going to do. Becoming a leader just kind of happened that way for me.*

### ***Leading, Even in the Face of Loss***

*Becoming a leader changed many things with working relationships and my peer dynamics. The big issue with me taking the leadership role is that I was no longer a peer to friends I'd know while coming through the ranks. I was now their direct supervisor. Because*

*there aren't that many African American faculty here, some of the [White] people that I thought were cool, ended up showing some racist behaviors because [now] they had an African American supervisor who was somebody that they used to sit and joke with. So that created a whole different dynamic because I had to change my relationships with them because there were things that I could not talk to them about, things that I could not reveal to them. So, along the way, there are two or three relationships that really have been changed forever because of their reaction to me, to my role. For a while, and I really internalized things. Finally, I had to kind of set myself free from that. When I think about my freedom mechanism, I had to really tap into my spirituality, my belief in God, and the whole idea that this was ordained for me to do. Yes, it is my destiny and really, I had to stop personalizing it in terms of, 'Oh, why don't you like me anymore blah, blah, blah.' You know, I was to the point that it could have been Snoopy in this position and people were going to have animosities.*

*I think being a Black female leader has also caused me to face some challenges in my personal life too. One example [of personal sacrifice] I can give is the fact that I've never been married, and I don't have children. Of course, I've dated and had close friends, but things have never materialized. Remember, I grew up in an era where men were truly the breadwinners, the dominant partner, and the head of the household. So, when you think about that in generational and gendered terms, I was an anomaly.' So, I believe that some men seemed to have been threatened by my achievements. I've had men to tell me directly things like, 'Women like you don't [seem] to need a man for anything.' Some of my church family members have also said that often men can be intimidated by strong, independent,*

*intelligent women. It seems that if you're successful or have a position where they [men] perceive you to be in power, then they can feel intimidated or emasculated.*

### ***Only the Lonely***

*Being one of only a few Blacks on campus presents its own difficulties. I feel that I'm always targeted to do certain things on campus. I don't think that White faculty whether male or female are targeted to do certain things on campus. So, I get called to be on a lot of search committees and do some other things. I feel as though I'm often called to represent what is 'Black' at the university. So, you know, there's the pressure to always be present. I call it 'Rent a Negro.com!'*

*You know, there are so few women of Color here in general, but there are some Black women here who are in leadership positions. And if they call me to do something, I'm going to do it. I'm going to do it to help 'them.' I'll do it only because it will help 'them' [my Black peers].*

*Being one of only a handful of Blacks also causes me to have to make sacrifices of my time. You know, sometimes I'll get a call from a parent, friends who have relatives here, or somebody who knows somebody who knows me, saying there's an African American student who needs help, extra nurturing, or mothering. So, I will take the time to do that. I'll make time to have that interaction with the students and give them tips or pointers, many of whom are not even in my own program. I think that's one difference between my White counterparts and me.*

*So, I'm hoping the university will do better with keeping people of Color. I don't know of any African American chairs at this university. You know, we have a student body population of nearly 30,000 and I would say there is maybe 10% faculty of Color, and I'm*

*including Asians and Native Americans in that number. And you see what happens is that number stays stagnant because people come, but they aren't retained.*

### ***Not Easily Led***

*My leadership experience here is that I have a job that is often very thankless. I get pulled into so many directions. You know, you have those from the Provost's and Chancellor's offices talking about these big ideas. They [the executive leadership teams] speak using all of the big buzz words [such as] big data, research, and enterprise. They talk about all of that with not a lot of concrete mechanisms in place to make a lot of these things happen. And it's too much pressure dealing with the abstractness of things.*

*Also, in the age of cutbacks how are you going to make it? Lots of people are running on empty. I've learned that academia is a place where sometimes people who are not well or emotionally unhealthy live. For instance, I have spent most of this semester dealing with personnel issues. And these are people with Ph.D.s, some of whom are [mentally] unstable. I mean I could tell you some things that you would just never believe. But what can you do? Most of them [faculty] are protected by the tenure system. I mean, you have to do a lot to lose your tenure.*

*But then you have to add that other layer, that whole racist piece that I see a challenge is for me as a Black female leader. Many times, in upper administrative meetings I am the only person of Color in the room. And so, you know, when I would say things and contribute, you know, there was not a lot of response, but then somebody else [a White person] would say something and it was like a brilliant idea. And it's the same thing I just said!*

*I've also encountered situations when my authority or integrity has been called into questioned or challenged. You know there was a time when if a person needed a resource they had physically go to the library! [In doing so] I have had issues dealing with trying to access services and resources right here on campus. So, I would go and request something and they say, 'Oh, you have to be faculty to reserve that material.' And I really have to say, well I am, or you know, I'm the administrator or the director of this program. And this has happened several times. This is an issue that I don't believe that my White counterparts deal with because people make it a point to know and remember who THEY are.*

*The problem with this is I think those people [Whites working in the library] have perceptions of what they think faculty and administrators should look like. I've found it with students and other workers too. Students have had the tendency not to believe what I'm saying and have questioned my knowledge base, so to speak. I know my White counterparts are getting these same questions or pauses because these same students need to confirm their credibility. Another problem with students is their sense of entitlement. They think that because I show up, I [should] get an A. This mentality stems from their upbringing and our society because nowadays when they play little league ball, everyone gets a trophy. No one has ever told these students no.*

*The lack of support is yet another challenge I face. I think if anything, it's hard to get support from some Black women. It's not so much because there's animosity, it's because we are so siloed in our units. We are so busy doing the work that we don't even have time to get together, let our hair down and we can't do it in public because it's an 'all of 'y'all' [Black women] are getting together type of assumption. So, you know, because there are only a few of us [Black leaders], it's hard for us to kind of show the support. I know we know we have*



*each other's backs and I also know that if I call them and say I need something, they've got it. But in terms of us just kind of letting my hair down to really relax with them and that kind of thing, we do not have the opportunity because of our work roles.*

### ***Perspectives on Race, Gender and Culture***

*In my own experience, I think race trumps gender. I think race permeates everything about me. Where the race and ethnicity come in is when you feel like as a Black leader, you have to work harder or be smarter to move your faculty forward to meet the ever-changing bars that are set by the university. So, in terms of being a Black female, I think it's critical that I be able to meet those almost impossible benchmarks. This goes back to us [Blacks] having to always work harder. You've heard of the Black Tax, haven't you? It's where Blacks must work three times harder and have three times the education to slay the dragon. That's called the Black Tax and I pay it every day.*

*I've also seen many differences in treatment, and I don't know if this is because I'm African American or because I'm a woman. [For example], there are some differences in salaries between men and women on this campus. But you know when you talk to people [in leadership and Human Resources], and they'll say, 'Oh no, there's no difference between men and women on this campus. All people are treated the same.' But the nuance is we work for the state, so all salaries are published; its public knowledge and you can go onto the website and see what people make. A lot of times the chatter is that women aren't great negotiators when it comes to defining their worth in terms of dollars and cents. For example, when I moved from being Interim Director to the permanent role, my first offer was \$10,000 less than what the White male was making who had left the program in a mess. I mean, we were getting ready to come up for accreditation review and the program was in a complete*

*mess. And even though that offer was more money than I had ever made in my life, I said, 'I can't work for that.' Knowing what the other leader was making was the only way that I was able to negotiate better pay.*

*Cultural norms and expectations also create a common way of thinking because I know that some colleagues, especially White ones, have a negative perception of me because of my hair. I had relaxed hair for a long time. And then I was in the middle of trying to attend school and take care of my mom who was sick, so one day I told my stylist to just cut it off! And so, I wore a buzz cut for a while. When I did this, I think some White people were intimidated by it. Then when I started growing my locks [dreadlocks], I think people were kind of taken aback because I started to wear these little scarves, like little headwraps until it started to grow out. It was only until it started to grow out and started hanging a little bit, I think people felt a little more comfortable. If I get it twisted or would wear Bantu knots, for a couple of days, many of my White colleagues were looking. The looks on their faces said, 'She's just been so ethnic now.' Something so personal as my hair should not dictate who I am as a person or a leader; yet, I always find those who are judging me on the basis of it.*

### ***Quantum of Solace***

*Throughout these trials, again what has always kept me going is my personal relationship with God and being able to talk with like-minded people. A bright spot in my leadership journey was fostering relationships with my mentor. She was the person who encouraged me to go to graduate school. She was here at the university and was the first Black female hired in her department. Because we came to the university within a year of each other, we've kind of been bonded at the hip. So, you know, she still checks in on me, sees how I'm doing, gives advice and that kind of thing.*

*The other lady who was instrumental in my success passed away about four years ago. She was a member of the executive leadership team. I could always call her and say, what do you think about this? I'm a very emotional person, and she would kind of put me back on the right path that helps me get back to strategic thinking. In fact, my advice for others who may choose this path is to always be open to mentorship, and you can get mentorship from a lot of different people. So even from people who I felt have not supported me, I've learned something.*

*Other coping mechanisms or things that keeps me going are the special friends that I lean on, and these are friends for life. I've been in therapy. I'm also a member of a sorority. I love to travel and see new places and things, and I try to stay involved in the church and the local community. I read uplifting things and try to always remember that things could be a lot worse and that there are some people who have it worse than me.*

*But ultimately, through all of this, I did fall back to my belief in God and I kept believing that what's for me IS going to be for me. I found great comfort in knowing that God's gonna take care of me. He's going to fight these battles for me. My pastor tells me all the time, 'You've got to let God fight that battle and if you do, it will work out.'*

### **Dr. Diana Hampton**

Growing up with a father in the armed services, Dr. Diana Hampton, a self-described military brat, has seen a lot of the world. Dr. Hampton's parents were instrumental and supportive of her pursuing her education. As such, Dr. Hampton began her own higher education journey in the late 1990s, obtaining both a bachelor's and master's degree in Special Education from IU. Two years later, she completed the Special Education Ph.D. program at HSU. Her duties have run the gamut of developing curriculum for students with

social, academic, and behavioral deficiencies, to designing learning modules for professional working with those who are hearing impaired. Dr. Hampton currently serves in a senior-level administrative role at SHSU, where her focus remains on Special Education curriculum development. She also oversees a team of seven tenure-track faculty. As with several of the other leaders, it was never Dr. Hampton's intent to become a senior-level administrator in the academy. However, it was clear from the onset that Dr. Hampton has always had a passion for students. In fact, she deduced early on that young children in today's classrooms embody a variety of racial, ethnic, and cultural identities, live in a multitude of family structures, and have a wide range of developmental abilities. She recognizes that educators must be adequately prepared to engage children and families in ways that are responsive to these numerous intersecting identities. She elected to be a conduit for preparing children to successfully navigate a multicultural world. She credits her upbringing with making her resilient, passionate, and fueling her desire to teach, lend voice to the voiceless, and serve.

***There's a Leader in our Midst***

*I've always been a champion for the physically and mentally disabled and their families and I've also have had a passion to serve. But, my trip, my start in academia actually came through my desire to work with parents. When I started my doctoral work, I was intending and preparing to be a parent advocate. I became a teaching assistant while I was in the doctorate program. I had no intention of pursuing administration at all. Then when I arrived at my present institution, it was a case that people saw my talent, my ability, and they liked how I conducted myself. They liked the fact that I was able to interact with individuals and get things organized. I was offered a position initially as a program coordinator to replace the one that had moved away and then as a department chair came*

*and said, 'You'd be really good at this.' Somebody nominated me, and everybody agreed. So again, I honestly say from the very beginning, I never saw myself in an administrative position.*

### ***A Change is Coming***

*When thinking back on my career, I can speak to the critical incident that occurred within one of my initial leadership roles. The individual who I replaced, the Department Chair, decided she was going to retire. At that point, I was already in the interim program coordinator position and it was one of those situations where we really needed somebody who was familiar with the program. If this doesn't happen, the program could kind of fall apart. At the time, I didn't realize how critical it was or how important it was for me to step into that position.*

*Looking back, I think I got in there and started learning more things about leading. Had I not gotten there, there would have been kind of different ramifications. Like, we wouldn't have been in compliance there. We wouldn't have been able to complete the required task there. So, it's one of those things that when I made the decision that day and it worked out for the best. You know, I could've said no, but I chose not to. Looking back, that's why it was very important that I come into the position and handle it, manage it, and lead if you will, and I did.*

### ***Only the Lonely***

*My campus has a climate where White males have always been viewed as being fit for leadership. It was historically how this campus was designed. It was always males who were in administrative roles, females were within teaching because of it being such a community themed school. That's also kind of the nuances that you see across campus. Even if you have*

*only one male in the department and the rest are female, typically you'll have that male in the position as Department Chair, or he's the Associate Dean, or he's the Dean, and so it perpetuates the campus climate and historical background here. So, I think that that's how it's different for me as a Black female leader in terms of how it is anticipated the White man will be the one that gets [and is in] the position of authority.*

*My campus also boasts diverse student populations and I will say my department on campus is the most diverse. I have four African American faculty members. So, if you look at the diversity of my department, I think we very much mirror the campus itself. But, all of the other departments across campus are predominantly White males and females. There are very few areas that have African American faculty. Across campus, it's harder to find [African American] senior-level administrative leaders, especially in our administrative building. I don't think that there are any African American females over there. They may be within like the Registrar's Office and the Cashier's Office, but kind of in that top layer, I don't think we have any African Americans.*

*I always smile when I'll get selected for different, ad hoc committees. Some of these selections are because you know they need diversity. So, I feel like I'm just as qualified, diverse or not, to sit in there. You can especially see people's reaction if I go talk to a higher-level administrator, like the Provost. They're like, 'Oh, he really knows her?' I mean just because I'm not constantly in their face, doesn't mean that I'm not a valued part of this team. In my building, you know, it's typically a situation where whatever I say goes. In other places, you can kind of see them wonder and question me. It's not as widely accepted that I'm a Black female who's in this capacity that I'm serving. Those have been my experiences.*

### ***Overcoming Multiple Marginalization***

*When I think about issues of race and gender, I think that it is mostly race that is the dominant issue for me. It's race initially rather than gender that they [Whites] see because again, with this particular school and because of my field, there are more females anyway. So, I don't have that big of a barrier as being a female. In my case, people are always just trying to figure out how I am qualified. You know, the Whites look at you and wonder if you have your doctoral degree, are you a product of affirmative action. They wonder to themselves, 'How did YOU get through the system?' And I think they're more likely to question my credentials and again ponder how I did get there.*

*As I mentioned, my department is fairly diverse, so, I feel comfortable in the fact that my department is a very safe environment for me to learn and grow administratively and as a Black woman. I will say once I leave the confines and the safety of my area, once I'm birthed out on the campus, there are different dynamics that come into play. There are times where I'm in a meeting I may not have a question. I may sit there for the entire hour, take my notes, know what I need to do and not say a word. There are other times, if the content is of particular interest in my program or my department, I may voice a comment, raise a concern, or ask a question or whatever. And then that's when you can kind of see the dynamics like, 'Well, who is she? Why is SHE talking about this? How did she end up in this capacity? What is she allegedly bringing to the table?' They stare as if the Black woman really has no credible point to make or no authority either. These are the times I feel people see race, particularly the White males.*

*In my experience, race always permeates the space and I have to prove myself and win them [Whites] over. My personality lends itself to where I don't always have to be the one facilitating or being overly verbal in a meeting. I'm fine with letting others in the*

*department take the lead in a meeting. I'm confident in the fact that I know just as much or more than my White female counterparts know. However, it gets perceived that she [the White woman] somehow is more competent because she does more of the facilitation of the meetings. So, I can see them [Whites] like sit up and take notice when she might defer to me. I can see people like wondering, 'Oh well why is she asking her?' 'Who is she supposed to be?' 'What could this Black woman know that the White woman doesn't?' And then when I start to speak, they started saying, 'Oh wow, she's really good.' And I've actually heard them saying, 'Oh well, she does get issues resolved.'*

*When looking at how my experience is different, I think for my particular campus, there is still very much kind of Black versus White kind of undercurrent that still exists. I think looking at people's perceptions of competence is still very much an issue here. What I liken it to is when one of my White colleagues comes off the wall with statements and has all these wild or unconventional comments. It happens quite often, and nobody seems to question her leadership. Then I've been in similar situations and a woman of Color says something [unorthodox] and it's almost like, 'Oh my God, why did she say that? How is she qualified to be here?' So, I think the difference is there's a little more leeway and flexibility given to the White female and if she messes up or talks too much, asks a thousand questions so to speak, she's not seen or viewed so much as not knowing her job.*

### ***Combatting Disregard and Disrespect***

*A lot of times, people are confused by my name and so they anticipate me being a White female. This is especially true with students. They will see and when I introduce myself, they're like, 'Oh, you're Black.' So, I often have to contend with people's kind of preconceived notions of what I should and should not be in terms of that leadership*



*structure. This is often the case when I'm required to interact with students. I've had them to question my authority or you know they are like, 'Is there somebody else I can talk to?' And I let them know that the buck stops with me; I am the someone they should talk to. I also love it when they open up my door and they're like, Dr. Hampton? I'm like, yes, and you see the look of shock. So, those are the kinds of those nuances where you're like, I need to help you get a successful point, but you are [being] resistant because you don't look like what I physically look like. I think it's that many of them don't like the idea of a Black person telling them what they need to do. You know, I can quote them a policy, and the next person, a White person, can quote them the same policy and it'll be more palatable based on her hair color or whatever. I think it's a common perception because of where my university is [geographically] located. It has much to do with the community values or the values the students bring with them to school.*

*Being in leadership at a mostly White institution presents many challenges for African American women. [For example], when I'm the lead on a project, I go in very confident. But I see the look on their [the White faculty's] faces. So, I think a lot of times I get prejudged with the belief, 'Oh, she only got here because they needed a Black female.' They [my White critics] are not realizing that it might have been their initial reason [for placing me in a leadership position], but I'm very qualified and I know what I need to do in order to maintain this spot.*

*Another issue for me is the way I'm perceived on the campus and within the campus community. For instance, I can see them [my White counterparts] and work with them in this committee capacity say on Monday, pass them on campus on Tuesday and they give me no acknowledgment. My running joke is like I'm over six feet and am about something,*

*something, something pounds. I'm like, as big as I am, I know you see me. This is not to mention you just sat beside me or across from me in a meeting last week. You know, as an African American woman you kind of get glossed over. For me, primarily it's the White males that are doing this. My best example is that I had a really close colleague, a White male, in which I was really good friends with both he and his wife. Well, he died unexpectedly. So, I went to their house for the repass because I couldn't make it to the funeral. And of course, there are a lot of my faculty members there; there was campus-wide representation. Particularly, there was one of my colleagues who I had just been in a committee meeting with earlier that week and the funeral is on a Saturday. I'm sitting in the living room and he walks in and asks my friend, 'Well, who was that?' Again, that's the vibe I get more from White males. So, it's kind of that undercurrent where you realize that there are certain surroundings that I've found myself in that I know I'm just being tolerated.*

*So, I understand how to navigate all of that. My Dad had this saying that once you understand the man, you can deal with him. [Do] you know what I mean? Once you know where he or she is coming from, you can deal with it. It's one of those things, my work speaks for me in that regard. So that's kind of how I balanced it all out.*

*So, in my building, I'm really comfortable and I'm not necessarily uncomfortable out there. I just realized that again, in other instances I may say something, it kind of goes unacknowledged. You know, the White male says the same thing and oh yeah, that's a good idea. So there have been some of those experiences where you're like, really? Okay, he said it differently, but that's kind of what I'm lending to. Or, when you say and everybody kind of shifts and looks at you like, why are you saying this? So, it's still kind of that vibe that I experience from some people who don't really think that I should be there.*

*However, you know, for me the biggest challenge again is my credentials being questioned. I've heard the chatter, and it's always like, 'Is she really qualified? How did she really end up in this position?' You know, I think sometimes it's also the fact that the Whites want to believe that the university just needed somebody Black in this role or on this committee, so they just got me as opposed to, well, she IS qualified. I think the biggest issue for me is that once I get on the committee, I'm struggling to feel like I'm a valued part of the team. I also don't want to be in a situation where I'm having to work harder than them [my White counterparts] to prove my worth. But again, I generally combat this because I like letting my work speak for me. I come in and my stuff is done. I'm at these meetings, I take away the information, disseminated the data and I have this completed, finished product for you. Whatever you ask me is being completed to the level of quality that you wanted it to be done at. I know that I'm a vital contributor to the team. Yes, [in your minds] the color of my skin may have gotten me here and maybe you have an issue with that, but the reality is like everybody else at this table, I hold my own in terms of what I'm able to contribute.*

### ***Motivated by the Future***

*What keeps me motivated is that when it's all said and done, I feel that I'm pretty good at this job. I like what I do and I'm very well qualified for this. I think that the other administrators appreciate seeing the results I get. Also, I'm proud of how the students interact with me. For example, when students come to me and they're all irate and I can see how I can defuse that situation and by the end, we're laughing, joking, and talking about what the next steps, you know, truly being proactive. So, I guess the motivation is that regardless, I see myself still as an educator first; I got hired to be an instructor. I more so look at kind of the student focus is what keeps me motivated. This administrative piece is*

*something I can create at any point. I didn't get hired to be an administrator and if I get tired, I really don't have to do this anymore. Then that's kind of what balances it for me. But again, the biggest piece of motivation for me is that I do enjoy helping people to succeed.*

*I think future leaders need to also remember to keep a balance. For me, finding comfort and understanding that there will be days where I'm going to need to be on campus, pretty much [from] sun up to sundown help me reconcile it all. There are pockets of time where my administrative role takes the forefront because I have to manage the schedule and I know it's going to morph out of control. Like now, my midterm grades are out, then I get all of the student complaints, then I have to do faculty evaluations. But then there also will be down weeks where everything is pretty much even-keeled for the most part. And so, things balance themselves out. I've learned kind of where stuff ebbs and waves, you know, the days that I can kind of lay back, operate on cruise control, and everything's fine departmentally. And that I know the days when I need to ramp up and stay on top of things.*

*My advice for future leaders is to just keep the faith and believe in yourself. Personally, I also, take any opportunity that is provided to me for personal and professional development. I often go to leadership conferences and usually participate when I'm asked to present. I'd recommend for future leaders take every opportunity that's given to them regardless if it's within or without their comfort zones. Prospective leaders should look at it as an opportunity to develop themselves personally and enhance their skills. These individuals should hone-in on and develop those skills that you determine are needed to be a success at the next level. I would also advise Black women to build a network within that capacity [for which they want to grow], and it does not matter whether your advocate is Black or White.*

## **Dr. Brandy Jacobs**

Dr. Brandy Jacobs was born in the Northeast and grew up in a large, metropolitan city in a single-parent household. She is the younger of two girls and credits her mother with instilling in her many of the values that fueled her quest for higher learning. Despite the challenges of growing up in a tough area with few resources, like thousands of inner-city kids, Dr. Jacobs excelled academically. Dr. Jacobs graduated *summa cum laude* with her bachelor's degree in Sociology in the early 1990s from Brightman State<sup>19</sup> (BU), a prominent HBCU in the Northeast. Over the next few years, she earned both a master's and Ph.D. from Fisher University<sup>20</sup> (FU).

Dr. Jacobs has worked in higher education throughout her entire career. Most recently, she served for more than three years in a senior-level leadership role at HSU. While at HSU, Dr. Jacobs has earned a solid reputation of always putting students first, as she strives to increase academic achievement among students from underserved communities.

### ***An Accidental Educator***

*My journey in higher education began as I graduated high school. I knew I wanted and needed to go to college but was very cognizant of my family's financial situation. Luckily for me, I had some advisors when I was in high school who encouraged me to go to college. They found me the money I needed to attend. They found me scholarships and a place to go. So, I got a free ride to go to my undergrad institution. Thank God for that!*

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<sup>19</sup> Brightman State is a pseudonym for a prominent HBCU in the Northeast with a student body population of nearly 8,000 (NCES, 2017).

<sup>20</sup> Fisher University is a pseudonym for a prominent research PWI in the Midwest with a student body population of 45,000 (NCES, 2017).

*Going away to college, I knew that I wanted to be a lawyer. I went to Brightman and started in pre-law. My concentration was a sociology degree and so I completed the whole sociology degree. I was planning to go to law school all the way up until my senior year of undergrad. The summer between my junior and senior year, I was looking for something to do. I wanted an internship because I just didn't want to go home and work for the summer. I found an internship that was SROP (Summer Research Opportunity for Undergraduates), and it was great! We talked about all this fun stuff and it was awesome! An older White male, Dr. Owens [pseudonym], at my HBCU kept telling me, 'You're too smart for law school.' This really shaped my decision to travel the higher education path.*

*My time as an undergrad and encounters with Dr. Owens really prompted the crucial event that changed my career trajectory. All the way up until my senior year, I was going to law school. I was going to be a lawyer because I was determined that I was going to make me some money. This was the plan all the way up until my senior year. I was looking at dates to take the LSAT [Law School Admission Test]. But again, I'd always had the Sociology professor, Dr. Owens who kept telling me, 'You're too smart for law school, you're just too smart for law school. You are Ph.D. material!' You know, he was always challenging me. [For example], when I took his class, he would give everybody one little sheet of paper and you'd go home, and it would be a take-home exam. But for another colleague and me, he would give us a packet. He would say, 'Here are some new readings. Here is YOUR exam.' This colleague and about two or three others of us would always have different work from the rest of the class, and we thought nothing of it. Today, I'd be written up, sued, and all these other things for discrimination if I did this. But he always challenged us and always kept pushing and pushing for me to go to graduate school.*

*Even after all his insisting, I was still intent on going to law school. So, on the day that I was registering to take the LSAT, I thought of him in that moment and instead of paying for the LSAT, I paid for the GRE [Graduate Record Examination]. I was like, I'm going to go to graduate school. Because I still didn't know what I was doing, he [Dr. Owens] worked with me and got me to apply to several graduate programs. Again, I was able to get multiple scholarships. I just knew that I didn't want to go to work yet, and I was going to keep going with college while it was free.*

*During my graduate years at Fisher is when I realized that I liked teaching, and I also liked the job security aspect of tenure. And for the first time, I seriously thought about going into the [higher education] industry. You know, looking back, I see that God had a hand on me, and HE had a sense of humor.*

### ***What Others Saw in Me***

*I will say that the first time folks started talking true leadership to me and about me was funny. During this time, one of our former administrative assistants would always come to me and kept saying, 'You've got to be department head one day!' I thought yeah, I would eventually maybe float into the department head role like everyone else in the department would have to, but I had no desire to do it. But she kept insisting that one day I was going to take the helm. Each time she would say it I would look at her and give her that 'whatever' or a 'you're funny' gaze. She kept insisting that I'd be good at it. I just had no desire to lead people. I'm great with being with the masses and giving my ideas and my thoughts and putting forth initiatives, but I never had this amazing desire to be the top person.*

*Then, the first time having a leadership position seriously put in my head was [for a role] in another department. Our former Dean, [a White female], was the one who*

*approached me. I found out that the department head was stepping away for a research stint and the Dean kept asking me if I wanted to move into that departmental leadership role. I had absolutely no interest [because] for one, it was in a different program, and two, I had no interest in leadership with that small department. Yet, this Dean kept grooming me and asking me to take it; I was always like, 'No; [I am] not interested.' And even she was like, 'You'd be a great person to take over.' Still, I told her that I had no interest.*

*But the head of the other department went on research leave for a semester and they needed somebody to take over for her there. I reluctantly took the role because I knew it was only temporarily. So, that was like my first foray into leadership and I was like, 'Okay, great, I can take over leadership for a semester.' It was a small program that consisted of four people. It was a temporary, fill-in role and was only going to be four months of filling in. It turned out to be pretty easy. What's also great is that it gave me access to learning more about the inner workings of program management, budgeting, and the university as a whole. I didn't plan for it but now, I've got that in my background. So again, academic leadership was not something I ever really planned for because I never really thought about myself being in a leadership position at all. I often say to people that my life is a true Lemony Snicket's adventure, a series of unfortunate events; but this is a series of events that seemed to work out well in my favor.*

*Still later when a permanent role came open, I had no desire to take it. The Dean asked me three times to step in and three times I refused. But over and over again this Dean would just drop a little tidbit and say things like, 'Okay, all right, think about it and we'll set up a meeting.' I was dead-set against it. But then folks [my peers] started coming down the hall talking to me. They told me that I should be the next department head. They would say,*



*'You know, you'd be good for this.' I think it's mostly because I'm pretty even; I do my best to see all sides. I tend to be pretty democratic about things because there's no desire for me to make decisions in isolation that affect other people. I have no desire for that. And I also don't presume to be the expert, and if I want buy-in, you need to be part of the discussion.*

*After I finally agreed to take the leadership role, I had few regrets, but I wish I had been a better negotiator. After talking to another White male peer, I realized I could have negotiated up some good stuff including like standard salary bumps and all this other stuff. I was amazed at what others were getting. And it's funny because even though I liked this Dean, some things he offered financially was not the same rate given to the White male. After I found out, I went back to the Dean and let him know that the administrative bump he quoted me was wrong. He claimed he didn't know and was just going on what he'd heard. I was later granted the true rate. [I asked Dr. Jacobs what empowered her to stand up for herself]. At the time, it wasn't even me standing up for myself. It was more like the fact that I'd spoken with someone else and I'd told them that I'd heard that number for the administrative bump was one figure, and they informed me that the bump was nearly three grand. So, when he [the Dean] mentioned the lower salary I told him that I'd heard the administrative bump was three grand. At first, he acted like he didn't know for sure, but he later conceded. So, I wasn't really standing up for myself, I was just noticing something that was truly incorrect.*

### ***Up Against the Wind***

*Okay, so let me give you a little bit of the backstory. When I first started here, I was the first African American female and am still the only Black woman that's been hired in this department. This is quite surprising for a field like Sociology, which is a very diverse major. But still, when I arrived here, I would sit through faculty meetings and offer a suggestion and*

*it would be all quiet like crickets around. Then maybe half an hour later, a colleague would paraphrase what I said and it's an amazing idea. And I would sit and think, 'wow.' After that, for a while, I didn't say much in meetings because, I was like, you know, y'all work it out for yourselves. If it didn't affect me, I would be pretty quiet about lots of things, especially in the beginning. After a while, I mentioned this to one of my White female colleagues and she insisted that things like this just didn't happen and agreed to watch. So, when it did happen to me, she empathized and acknowledged it. She was like, 'Oh my gosh; it DOES happen!' I can say that now it has been amazing for me to go from people ignoring me in this department to people wanting me to sit at the head of the table. Also, after I took the lead, some of the issues I had with people listening to me got better, but then sometimes it didn't.*

*When I started [in the leadership role], I felt like in the beginning, I had the support of everybody up and down the hallway. I had always gotten along with pretty much everyone. I mean they were encouraging me and many of them talked to the Dean and would tell him, 'Brandy's a good choice.' This was mostly because I had not shown any negative qualities yet. So, when folks looked up and down the hallway, they didn't see many other people [who were neutral]; and they were like, 'Okay, we can work with her.' But things seemed to change when I took the role. Peers seemed less apt to chat and even less likely to collaborate. I've had one White female who aggressively questioned a decision I made and accosted me to the point where we had to be physically separated by another peer.*

*Another challenge associated with being a female and a person of Color in leadership is that once people find you and find out that you will speak up with a brain, they want you for everything. They want your voice in the room because there's something about your voice as a person of Color that needs to come into conversations. I tend to be pulled*

*into every big committee and that's a time suck. Sure, I wanted to make sure our [ethnic minorities] voices, voices of diversity were heard but often wondered, 'But why does it always have to be me?' And that's the problem, you know?*

*When I came here, my department head warned me that the student body population wouldn't look like what I'd seen over the previous years during grad school. He said, 'You know, we don't have a lot of the privileged students here.' And I was like, 'Yay,' because the students at my alma mater were often wealthy, privileged, and felt entitled to a degree. I was relieved to know that I'd be working with working-class students here who work hard for their degree. I love that in my students! However, one of the things that I've experienced is subtle disrespect in the classroom. [For example], I'm always called a 'Miss' and not a doctor. I'm Miss this, and Miss that. It's hardly ever that they say, Doctor. And I tell my students all the time that it's okay to call me Doctor, and my first name. So, if they're like Dr. Brandy, I'm okay with it; we're cool. Yet, still I have those who will email me and address me as 'Miss Brandy' and I'll email back, 'Doctor.' Some catch it and others don't. You know, I'm not the one who wants to say, 'Hey, I'm Dr. Jacobs,' but I do want you to respect who I am.*

*Also speaking in terms of disrespect, I've even felt the disrespect from other colleagues. I've walked into rooms and events and I've been mistaken for another Brown female faculty member on campus. And it was to the point where I watched a White colleague, who knew what he was about to do, and they're like, 'Don't do it. No, no, no. It's not her! It's not her!' Still, the person did it and I was laughing. I was like, 'No, that's the other one.'*

## ***The Politics of Race and Gender***

*I was well aware of gendered roles while attending Fisher. The Black/White dynamic wasn't really an issue because there weren't any Black female faculty. It was also no secret that with the women at Fisher, regardless of complexion, female faculty had a hard time getting tenure. This was especially true if you were a female faculty member and you had a family. I think the first woman to get tenure with a family did it after a lawsuit.*

*Issues of race and gender also show up in my role here. I mentioned earlier that students often refer to me as Miss and not Doctor. Yet we have males [working in the department] who don't have their Ph.Ds., yet they are always called Doctor. That's gendered. And, I'm sure the fact that I'm Black adds to the complexity. When I have corrected them, a lot of students have even said, 'Oh, really? You have your Ph.D.?' I think that's a gender thing there and it may be some race on top of that.*

*Issues of race and gender have affected my leadership style. You know, there's this commonality with White women, but White women don't have that extra added aspect of that of a person of Color. For me, race is the more significant issue. You're a Black woman, so amongst circles of people, especially White men, White women are seen as more of a peer than I am. And on this campus, there's a man's network; there is even a circle of Black men in leadership positions who can get together and support each other. They would have their meetings and their little gatherings that was designed at pulling in and pulling up the next generation. But the Black women can't do; the women just don't have the numbers.*

*Another was that race and gender impact my role is that I find myself having to be much more diplomatic when talking with White colleagues and I mean it's exhausting. You know people can be so obnoxious! I even had another colleague come to me and, 'How do you deal with them?' I told her, 'You know what, they are not going to make me lose my cool.*

*They're not going to make me look like a fool.' Black women especially have to be careful not to get overly angry because you're the angry woman or you can't be too obnoxious because you're a 'bitch.' So, we have to appear more even because then we get labeled and then once we get labeled, those interactions are even more difficult to have because everybody sees that light bulb before they even see you. And trust me, that label gets spread around; so, I have to do that label management a lot!*

*The intersectional aspect of being a Black female oftentimes means including the idea and the concept of the working mom and the parenting mom, because lots of the Black women here are parents as well. And somewhat culturally, there's a role of the Black woman in the family that can be different than the role of the White woman in the family. So, as the Black woman in the family, you are a major support structure for your family. Regardless of what level you're at economically, or the level and position of your spouse if you happen to be married. So, you know, I have a Ph.D., but that still means that I'm cooking dinner, I'm doing the PTA, I'm organizing all of these other things for my kids.*

### ***Follow My Lead***

*I think that others have been comfortable with my leadership style because I have colleagues that can be pretty opinionated, boisterous, and downright obnoxious and don't necessarily play well with others. I tended to be quieter and more introspective in meetings, try to see all points of view, and work towards more unity than divisiveness. I think because I was that person who wouldn't pick sides. I would be friends with everyone up and down the hallway, no matter what side you were on. I was always in support of team Jacobs.*

*Being in leadership has allowed me to better understand the nuances that are going on in my colleagues' lives and I try to be more aware of work-life balance issues. In the past,*

*departmental leaders always had a summer event. It was a one-day retreat that would typically happen right before classes began. I always dreaded it because it was still summertime. This was a time when you took family vacations and also a time when many want to do their research. So, when I took the helm, I didn't have a summer event. I realized that the faculty has lots going on and I wasn't going to infringe upon their time. Now, my peers trust me and trust that I'm going to look out for their best interests.*

*My role as a leader also made me better in the classroom and as a person. I'm constantly looking for ways for which I can better the students' experience. Back when I was an undergraduate student, most of us went to college and were full-time students. Lots of students at this institution are working, they are married, they have children. College is but one sliver of their life. Many of them are working full-time, off-campus, and some are working part-time on campus. So, we're just one mini drop. Understanding that dynamic makes a difference in what I expect from my students outside of the classroom. Now, I make the readings light and the discussion heavy. I'm more flexible with due dates and I try not to give obnoxious, boring textbook readings. I give time in class to complete outside research tasks and adjust deadlines as needed. And, I try to use the textbook that I force them to buy. If I see that a student is missing class or struggling, I'm like, 'Tell me what's going on. If you're not there, if this isn't working, tell me what's going on.' [I do this] because I want [to have] that conversation with them. I'm really interested in the learning about them and need to know their concerns. And sometimes we go off on tangents in class where I'm making sure that they can check all the boxes. Those are the times when I'll have to say to them, 'Okay, I'm off my mommy soapbox now.' But you know, I've found that it's okay to take the time to do this because I'm always looking for ways to make the students successful.*

*Because I'm one of only a handful of Black campus leaders, I experience a steady stream of students of Color who gravitate to me for help. It is not uncommon for me to have visits from those who aren't even enrolled in programs within my department. However, I understand their need to interact with someone who looks like them. I understand that as one of the few faculty of Color, students of Color are just going to gravitate towards you and they're just happy to see you. So, you're going to get the students of Color always coming. You're going to get the student groups, students of Color, and I mean they're just going to come and camp out and you're not going to know what you can do with them because some may not be in your program. But also, as a faculty of Color who is open to helping students progress, I try to be there for them as much as I can.*

### ***Finding Shelter***

*My family and friends have been my strength. My husband has been my backbone and my support. I come home and he's just like, 'What did they do today?' You know, we sit, laugh, and we debrief. I can curse at him and do all the other stuff that I didn't get out of my system, and he supports me. And he's like, 'Which one was it today?' He's always been supportive and helps me find my balance. And then there are just times I leave work here and I go home and I'm like, 'Hey y'all, let's just hang out and have some fun.' The kisses from my kids, playing on the soccer field, dinner with my husband, and laughing at a TV show are things I do to debrief and get away from it; it's how I cope.*

*I've also found solace and gotten some of my best support from the mentoring and that I've received from Black women who were in leadership positions. Even though I've never had that formal mentor, I sought out what I needed from whom I knew I could get assistance from. They were my cheerleaders. They all may not have been executive-level*

*leadership roles, but they were leaders for me. They would say things like, 'Look, don't you let this happen and you watch out for this and how's it going? And let me give you a hug.'* There has been more than one, but it has been mostly women. There were also some men. I've also had a male colleague who was there to support me, but it was a different type of support.

*My strength comes also in knowing that I'm doing the right thing. I find comfort in knowing that I'm doing the right thing and knowing that I'm doing what needs to be done. I'm comfortable knowing that I'm giving a voice to the voiceless. I also know that I'm even making positive policy changes, even if it's [the credit] not attached to me or even when my other colleagues get full credit for doing it [making the change].*

*My strength also lies in my hope for future Black women leaders. [I asked Dr. Jacobs to expound upon what advice she would give to a prospective leader.] I would advise her to go in with her eyes open. Use all of your resources at every phase and negotiate every damn thing you can! Don't take anything at face value. If something seems off, ask your colleague. Ask your male colleagues of a different persuasion if this is what they've experienced. Don't be afraid to ask. Is this the rate? Was this their experience? Is this what you've been asked to do? Gather that information because you don't know salaries. We always don't want to talk about money, but you don't know if you're being discriminated against if nobody tells you that there's something different.*

### **Dr. Rose Lee**

Dr. Rose Lee was reared in the U.S. South and always felt the love and support of her family. Even as her own mother had been an educator for more than 20 years, her parents never restricted her career choices. She was open to study anything and choose her own



desired career path. Her parents reassured her that she could do or become anything. As a standout high school student in the mid-1990s, Dr. Lee completed an undergraduate degree in education at large, historically White university in the SRUS. She earned a master's degree in History from a prominent, private, PWI in the South. Dr. Lee then earned a Ph.D. in Counseling and Education from one of the largest universities in the SRUS.

Currently, Dr. Lee holds a senior-level leadership position at an SRUS institution where she has oversight of more than 18 tenured and tenure track faculty and 14 additional personnel. Dr. Lee is herself a tenured faculty member and an established scholar in the areas of curriculum design, pedagogy, and cultural studies.

### ***Changing Course***

*So, my critical event wasn't necessarily what led me into leadership in higher ed., but it is what led me into teaching, and that led me to leadership in higher ed. It was the summer before my senior year of high school. Yes, I am going that far back. I went to a journalism camp at Best University [a pseudonym]. Up until then I had been the editor of my high school newspaper and had been on this path to becoming a journalist. And I loved the camp for six weeks, but it was intense. Then, I left there thinking, 'There's no way I can do this as a career.'*

*So, I entered my senior year of high school really at a loss as to what I was going to do with no real money for college. I just remember very early on in the school year, my high school social studies teacher asked, 'Rose, have you ever thought about being a teacher?' She said that the State reserved college funds for teaching fellows and urged me to apply. That changed my life forever because it then meant that I got a scholarship to go to college. And so, coming from a family that was working, middle-class, we didn't have any money*

*saved. So, this sent me on a path to become an educator. And once I got into higher education, I knew that it was something that I could do right because I enjoyed the intellectual part of it. And so, I think in many ways that initial critical incident led me to this path.*

### ***The Right Person, Place, and Point***

*I don't think I necessarily set out to pursue a career as a leader in higher education. I started out as a high school history teacher and at some point, realized the pay was low. The accountability measures that were coming from multiple avenues were a challenge and I didn't think they were in the best interest of young people or teachers for that matter. I was fortunate to have several veteran African American teachers who worked with me, so they resisted a lot of the accountability measures with our principal. And so, I learned from them how to have voice in like a public school. And at some point, in my fourth year of teaching, I decided that I needed to do something that would make an impact, perhaps on policy or the way that the general public understood public education. So, I applied for and began a doctoral program where I learned a lot and then just decided to teach. I then went on to pursue the tenure track faculty position at an institution of higher education.*

*The first administrative job I took was as a director of a program where we have a partnership with more than 100 public schools. When this position came open the Associate Dean at the time asked me if I had thought about applying for it, and I said No. Interestingly enough, our prior Dean had a leadership academy and so people were nominated for that academy and I had been through it. I had, you know, thought about leadership for the year prior, but was not necessarily saying, 'Oh, I want to do that position in leadership.' So, I applied for that position and did that for four years, and then later we needed a department*

head in my [own] department and I took that role. And so, my road to leadership has really been more about opportunities that open up that I thought complemented my skillset and complemented my overall desire to change public education for young people.

### ***The Audacity of Race and Gender***

*I think for sure that race is a big part of how people perceive me. I know that some people think I'm too direct. That's because I come from this cultural tradition of just speaking my mind also. So, I know that they see that, and I know people close to me know that I'm working around trying to get people to jump on the same boat and understand what we're trying to do. I also think just historically that it's impossible for White folks to not see it [race] or to not come with prescribed notions of what Black women are and how Black women act. So, amongst us [my Black female colleagues] we just laughed because we can; we know when they think we're the crazy Black woman!*

*There's also always an intersection of race and gender that impacts the way we [Black women] do our work. Specifically, so much of higher-level leadership is patriarchal, even if it's not men in power we reenact these patriarchal ways of being in academia. [For example], I have a family and am committed to being there for my family and I'm not apologetic for that. So, if you call a 7:30 meeting, I can't be there at 7:30. I will be there at 8:00 or we'll adjust. Or, if I need to leave early to pick up my children, I will do that. And I have noticed that men do it too. If men have to go somewhere to take care of families, they do it and they are unapologetic. So, I think me being a woman of Color in academia has made me very attuned to the ways I move with my gender and the ways I challenge institutional expectations about that. [It also impacts] the ways that I have to challenge with respect to race. But I'm always speaking about these [race and gender] together. I'm always actually*

*thinking about what is being asked of me or us [Blacks] or how my response actually will affect different groups on campus.*

*Another thing I need to mention too is that our university started a lab school. And of course, our lab school is in the heart of an African American community. And so, one of the reasons I took this role, and I think one of the reasons they wanted me to take this role is because I'd already worked with this particular school.*

*This is also a school that became our partner in the community in which it sits. [They wanted me to take the role] because I don't think there was any way they felt like they could pull this off without a Black person leading it. I do agree that it [making a Black woman the director of the program] was a wise decision for the university, but it's also troubling for me because I used a lot of political capital so to speak. I mean I didn't have to do it, and I thought about not [leading the program] because, in a way, I felt like the university was using the grace that I had [built] in the community. At the same time, these kids were in an educational situation that was not good. It was not productive. And I think we have an obligation as a university to more intentionally be involved in that if we claim to be the kind of university that we are. But if this turns out to be a failed endeavor, which I don't think there will be, then I feel deeply troubled by that. [I will be especially concerned] for the community that I've worked with because we worked really hard to convince them that this is a hopeful possibility for their young people to have access to better education. And if we don't deliver on that, then that's a big problem. Because if this endeavor fails, I will internalize that, and I don't know if they would ever trust me again.*

*Race always impacts my role, essentially behind the scenes. I get asked to mentor lots of other women of Color and I love doing that. It's a good part of the work and it helps me*

*out because I think mentorship is reciprocal. I love to talk to other women of Color in academia and to hear their hopes, their struggles, and enjoying trying to problem-solve together. So, you know, I think my role is to help. I've been here; I've learned the institution and I want to help people figure out how to navigate it. I also want to make sure they feel confident enough to speak their own truth.*

*Not only am I asked to mentor other women of Color, I'll also get asked to lead certain diversity initiatives. You know, my Dean actually asked me to convene the faculty of Color in my area. And I get it. But then when I sat down to send the email, I thought, you know, I'm assuming these people defined themselves as people of Color. But I don't have access to HR records, so how do you even construct an email to them? Do I say, 'Hey, people of Color?'*

### **One of One**

*So, he [the Dean] asked me to assemble the people of Color, which I was happy to do, and we've had various meetings about it. But I think the expectation is that we [ethnic minorities] have something to say about diversity and that we need to be tapped to contribute to any conversation about diversity. I respect that the institution does that and I'm glad that they do, but when you have so few women of Color in leadership roles, especially Black women in leadership roles, we get over-taxed, and this is borne out in the literature. So, the mentorship is a big one and then the other piece is students. Even before I was a senior-level leader, if the few students of Color that we have were having trouble with their internships, I would often get pulled into meetings with the students, just because I'm Black. You know, I appreciate being in those meetings and I have built some great relationships with our Black students, so I'm not upset about it. But it's just gotten comical sometimes that we don't*

*necessarily speak that out loud, but it's so obvious. [I always think to myself] why am I here in this meeting with this student who is not mine? They [Black students] do come to see me but, they are looking for some support and some connection. And if I can be there for them at this predominantly White institution then that's what I need to do.*

*I would also say that being a woman of Color in leadership is also isolating because I am one of one. I think we now have a couple of department chairs that are Black women but when I started, I don't know who else there was [Black]. And I was also actually told unofficially that I was the first Black female full professor at this institution. And so, that was shocking to me. It was disappointing and shocking all at once. But it matters; it matters that the institution is continuing to see Black women rise.*

### ***Finding, Embracing, and Embodying a Liberated Leader***

*When I think about the challenges [of being a Black female leader] I am going to channel the voices of other women of Color, especially the Black women that I speak with all the time. Not that I'm speaking for them, but this is a pattern in our narratives. So, as much as I think upper-level administration will take what I have to say, I have found myself having to be much more diplomatic when talking with White colleagues and I mean it is exhausting sometimes! Sometimes I have to think about multiple ways to say this thing in a professional manner and they receive what I'm saying. This is opposed to me saying bluntly, 'How about you need to stop checking your email' because I always try to avoid that 'angry woman' moniker. And I think that as a Black woman, I have to be more careful of that management.*

*[I've also adjusted my management style because] I spend time doing purpose and vision and making sure we're all on the same path to the same goal. I have these conversations that I think are often circumventing the main point. But I have discovered that*

*it doesn't matter. Even if I say it directly, they [Whites] don't hear it and then I've wasted time too. So, I've also learned to be more diplomatic actually when talking to these White colleagues, as opposed to giving directives. I've found it to be much more useful in my way of working to ask White colleagues a question and then they come to the conclusion that I wanted them to come to. Also, as a part of my management style, I do a lot of consensus-building, and again, a lot of questioning. It has been helpful for me that I have never operated under the assumption that I was going to tell anybody how to do anything as a directive. When I deliver a decision, it's not my decision, it's OUR decision.*

*Because this is an institution that claims to want to embrace people of Color, I'm fortunate that I have a lot of freedom to say what I think. It helps that I also am a full professor, and I can't forget THAT dynamic. But I've honestly always felt like I could articulate a perspective as a Black woman academic. And, I've never felt like I would get retaliated against or ostracized for doing so. [I indicate this] because the institution, even if they didn't really want to embrace me, had to maintain the face of embracing diversity. So, I think that has given me a lot of ability to say things, you know, especially on behalf of colleagues who don't necessarily think they're in a position to speak. So that [speaking out and speaking up for others] has been an interesting part of my leadership experience that I didn't expect.*

### ***Staying the Course***

*When thinking about what's motivated me to stay up until this point, it is this deep concern for the ability of the university to actually be a generative force in the community. We are not and cannot be disconnected. The ivory tower, the building on the hill, that just can't be the way higher ed. functions in this century. This is especially true in a city like mine*

*where we have this deeply divided racial history and we know that we still have some tremendous work to do to repair that. That has been a part of my motivation. Another motivator has been my colleagues; honestly, I have some phenomenal colleagues, and we can find the humor in a lot of things. Even my White colleagues will identify the stupidity of some Whiteness, so it is great to work with them. And a lot of them are advocates for people of Color. So, I have never really felt the burden of being the only voice. In fact, I have been on committees where my White colleagues have been the first ones to say, 'But why aren't we considering this person of Color?' We've talked about it, and I have said [to some White peers] that you need to [continue] to do that because there's like three [Black leaders] of us right now, so you can't put us on all the search committees. You, [my White peers] have to be the advocates. I must say that it has been nice to see this transformation in the way that they see themselves as personally responsible for enhancing the diversity of the university and the way we think about our work.*

*I also strive to help my colleagues better understand that diversity is very complex in many ways. [For example], one of the challenges we have in certain search committee work is that sometimes it doesn't look like we're being racially motivated in our decision making. I pointed out to them one time that anytime you're looking at academic lineage per se, or anytime you're looking at how much somebody published before they graduated from a doctoral program, it is inherently tied to race, gender, class, and is contingent upon what kind of institution you've attended. I've found that we have these great candidates of Color who might not have 10 publications before they finished the doc program, nor should they. What has been nice for me is that it's not my simple job to say, 'Hey, you need to hire the Black person.' My job has become more nuanced in helping our White colleagues*



*understand the complexity of race. So, when it doesn't look like it on the surface, I can actually help them draw the line back to the fact that [decision making] is still about race and gender and class. So, I think that's been interesting and that's been another motivating factor for me.*

*I also have found comfort in my sorority as a means of support. Even though I'm not a big sorority person, I would say, but having that connection has helped keep me grounded in many ways. We have a church that we attend, [it is] a Black or historically African American church. And then, family of course is always there. Another support that helps is the fact that I'm a member of a panel for a large U.S. corporation. It's helped me stay connected to other kinds of creative thinking outside of academia. I have a lot of respect for this corporation because they just decided that they were going to embrace diversity and other people have followed.*

*I also find hope in tomorrow because I do not assume that I'm the only person qualified to do this work. So, I can leave this position and somebody else will come in and do a really good job. My advice to future leaders is to temper your attitude just a bit. I have learned to do this because I have a fierce one and tempering it has been decades in the making. I used to be an emotional extremist and when I got mad, everybody knew it. I've learned that nobody needs to see all that. I have this ability now to be furious internally and not have to look like I am. I've worked on that and it's been very beneficial. I would also say to understand that it's usually never about you. The other piece of that is to ask good questions. I have encountered so many colleagues, White ones especially, who on the face of the interaction I am angry about whatever it is I think they're saying. But when I ask follow-up questions, I realize they're coming from an entirely different space and I had no idea what*

*that space was. So, if you can understand that what you're reading from people non-verbally and as they articulate is often not what they're even talking about, then you can actually remain calm and figure out what the real issue is.*

### **Dr. Bernice Ruth**

Dr. Bernice Ruth, the eldest of two, was born in the Midwest and now lives and works in one of the largest cities in the South. Dr. Ruth was reared in a two-parent household where her stepfather was a K-12 administrator and her mom was an elementary school teacher, and her stepfather was a principal and a member of the clergy. Her parents served as the epitome of what it meant to be sincere, honest, and trusted leaders. They were lawful citizens who served their church, family, and community. It was through their example that Dr. Ruth learned the important individual and societal benefits of volunteering, serving others, and working hard.

Having two college-educated parents, Dr. Ruth's decision on gaining a postsecondary degree was not the hope, but the expectation. Accordingly, she completed her baccalaureate degree in Mathematics from a large, public, historically White university in the Midwest during the 1980s. She later attained a master's degree in Business Administration and went on to earn a doctorate from one of the Southeast's premier, private, research universities. Throughout her career in academia, Dr. Ruth has served in leadership roles within Academic Affairs, Information Technology, and Assessment and Accreditation. She currently holds a senior-level leadership positions where she leads a team of approximately 15 individuals.

#### ***Critical Times***

*I kind of think of myself as odd in that I have a bachelor's degree in mathematics. After college, I went to work at a manufacturing plant in a white-collar job and I was like, 'I*

*can't do this.' Then, I went back and got an MBA and went to work in corporate America. I didn't like the job but what I did like was the fact that I volunteered and had mentees. So, a critical period happened to me then.*

*I began mentoring in this program and they would have a bus come and pick us up, drive us to the corporate center of this large Midwestern organization, and drop us off. We would then be placed in this big room and we'd have our mentees [most of whom were African American] with us. I would help them in math because that was the worst subject for them, and I was decent at math. This happened one day a week, but we were also supposed to hang out with them outside of the program. I often took them [my mentees] to the movies or shopping or whatever. I wanted to see, hear, and talk to them about their experience. Most of their experiences were profound; it's like this is nothing that you can walk away from. I mean [I would think to myself], you have to do this, you just have to because who else is going to try to make things better? It was then that I was like, 'You know what, I want to impact these students and how am I going to do that?'*

*So, I looked for math education programs around the U.S. I ended up going to a university with one of the top math education programs. [When looking back], this all felt okay; it felt like the right thing to do because this was the example that my parents had set. My mom is a longtime teacher and my stepfather is a longtime principal, teacher, and minister, and their lives are all about service. I just followed the path that they themselves had taken.*

### ***Never Giving Up***

*I've faced several challenges during my career. [For example], I'm going along [in graduate school] and I have two or so years behind me and then I decide I want to do this*

*dissertation. I believed that children of Color, specifically African Americans, learned mathematics differently because this is what had been told. So, I wanted to study this occurrence and to understand how their [African American children's] learning experience was different. I also would then be able to better determine how we could work with teachers to enhance the students' abilities in mathematics. However, my chair said he wasn't interested, and I would need to find a different topic. Now remember, I was at an institution that was very White.*

*Having my research topic rejected, was disheartening, and it reaffirmed feelings that I had experienced even from my first year there. Early on, I thought that it [this PWI] just wasn't [the place] for me. [I felt this way] because there was no support and honestly, I wanted to drop out. I mean I was the only one [African American] in the program. But then I began working with an Associate Dean there and [again] I started a mentoring for folks of Color. So pretty much that's what I did for my dissertation. My dissertation was related to what are the factors that impact a doctoral student as to whether or not they're going to graduate. And so even though it wasn't exactly what I wanted to do originally, it was something related to helping [Black] folks to improve. This is also what helped me to decide on a career in academia.*

*An additional challenge being a Black woman leader is the glass ceiling that women talk about. And I think there is one, but I don't know what the Black women's ceiling is. What I do know is that it's a lot lower than a glass! But nonetheless, it's a ceiling! You know, people are like, 'Oh, hey, yea, you want to have a path and you want to continue to advance?' And what you're told is, 'Okay, if you do this then you can advance.' And then you do that thing and you still don't advance. [For example], you're told that you should go to*

*this leadership training or do this project. [You do it], and you soon recognize that it doesn't matter what you do, you're not going to move, no matter what.*

*I will say the other thing I don't like about higher education, and I still to this day don't understand it, is why as a Black woman do you have to have an advocate? Why do I have to have somebody speak on my behalf or someone to vouch for me? Why is that? Before you [Whites] believe that I know what I'm doing, agree that I do great work, and that I'm intelligent, someone else has to tell you. Why does someone else, someone who doesn't look like me, need to speak on my behalf? Why do THEY [a White individual] need to tell somebody else that I'm okay?*

*The interesting thing is that I thought my hope was going to be in an HBCU. I thought, 'You know what, I can make a difference here [at an HBCU] and I can be looked at differently.' So, I did apply, was qualified, and I did not even get a call. Someone told me a few years ago why [I didn't get an interview with the HBCU]. They said, 'Because you didn't attend an HBCU, they're not looking at you.' Now, I don't have HBCUs looking at me and I don't have the White folks looking at me in the PWIs either. It's like you're doubly discriminated against all over again.*

### ***Juxtaposing the Black and White of Gender***

*[When considering the issues of race and gender], I do believe the Black or the African American comes first and then the female comes. I say this because it's what they [Whites] see. I think it's the color that comes first. I know they see gender, even when they see White women too. But with Blacks, they see race first. Then, they have all these preconceived notions of how you are. And I have to say that I have experienced situations where there are White women who don't want to work for a Black woman. And in these*

*instances, is when you see them [performing] sabotage, even though they won't admit that it's on purpose.*

*[Regarding sabotage], I'll be quite honest, I came from had an institution located in a county with a reputation in the community of being very White and very racist. At my last position, I had a White female in charge who didn't know what she was doing. She had all this stuff on her plate, and she wasn't organized. So, I got a lot of her work and I did it, because I thought I would move up the ladder because I was doing the things that she wanted me to do. Well, that didn't work; here's what happened. Now again, the leader at the time was a White woman who had three or four of us who were Dean-level who reported to her. I'm here to say that [as a team] we all had some real battles. I mean we disagreed over ideology, what we should do, and lots of other things; we had battles, but it was always done in a respectful way. Well, most of them ended up retiring and I think I was the last one left when she [the White female leader] had done something wrong. I was called into the President's office and was told, 'We're going to let you go.' Whatever she'd done had nothing to do with me or my performance, but I too was dismissed.*

*What I found with this is that even though I'm from the Midwest and there is racism there too, the racism in the South is a little different. There are people out there who others would perceive as very smart and intelligent who don't look like me, but who do well and are biased, racist, or whatever you want to call it. And I've found that no matter what you do, you are never, ever, ever, going to be good enough. And the bigger issue is that I think it's rampant.*

*Issues grounded in gender were prominent when I graduated. What is interesting is that not only was I affected, but some of my other female friends were too, as we did not have*

*a job. [Because we attended such a prominent and well-respected university], everybody told us while we were there, 'Oh, everybody's going to come after you finish here.' Yet, we completed the program and didn't have any job prospects! The African American males did! And don't get me started on that because there's such a difference in higher education with African American males and their success versus that of African American females. I just don't know what's going on with that. But anyway, we all graduated and nobody [none of the females] had a job. So, what happened for me was I followed my spouse and I adjuncted at four different institutions. At one of the institutions, the Director of Academic Affairs came and offered me a job in his area. Because I'm trained to be a faculty member and a researcher, I started not to accept the job. But then someone said, 'No, no, no, you need to take this job.' So, I took the job and that's how I got into administration. [It was] purely by accident.*

*I've also found there to be gender dynamics at HBCUs. I say this because with the HBCU track, they take care of their own. What I mean is if you're [a Black female] planning to be a President [at an HBCU], which some of us want to do as Black females, you have to be from there in my opinion. They're not bringing any of us in from the outside. But, some of my counterparts, Black males who I graduated with [at the PWI], didn't have any problems getting Presidency there. I'm not sure why we are treated this way at HBCUs. But I have a friend who is the Vice Provost of Institutional Effectiveness at a prominent HBCU within the SRUS, she said that she's recruited some Whites and internationals to come in. However, she believes that some of the hires have been unsuccessful because some of them just don't 'get' the students HBCUs serve. So perhaps it is a case where they also don't believe that we*

[Black females with PWI pedigrees] *would understand the students that they're serving either.*

*My experience in higher education is that most of academia consists of White females. And I'm not sure what it is, but to me, they have a view of us and a way of working with us [Black females] that is not positive, and it impacts our ability to succeed. What I have also seen is, is that we, people of Color, must work three, four, five, and ten times harder! And then you look at yourself and you're like, 'But they're not doing as much,' yet you see them keep elevating. And I'm like, 'I don't understand.' And still today, I don't understand.*

*I see that my experiences are absolutely different than my White counterparts. I literally see differences in terms of workload, how people perceive, and you in terms of whether or not they think you're able to lead and move to that next level.*

*A perfect example is the fact that we have so many people who are retiring right now at our institution and in higher education in general, there is just a wave of folks who are retiring. I see the people who are getting hired in these positions. Do they look like me? Not a one, not a one! The other issue with that is there is no succession plan. There isn't anything out there where we can say, okay, I want to move into this position. How am I going to move into this position? What are you going to offer? What training is available? The problem is that they don't even see us, Black women, as being able to serve in those positions.*

*I think too, a challenge for Black female leaders, is a situation where they don't like you to think outside of the box. At my last institution, you had to fit that boxy mold. I used to think it was because it was women of Color in general [who were rejected for outside the box thinking], but then I found it was really about diversity in thought, which is also related to*



women of Color. They [the White establishment] can't wrap their heads around it; and because they can't understand it, they want to contain.

*I think that race plays a role also; it's invisibility. In numerous situations, even when I was in the classroom as a grad student, I couldn't understand it. I say something and there is no reaction. The next person, Sally Sue [a White female], says the exact same thing and they're like, 'Oh, that just a great idea!' Was it the way I said something? How did they not get what I said?*

*The other thing that I've experienced is like when you went through grad school and got your master's degree in business and there's a lot of group work, right? But you [as a Black woman] don't get picked. They never pick us [Blacks] to be in the group. It's like we get whatever's leftover, and that's the group you join. So, what is it about us? We're not getting picked and I don't understand.*

### ***Wisdom for Future Leaders***

*I used to think that when you grew up, all you needed was to work hard and people would notice. That is not the case. I didn't find out until later that you had to 'self-promote.' And as African American females, and I'm talking specifically females, you have to walk a line between promoting and letting people know what you're doing, and not overdoing it because someone else is going to be threatened.*

*One piece of advice that I offer is you better be able to move. You need to make sure you are mobile. Be willing to relocate just in case you need to move to another institution. It also helps if you have someone or somewhere you can go in, shut the door, and have a conversation with someone you trust, someone that you know won't let your words go anywhere else, and with them, you can just vent. It is also helpful if that person is someone*

*who understands, someone who can empathize with your experience. This way, you don't end up venting to the wrong people.*

*I also learned this from my coworker, and I like it; try to utilize the three Ps. [The three Ps are] be positive, professional, and polite. You need all three of those things to make it in the industry. And you know what I would also add to that is patience. You will definitely need it because you're going to come across all kinds.*

*The other thing I tell folks is that I wear my [mental] armor every day. I put on my armor every day. And there are some days when I really want to forget my armor because it's just so heavy. Those are the days where I'm like okay, 'I'm just not going to put it on.' And then when something happens, I'm like, 'Oh, I forgot my armor today!' Those are the days that in order to keep going, I remind myself that some days are just going to be tough, but I can, and I will make it.*

### **Summary**

Overall the findings in the chapter provide insight into the experiences, challenges, and strategies for persistence of seven African American female senior-level leaders serving at PWIs in the U.S. South. Throughout the chapter, participants described their individual pathways to attaining their leadership positions, both tactical and strategic goals, leadership strategies, and aspirations for future leaders. Each of them addressed how support systems such as family, friends, professional affiliations, and spirituality have been key in coping with the persistent challenges of being Black, female, and a leader on historically White campuses.

The participants shared how they make meaning of their day-to-day interactions with peers, subordinates, and superiors, along with the challenges of managing administrative

responsibilities, maintaining a work-life balance, and persisting. Overall, the leader's views presented in this study express a myriad of perspectives on the intersections of race and gender while serving as a senior-level administrator in higher education. While each of their perspectives are unique, there are many parallels that link the leaders to each other. The stories presented are valuable, insightful, revealing, and unique, expressed in these women's own voices.

## Chapter 5: Discussion and Analysis

The purpose of this study is to better understand the lived experiences of seven Black female senior-level leaders serving at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) in the Southern Regional University System (SRUS), from their point of view and in their own words. In an effort to understand how these leaders make sense of their experiences in settings where they are an overwhelming racial and gendered minority, I conducted in-depth interviews. I then analyzed portions of the data gleaned during these participant interviews to answer the following research questions:

- (1) How have race, gender, and culture influenced Black women's journeys toward obtaining a senior leadership position at a Predominantly White Institution?
- (2) What are the leadership experiences of Black, female, senior-level leaders at predominantly White institutions within the South/ern Regional University System?
- (3) What are the challenges, barriers, and experiences confronting Black women in senior leadership positions in higher education at these predominantly White institutions?
- (4) What are the strengths and strategies employed by these leaders when confronting these challenges?

Through the intersecting lenses of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Black Feminist Thought (BFT), I examine critical experiences of seven Black women in leadership positions at public, historically White institutions in the South. Especially when used to evaluate paradigms in education, CRT examines how multiple forms of oppression can intersect within the lives of people of Color, and how those intersections manifest in their daily experiences (Abrams & Moio, 2009). Black feminists contend that these manifestations are

often revealed through racial biases, stereotyping, and generalizations, which when forced on marginalized communities are at times debilitating and painful (Collins, 2000). Thus, BFT serves to reshape knowledge by broadening the identity of the knower and making the location of a Black woman a legitimate platform from which she can create knowledge (Beal, 1969; Crenshaw, 1989; Taylor, 1998).

This chapter has five sections. The first section presents a discussion and analysis of the findings as they relate to the critical incident experienced by the leaders. The second section provides the impact of race, gender, and culture on the women's ascension to leadership. Section three presents a discussion and analysis of the findings pertaining to the experiences of the leaders while serving at their respective historically White institutions. The fourth section explores the barriers and challenges endured by the leaders and the final section focuses on the strengths and strategies employed by the leaders.

### **The Impact of Critical Incidents**

This study included semi-structured interviews, with a focus on critical incidents or events. The critical incident portion of the interviews were, by far, the most intriguing portion of this research endeavor. Participants were asked to reflect on a significant past event that occurred in an educational setting to illustrate how these experiences impacted their leadership styles, experiences, and/or trajectories.

Several of the participants alluded to numerous critical events, some being both positive and negative situations that influenced their career choices, leadership ideals, and desire to impact change (Mertova & Webster, 2013). Critical incident examples included student-focused and interpersonal situations. However, from the interview data collected, the overarching theme were events that altered the trajectories of the participants' lives. Even

more, these events led many of the participants into careers in higher education and ultimately into leadership positions. I elaborate on these critical incidents in the section below. Table 5.1 provides a glimpse into the participants' critical incidents.

*Table 5. Summary of Critical Incidents*

<b><i>Participant</i></b>	<b><i>Critical Incident</i></b>	<b><i>Participant's Meaning Making</i></b>	<b><i>Result/Change</i></b>
<i>Dr. Battle</i>	Recruited to assist failing students of Color.	Realized that with the right support, these students could become successful.	Developed & implemented student success initiatives.
<i>Dr. Freeman</i>	Recruited to manage and mentor undergraduate student interns.	Realized that her calling was working with the next generation of social science leaders.	Began working full-time in higher education with social science students.
<i>Dr. Hampton</i>	Realized the need for change for people with disabilities and their families.	Needed to be a conduit when developing policy and practice for this population.	Pursued a career in higher education.
<i>Dr. Jacobs</i>	Prodded to pursue a career in higher education.	Realized the change she could make in the lives of students.	Altered her career path and elected to work in higher education.
<i>Dr. Lee</i>	Prompted to consider a career in education.	Realized the change she could make in the lives of students and their families.	Altered her career path and elected to work in education.
<i>Dr. Riley</i>	Recruited for a leadership position in higher education.	Realized that working in higher education leadership was her dream and calling.	Uprooted her family; accepted the position; pursued her own dreams.
<i>Dr. Ruth</i>	Began tutoring and mentoring inner-city students of Color.	Realized that her calling was working with underserved student populations.	Vacated position to pursue a terminal degree.

The use of critical incident narrative inquiry within this study proved to be a highly effective means of unlocking conversation with the leaders. This method provides a means

for garnering an array of information that gave insight to the essence of the women's true personalities, career aspirations, leadership qualities, and ultimate goals.

The first critical incident is recounted by Dr. Battle, who began her professional career in middle school education. Her goal was to impact the lives of children in the rural South. In order to better serve this population, she completed a Master's degree program. However, soon after, she began working on the campus of a local historically White university. It was while working in this initial role, a White administrator recruited her to work with ethnic minority medical students who were failing to complete the program and/or pass the necessary standardized tests. When working with these students, Dr. Battle realized that many students of Color on her campus needed special attention to be successful. She knew that her calling was to design and implement programs that would foster the success of these underrepresented students. As a result, she accepted her first true leadership role; she knew that serving in this capacity would best ensure that she could be a permanent conduit for change.

As with Dr. Battle, Dr. Freeman's critical incident led her to a career in higher education administration. Dr. Freeman recalled working in the field of public health when by happenstance, she elected to oversee a group of college undergraduate student interns. She advised the students on what to expect, how to manage, and gave them insights on various keys to success when obtaining their professional license. Fortuitously, a Dean at the university learned of the great influence Dr. Freeman had on the students and offered her a full-time position working with students in social science programs. Realizing that improving the success of future generations of social science leaders was her true passion, Dr. Freeman began her transition into higher education leadership.

Dr. Hampton's critical incident occurred while she was a doctoral student and stemmed from her desire to work with the parents of students with disabilities. An advisor in her doctoral program provided her with the opportunity to become a teaching assistant while completing her terminal degree. Once she began teaching, she was certain that she had found her niche. She knew that teaching on the collegiate level was her calling. Thus, when she arrived at her current institution, administrators recognized her as a driven woman and applauded her ability to effectively lead when serving on committee and special projects. She recalled, how an administrator lauded her for the manner in which she conducted herself, her ability to positively interact with individuals, and her aptitude for "getting things organized." She recalled,

*Soon after I came here, I was offered a leadership position to replace an administrator who was moving away. Looking back, it's interesting to think about the qualities that others saw in me.*

As with several participants, Dr. Jacobs' critical event occurred while she was completing her terminal degree. She described how she had determined early in her collegiate career that she would become an attorney. She spoke to her humble beginning and felt having a career in law would provide her with a great opportunity to earn a comfortable living. However, Dr. Jacobs noted that throughout her undergraduate years, a White male professor constantly encouraged her to pursue a terminal degree instead of one in the legal field. He repeatedly told her that she was "too smart to be a lawyer." After hearing this on multiple occasions, Dr. Jacobs elected to enter a doctoral program and dedicate her career to working with and advancing students, especially those who have been historically underrepresented in higher education.



Dr. Lee spoke to her critical incident as being one that occurred during her final year of high school. She remembered being confident about her desire to become a journalist. After all, she had been the editor of her high school newspaper and was “on a clear path to become a journalist.” She recalled the excitement she had for the journalism camp she was selected to attend during the summer before her senior year. The camp was a grueling six-week experience where she learned the fundamental principles of newsgathering and where projects were introduced, viewed, and critiqued. She noted,

*The camp was intensive and then I left thinking there's no way I can do this as a career. So, I entered my senior year of high school really at a loss as to what I was going to do. And then very early on in the school year, one of my high school social studies teachers asked: 'Rose, have you ever thought about being a teacher?' She let me know that there were scholarships available and I could possibly get a free ride. And that changed my life forever because it then meant that I got a scholarship to go to college. And so, coming from a family that was working middle class we didn't have any money saved. So, it sent me on this path to actually being an educator and little did I know, a future academic leader.*

Dr. Riley's critical event came during a time when she had placed her own career aspirations behind the hopes and dreams of her husband. She met him while they both were enrolled in the same doctoral program. He was bright, ambitious, and always dreamed of being a college President. He always reminded her that being mobile was the key to success for any higher education administrator. She remembered,

*In retrospect, my critical event was deciding to put myself and my own dreams first. At the time, my husband was also in education and we'd moved several times for his career. No matter what I was doing or how well my job was going, I was always willing to pick up stakes and move to wherever his next role landed us. Some years ago, a search firm contacted me about a senior-level role at a large, well-known research institution in the South. We both were aware of its enormous reputation in the academic community and agreed that I should take the interview. After I landed the role and he realized that my income would be greater than his, he started questioning our moving and what he deemed to be a "non-progressive area" for Blacks. We moved and after that things just seemed to fall apart for us [as a couple]. While it was devastating personally for me at the time, I learned that I'd made the best professional decision. I was right for this senior-level administrative role. The job was perfect for me and I learned so much and was able to model several initiatives that had huge and positive impacts for the campus.*

Dr. Ruth's critical event transpired while working in a large corporation where she began serving in a tutoring and mentoring program that targeted inner-city, Black youth. During her student sessions, Dr. Ruth became extremely concerned about the deficit that many of them exhibited in math, the hopelessness of many of their own described life experiences, and the lack of hope for the future that many of the students anticipated. Her critical event is what propelled her into a role as a leader in the academy. Dr. Ruth remembered,

*When I worked in corporate America I began mentoring in this program. ... a bus would come and pick us up and drive us to the corporate center of this large Midwestern organization and drop us off. We'd have our mentees and we would work with them one day a week. ... we were supposed to hang out with them outside of the program. So, I took him to the movies or shopping or whatever to see, hear, and talk to them about their experience. It's like this nothing that you can walk away from. Their stories were filled with hopelessness and despair. I knew I had to work in education, because who else is going to try to make things better?*

After this occurrence, Dr. Ruth elected to leave her corporate position and complete a doctoral program. She knew that having a terminal degree would better equip her for a role in education. She was determined to make a change in the lives of students of Color and serve as a role model to them.

While each of these critical incidents took place at different times and in different places, what they have in common is that they served as turning points in the career paths and leadership trajectories of the participants. What's more, these critical occurrences contributed to the construction of the participants' desires to be agents of change for students (particularly students of Color and other underserved populations) and for higher education. The critical incidents of these Black women leaders were impacted by race, gender, and culture and had significant implications for their leadership journeys.

### **The Impact of Race, Gender, and Culture on the Leadership Journey**

The first research question explored the theory for how race, gender, and culture have impacted Black women's journeys toward obtaining senior-level leadership positions at

PWIs. The findings reveal that issues of race, gender, and culture are prevalent, multi-dimensional, and have far-reaching implications. At the same time, participants posited that (1) race was more salient than gender or culture, (2) racism is perpetuated through disregard and disrespect, (2) invisibilization<sup>21</sup> in higher education is prevalent, and (3) tokenism is problematic for Black female leaders.

### **The Permanence of Race**

Each of the study participants acknowledged experiencing racism, sexism, and cultural bias in a myriad of forms. The constant drive for Black female leaders to go above and beyond to overcome racism and sexism was a constant motif throughout the study, as participants echoed this concern within their interviews. Interestingly, all participants confirmed the salience of racism over gender. For example, Dr. Jacobs disclosed, “*Race is definitely the bigger issue. People definitely consider race before they consider gender.*” Dr. Ruth shared, “*I think the Black or the African American comes first and then the female comes because it's what they [Whites] see.*” Dr. Lee concurred with these findings and illustrates her thoughts on the permanence of race: “*I think just historically that it's impossible for White folks to not see it [race] or to not come with prescribed notions of what Black women are and how Black women act.*”

It is clear that through their experiences their race has impacted their trajectories and that they have experienced discrimination due to racism as compared to their male and White colleagues. Dr. Riley disclosed,

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<sup>21</sup> *Invisibilization* is a term used to describe excluded and/or marginalized social groups who frequently face problems involving representation in the public sphere. The notion of exclusion typically refers to being considered irrelevant in public processes of communication (Herzog, 2017).

*I know that my race has impeded mine and other African Americans' ability to move forward here. I always pay attention to the new leaders hired. They are always young, and always White. It seems that none of the search teams ever find Black women who are qualified. I always wonder, 'Where are they looking?' There are plenty of us out here.*

Dr. Hampton also addressed her experiences with racism, *"In my experience, race always permeates the space and I have to prove myself and win them [Whites] over."*

Each of these sentiments is consistent with what Critical Race theorists have always maintained: race is central and has permanent, enduring effects (Bell, 1992; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). In addition to validating leaders' experiences, this critical scholarship confirms the permanence of race and racism in academia while giving voice to those too often marginalized and/or silenced by majoritarian power structures.

These findings align with current literature that suggests many Black professional women deem race as more significant than gender because all of the women reported being the "only" or "one of few" Black employees in their departments (Beckwith, Carter, & Peters, 2016). While three of the seven study participants worked in all-female departments and were members of the majority group in terms of gender, they were still conscious of the fact that there were few, if any, people in their department who shared the same race. Several participants believe that they experience continual pressures of subtle racism. This is problematic, as it impacts Black women's emotional and mental health, promotion, tenure, and ultimately their ability to progress (Burgess, 1997). This is also an issue for which Whites do not have to endure; thus, leaving White faculty with the mental and emotional energy to pursue other intellectual, cultural, and social activities.

CRT proponents believe that race is used for and is overall concerned with power relations and continues to be an ideology to legitimize the dominance of certain groups. Race and its consequent racism are fundamentally part of a global system of structural racial stratification used first and foremost as matter of power. Dr. Hampton reaffirmed this philosophy as she recalled,

*For me, race is the biggest piece because...people are trying to figure out how I am qualified. ...the other department chair is a White female. ... I don't always have to be the one facilitating the meeting. [Even as] I know just as much as she does, but I think a lot of times it gets perceived [by my White counterparts] that she somehow is more competent because she's White and does more facilitating of the meetings. And when she's had to defer to me, I can see the looks on their faces, I see them like think [or ask themselves], 'Well, why is she asking her?' 'Who is she supposed to be?' 'What could this Black woman know that the White woman doesn't?'*

#### *Issues of gender*

Even as the women in the study were staunch in their beliefs that race was the most prominent of the intersectional qualities impacting their leadership paths, there is significant evidence that gender bias has also influenced their trajectories. It is clear that gender stereotypes have also limited the opportunity for some of these women of Color to achieve leadership positions, as well as increased the scrutiny and criticism of their ability to take command. Dr. Riley recalled an incident when she did not receive a promotion because of her gender. She remembered,

*I know for a fact that gender and even my race has impacted my ability to move into certain roles. ... there was an internal posting for a newly created position. ... the candidate was going to be working with military programs and would have some responsibility with creating, designing, and implementing new curriculum. I had all the qualifications... I applied and did well with the interview. Still, I did not get the appointment. I later found out that the Dean of the department supported another [less qualified] candidate because he felt that a White male would be better suited for the position. He presumed that most of the military contacts would themselves be White, conservative males. He told another colleague, 'Those GIs probably wouldn't play well with an educated Black woman as the head of a program like this.'*

Dr. Battle addressed the impact of gender in her career and stated, *"I think that earlier on in my career, gender was probably the most salient one of the two issues. Yes, I'm sure that gender was more salient because this was a very male-dominated environment."*

Dr. Riley also spoke about the nuances gender creates in the academy. She revealed,

*I know that both my race and gender have impacted my ability to earn equal pay or even comparable in some instances versus White males, females, and even Black males; I'm not naive. I believe that gender plays an expansive role in the way leaders are groomed and developed. Men are typically looked at first to lead. Our education system in general bolsters gender disparity and it is very problematic in higher education.*

Dr. Hampton addressed her views on gender bias. She stated,

*My campus has a climate where White males have always been viewed as being fit for leadership. It was historically how this campus was designed. It was always males who were in administrative roles, females were within teaching because of it being such a community themed school.*

Globally, women are underrepresented in academia, and the share of women decreases with each step up the hierarchical ladder (Beckwith, Carter & Peters, 2016). Women encounter many barriers to advancement into leadership positions, and these barriers include gender-based discrimination as well as gender bias (Bonebright, Cottledge & Lonquist, 2012; Collins, 1989). This study's findings align with contemporary research indicating that gender bias remains a significant barrier to women's career advancement. Gendered stereotypes reflecting normative notions of femininity and masculinity remain as barriers to the professional advancement of ethnic minority women. Gender stereotypes typically portray femininities and masculinities as binary opposites and can make the difference in advancement when depicting women as emotional versus rational, indecisive versus decisive, and impulsive as opposed to strategic (King & Ferguson, 2011). Gendered stereotypes can also adversely affect performance and can lead capable individuals within a group to conform to their group's negative stereotype (Bush et al., 2010).

*I am not my hair.*

For this study, three participants wore their hair in its natural state, and two commented on how perceptions of their hair, rooted in racist sentiment, have impacted their leadership experiences. Some of the women report workplace incidences of being singled out, gawked at, commented on, or having jokes made about their latest hairstyle. Thus, race-



based hair discrimination for women of Color facilitates biases that keep them from having the same opportunities as their White female peers (Robinson, 2011). Even as several states have taken measures to force employers and the broader community to help dismantle a culture of discrimination experienced by Blacks, they continue to face implicit pressures to conform to European standards (Burney, 2019; Powell, 2018; Robinson, 2011).

Historically, for many Blacks, hair has always carried symbolism. In some African civilizations, hairstyles were used to indicate a person's age, religion, ethnic identity, marital status, wealth, and rank within the community. In the 1960s and 1970s, the Afro was more than a hairstyle; it was "a symbol of Black pride, a salient affirmation of African roots and the beauty of blackness" (Calder & Macfarlane, 2016, p. 2). Over the last decade, there has been resurgence of the 1960s and 1970s movement among Black women to "go natural<sup>22</sup>."

However, contemporary research has shown that women of Color who wear their natural hair<sup>23</sup> in the workplace are often penalized and are judged for not conforming to the traditional, Eurocentric ideals of beauty, with views featuring White women with long, straight, flat hair (Calder & Macfarlane, 2016; Norwood, 2018). Indeed, this is the dominant narrative created by Eurocentric ideals of professionalism that these women refute. Hairstyles such as Afros, braids, dreadlocks, kinky and curly twists are burdened with societal norms equating these designs to Blackness, a lack of professionalism, and inferiority (Norwood, 2018).

Dr. Riley addressed racialized perceptions of her hair,

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<sup>22</sup> *To go natural* is a colloquial expression widely used among African Americans to reference hair that is untreated by chemical processors or texturizers that alter the natural curl pattern of one's hair.

<sup>23</sup> *Natural hair* is hair that has not been altered by chemical straighteners, including relaxers and texturizers (Robinson, 2011; Norwood, 2018).

*So now, depending on how the wind blows and what I feel like in the mornings, I either flat iron and go straight or just wear it like God gave it to me! And I know [initially] when I came in with that curly 'do' [slang for 'hairdo'] the eyes were popping! One White female did a triple-take as we passed each other. And when I caught her staring, she awkwardly mentioned 'liking my new haircut'. She doesn't know it but months later, a person she deemed to be her friend told me that when she originally saw me, she wondered if 'I'd gotten caught with my fingers in the [electrical] outlet.' I thought, she has some nerve because on most days her hair is an oily, flat mess.*

Dr. Freeman also believes that the culmination of race, gender, and culture has impacted her leadership experience as a result of her decision to revert to wearing a natural hairstyle. Dr. Freeman spoke to the implicit bias<sup>24</sup> she's endured regarding her hair. She revealed,

*I think that race trumps gender. I feel like race challenges the way other people perceive me. Well, I'll put it this way. I had a perm for a long time, and then I was in the middle of trying to be in school and take care of my mom who was sick. So, I went one day and just told my stylist to just cut it off. And so, I wore a little buzz cut for a while. And so, I think people were intimidated*

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<sup>24</sup> *Implicit bias* is a term that describes the unconscious bias that occurs when a person consciously rejects stereotypes but still unconsciously makes evaluations based on those stereotypes (Staats, 2016).

*by that. ...you know, White women don't have this extra burden. They are free to do whatever, whenever with their hair without fear of being judged.*

Both Drs. Riley and Freeman contend that the way they wear their hair obscures the perception of what the face of a leader in the academy should look like. Both leaders assert that they find comfort in the Black feminist dogma that urges them to resist the stereotypes requiring them to be meek and docile. They are instead, “embracing their assertiveness, valuing their sassiness, and to continue to use these qualities to survive in and transcend the harsh environments that circumscribe so many Black women’s lives” (Collins, 1986, p. 18).

### **Disregard and Disrespect**

An additional cause for concern with many study participants is the pervasive nature by which they endure various forms of disregard and disrespect. All participants concede that they are or have been victims of racialized behaviors grounded in disregard and disrespect. Several participants report being mistaken for other Black women, ignored or invisibilized, and victims of being widely assumed, perceived, or treated by Whites as token appointments who are underqualified and undereducated.

#### *Invisibilization*

A specific form of disregard and disrespect experienced by many of the study’s participants is invisibilization. All seven participants could identify negative incidences associated with being invisibilized in the workplace. Several leaders addressed being excluded within social groups; some participants spoke to being treated as communicatively irrelevant when expressing individual, unique thoughts, ideas, or concepts (Herzog, 2017). A commonality among the participants’ responses were feelings of frustration when offering

ideas and no one responds; then, a few minutes later, a White person in the room presents the same idea, and only then is it heard and received. Dr. Riley addressed this issue,

*I constantly have to fight to have my ideas, thoughts, and actions heard, understood, and accepted. Yes, and I do mean fight! That's because there have been so many times where I feel as though I'm in the heat of battle. You know, as I seem to always do, I get pulled into a project, we're all working together on said project, and I get relaxed and begin to think of us [the committee] as a unit that's really trying to make meaningful changes. But then it happens. I present what I think to be a plausible and really sustainable solution to our issue, and it is totally dismissed or even glossed over. I swear to you, in one of these situations, it was no more than three minutes later when a colleague [a White male], who I've always admired, literally repeated word-for-word what I had already said to the team. Do you know he was lauded [by the other members of the mostly White team] as if he were the Savior? Someone even said, 'That's a brilliant idea!' I sat there speechless and stunned for a few minutes. He [the co-worker] couldn't even look my way. For the rest of that meeting, I shut down.*

Dr. Ruth conveyed her experience with her contributions being ignored, *I agree that this type of thing happens all the time. Even when I was in the classroom as a grad student it would happen, and I couldn't understand. Was it the way I said it? How did they not get what I said? Did they not hear me when I said it? And the next person who is Sally Sue [a White female] says the*

*exact same thing. [Then], they're like, 'Oh no, but that's a great idea!' ...we call those folks, I heard the term a few weeks ago, 'academic thieves.'*

*Another form of disregard that I have experienced and maybe you've experienced this too, was during grad school and when there's a lot of group work, right? They don't want us! That's right, we don't get picked. It's like whatever's leftover, that's the group you join. So, what is it about us? We're not getting picked? I don't understand?*

BFT proponents address the phenomenon of invisibilizing Black women as a “structural domain of power” and as a “powerful mechanism designed to disadvantage Black women working in academia and the professional structure” (Collins, 1990, p. 62). Collins (1990) further suggests, “This larger system of oppression works to suppress the ideas of Black women intellectuals” and further insists that these types of occurrences “facilitate the elevation of elite White male ideas and interests” while simultaneously suppressing Black women’s ideas and interests in traditional scholarship (p. 63). Crenshaw (1989) also believes that these perpetual situations wherein Black women are ignored facilitate invisibility. Even more, acts of invisibilization have the propensity to inspire all males and White females to perpetuate the unjust treatment of Black women by talking over them, interrupting them in meetings, excluding them from certain conversations, and denying them the credit for the effort and passion they devote to the profession (Brown, Keith, Jackson, & Gary, 2003).

#### *Disrespect from students*

Two participants expressed concern for the disregard and disrespect they have received from students. They believe many of these instances to be rooted in racial

microaggressions that challenge the legitimacy of authority for ethnic minorities. Dr. Hampton recalled that on multiple occasions she's had encounters that have questioned her legitimacy as a leader. She explained,

*So, I often have to contend with people's kind of preconceived notions of what I should and should not be in terms of that leadership structure. This is often the case when I'm required to interact with students. I've had them to question my authority or you know they are like, 'Is there somebody else I can talk to?' And I let them know that the buck stops with me; I am the someone they should talk to.*

Dr. Jacobs addressed the disrespect she has received in the classroom from students who refuse to recognize her credentials as a Doctor of Philosophy. She posited,

*...one of the things that I've experienced is subtle disrespect in the classroom. [For example], I'm always called a 'Miss' and not a doctor. I'm Miss this, and Miss that. It's hardly ever that they say, Doctor. And I tell my students all the time that it's okay to call me Doctor, and my first name. So, if they're like Dr. Brandy, I'm okay with it; we're cool. Yet, still I have those who will email me and address me as 'Miss Brandy' and I'll email back, 'Doctor.' Some catch it and others don't. You know, I'm not the one who wants to say, 'Hey, I'm Dr. Jacobs,' but I do want you to respect who I am.*

The reactions from the women in this study coincide with other qualitative work which has shown that exposure to microaggressions can create hostile spaces, where the “value of racially diverse identities seems to always be on trial” (Auguste, 2018). Those who are victimized by microaggressions often see them as reminders that because of their race,

some individuals have relegated them to a lower social class and believe they lack intellect or merit (Sue, 2010). Unfortunately, these suppositions provide aggressors with just cause to question the authority, credentials, and worth of the victims. Even as microaggressions are often subtle, they are discriminatory and can have far-reaching implications such as impacting one's emotional health and can manifest in the forms of anxiety and depression (Auguste, 2018; Sue, 2010). Similar to microaggressions, being mistaken or misidentified is equally problematic for Black female leaders in the academy.

### *Misidentification*

Several participants spoke to the common phenomenon of being disregarded in the form of misidentification. Most participants believe this to be an additional consequence of having only a few Black female employees in the workplace. As such, being mistaken for each other is yet another conduit for marginalizing these Black leaders.

Both Drs. Jacobs and Riley shared their own encounters with this issue. Dr. Riley spoke candidly about the frustration associated with being mistaken for one of only a few other Black women faculty on campus, even when they don't have a similar stature, complexion, or personality. Dr. Riley stated,

*It makes me feel invisible when people can't tell me apart from another coworker of Color. I'm not sure if they really just don't know any better, or if it's the fact that they don't care, or both! What I will tell you is that [in my mind] I automatically go to, you're a racist. I'll say it again, with the person who I've been mistaken for, there is a HUGE difference in our physical appearance. Not only is there is about a five or six-inch height difference in us, our complexions are on the opposite ends of the brown color spectrum. I*

*mean, there is simply no way anyone can believe that I look like her or she like me. No way. What that tells me is they [Whites] don't care enough about either of us to want to truly know us and be able to distinguish us apart. When this happens, it erases all of my contributions to the university, it erases my entire body of work and the other person's too. Why [does this keep happening] is always my question. I always come back to the fact that it's because we both had some ancestors who were born on the same continent.*

Dr. Jacobs recalled her own experiences with misidentification and commented, *I've walked into rooms and events and I've been mistaken for another Brown female faculty member on campus. And it was to the point where I watched a White colleague, who knew what he was about to do, and they're like, 'Don't do it. No, no, no. It's not her! It's not her!' Still, the person did it and I was laughing. I was like, 'No, that's the other one.'*

Connelly (2015) explains that misidentification could be a result of having difficulty with cross-racial identification bias, which is the idea that, in general, people of other races and ethnic groups all look alike to most perceivers. It is also supposed that this phenomenon can be attributed to an individual's "own-race bias" which suggests that individuals tend to recognize and differentiate between faces of our own race more easily than faces of another race (Connelly, 2015, p.127). Whatever the reason or rationale for being mistaken for another Black woman on campus, it is problematic in that it is yet another means for invisibilizing people of Color. While being confused for other Black women on campus is a painful form of disregard, being socially overlooked can be similarly as upsetting.



*Socially overlooked*

Four participants reported being socially overlooked and ignored at events and settings both on and off campus. Some Black feminists contend that Black women are more likely than other racial or gender groups to go unnoticed or unheard (hooks, 1981; McClaurin, 2001). In a 2010 study, researchers Sesko and Biernat examined the idea of Black women being socially ignored. The results suggest that Black women are more likely than White men or White women (and even Black men) to go unnoticed by others in a group or social situation. Dr. Hampton spoke to her own experience with being overlooked as she was visiting with a co-worker's family after his untimely passing. She recalled,

*I went to their house for the repass because I couldn't make it to the funeral. ...There are a lot of my faculty members there; there was campus-wide representation. Particularly, there was one of my colleagues who I had just been in a committee meeting with earlier that week and the funeral is on a Saturday. I'm sitting in the living room and he walks in and asks my friend, 'Well, who was that?' Again, that's the vibe I get more from White males. So, it's kind of that undercurrent where you realize that there are certain surroundings that I've found myself in that I know I'm just being tolerated.*

Dr. Hampton also addressed the common occurrence of her being overlooked by some White faculty members. She disclosed,

*I can see them [my White counterparts] and work with them in this committee capacity say on Monday, pass them on campus on Tuesday and they give me no acknowledgment. My running joke is like I'm over six feet tall and am about something, something, something pounds. I'm like, as big as I am, I*

*know you see me. This is not to mention you just sat beside me or across from me in a meeting last week. You know, as an African American woman you kind of get glossed over. For me, primarily it's the White males that are doing this.*

The point that these leaders want to convey is that Black people are not interchangeable, nor can they be ignored; no member of any racial, ethnic, or gender group should be. When Whites exercise their own privilege in “mixing up” or “confusing” one person of Color for one another, or ignoring one’s presence, they speak to a larger truth about White attitudes toward Black individuals (Stanley, 2009; Trotman Reid, 2012). Whether the person acts with intent or not, the message sent is that Black individual identities are so unimportant, Whites don’t even have to remember which one they are.

#### *The token effect*

Similar to being socially overlooked, participants also described feelings and experiences rooted in tokenism. These leaders presume that their White counterparts believe their inclusion to be only a result or reaction to the university’s need to fulfill diversity requirements, or to make it appear that the organization is committed to offering equal opportunities. Dr. Battle addressed the challenges of being the only Black and the only female “at the table” while serving in her first leadership position. She recalled,

*When I initially took a seat at the leadership table, I was the only Black and the only female. ... this was a very male-dominated environment. ... oftentimes I was being called into conversations that were related to race because of that. I mean again, I was speaking for all Black people. ...Interestingly enough, it was also during these times that I also became more aware of the*

*fact that I was often the token. It was clear that I was involved in some conversations because they needed a Black person's voice, a woman's voice. I knew there were many times that was the case and it was the only reason for me being involved.*

It is clear from the leaders' perspectives that some of these instances cause them to question whether selection into a position was based on their qualifications or substantiated on a need to meet a presumed diversity quota. It is also clear that for many, navigating spaces where they were the only female person of Color is difficult. Dr. Hampton addressed these difficulties when recalling her experiences with the notion of tokenism,

*Being in leadership at a mostly White institution presents many challenges for African American women. [For example], when I'm the lead on a project, I go in very confident. But I see the look on their [the White faculty's] faces. So, I think a lot of times I get prejudged with the belief, 'Oh, she only got here because they needed a Black female.' They [my White critics] are not realizing that it might have been their initial reason [for placing me in a leadership position], but I'm very qualified and I know what I need to do in order to maintain this spot.*

Kanter's (1977) theory of tokenism and disproportionate representation implies that racism and unfair treatment experienced by minority employees, such as Black female academic leaders, makes them susceptible to the widely accepted racial stereotypes of being perceived as less competent even with continued evidence of high productivity and competence. In many instances the token perception also brings about increased performance pressure and unrealistic expectations from the dominant group (Kanter, 1977; Neimann,

2016). Kanter (1977) further advises that a significant principle of tokenism is that persons who are deemed as tokens are not viewed as individuals, but as representatives of their entire race, gender, or other marginalized groups. The findings in this research are consistent with previous studies wherein experiences, such as disregard, disrespect, and the pervasiveness for which tokenism occurs for Black female faculty is problematic and inhibits their recruitment, retention, and persistence (Allen et al., 2000; Brooks, 2013). While each of the Black women had different specific experiences with tokenistic behavior, it was a challenge that all of them endured (Collins, 2009).

### **Summary Regarding the Impact of Race, Gender, and Culture**

The findings from this study align with Black feminist theorist bell hooks (1984), who argues that for Black women, race is always more salient than gender as an aspect of their identity. Race and gender are social constructs produced by the dominant group in society as a way to impose boundaries and perpetuate their power (Closson, 2010; Collins, 1990; Harlow, 2003). These prominent social categories in the U.S. shape how we are seen by others and even how we understand ourselves. Often, race, gender, and cultural perceptions influence our well-being, peer interactions, and even our academic and leadership pathways (Grant & Simmons, 2008). Both CRT and BFT are connected as they acknowledge race and gender as simultaneous oppressions (Bell, 1992, Crenshaw et al., 1996). BFT argues that Black women are not empowered until intersecting oppressions are eliminated (Collins, 1996). The results from this study demonstrate how intersecting oppressions can come from people in an organization and the systems established by the organizations and manifest themselves as racist and sexist behaviors (Bell, 1992; Collins, 1990; hooks, 2000).

The insight gleaned from these academic leaders only amplifies what BFT proponents acknowledge, the undercurrents of racism and sexism have the propensity to perpetuate domination and remain a constant source of oppression for Black women (Collins, 1996; Patton et al., 2007; Wheeler, 2002). CRT scholars join feminist theorists in emphasizing the fluidity and autonomy of oppression that gender and racial identities maintain (Gillborn, 2015). Despite aims for racial and gender equity in higher education, the academy continues to be a significant breeding ground for these oppressors. Thus, only until we explore more deeply the lived experiences of these Black women will we be able to offer viable alternatives for which to truly fight these oppressions.

### **Experiences of Black Female Senior-Level Leaders**

The second research question explores the leadership experiences of Black female senior-level leaders at PWIs. While they spoke to a plethora of experiences at their intersection of race and gender, three prevailing themes dominated the landscape of their experiences: (1) “outsiders within” and “insider without” status, (2) having a commitment to social justice, and (3) the necessity for stepping down.

### **Outsider Within and Insider Without**

#### *Outsider Within Status*

Each of the participants for this study received the vast majority of their credentials at PWIs. In fact, only one participant, Dr. Jacobs, received any portion of her education at an HBCU. Thus, they are familiar with being a minority within a majority culture. However, even with this familiarity, four women reported feeling as if they were perpetual “outsiders” working “within” the confines of and playing by the rules of the dominant group. These leaders report that their presence creates divisions and facilitates a sense of separateness

grounded in the intersections of race and gender (Collins, 1986). The notion of the “outsider within” is not a novel concept, as Collins (1986) explains it as a standpoint wherein a minority employee is able to observe the inner workings of the majority group but are still, paradoxically, not considered “one of the family” (Collins, 1986, p. 22).

Collins (1986) argues that this outsider/insider paradox causes Black women in the academy to simultaneously benefit and suffer from their outsider status. Collins’s theory of the outsider within is especially relevant to this study, as participants reflect on the way that they are perceived by their colleagues. Dr. Riley spoke to her outsider within experience as it related to the announcement for her promotion:

*The announcement informing the others that I would be Chair was sent by email. The announcement for the previous Chair [a White woman] happened during a staff meeting where everyone was there. And, they even had a cake for her. For weeks, I felt like an outsider because only two of my thirteen co-workers even acknowledged my new role.*

Dr. Ruth shared insight into her own outsider status and the need for Blacks to have their own activists if they are to be taken seriously or deemed as competent, viable, or worthy.

*There are people out there who others would perceive as very smart and intelligent who don't look like me, who do well but are biased. ...the other thing I don't like about higher education, and I still to this day don't understand it, is why as a Black woman do you have to have an advocate? Why do I have to have somebody speak on my behalf or someone to vouch for me? Why is that? Before you [Whites] believe that I know what I'm doing,*

*agree that I do great work, and that I'm intelligent, someone else has to tell you. Why does someone else, someone who doesn't look like me, need to speak on my behalf? Why do THEY [a White individual] need to tell somebody else that I'm okay?*

Both Critical Race and Black Feminist theorists have discussed the barrage of institutional behaviors that perpetuate the “outsider” climate Black women face on predominantly White college campuses (Bell, 1992; Patton et al., 2007; Edwards et al., 2007). Differences in hiring patterns, tenure attainment, promotions, and compensation in academic units are illustrative of the interlocking nature of oppression and preserve Black women’s status as outcasts (Collins, 1986; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

It is clear that the oppression felt by leaders of Color at PWIs is a direct result of their outsider status. However, several participants addressed a phenomenon that is a stark juxtaposition to the outsider within status; it is that of the “insider without.”

#### *Insiders Without Status*

An unanticipated finding of this study is the notion of the “insider without.” Several participants believe that while they are too Black for the culture within their PWIs, they are also shunned and not seen as being Black enough to secure leadership positions at HBCUs. Thus, even as these leaders are “insiders” because they identify as Black or African American, they are still perceived by those in power within HBCUs as outsiders who are destined to be “without” roles at these institutions because their experience and credentials are from historically White universities. Dr. Battle spoke candidly about her experience when applying for a leadership role at a prestigious HBCU. She explained,

*The truth is I don't think HBCUs like me. I've never experienced one as far as working at one or attended one either. Over the years, I've had several search firms to approach me for roles and it never works out. For example, at one point I applied for the President's position at a prominent HBCU. Everything went well and the interview process was seamless. I heard that I had gotten to be on the final list. Then I was in the top three, then top two. What I found is that I'm always been the bridesmaid, never the bride. Of course, I didn't get the job. And the feedback that always comes back is, 'Well, you don't have any HBCU experience.' Yada, Yada, Yada.*

Some study participants postulate that the administrators at HBCUs deem those who have pedigrees from PWIs to have little knowledge about the struggles, journeys, and needs of Black college students. Thus, they would offer little by way of mentoring and developing these students of Color. Dr. Ruth commented on her meaning making of being shunned by HBCUs. She commented,

*You know the interesting thing is I thought my hope was going to be at an HBCU. I thought, you know what, I can make a difference there and I can be looked at differently. So, I did apply, [was] qualified, and I did not even get a call. Someone told me a few years ago and here's what they said. Here's why you didn't get called, you didn't attend an HBCU. They're not looking at you because HBCUs take care of their own. So, now I don't have HBCUs looking at me and I don't have the White folks looking at me in the PWIs. So, it's like you're doubly discriminated against.*



While I could find no formal literature on this phenomenon, I can only postulate as to the causation of these occurrences. HBCUs are known for their support systems, family-like atmospheres, and tend to pride themselves on nurturing and caring for students (Gasman & Conrad, 2013). These institutions are recognized for their capacity to meet students where they are academically and bring them up to where they should be. Even more, they are lauded for providing access and fostering the success for students who otherwise would not have the opportunity to pursue a postsecondary education (Gasman & Conrad, 2013).

More importantly, many researchers attribute HBCUs with providing students with cultural value, social empowerment, and the development of racial identities and attitudes (Brown, Ricard & Donahoo, 2004; Gasman, 2006; Gasman & Conrad, 2013). These traits are consistently identified as being part of an HBCU environment. It should then be recognized that Black students who attend HBCUs also participate in and immerse themselves in The Black College Experience<sup>25</sup>. Thus, those who do not attend HBCUs are less likely to be able to empathize with and fully promote this experience.

It appears that those who are at the helm of these HBCUs are subjecting intelligent, capable Black female leaders to a new-age and dangerous form of discrimination. This tantamount to a new-age form of segregation. More concerning is that nearly 30 years post Collins' seminal work, *Learning From the Outsider Within*, this is in essence a contemporary form of the "outsider status." The difference now is only this time the injustice is implemented and executed to us and by us.

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<sup>25</sup> *The Black College Experience* is one that is characteristic of institutional family, cultural immersion, and universal inclusion (Gasman & Conrad, 2013).

The irony of these decisions is that HBCUs have always prided themselves on being shelters from racial bias (Li, 2007). Yet when HBCUs exclude certain categories of Black women, they are summarily contradicting their own collective philosophies of nurturing, growing, and accepting all people of Color. It also presents a dangerous precedence for HBCU students, as they too need to be exposed to those who have experienced alternate forms of education. HBCUs need to see Black women PWI graduates as the assets that they are, pioneers who have persevered and successfully navigated different and difficult terrain.

***Compensation disparities.*** Returning to their racialized, gendered, and cultural experiences at their PWIs, issues surrounding compensation inequities are an additional cause for concern for many participants. Three participants addressed the belief that even with similar qualifications and experience, as Black women they are consistently paid less than White females serving in a similar capacity. Dr. Jacobs is staunch in her belief that all women need to “do their homework” and be prepared to “negotiate your salary upfront.” Dr. Jacobs elaborated on an encounter related to compensation inequities,

*After I finally agreed to take the leadership role, I had few regrets, but I wish I had been a better negotiator. After talking to another White male peer, I realized I could have negotiated up some good stuff including like standard salary bumps and all this other stuff. I was amazed at what others were getting. And it's funny because even though I liked this Dean, some things he offered financially was not the same rate given to the White male. After I found out, I went back to the Dean and let him know that the administrative bump he quoted me was wrong. He claimed he didn't know and was just going on what he'd heard. I was later granted the true rate.*

According to Bichsel and McChesney (2017), Black women's pay disparity is especially concerning for those working in the academy. In 2018, women of Color earned only 65% of what White men earned and 80% of White women's salaries (BLS, 2019a). Dr. Freeman disclosed that she's always known about "*differences in salaries between men and women on this campus.*" She's even spoken to the pay discrepancies with Human Resources representatives and was advised that all were equally compensated. Dr. Freeman maintained,

*...the nuance is we work for the state, so all salaries are published; it's public knowledge and you can go onto the website and see what people make. A lot of times the chatter is that women aren't great negotiators when it comes to defining their worth in terms of dollars and cents. For example, when I moved from being Interim Director to the permanent role, my first offer was \$10,000 less than what the White male was making who had left the program in a mess. I mean, we were getting ready to come up for accreditation review and the program was in a complete mess. And even though that offer was more money than I had ever made in my life, I said, 'I can't work for that.' But, knowing what the other leader was making was the only way that I was able to negotiate better pay.*

Dr. Riley also spoke to the wage gap for Black women working in higher education. Sharing her thoughts on compensation disparities and practices for grooming new leaders, she stated:

*I know that both my race and gender have impacted my ability to earn equal pay or even comparable in some instances versus White males, females, and even Black males; I'm not naive. I believe that gender plays an expansive role*

*in the way leaders are groomed and developed. Men are typically looked at first to lead. Our education system in general, undermines gender disparity and it is especially problematic in higher education. This disparity is not only concerning in terms of opportunities and resources but also with compensation and rewards. I know of numerous instances where less experienced, less qualified men are paid more, are given more opportunities at training and leadership initiatives than women. What's even scarier is that we [women] often have to try to achieve a successful career at the cost of our family life.*

Despite the implementation of Affirmative Action and Equal Pay laws, Black females continue to experience significant inequities when seeking senior-level positions within the academy. In a 2017 study, Bichsel and McChesney concluded that among higher education administrators, women of Color face disadvantages regarding compensation at a higher rate than White women. The researchers attribute this disparity to “the intersection of gender and ethnic minority status” (Bichsel & McChesney, 2017, p. 3). Some Black feminists argue that as a means of suppression, the dominant group discounts the contributions of African American women (Evans-Winters & Love, 2015). The means for discounting Black women can be multifaceted and often manifests in the form of fiscal allocations through unequal compensation practices (Davis & Brown, 2017). Even as respondents expressed profound concern for the salary differentials that sometimes exist between themselves and their White counterparts, participants equally reported angst and frustration brought on by experiences stemming from isolation.

**Isolation.** The seven participants in this study are accomplished leaders, strong contributors within their respective institutions, and all making an impact by using their voice. However, the issue of exclusion and overall isolation of Black female leaders was another major theme that emerged. Even as the participants' specific situations varied, four out of the seven participants discussed at least one experience with a lack of inclusion and feelings of isolation. Dr. Riley explained,

*For many years, I've felt like the lone wolf. I see it over and over again at conferences and in different peer organizations, there are simply not enough Black women in higher education or in leadership. It's so obvious at the conferences I attend. It's so sad and depressing that on my way to these conferences, I play the game of guessing how many of 'us' [African American women] will be in the room. You know, even though it's never many, it's really hurtful when I'm the only one. ...They have these talks and serious discussions and policy, practice, pedagogy. I've been in this field for over two decades, yet rarely does anyone elicit my opinions.*

These findings are consistent with other studies in that this isolated status is often perpetuated by the impact of "being an only" phenomenon. Throughout the interview process, phrases such as "I'm one of one" or "I am the only Black female in the department" or "I was the first Black to be hired in the group" were iterated. Being one of the only ethnic minorities in their workplace is a phenomenon affecting 40% women of Color, which leaves these women feeling uniquely alone (Bartman, 2015; Bates, 2007; Chambers, 2012). It was interesting to listen to how the dynamics play out when you are "the only one." Dr. Jacobs

remembered, *“When I first started here, I was the first African American female and am still the only Black woman that's been hired in this department.”*

Dr. Lee added,

*I would also say that being a woman of Color in leadership is also isolating because I am one of one. I think we now have a couple of department chairs that are Black women but when I started, I don't know who else there was [Black]. And I was also actually told unofficially that I was the first Black female full professor at this institution. And so, that was shocking to me. It was disappointing and shocking all at once. But it matters; it matters that the institution is continuing to see Black women rise.*

Dr. Freeman addressed the fact that women of Color are frequently emancipated from their isolated status whenever it is convenient for the organization, or when someone has an overarching question for which they feel only a Black woman can answer.

*I don't think that White males or females are targeted to do certain things on campus. [For example], I get called to be on a lot of search committees and do some other things. I feel as though I'm often called to represent what is 'Black' at the university. So, you know, there's the pressure to always be present. I call it 'Rent a Negro.com!'*

Dr. Hampton corroborated these same sentiments. She stated, *“I always smile when I'll get selected for different, ad hoc committees. Some of these selections are because you know they need diversity.”*

Dr. Lee spoke to her increased workload related to students of Color:

*Even before I was a senior-level leader, if the few students of Color that we have were having trouble with their internships, I would often get pulled into meetings with the students, just because I'm Black [and I can relate to everything Black]. You know, I appreciate being in those meetings and I have built some great relationships with our Black students, so I'm not upset about it. But it's just gotten comical sometimes that we don't necessarily speak that out loud, but it's so obvious. [I always think to myself] why am I here in this meeting with this student who is not mine?*

Unlike other participants, in some situations, Dr. Freeman has opted for a state of self-imposed isolation. She explained how she lost friends and those who she had previously deemed to be her supporters after being elevated to a senior-level role:

*The big issue with me taking the leadership role is that I was no longer a peer to friends I'd known while coming through the ranks. I was now their direct supervisor. Because there aren't that many African American faculty here, some of the [White] people that I thought were cool, ended up showing some racist behaviors because [now] they had an African American supervisor who was somebody that they used to sit and joke with. So that created a whole different dynamic because I had to change my relationships with them because there were things that I could not talk to them about, things that I could not reveal to them. So, along the way, there are two or three relationships that really have been changed forever because of their reaction to me, to my role.*

These accounts are consistent with the thoughts of CRT proponents, as they posit that racial, class, social, and cultural-based isolation are common among people of Color, and these various forms of alienation prevent the sharing of diverse stories and counterstories (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Delgado and Stefancic (2013) explain that practices rooted in isolation inhibit cultural assimilation and diminish the conversations through which we all “create reality, construct our communal existence” (p. 44). Each of the participants agrees that the effects of isolation have far-reaching implications, but most importantly, they prohibit the exchange of knowledge, ideas, and experiences, and further limits Black female academics (Meyers, 1998). Even more limiting are the higher performance standards expected from some Black women leaders.

#### *Higher expectations and standards*

Overall, the study participants had positive responses when asked directly about their experiences working at their PWIs; however, a common theme amongst the group was feeling that they needed to meet a higher standard of performance versus their White peers. Dr. Riley shared, “*We all already know it, it’s ingrained in our cultural teaching, Black people must work harder than any of their counterparts, White, Asian, you name it, to achieve similar outcomes.*”

Other leaders confirm that the concept of Blacks needing to work harder was not a novel premise. All admitted that it was common within the Black community and for parents, grandparents, mentors, and leaders to explain the greater work output expectations of them as Black women (Bush et al., 2010). This sentiment is evident in the story of Dr. Freeman who introduced the term “Black Tax,” or the idea that Black people have to work twice as hard to get half as much as their White counterparts. Dr. Freeman disclosed,



*I've also seen many differences in treatment, and I don't know if this is because I'm African American or because I'm a woman. ...in terms of being a Black female, I think it's critical that I be able to meet those almost impossible benchmarks. This goes back to us [Blacks] having to always work harder. You've heard of the Black Tax, haven't you? It's where Blacks must work three times harder and have three times the education to slay the dragon. That's called the Black Tax and I pay it every day.*

Etters-Lewis (1993) believes that female faculty of Color are more likely than Whites to feel scrutinized by their colleagues and to believe that any error on their part is interpreted as a sign of incompetence or intellectual inferiority. In discussing the intersections of opportunity in academic institutions, Dr. Riley indicated that a particularly taxing aspect of being an African American in leadership is the constant requirement to justify your existence. Dr. Riley imparted,

*There is always that constant need to be perfect. Even though they [Whites] aren't and don't have to be, we [African American females] ALWAYS have to be. There is no room for error for me. An African American colleague of mine who lives out West told me that she issued a report at 9:00 am that had a minor typo and by 11:15 she was receiving calls from all walks of campus letting her know about the error. Never mind the fact that her admin. assistant was the one made the typing error; my friend was berated for it. Now this woman graduated near the top of her class at a very prestigious university. She's holding a position at the Vice Chancellor level. She clearly knows her shit! Yet, she still feels the need to be perfect.*

Dr. Ruth addressed the Black/White workload variance,

*I see that my experiences are absolutely different than my White counterparts.*

*I literally see differences in terms of workload, how people perceive you in terms of whether or not they think you're able to lead and move to that next level. ...it happens all the time. ...What I have also seen is, is that we, people of Color, must work three, four, five, and ten times harder! And then you look at yourself and you're like, 'But they're not doing as much,' yet you see them keep elevating. And I'm like, 'I don't understand.' And still today, I don't understand.*

From the participants' experiences surrounding unequal workloads and the necessity to prove their competency, another theme emerged: higher expectations or standards for the Black female administrators. Several leaders believe that they are expected to undertake issues, projects, and serve on committees at a higher rate than is required of White leaders. For example, Dr. Hampton contended that her experiences were not merely in her academic work, but also in the way others evaluated her as she interacted with them when serving on committees and even at off-campus events. She explained,

*I think the biggest issue for me is that once I get on the committee, I'm struggling to feel like I'm a valued part of the team. I also don't want to be in a situation where I'm having to work harder than them [my White counterparts] to prove my worth. But again, I generally combat this because I like letting my work speak for me. I come in and my stuff is done. I'm at these meetings, I take away the information, disseminated the data and I have this completed, finished product for you. Whatever you ask me is being completed*

*to the level of quality that you wanted it to be done at. I know that I'm a vital contributor to the team.*

Others explained how they too felt as though their contributions were dissected, yet interestingly in some instances, the leaders seemingly came to normalize the hyper-scrutiny and deemed it as a standard aspect of being a Black female leader. Dr. Riley noted,

*These senior-level administrative roles are often White male-dominated positions. Racial and gender biases are revealed when Black female applicants are required to have higher qualifications and more academic degrees and experience to be considered as a viable candidate for an administrative role. Being held to a higher standard or expectation is not a surprise to me. I've come to expect that I will be held to higher expectations. Not only must someone who looks like me have all of the qualifications listed on the job requisition, we must also exceed those qualifications if we are to truly be considered.*

Respondents agree that workload imbalance is a serious issue which can lead to poor faculty morale, lost research time, and faculty attrition (King & Ferguson, 2011). Even as workload imbalance and being hyper-scrutinized were cited as a great causes of workplace frustration, participants also revealed that a key impetus for their ability to persist was their commitment to social justice.

### **Commitment to Social Justice**

With many of the leaders in this study, the theme of a commitment to social justice was prominent. In fact, BFT acknowledges the importance of advocating for social justice

causes as a means to address oppressions that have persisted in the Black community (Amoah, 1997; hooks, 2000). Collins (1990) also advocates having a commitment of social justice issues and explains,

By advocating, refining, and disseminating Black feminist thought, individuals from other groups who are engaged in similar social justice projects—Black men, African women, White men, Latinas, White women, and members of other U.S. racial/ethnic groups, for example—can identify points of connection that further social justice projects (p. 37).

Having a commitment to social justice issues is also key to critical race theorists. This agenda is best exemplified by the CRT tenet of maintaining a commitment to a social justice agenda to eliminate all forms of oppression, as doing so simultaneously empowers minority groups (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Accordingly, the social justice commitment to bettering the plight of underrepresented students in higher education echoes throughout several of the narratives.

An example occurs in Dr. Battle's account of a critical event in her career. She discussed how her commitment to social justice solidified her decision to work on a project designed to increase the success rates of ethnic minority medical students:

*I began my journey as a leader while working with the minority students at IU's medical school. So [the problem was] every year you could expect to get 11 students, 13 at the most, of underrepresented minorities [in the medical program] and that was typically Black folk or Native Americans. ... however, the students were not successful academically or doing well in the coursework. This meant that they weren't progressing from year to year. This*

*also meant that they were not passing the licensure exam. Imagine going through four or five years of medical school and not get a license. So, you had incurred this debt, but now you've haven't completed your M.D. For any student, this could be devastating, but, for a Black student, this is life-altering.*

*...My thinking was how do we make sure that we take care of the ones we do have and get them to be successful and at the same time?... Many of the minority students had low GPAs and low standardized scores on the MCAT. Yet, there was no help for them. So, you're already setting them up for failure. My goal was to turn that around. And for those students that we brought in, I was determined to get them to be successful. Once I proved that they could be successful, then I could start recruiting even more minority students.*

Dr. Battle was instrumental in helping to develop and implement programs and support mechanisms designed to fortify the success of students of Color. By employing the CRT concept of community cultural wealth (the unique forms of cultural capital, assets, and resources that students of Color bring with them from their homes and communities into the classroom), Dr. Battle made students of Color active participants in their education, rather than persons conforming to the dominant cultural expectations (Yosso, 2005).

Dr. Battle elaborates,

*...I understood that many of the minority medical students during this period were first-generation college attendees. More importantly, a great majority of these students were products of families where many members had never even obtained high school diplomas. ... However, we knew these students were smart and were from families with Christian ideals and good values. If they*

*were willing to put in the work, we were going to make sure they were successful... even if they would come in with low academic credentials, we put something in place here at the school that helped them [the students of Color] to be successful. We were able to put something successful in place that was tremendous. We saw good results from that process and there were excellent results even from the very first class. ... then the medical school's executive leadership team also took notice and offered me the leadership role in directing this student success program.*

As with Dr. Battle, Dr. Ruth's critical event fortified her commitment to the social justice agenda of eliminating oppression, while empowering underrepresented minority groups, is also her impetus for pursuing a terminal degree and jumpstarting her work in academia (Howard-Hamilton, 2003). While working in the corporate sector, Dr. Ruth became compelled to fight to improve the lives of young, impoverished, inner-city students. She discloses,

*I began mentoring in this program and they would have a bus come and pick us up, drive us to the corporate center of this large Midwestern organization, and drop us off. We would then be placed in this big room and we'd have our mentees [most of whom were African American] with us. I would help them in math because that was the worst subject for them, and I was decent at math. This happened one day a week, but we were also supposed to hang out with them outside of the program. I often took them [my mentees] to the movies or shopping or whatever. I wanted to see, hear, and talk to them about their experience. Most of their experiences were profound; it's like this is nothing*

*that you can walk away from. I mean [I would think to myself], you have to do this, you just have to. ...I was like, 'You know what, I want to impact these students and how am I going to do that?' So, I looked for math education programs around the U.S. I ended up going to a university with one of the top math education programs.*

Both CRT and BFT pundits agree that social justice is an ongoing process to which all must remain committed, especially as it relates to educational issues and underserved populations (Abrams & Moio, 2009; Bell, 1992; Collins, 1990). For participants in this study, the social justice issues they champion require them to respect, care, and pursue equity for all, while remaining conscious of the impacts of the binary issues surrounding race and gender. These leaders have proven through their own actions and personal commitments to the diminution of inequality that championing social justice involves shifting attitudes, and constructing institutional practices designed to foster sustainable change. In addition to its concern for social justice causes, CRT also examines the theme of interest convergence its relationship with power and oppressive policies and practices.

### **Interest Convergence**

An additional theme that emerged from the leaders' counternarratives is the notion of interest convergence, or the idea that Whites will support racial justice only when they understand and see that it will also benefit them (Bell, 1980; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). As informed by Derrick Bell's ground-breaking work, *Brown v. Board of Education and the Interest-Convergence Dilemma* (1980), these leaders also contend that only when Whites realize a personal benefit, can the "convergence" between their interests and racial justice do they act in the interest of social justice.

Dr. Battle's experience with interest convergence occurred when she accepted a leadership role working with underachieving, minority medical students. She spoke to the fact that even as many former minority students had a long-standing history of failing to realize success, and presented low completion rates, the university offered no respite. However, after the "*medical school had a mandated mission from the legislature to make medical education accessible to underrepresented or disadvantaged and nontraditional students,*" Dr. Battle was then selected by the executive administration team to design and implement initiatives aimed at bolstering these students' success rates. She further explained,

*We were able to put something successful in place that was tremendous. We saw good results from that process and there were excellent results even from the very first class. Then, of course the school wants to take credit for this and sort of beat their chests. Then they began funneling money into the program.*

Dr. Battle's counter-story reminds us that the programs she designed and implemented for minority students, may not have occurred had they not aligned with the interest of the majority (Ladson-Billing, & Tate, 1995).

As with Dr. Battle's story, Dr. Lee's counternarrative includes components deeply rooted in ideals related to interest convergence. This was evidenced when Dr. Lee spoke to a new lab school project (a state mandated, legislative initiative aimed at providing enhanced educational programming to students in low-performing schools) which her university was undertaking. She explained,

*...our university started a lab school. And of course, our lab school is in the heart of an African American community. ...I think one of the reasons they wanted me to take this role is because I'd already worked with this particular*



*school. This is also a school that became our partner in the community in which it sits. I don't think there was any way they felt like they [the university] could pull this off without a Black person leading it. ...[While] it was a wise decision for the university, it's also troubling for me because I used a lot of political capital so to speak. ... I felt like the university was using the grace that I had [built] in the community. ...I think we have an obligation as a university to more intentionally be involved in that if we claim to be the kind of university that we are.*

Dr. Lee's experience supports what Critical Race Theorists have always posited, those in the majority who enact social, political, and economic change on behalf of minorities rarely do so without first identifying the personal costs and gains associated with those actions (Bell, 1980; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Even more disconcerting is that nearly four decades post Bell's 1980 work is the fact that Dr. Lee's counternarrative eerily mirrors Bell's original theory of interest convergence. Specifically, Bell (1980) supposed that desegregation was beneficial for the self-interest of White elites, as it elevated the nation's prestige in world politics during the Cold War. Thus, these interests, and not a genuine desire to dismantle an oppressive system, was the real motivation for helping young Black children. Dr. Lee's experience also leads one to conjecture as to whether or not the university holds greater value in its reputation in the community versus its desire to promote and elevate a Black female leader. However, even as the theme of resilience rings loud within each of these narratives, and while the commitment to their craft is clear, some leaders find it necessary to exit leadership.

## **Walking Away**

It is clear from these narratives that being a Black female leader in higher education is more than an arduous task. This is evidenced by the fact that a majority of the participants report a myriad of issues impacting their ability to attain and persist in a leadership capacity. As such, an unanticipated theme of this research lies within the fact that three of the seven research participants have elected to step down from their leadership positions.

Research suggests a myriad of reasons as to why female leaders walk away from their roles. The rationale runs the gamut of becoming disillusioned due to the lack of opportunities and support for women, poor female representation at higher levels of leadership, and the need for a greater work-life balance (Madsen, 2012).

Work-life balance was a significant theme in this study, as evidenced by five participants identifying it as a disadvantage. Two leaders cite work-life balance issues as their impetus for walking away; the third leader noted a variety of reason for her departure. One participant confirms what prior research has demonstrated: women have traditionally been considered the caregivers, nurturers of their families, and that working as a leader in academia has forces them to assume the role of having “two full time jobs,” both at home and on campus (Chambers, 2012). Accordingly, a participant cited her rationale for stepping down as the need to better support her children’s endeavors. She states that as her children continue to mature, her need for wanting to be more active and engaged in their extracurricular activities outweighed her desire to manage at her current level. She candidly disclosed,

*While I love everything about being able to influence policy and impact change, my commitment to my family, my children, means more. Right now, my children are involved in multiple activities and I’m ashamed to say that*

*I've been missing out. I don't want to be that mother who looks back 20 years later and has regrets. I've decided to walk away from this for a while and just focus on being there for them.*

An additional participant revealed that she reluctantly decided to step down because of family obligations and her need to care for an aged and ailing parent. She said,

*I'm going to walk away for at least a year. Both my parents are going through some healthcare issues and because they've always been there for me, I am going to definitely be there for them. You know too, I'm a believer in destiny and divine intervention; if I am meant to lead a team again, it will happen. My track record shows my ability to impact change, and over the years, I've made changes for the betterment of the department, and some good changes that have impacted the entire campus.*

The third leader who walked away indicated that she did so for a variety of reasons. She felt as though there was a lack of support from the executive level and found truth in the notion that women have to be more flexible in managing their work and personal obligations than their male counterparts. She shared,

*My choice to step away was difficult. Even when I think about all I've gone through, the disrespect, juggling workloads, and managing people who are resentful of my position I still love it. Now remember, I've actually had faculty member, a Ph.D. angry at me to the point that another peer grabbed her so that she wouldn't physically assault me. Still, I love higher education. I love everything about helping future generations learn, grow, and plan better futures. However, the late nights, toiling over evaluations, deciding who gets*

*the miniscule raises that we're able to offer has gotten to be too much. I know that males are facing these kinds of issues home, but I am. I'm bringing my stress and moodiness home to my family and it's to the point that it's even become noticeable to my teenage daughter. And this is a person who typically sees nothing unless it has a direct impact on her! I've decided that I'm putting my family first. I'm putting myself first too.*

These findings suggest that the research of Hull, Scott, and Smith (1982) regarding the daunting effects that accompany working women who have to perform the balancing act of being professionals, wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters are still relevant today. The research also suggests that balancing the roles is often too difficult and requires that some leaders change course. However, we can find solace through the construction of these counterstories, and by documenting these experiences, we not only underscore the persistence of racism “from the perspectives of those injured and victimized by its legacy” (Yosso, 2005, p. 10).

Despite preparation and readiness, access to opportunity has been slow to open for Black women seeking senior-level roles at PWIs. Even more, for those who do ascend to this level often find it difficult to persist. I hypothesize that some who resign do so as a show of resistance.

***Stepping down as a form of resistance and reclamation.*** Even as I was disheartened with the news that some leaders found it necessary to step down, I found solace in the idea that their decisions may have been rooted in the fight for equality that all Black women continue to endure. Several of the narratives suggest that Black women may choose to vacate their roles as a form of activism or a means of reclamation and resistance. For example, some

respondents spoke candidly to the demands of their positions. It was not uncommon to hear phrases embedded in their narratives of the problematic landscapes of race, gender, and culture such as, “this role is extremely time-consuming,” or “this is truly a thankless job,” or “I’m often frustrated because there is little support from those at the next level,” or “this role is extremely stressful.” One respondent disclosed,

*I’ve been fighting the battle of racism for years. I’m juggling all of these balls and am sacrificing my family life while trying to become the consummate professional. And for what? Is all of that really even attainable? I mean this work-life balance thing has to be a myth. Several of my co-workers have played their racist hands and I know they don’t want a Black woman as their leader. And sadly, there is likely very little I can ever do to change their minds. Even though part of me wants to stay just to keep them on their toes, I know something has got to give because I’m committed to staying true to myself. My truth means that I will always put God and my family first.*

Collins (1990) and other Black feminists have always maintained that resistance is often linked to self-definition and self-identity. Collins (1990) purports that as Black women leaders resist daily gendered racist experiences, self-definition and self-valuation are necessary acts of resistance and survival. Collins (1990) further explains that through the fight for equality, the importance of self takes on a new meaning, as in self-defining moments, Black women leaders are “posed in that they are coming from a position of strength” (p. 112). Accordingly, a respondent spoke to her experience when stepping down and her decision to do so on her own terms. She shared,

*I will be stepping down at the end of the semester; the powers that be wanted me to stay until they named a replacement but I'm not willing to sacrifice any more right now. ...To put it plainly, I am no longer willing to sacrifice my time away from my family, my research interest, my dignity, or just plain being me. I no longer want to carefully choose what I say or how I say it because I have this title and need to uphold some image that they have determined for me. I want to be just like my colleagues who say what they want and have no fear of backlash or how they are perceived within the department or even the greater campus community. I'm taking back the power to define, determine, and create my own path. You know, in the past, I've been offered opportunities for different positions in different areas, but I've typically turned them down for fear of how I might be labeled or pigeonholed. No more. ...I'm not saying that I'll never take another leadership position. In fact, I know I'll take on another administrator role again. But I'm just saying that for me, right now is my time to decide what, when, where, and how I want to do things.*

These statements substantiate that for some women, stepping down is a powerful instrument used for reclamation, empowerment, and more importantly, resistance. Many Black female leaders and researchers acknowledge the importance of resistance, or what Langhout (2005) defines as “an exercise of power in reaction to an act of control” (p. 397). According to Robinson and Ward (1991), visible acts of resistance, such as stepping down, is a healthy form of liberation that forces Black women to acknowledge the problems of an environment that oppresses them.

This form of rebellion and resistance dates back to the onset of Blacks' history in the America. In fact, Dei (1999) identified resistance as one of the central ways in which Black

women African descent responded to oppression, as historically women such as Harriet Tubman, rebelled against slavery and assisted in freeing other enslaved African Americans. Even more, enslaved Black women who worked in the house, engaged in day to day domestic-related resistance such as, accidentally burning their master's and his family's clothes while ironing, or purposefully putting wrong ingredients in the food while cooking (Dei, 1999). Additionally, the Civil Rights Era in America holds many stories of resistance and the constant attempts by Black women to have the government correct laws and policies deemed oppressive and racially discriminatory. Black women such as Rosa Parks, Fannie Lou Hamer, and Dorothy Height resisted policies and laws that upheld racial oppression (Isoke, 2015). Thus, some Black female leaders seemingly have decided to use the act of resigning their leadership positions, as a contemporary method of resisting oppression in the academy.

This concept aligns with Yosso's (2005) notion that people of Color often utilize multiple forms of capital as a means for empowerment as they navigate the higher education system. Yosso (2005) explains that there are six forms of cultural capital, or tools that explore the talents, strengths, and experiences which ultimately help people of Color navigate the higher education environment. One such tool is resistance capital, which focuses on the knowledge and skills that are developed through oppositional behavior (Yosso, 2005). It is thought that for Blacks participating in higher education, the sources of resistance capital are learned behaviors that have been derived from parents, community members, and an historical legacy of engaging in social justice (Yosso, 2005). Thus, when Black female leaders in the academy decide that they will no longer accept the isolation, disregard and disrespect, invisibilization, and marginalization, stepping down is indeed a countermeasure

rooted in resistance capital, as it challenges discrimination is used a means of fortifying their own self-interest (Yosso, 2005).

This concept of stepping down is powerful. Even more, gaining an understanding of how Black women defend, rebuild, redefine, and reinvent themselves as leaders working in the academy is vital for other Black women leaders who are struggling to create an identity of strong leadership and courage.

### **Summary of Leadership Experiences**

Not only do Black women have to overcome the disadvantage of being members of two underrepresented groups, they also have to deal with additional forms of discrimination that are not experienced by Whites. Within this research, study participants addressed issues related to navigating the internal ranks while experiencing outsider status, leading in the face of isolation, interest convergence, and with heightened work expectations.

Through these counternarratives we also learn that the pressure to lead for Black women is often too much to bear. Their words speak volumes about the complexities of women of Color who occupy leadership positions in the academy while simultaneously experiencing both privilege and marginalization. These leaders are brave in sharing their insights to a host of experiences, from being outsiders within higher education, to their roles in fighting for social justice, to their candor as to why they need to walk away.

It is through the construction of these counterstories that we document experiences that underscore the persistence of racism as well as other forms of subordination told “from the perspectives of those injured and victimized by its legacy” (Yosso, 2006, p. 10). It is also through these counternarrative that the storytellers make sense of the challenges and barriers that have historically and currently bound them.



## **Facing Challenges and Barriers**

For the third research question I explored the challenges and barriers, confronting Black women in senior leadership positions in higher education at PWIs. The participants counternarratives uncovered the following four themes: (1) Black female leaders in the academy are impacted by organizational barriers, (2) there is a dearth of mentors and peers for Black women in academia, (3) Black women continue to suffer from the effects of negative stereotypes, and (4) there is an absence of positive Black female imagery for academic leaders. I discuss these below, interweaving the data with the literature.

### **Organizational Barriers**

Despite the fact that there is increasing participation for women of Color in higher education, a disparity in the attainment of leadership positions still exists (Bonebright, Cottledge & Lonquist, 2012). Each of the seven women interviewed cite organizational obstructions such as cultural taxation<sup>26</sup> and patriarchy as significant barriers inhibiting Black women's ability to advance.

### **Cultural Taxation**

#### *Unseen Labor: Student mentoring*

A common experience among participants was the expectation that Black female leaders should be more involved in service in support of the minority and African American students. Several participants report that other leaders would often refer unscheduled walk-ins and send minority students to them, citing a lack of cultural competence to understand

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<sup>26</sup> The term *cultural taxation* was coined by Amado Padilla in 1994 and is a way to describe the unique burden placed on ethnic minority faculty in carrying out a responsibility for service to the university (Padilla, 1994).

them. Dr. Jacobs commented on her perpetual encounters with ethnic minority students. She recalled,

*Because I'm one of only a handful of Black campus leaders, I experience a steady stream of students of Color who gravitate to me for help. It is not uncommon for me to have visits from those who aren't even enrolled in programs within my department.*

As with Dr. Jacobs, Dr. Lee also has instances wherein she's called to mentor many students of color. She addressed being "over-taxed" and getting "pulled into meetings" with Black students simply by virtue of her being Black.

Dr. Riley describes how challenging it is to be Black and female at a PWI. Because there are nominal numbers of Black faculty and/or administrators on campus, she too has been pulled into situations regarding students of Color. Dr. Riley explained,

*A few years ago, I was on my way to a meeting and I received a call from one of the executive leaders on campus. I was told to drop everything because there was a student in crisis, and they needed me to help with the 'situation.' The whole time I was walking to the incident, I wondered which of the students in our department has had a meltdown to the extent that I needed to be called in. When I got there, I saw a young, African American male who was visibly upset. I was told by others that he'd received some disturbing personal news from home and had mentioned something about 'just needing his mother.' I had never laid eyes on this child before that very moment. I later found out that he was in the biology program. I have absolutely zero to do with that program, nor am I a counselor or a social worker. What in the world*

*did they expect me to do or say? Why was I there? Then it dawned on me; they 'needed' me because I'm African American. I was glad to help but you know, White men and White women just aren't asked to do these types of things.*

These narratives are consistent with existing literature confirming that nationally, Black faculty spend more time mentoring students (Jones, 2009). Rodgers and Cudjoe (2013) report that excessive mentoring and advising is expected of faculty of Color to students of Color. Black female leaders report that helping students of Color and managing the day-to-day difficulties of life at PWIs is a professional and emotional balancing act that can be arduous and overwhelming (Chambers, 2012). Mentoring Black students is just one barrier related to cultural taxation; Black women also report that they are asked to perform additional services such as working on committees and teams. Many deem these requests to be excessive as compared to the amount reported by White faculty (Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007).

#### *Invisible Labor: Committee assignments*

Several participants spoke to the organizational barrier of being called upon to participate in committee work at higher levels than their White counterparts. Some leaders indicate that they have accepted numerous invitations from Deans, Provost, and various other leaders of campus organizations to sit on panels and serve on search committees at disproportionate levels versus their White peers. This disparity is due in part to an institutional desire for diversity on committees and to minority leaders' feeling obligated to serve the needs of their racial and ethnic groups on campus (Ross, 2016; Stanley, 2009). Some believe these tasks to be problematic for Black leaders, as often these are undervalued, free-labor requests.

Ross (2016) warns that excess committee participation may harm the career prospects of minority faculty, as these duties can add stress. Even more, these incremental duties can be significant hurdles in the paths to tenure for female faculty of Color, as they usurp time available for research and scholarship (Burgess, 1997; Ross, 2016).

Dr. Jacobs explained how arduous working on committees can be for Black leaders.

*Another challenge associated with being a female and a person of Color in leadership is that once people find you and find out that you will speak up with a brain, they want you for everything. They want your voice in the room because there's something about your voice as a person of Color that needs to come into conversations. I tend to be pulled into every big committee and that's a time suck.*

Dr. Freeman also addressed how common it is for her as a Black female leader to perform work with various committees.

*I don't think that White faculty whether male or female are targeted to do certain things on campus. So, I get called to be on a lot of search committees and do some other things. I feel as though I'm often called to represent what is 'Black' at the university. So, you know, there's the pressure to always be present. I call it 'Rent a Negro.com!'*

While all participants acknowledge their willingness to help and gratitude to serve, they concede that the issues with mentoring students and performing committee tasks are that they are rarely lauded for doing so in their departmental evaluations. What's more, their work in these capacities does little to help them gain tenure or promotion. Even more, Black women are tenured at lower rates than Whites, and excess committee service may be a

contributing factor as to why Black women are not proportionately represented in the higher ranks of the professoriate (Brooks, 2013; Ross, 2016).

Some scholars have hypothesized a few reasons why female leaders in academia might perform more institutional service than their male and White counterparts. First, these faculty become more involved because of institutional pressures. Second, institutions seek out females and faculty of Color to ensure diversity in the faculty governance process; thus, given their minority status in many institutions and academic fields, these faculty end up serving on more committees than usual (Chambers, 2012; Hartley, 2008). This in turn, creates exacerbated obligations for work that is undervalued or invisibilized.

### **Patriarchy**

The invisibilization of these women's work is indeed a function of patriarchy. Participants indicated many of the challenges facing them at their respective PWIs are grounded in male dominance and longstanding patriarchal systems. In fact, the notion of male dominance was a collective theme throughout several narratives.

Dr. Riley shared, "*These senior-level administrative roles are often White male-dominated positions.*" Dr. Battle commented on the patriarchal nature of the leadership team early on in her career: "*... I'm sure that my gender was more salient because this was a very male-dominated environment.*" Dr. Battle also described patriarchal situations involving interactions with male supervisors and colleagues and recalls the difficulty when working with a predominantly male team: "*...my ideas were being disregarded by my White male colleagues. Sure enough, I say something, they knock it down. Somebody else says it: they love it.*"

Dr. Jacobs also remarked on the struggles that facilitate systems of patriarchal behaviors on her historically White campus:

*...on this campus, there's a man's network; there is even a circle of Black men in leadership positions who can get together and support each other. They would have their meetings and their little gatherings that was designed at pulling in and pulling up the next generation. But the Black women can't do; the women just don't have the numbers.*

Dr. Lee comments on the patriarchal impact of leadership and maintaining a work-life balance. She disclosed,

*...so much of higher-level leadership is patriarchal, even if it's not men in power we reenact these patriarchal ways of being in academia. [For example], I have a family and am committed to being there for my family and I'm not apologetic for that. So, if you call a 7:30 meeting, I can't be there at 7:30. I will be there at 8:00 or we'll adjust. Or, if I need to leave early to pick up my children, I will do that. And I have noticed that men do it too. If men have to go somewhere to take care of families, they do it and they are unapologetic.*

Still, others point to the hiring process itself as a patriarchal challenge to a woman's pathway to pursuing senior-level administrative positions. All-male search committees were cited as influencing the outcome of new hires and impeding the advancement of seasoned females to positions of power (Jones, 2009). Male hiring decisions are based on hiring candidates who they judge to be a right fit for the institution; yet, the outcome of these decisions is usually White males (Gagliardi et al., 2017; Jones, 2009). Edwards, et al. (2011)

cite obstacles such as non-job-related requirements and all-male search committees as deterrents to women applying for leadership positions.

For decades, Black feminist scholars have worked to challenge the traditional patriarchal constructions of higher education. Crenshaw (1989) informs that the patriarchal influences have been shown to create barriers to equity and inclusion in higher education. These stories confirm that this patriarchal domination persists and has lasting effects for Black women working in academia.

### **Dearth of Peers and Mentors**

While men in the academy often have both formal and informal mentors as a natural outcome of a patriarchal system, multiple leaders in this study addressed their concern for the increased scarcity of these mentors and peers to be as advanced in their careers. Some participants even cited this shortage of colleagues as a significant limitation and cause for concern. Others confess that due to the limited numbers of Black females within their own institutions, they have been forced to seek guidance outside of their respective PWIs. Even more, with the restricted numbers of African American female administrators, some of these leaders have had to seek assistance from those outside of their own ethnic group (Jones, 2009; Edwards et al., 2011).

As example, Dr. Ruth explained that she regularly confides in a White male who she regards as an unofficial mentor and advocate. Dr. Jacobs also has a White male colleague from whom she has regularly sought advice. Dr. Riley shared,

*Even with all of our credentials, many of my colleagues and I find that if you are a Black woman seeking to grow and be promoted on a White campus,*

*having a strong White male mentor is like having a Black American Express card! Membership definitely has its privileges!*

Crawford and Smith (2005) suggest that Black women can also benefit from having strong White males as mentors and advocates, as they often carry the clout and power to wield the consideration necessary for Black women to be considered for the senior-level roles.

In her seminal work, Kram (1985) suggests that the major contributions of mentors and peers can be divided into two categories: career support and psychosocial support. Career support refers to the sponsorship, exposure, coaching, protection, and challenging assignments that a mentor can offer a protégé. Psychosocial support refers to the support a mentor offers by role modeling appropriate expectations and behaviors, counseling, affirming, and befriending a protégé (Kram, 1985). Dr. Riley expressed her belief in the sheer necessity and vitality of having Black female peers and mentors in the academy. In fact, in her own estimation, the absence of African American female mentors and peers is tantamount to an epidemic:

*... the sad part is I have peers located within institutions all around the country and honestly, their stories are the same. They all say minorities, specifically African American females, are underrepresented in senior leadership positions on their campuses too. So, this isn't just an SRUS problem, it's problematic all over the United States. ...Because there are so few Black women serving in leadership positions in the SRUS, we don't have peers or mentors, and it is a major barrier for Black women wanting to rise to the next level.*



The participants in this study shared that the absence of Black female leaders within different networking systems is not only challenging but also discouraging. Some leaders acknowledged they have frequently gotten mentorship, advice, and empowerment from women of Color in leadership positions outside of higher education. These findings are consistent with the literature and confirms that the dearth of peers and a lack of mentors for Black female senior-level administrators.

### **The Effects of Negative Stereotypes/Controlling Images**

This research finds that an additional barrier to success for Black women in the academy is the lasting and often damaging effects of negative stereotypes or controlling images<sup>27</sup>. Black feminists explain that controlling images are “designed to make racism, sexism, poverty, and other forms of social injustice appear to be natural, normal, and inevitable parts of everyday life” (Collins, 1990). Labels such as Mammy (the motherly, loyal, self-sacrificing, servant, nurturer) and Sapphire (the loud, overly assertive, talkative, dramatic, bossy, angry, bitchy, and wisecracking complainer) continue to impact Black females’ outcomes in academia (Collins, 1990). Sapphire is arguably the most hostile and negative depiction of Black women; however, what is significant about Sapphire is how she imposes a threat not only to White men and women but also to Black men (Collins, 1990).

Several participants for this study reported attempting to avoid being perceived as the Sapphire, or angry Black women, stereotype. Dr. Lee addressed having to temper her approach with disrespectful subordinates while attempting to avoid the angry Black woman

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<sup>27</sup> A *controlling image* is similar to a stereotype and is an image that is used to incorrectly represent a group of individuals based on racist or sexual notions (Collins, 1990).

stereotype. She shared, “...*I always try to avoid that ‘angry woman’ moniker. And I think that as a Black woman, I have to be more careful of that management.*”

Dr. Jacobs’ experience confirms what Dr. Lee endured. She disclosed, *Black women especially have to be careful not to get overly angry because you're the angry woman or you can't be too obnoxious because you're a 'bitch.' So, we have to appear more even because then we get labeled and then once we get labeled, those interactions are even more difficult to have because everybody sees that light bulb before they even see you. And trust me, that label gets spread around; so, I have to do that label management a lot!*

Dr. Jacobs also believes that the “aggressive Black woman” moniker has definitely been something that has characterized White male and female depictions of her. She added,

*During my career, I've dealt with various stereotypes. I know how they [Whites] think. You know, you try hard not to be the ‘angry Black woman. But I can remember times and specific situations where I've talked it over with my husband and we agreed that I needed to walk into the office and let them know that I'm an angry Black woman.*

An additional stereotype felt by several participants is that of the incompetent or unskilled appointee (Harley, 2008; Meyers, 1998). Substantiating prior research, the leaders in this study report that they are often perceived as “tokens who are unqualified, and who lack the intelligence to maintain their role” (Sherman, 2005, p. 708). Dr. Hampton told of her experience with the perception of Blacks lacking intelligence,

*... for me the biggest challenge again is my credentials being questioned. I've heard the chatter, and it's always like, ‘Is she really qualified?’ or ‘How did*

*she really end up in this position?’ You know, I think sometimes it's also the fact that the Whites want to believe that the university just needed somebody Black in this role or on this committee, so they just got me.... I think the biggest issue for me is that once I get on the committee, I'm struggling to feel like I'm a valued part of the team. I also don't want to be in a situation where I'm having to work harder than them [my White counterparts] to prove my worth. But again, I generally combat this because I like letting my work speak for me.*

These characterizations of Black women are engraved in the minds of other groups, thus making it difficult for African American women to surpass particular levels of advancement in leadership roles in higher education (Rodgers & Cudjoe, 2013).

Other respondents added that when they are focused or results-driven, the perception is that they are being aggressive or very angry. However, those same characteristics in their White counterparts merit the perception that they are go-getters, drivers, and great leaders.

### **The Absence of Positive Black Female Imagery**

This research confirms what Black feminists have consistently purported, that positive imagery, or the notion of Black women as intellectuals, is noticeably absent for Black women (Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1989). Several participants reported facing struggles with others viewing them as viable, intelligent contributors. Dr. Ruth's experience with finding employment after graduating from a prestigious, well-respected, PWI illustrates this point, and seems to be indicative of the continual struggle for some Black women seeking work in higher education. Dr. Ruth explained,

*...When we began this program...everybody told us while we were there, 'Oh, everybody's going to come after you finish here.' Yet, we completed the program and didn't have any job prospects! The African American males did! Yet, ...we all graduated and nobody [none of the females] had a job.*

Dr. Jacobs believes that her pedigree from a prestigious university was the reason for her securing the role at her PWI. She remembered,

*When I arrived for the interview there were no Blacks in the department. In fact, I was the first Black person, male or female, to be hired in this department. As a part of my interview process, I had to complete a presentation on my dissertation research. Because my research was tight and I had a degree from a well-know, prestigious institution, they took notice. And honestly, I believe I only got the interview because my work was completed at an RI<sup>28</sup> institution. ... I gave a research talk and it was methodologically above their heads. The reason why I know it was methodologically above their heads is because when I came in for the interview a colleague of my persuasion [who they had pulled in from another department] whispered to me and said, 'It's your job to lose.' After I started in the role, I found out that they took my dissertation and sent it over to the statistics team to verify if the math and statistics made sense because nobody in this department was sure. That same colleague later said, 'I'd never seen them do that before.'*

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<sup>28</sup> *RI*, or *Research I* is a category that the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education uses to indicate universities in the United States that engage in the highest levels of research activity.

Despite recent advances in higher education attainment it is still problematic for African American women to be viewed as intellectuals. Both historically and contemporarily, there are few popular representations in the mainstream and popular media of Black women as intellectuals, persons of character, and individuals with productive colleagues (Bush, et al., 2010; Harley, 2008). Black women intellectuals are especially invisible on college campuses; thus, it's difficult for many to collectively imagine what a Black woman intellectual truly is.

### **Summary: Barriers and Challenges facing Black Female Leaders**

The lack of Black female leadership in higher education is important to explore. Thus, understanding the experiences of Black women in academia is critical when attempting to uncover the reasons for this scarcity. The leaders in this study report experiencing organizational barriers rooted in the lasting effects of patriarchal structures, a shortage of mentors and peers, the effects of negative stereotypes and controlling images, and the lack of positive images projecting Black women as scholars. Of particular concern is the negative imagery of Black women as angry, unintelligent tokens, which are depictions that are steeped in racial and gendered overtones of Black women who are valued less and are seen as less integral to the academy. Equally concerning is the absence of images and representations of Black women as intellectuals.

Given these barriers there is no wonder that women of Color are disproportionately represented in leadership positions. Although Black women are qualified and exceed expectations in entry and mid-level positions, women of Color continue to experience organizational barriers that hinder their ability to achieve and sustain executive-level leadership positions (Stanley, 2009).

## **Strategies and Strengths**

In the face of so many obstacles and barriers, these women also provided insight into how they utilized strengths and strategies that helped them work through difficult situations and navigate pathways to success. The themes of their strengths and strategies revealed: (1) the importance of support systems, (2) the significance and value of service, and (3) the benefits surrounding leveraging advocates.

### **Strengths**

#### *Support Systems*

When exploring the strategies and strengths utilized by Black females in the academy, the significance of support systems emerged along with the subthemes of spirituality, leveraging parental support, and the support of all advocates and influencers. Each of the Black female leaders credit their successes and ability to endure to myriad support systems.

#### *Faith and spirituality*

Many of the participants cited a strong sense of faith, or believing in favor from a higher power, or spirituality, as their impetus for leading in the face of such adversity. These findings support King and Ferguson's (2011) notion that the Black woman's faith and spirituality is a foundation in providing balance, actualization, positive outlook, and drive to promote their well-being, productivity, and sustainability.

Additional studies have found that African American female leaders in higher education administration often speak of their spirituality, their faith in God, or allowing a higher power to intervene during negative situations (Jones, 2009; Ross, 2016). This study mirrors those findings as six of the seven women spoke openly to their staunch belief and

trust in God, and openly confessed their Christian faith. During the interview process, it was not uncommon to hear phrases such as; “...*I had to fall back to my belief in God,*” *I found great comfort in knowing that God's gonna take care of me,*” “...*let God fight that battle,*” and “*God puts the right people in your path at just the right times.*”

Dr. Riley was unapologetic about her faith and openly credited God’s glory with her success. Dr. Freeman gives insight to her deep reliance on God, and how her faith is especially heightened during tough times. She believes, “*When I’m going through really tough time, I turn it over to God.*” She again references her belief in God when she’s struggled and blamed herself for certain outcomes. She remembers, “...*I had to really tap into my spirituality, my belief in God, and the whole idea that this was ordained for me to do. Throughout these trials, again what has always kept me going is my personal relationship with God...*”

The significant theme associated with experiencing or overcoming difficult times for these participants was faith. Six of the seven women revealed that they were taught at an early age that God and spiritual guidance were the keys to success in life. Even more, the majority of these leaders identified their faith in God as way of life, as well as a coping mechanism to contend with their daily challenges and as a tool for which to combat the daily struggles that come with living in a socially and politically oppressive system (King & Ferguson, 2011).

#### *Familial support*

Several of the leaders identified family as a crucial support system, and coping mechanism. All of the women conceded that family was the driving force behind their success. They were all reared in Black communities and churches and indicated a strong

family support system. Most cite their parents, siblings, spouses, extended family, and friends as being instrumental in their coping with professional and personal challenges.

Several participants underscored the importance of the support that they've received from strong female influences, such as mothers or grandmothers. Dr. Battle credited her strong family values and her working-class parents for instilling in her the drive to complete her education and believe that she could succeed whatever she attempted. Dr. Lee spoke to the strong influence of her mother who was also a public-school teacher. Dr. Freeman spoke endearingly about her sister who now lives on the West coast. She smiled lovingly when she recalled their last conversation and their last visit with each other. Dr. Hampton explained that her mother was instrumental in her decision to continue her education. She remembered,

*...it was my mother who played the most instrumental role and the person who continued to push me. Even when all I wanted to do was graduate and get the opportunity to work with people with developmental disabilities, she would say, 'When you graduate with this degree, I want you to go and get your master's. And, I don't want you to wait a long time either.'*

Dr. Jacobs also relies heavily on her family, and especially her husband. She stated, *My family and friends have been my strength. My husband has been my backbone and my support. I come home and he's just like, 'What did they do today?' You know, we sit, laugh, and we debrief. I can curse at him and do all the other stuff that I didn't get out of my system, and he supports me. And he's like, 'Which one was it today?' He's always been supportive and helps me find my balance.*



Each of the women implored future generations to build social support systems that are trustworthy, honest, and committed to provide you with sustainable guidance. The leaders all agree that throughout your professional career, it is extremely important to have people to lean on in times of need. While it is clear that family and community-based support systems are critical to the strengths of Black women leaders, respondents also indicated that additional strengths lie within the value and importance of service to others.

### **Valuing the Importance of Service**

Several participants reported understanding the importance of service as a core strength. Four of the leaders noted the importance of helping others, especially those who are underrepresented and underserved in the academy as not only a duty, but also a privilege. These leaders deem their careers in higher education to be respectful, noble work and see their roles as opportunities to make a difference in the lives of others. Among the values that the scholars championed was the clear appreciation for their relationship with their students. They deemed that working in education was a calling and were committed to advancing students. As such, the notion of “felt obligation” permeated throughout their narratives.

#### *Felt obligation*

Felt obligation is the belief that one is expected to behave in a manner that benefits others (Greenfield, 2009). Felt obligation to help others has been conceptualized as an aspect of selflessness or having a desire toward enhancing the welfare of others (Batson, 1991).

Some leaders related felt obligation to the expression and a belief in the “each one teach one” philosophy. “Each one teach one” is an African proverb that originated in America during slavery times. Because slaves were deemed as property, they were denied an

education, so when one slave learned to read or write, it became their duty to teach someone else (Bambara, 1970).

Dr. Freeman speaks to the impetus for her commitment to serving others:

*I became an educator because it was a noble profession. My mother always reminded us that it was our duty to help, uplift, and promote our fellow man and especially the next generation. When we were kids 'playing school' I always had to be the teacher. And grandma would say, 'Keep on practicing. A lot of people out there will need you.'*

Dr. Battle recalled the legacy of service that was established by her mother and father. She confirmed that her parents were always role models regarding the importance of service to others and demonstrated how to be involved and supportive of friends, family, neighbors, and the surrounding community. Dr. Battle advised,

*My parents were very influential and active in our local community. They were very impactful in many people's lives. Even as small children, we [my siblings and I] were taught to serve others. They instilled in me the desire to lead and serve. They led by example and taught me what it meant to be a servant leader. My parents also emphasized the importance of giving back even when it was not convenient. My upbringing taught me the value of love, responsibility, and perseverance, but also enabled me to understand that working in education was a wonderful vehicle for honoring one of my core values of helping others.*

### *Service through othermothering*

Despite a lack of biological ties, it was common for these leaders to perform othermothering roles with African American students. Othermothering is a vital role that emerged from female slaves, as during slavery, older women were physically incapable of participating in the hard, manual labor; thus, othermothers provided care, guidance, and discipline to children whose mother was working in the fields or domestically in White homes (Case, 1997).

Collins (1990) explains that many Black academic women feel a sense of responsibility not only to continue to collectively care for children but also to provide them with support while they are away from their own communities. Accordingly, the function of othermothering serves as a foundational tradition of Black women's leadership. Some participants spoke to actions that were reminiscent of othermothering traditions. Dr. Freeman revealed,

*You know, sometimes I'll get a call from a parent, friends who have relatives here, or somebody who knows somebody who knows me, saying there's an African American student who needs help, extra nurturing, or mothering. So, I will take the time to do that. I'll make time to have that interaction with the students and give them tips or pointers, many of whom are not even in my own program. I think that's one difference between my White counterparts and me.*

Collins (1990) also informs that the othermothering service Black women provide for students is often pivotal to their academic success. Dr. Jacobs shared her experience when working to enhance student achievement:

*If I see that a student is missing class or struggling, I'm like, 'Tell me what's going on. If you're not there, if this isn't working, tell me what's going on.' [I do this] because I want [to have] that conversation with them. I'm really interested in the learning about them and need to know their concerns. And sometimes we go off on tangents in class where I'm making sure that they can check all the boxes. Those are the times when I'll have to say to them, 'Okay, I'm off my mommy soapbox now.' But you know, I've found that it's okay to take the time to do this because I'm always looking for ways to make the students successful.*

It is clear that the desire to make an impact and to help others is a driving force and motivation for all six of the participants in this study. These Black women leaders are intentional, disciplined, and unwavering in their actions to influence positive outcomes. Even more, their strengths greatly informed the strategies they deployed in doing so.

## **Strategies**

### *Embracing labels*

A strategy employed by several participants is using their voices and status as a means of offering positive representations of their racial group. These leaders also seized the opportunity to further the cause of Black women by presenting themselves as true intellectuals (Collins, 1990). Some research indicates that Black leaders at PWIs have increased visibility and a pronounced voice (Brooks, 2013). Dr. Lee explained how embracing the positive aspect of conceivably being a being racial token has furthered the Black cause. Dr. Lee expressed:

*Because this is an institution that claims to want to embrace people of Color, I'm fortunate that I have a lot of freedom to say what I think. It helps that I also am a full professor, and I can't forget THAT dynamic. But I've honestly always felt like I could articulate a perspective as a Black woman academic. And, I've never felt like I would get retaliated against or ostracized for doing so. ... I think that has given me a lot of ability to say things, you know, especially on behalf of colleagues who don't necessarily think they're in a position to speak. So that [speaking out and speaking up for others] has been an interesting part of my leadership experience that I didn't expect.*

Dr. Freeman has also found a way to promote growth through her leadership voice.

She held,

*I think all Black women on college campuses have a special calling that we must adhere to. God has placed us in these positions to help promote change. My job as a Christian and a Black woman is to ensure that the legacy of those before and those who will come after me is one that is proud and progressive. I'll leave this university addressing what is truly right and what is truly just for all students, faculty, and staff. I'm especially standing up for folks of Color.*

### **Leveraging Advocates/Allies**

Relationships and connections were fundamental to each participant's success at their respective institutions. Based on the interviews with these Black female senior-level leaders, a significant strategy that was key to their success was leveraging allies, or people who were willing to serve as their champions. Many participants acknowledged the added benefit of

those who were willing to advocate on their behalf and vouch for them to ensure their success. What's more, several of the participants realized that advocates come in many forms, and in many instances, the leaders found champions in seemingly unlikely advocates, White males.

Multiple participants spoke of partnerships with White men who helped advance their careers and move them into the directions of success. They found that women and men of other racial and ethnic backgrounds were not always adversarial and could be strong allies. In her seminal work, "*Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*," (2000) author bell hooks contends that women in society need male allies. Even more, as members of an advantaged group, these male allies need to be committed to building relationships with women and understand the importance of establishing active efforts to address gender inequities.

Dr. Battle explained how a White male helped her navigate a male-dominated environment, as he personally chastised other White male colleagues who were disrespecting and diminishing her thoughts and opinion. Dr. Jacobs experienced two separate incidents wherein she had White males to counsel her. The first incident initiated a critical event in her career, as it was the deciding factor in her decision to pursue a career in higher education.

She recalled:

*...I was planning to go to law school all the way up until my senior year of undergrad. ...An older White male, Dr. Owens [pseudonym], at my HBCU kept telling me, 'You're too smart for law school.' This really shaped my decision to travel the higher education path. ... My time as an undergrad and*

*encounters with Dr. Owens really prompted the crucial event that changed my career trajectory.*

Dr. Jacobs also found support in a White female at her current institution. She is the person who encouraged her to accept her first leadership role. She spoke to how this advocate persistently pursued and prompted her to join the leadership team. She recalls:

*Our former Dean, a White female, was the one who approached me. I found out that the department head was stepping away for a research stint and the Dean kept asking me if I wanted to move into that departmental leadership role. I had absolutely no interest. ... Yet, this Dean kept grooming me and asking me to take it.*

Each participant agrees that there are many ways for which institutions can foster equal opportunities for women. However, Dr. Jacobs spoke to need for leveraging diverse allies when pushing the agenda for equity. She urged,

*That voice of diversity, or should I say, reason for the left behind doesn't always have to be a person of the left behind. I think sometimes some of the better heard voices for diversity are the people who don't fit the categories. When that woke<sup>29</sup> White man comes in and says, 'Really y'all?' Then you understand that is sometimes heard better in certain situations, because when I go in there and say, 'Really y'all?' They're thinking, yeah, well that's her people. But when that White man says it, do you really think this is*

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<sup>29</sup> The term *woke* is commonly used slang to describe a person who is aware of and actively attentive to important facts and issues, especially issues of racial and social justice (Merriam Webster, n.d.).

*discriminatory? They expect me to play the race card; they expect me to play the gender card. But when this White man says, 'no, that's racist and that's sexist,' you know he doesn't have cards that they're expecting to come out. So, they think he's impartial.*

Each of the participants realize the power and benefit of maintaining supportive relationships. The leaders grew to have a clear understanding of how these connections were fundamental to their success at PWIs, as some stressed that their capacity to grow at their institutions were impacted by their ability to find allies. Moreover, they were explicit in explaining that allies were not always the individuals that one assumed they would be and could be cross-race and even cross-gender. In the opinion of the participants of this study, allies and advocates cannot be limited to Black Women.

### **Summary: Strategies and Strengths Employed by Black Women Leaders**

Black female leaders working at PWIs often struggle to succeed and persist and face many barriers that inhibit their opportunities. Literature points to several factors that contribute to the absence of opportunity for career advancement. These factors include recruitment and hiring practices, stereotyping, organizational barriers, and salary inequities (Bell, 1980; Collins, 1990; Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007). This study examined the impact of race, gender, and culture, the experiences, barriers, challenges, and strategies of success for Black women serving in senior-level at predominately white institutions.

The findings suggest that maneuvering within the organizational landscape continues to be challenging for Black women academic leaders. However, organizational barriers such as cultural taxation, controlling images, and university culture, continued to be insurmountable forces, for some Black women. As with these leaders, those who persist



credit multiple support systems such as holding true to ideals grounded in serving others, leveraging advocates, and valuing familial support.

## **Chapter 6: Implications and Conclusion**

The purpose of this study is to amplify the voices of seven Black female leaders serving at Predominantly White Institutions in the U.S. South. A critical event narrative approach supported by Critical Race Theory and Black Feminist Thought was used in this qualitative work as a means to accurately portray the lived experiences of this group of minoritized leaders.

The findings of this study suggest that there are multiple implications for executive leaders (Deans, Provosts, Chancellors, Presidents, etc.) at historically White institutions who desire to strengthen their senior leadership teams with the recruitment, placement, and development of Black females. Additionally, there are implications for educational practice and programming. Finally, this study offers insights and implications for Black women who currently serve in leadership roles as well as for those leaders who are committed to the causes of diversity, equity, and inclusion. In addition to implications for executive leaders, educational practice, and for Black women currently in or on the path to secure, leadership roles, this study's findings offer implications for future research.

### **Implications for Higher Education Practice**

Because the findings of this study indicate that PWIs lack ethnic diversity within senior-level leadership positions, it is imperative for those at the helm of PWIs to remember the importance and necessity for maintaining diverse and inclusive institutions. Lennon (2013) and Ross (2016) report that having diverse campuses enriches the educational experiences, promotes personal growth and a healthy society, and strengthens communities and the workplace. Additional benefits of having a diverse leadership is that they enrich campus communities by bringing new perspectives and values and serving as role models for

underrepresented students (Ross, 2016). One means for safeguarding this much-needed diversity is through the appointment of Black female leaders on predominantly White campuses. However, in order for Black women to matriculate to and persist at PWIs, they need to feel included, respected, and valued. Thus, administrators throughout our nation's PWIs must find means for which to enhance their overall campus climates for Black women faculty and administrators. Doing so will provide means for which to recruit, develop, and retain Black women leaders.

### **Improving the Campus Climate and Culture**

When seeking to create diverse leadership at PWIs, an implication for higher education is the need to improve the overall climate of their campuses. Hull, Scott, and Smith (1982) as well as King and Ferguson (2011) found that having a negative campus affected the views and sustainability of female faculty of Color (Hull, Scott, Smith, 1982; King & Ferguson, 2011). More than half of the Black women leader participants in this study indicated their campus climates as unwelcoming and unaccepting and agreed that the negative culture was perpetuated through: (1) dismissive behaviors of White peers, (2) disregard and disrespect, (3) isolation, (4) invisibilization and tokenism.

Research findings indicate that in 2016, only seven percent of higher education administrative positions, which includes top executives, administrative officers such as controllers, division heads, department heads, deans and associate deans, were held by Black individuals (Seltzer, 2017). More alarming is the fact that less than half of those administrators were Black women (Seltzer, 2017). As such, several research participants contend that the low numbers for female leaders of Color is a direct causation of hostile

campus climates. Thus, White campus administrators must seek courses of action designed to improve the overall campus climate for Black female faculty and administrators.

#### *Assess the current culture*

Administrators must seek the guidance of Black female leaders when deciding what the culture should look like. Let these women help decide what the university needs to achieve. To improve issues related to campus climate and culture, White administrators must first determine the best course of action by assessing the current culture and subcultures as seen through the eyes of Black female leaders. White administrators must conduct data-gathering research, such as equity and inclusion surveys, group interviews, or initiating workshops as process for creating dialogue with leaders of Color. White administrators must find root causes for the issues (Applebaum, 2018).

Additionally, White administrators must also provide women of Color with accessible alternatives such as counseling services for which to work through their experiences and concerns (Applebaum, 2018) with institutional racism. Having access to these services will facilitate Black leaders' ability to come to terms with hailing from a background that has been historically ignored, discouraged, and disadvantaged. However, Harley (2008) emphasized that institutional commitments to retain diverse faculty and leaders must also be reflected in all programs and initiatives. Examples of helpful measures include implementing implicit bias training and education on microaggressions for all faculty, staff, and administrators.

#### *Conduct implicit bias training*

Most of the participants in this study reported experiences grounded in isolation, tokenism, and being victimized by negative imagery and stereotypes. Many of these leaders

suspect that these occurrences are brought about and perpetuated by the underrepresentation of Blacks females at their institutions. As a means to mitigate these instances, PWIs must conduct trainings centered on implicit bias.

Implicit bias training involves creating programs designed to increase the awareness of implicit or unconscious prejudices and its impact on behavior (Applebaum, 2018). When considering how to address the racism that plagues academia, exposing implicit biases must be part of the solution. Bonilla-Silva (2010) explains that implicit bias training helps even the staunchest supporters of equality recognize that they too may be partial and cannot claim innocence, as many of these behaviors are so normalized in our psyches and in society that the perpetrator is unaware that bias has had an effect on his or her own behavior.

#### *Implement microaggression education*

As part of implicit bias training, the campus community must address microaggressions. There is evidence that the participants in this study face negative experiences as they seek to move up the ladder including discrimination based on race, gender, and microaggressive behavior (Auguste, 2018; Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal & Esquilin, 2007). Respondents report campus climates dominated by historical and stereotypical perceptions of the Black female, her intellect, attitudes, and behaviors. Three of the seven women indicated that White peers have developed their own suppositions for the Black woman's existence on campus. Many of these experiences are propagated through microaggressive behaviors. Thus, microaggression education has to become a cornerstone in the conversation on bringing about an inclusive campus climate (Auguste, 2018; Sue, et al., 2007).

Microaggression education aims to expose the effects of the repeated pattern of negative messages conveyed to members of groups who are already systemically marginalized in society (Applebaum, 2018; Sue, 2010). Microaggression education illuminates key points about the damaging message conveyed by microaggressive comments and explains how the cumulative effects of the comments can promote injustice (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Staats, 2016). Some college communities have even implemented campaigns like “I too am Harvard<sup>30</sup>” to document the ways in which microaggressions haunt the lives of individuals from marginalized groups and serve to amplify feelings of alienation (Applebaum, 2018). These types of programs are revolutionizing the national dialog surrounding race, the Black experience, and belonging on predominantly White college campuses. Understanding these key issues may also help White administrators uncover and mitigate factors that cause Black women to step down as leaders.

### **Assess the Factors that Cause Black Women to Step Down**

Because three of the seven participants in this study have elected to vacate their roles, the results of this research indicate the need to explore the factors that may contribute to the departure of Black females in senior-level leadership positions at PWIs. According to the findings, there is a significant parallel between the demands of family obligations and persistence in senior-level leadership roles. For example, two of the leaders in this study cited the need to step down as a means to gain a better work-life balance. The third leader referenced copious reasons for her departure including: managing family obligations, the lack

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<sup>30</sup> *I too am Harvard* is a photo campaign highlighting the faces and voices of black students at Harvard College. Black voices often go unheard on the Harvard campus, our experiences are devalued, and our presence is questioned.

of administrative support, managing increasing workloads, and navigating the overwhelming emotional task of managing difficult teams. Thus, it is prudent for White administrators to better understand the rationale for why women of Color are exiting leadership.

More specifically, White administrators must be sensitive to the changing needs of female administrators of Color. Applebaum (2018) indicates that White administrators must address the very different experiences women of Color have endured in higher education and develop new hiring, promotion, and retention strategies aimed at this demographic (Applebaum, 2018). Pace (2018) reports that collectively, women of Color have pointed to two factors influencing their intent to stay with an organization: a feeling of belonging and satisfaction and having the ability to achieve long-term career goals. Therefore, White administrators must seek an understanding of issues surrounding campus climate, the incremental demands from the increasingly diverse student populations, and the impact of disregard, disrespect, and invisibilization, as all influence Black women's ability to effectively persist.

Pace (2018) advises that to increase diversity at senior and executive levels, more must also be known about women of Color in midlevel leadership positions who have successfully developed and progressed. White administrators would be prudent to determine: (1) what are the contributing factors for their ascent, (2) how did (or didn't) managers and university administrators play a role, and (3) what factors helped or hindered their advancement (Pace, 2018). Even more, understanding these retention-related issues may also help when planning and developing mentoring programs.

### *Implement mentoring opportunities*

Implications for educational practice and programming also include a significant need for mentoring for Black female senior leaders and aspiring Black female leaders. Despite the successes of Black women in higher education, they continue to lag behind when attaining leadership appointments at PWIs. Crawford and Smith (2005) indicate that most African American female administrators contend that having mentoring relationships is a leading factor towards personal development and success in higher education (Crawford & Smith, 2005). The benefits of having a mentor include increased opportunities, overcoming obstacles in the path toward leadership and success, career advancement, education and skill-building, and greater visibility (Chambers, 2012; Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007)

Mentoring has also been identified as a means to not only support Black women in their current roles, but also as a means to help them remain in higher education and facilitate aspiring leaders' progression into leadership positions (Chambers, 2012). To this end, White administrators must implement more mentoring and opportunities for Black females in higher education.

As reported by Crawford and Smith (2005), these mentoring opportunities create a haven of safety for Black women in the academy. This premise is supported by participants in this study who indicate that their campus climates would be improved if they were offered more opportunities to learn, especially from other female leaders of Color. These findings are consistent with earlier studies which found that, while mentoring relationships for Black women in academic positions at PWIs were not prevalent, they are beneficial and can help mitigate bias and longstanding patriarchal networks (Holmes, Land & Hinton-Hudson, 2007).



White administrators must also realize that fostering effective mentoring programs is going to be a complex process that demands flexibility and an understanding of human interrelations (Kram, 1985; Madsen, 2012). For example, Bonebright, Cottledge and Lonquist (2012) find that mentoring generally has a greater impact if the mentor is of the same race and gender as the mentee because they can relate to the same issues or challenges around culture, race, and ethnicity. Thus, when implementing mentoring programs, some Black women may have to seek mentors outside of their current institutions and maybe in other professional fields. Even more, White administrators must also know that as organizational diversity continues to grow, mentoring relationships can become increasingly complex. Therefore, long-standing biases and traditions such as “good old boy networks” and male-dominated leadership grooming traditions must be addressed if African American women are truly to successfully and effectively serve in senior-level roles (Muhs, Niemann, Gonzalez & Harris, 2012).

Mentoring units can be centralized within departments such as Human Resources, Academic Affairs, Institutional Effectiveness, etc. Locale is insignificant, as long as the programs align with the individual concepts, objectives, goals, and have an end result of the increased socialization of African American females within higher education administration that would position them in direct pathways to senior-level positions of authority within the academy (Rodgers & Cudjoe, 2013).

### **Increase Consciousness Surrounding the Black Woman’s Experience**

Another implication for executive-level administrators at PWIs is that they must do more by way of understanding the lived experiences of Black women. Hull, Scott, and Smith (1982) contend that there is an intellectual void surrounding African-American women and it

is immersed in the politics of a White male society. Even more, this society “does not recognize and even denies, the importance of African-American women's lives and contributions through racial, sexual, and class oppression” (Howard-Vital, 1989, p. 180). Nearly four decades ago Hull, Scott, and Smith (1982) suggested there be an examination of the lives and experiences of both the “ordinary and exceptional African-American woman” (p. 44). They posited that this examination could be a means for which to promote the expansion of knowledge about Black women as a group, as well as for generating insightful recommendations for establishing policy designed to benefit them (Hull, Scott, & Smith, 1982).

Unfortunately, understanding the Black woman’s experience has suffered from an association with the idea of race, even though being a Black American is not a racial designation but a social category (McPherson, 2017). Thus, being aware of the Black female’s history, culture, and experiences grounded in racialized oppression would provide White PWI administrators the opportunity for which to cultivate more inclusive campus environments.

Of significant consideration is the need for White administrators to come to terms with Black women’s history with slavery and its lasting implications. For example, even as slave owners dismantled families, those individuals still managed to develop strong cultural identities (Brown et al., 2003). Today, those cultural identities manifest themselves through means such as religion, maintaining strong family and communal ties, music, and even through upholding African traditions, such as wearing ethnic hairstyles. Colleges and universities would be richer, more diverse, and inclusive if they would align their institutional practices with strategies to enhance the understanding of these cultural practices.

Thus, to combat institutional racism, faculty and administrators at PWIs should be required to undergo cultural sensitivity and/or diversity training or complete coursework relating to the African American experience. Individuals must learn to appreciate the contributions of Black women and all ethnic minority groups and to celebrate their differences. As such, diversity training would not only address all of the unique things about employees, such as race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, but also establish the tone for fostering an inclusive campus culture. Brown et al. (2003) advise that by changing the institutional ethos to value and exhibit multicultural competence, PWIs could improve the hiring and retention of African American women administrators and faculty.

Addressing campus climate is complicated and cannot be solved by trite remedies. At its worst, mitigating climate-related issues can serve as a strategy for avoiding legal liability for the university and also as a means for combatting the status quo. White administrators must remember that remedying a toxic campus climate for women of Color and other marginalized groups is time-consuming and may feel uncomfortable at times. This process will also require assurances from all higher education administrators who are willing to endure the discomfort that is necessary for learning and transformation (Bonilla-Silva, 2010).

### **Recognize the Impact of Intersectionality**

An additional area of focus for White faculty and administrators who want to increase the placement and elevation of Black women leaders is for them to have a better understanding of the intersectional nature of race and gender and its implications for women of Color. PWI administrators must realize that recognizing the impacts of intersections of race and gender are critical to understanding the dearth of Black female leaders at their institution. These leaders must seek to conceptualize how the multiple dimensions of socially

constructed relationships and categories (such as race and gender) interact and shape simultaneous levels of social inequality and perpetuates power, privilege, and oppression (Sesko & Beirnat, 2010). Because the women in this study contend that they are often discriminated on the basis of race and gender, White leaders must also come to terms with how these forms of discrimination function as a larger system for marginalization and oppression amongst those who already have discriminated identities (Crenshaw, 1989).

Thus, because higher education has the overwhelming reputation of being a White, middle class, male-dominated structure (which is a normative and inherent social structure in America), an education on intersectionality would allow White leadership to focus on how the social location of race and gender, and how this privileges some and oppresses others (Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1989).

### **Understanding White Privilege**

Despite many claims to the contrary, racism is alive and well and robustly shaping the educational experiences of Black female leaders in higher education systems (Ross, 2016). Accordingly, much of this racism is perpetuated through White privilege, or the premise that many Whites have greater access to power and resources than people of Color in the same situation do (Kendall, 2012). Thus, as an additional means for supporting and elevating Black female leaders, White administrators must also acknowledge and come to terms with their White privilege and appreciate its impact on the equity of Black women.

For White leaders at PWIs, understanding White privilege means finding solace in the fact that put simply, administrators must see White privilege as a system deeply embedded in American society, that materializes in and is perpetuated by White people's lack of awareness that they hold this power (Kendall, 2012). White administrators must review

current policies that maintain covert and overt forms of racism, which continue the exclusion of Black women.

An example of policy and practice steeped in White privilege was exposed during my interview with Dr. Lee. She notes that one means for which White privilege prevails at her institution is through the vetting and hiring of new faculty. She explains that the process for evaluating new hires includes having an emphasis placed on a candidate's published and peer-reviewed work completed prior to graduation. While these distinctions are important, they often disenfranchise Black women. Dr. Lee explained,

*Anytime you're looking at academic lineage, and anytime you're looking at how much somebody published before they graduated from a doc program, that is inherently tied to race, gender, class, what kind of institution you've attended.*

Dr. Lee further explains that many Black candidates (both male and female) may not have had these types of opportunities and are thus disenfranchised by the process.

The same premise holds true for the White privilege associated with the tenure process at most PWIs. Accordingly, White administrators must also reconsider policies and practices during the tenure process that inherently disenfranchise Black women. For instance, Black women are spending a great amount of time dedicated to service obligations, such as advising and mentoring African American students, which is an issue that is rarely faced by their White peers (Jones, 2009; Rodgers & Cudjoe, 2013). This consequently leaves Black women with less time to produce substantial publications, which has a tremendous impact on gaining tenure (Bush et al., 2010; Grant & Simmons, 2008). White administrators need to

therefore reshape the tenure process to include the values and work value of Black women, as this is the only way to ensure equity for Black females.

Understanding and working through the lens of White privilege would allow administrators to focus on designing programs and services that address the core causes of the gross inequities that women of Color face daily. For example, White administrators must train the campus community on how to discuss privilege-related issues. This can start with providing professional training for all faculty, staff, and administrators on ways for which to initiate effective conversations about White privilege and racism on campus (Edwards, Beverly & Alexander-Snow, 2011). Moreover, there are many beneficial books and articles that allow for a deeper understanding of strategies for dismantling White privilege (Bruner, 1994; McIntosh, 2003; Oluo, 2018). After all, in her seminal work, *So, You Want to Talk About Race*, Ijeoma Oluo (2018) advises, “When Whites identify where their privilege intersects others’ oppression, all can find opportunities to make real change” (p. 34).

### **Implications for Practice for Current and Future Black Female Leaders**

The findings of this study point to several implications for current Black women leaders and those pursuing leadership positions. Participants in this study agree that dismantling the current patriarchal and often racially oppressive structure of higher education while simultaneously increasing the presence of Black women will be difficult. However, if this feat is to be successful, the efforts must include the continued commitment of African American female leaders who are devoted to service, unafraid of speaking up, and who champion the use of allies and support systems.

### *Continue to Serve*

Black female leaders on campus must also maintain their own accountability for future generations of leaders by continuing to serve as mentors for students, peers, and other faculty of Color in the academy. Even as serving and mentoring is often grueling and sometimes thankless work, current Black female leaders at PWIs must recognize the need for African American students and peers to have safe spaces with people with whom they can have open and honest dialogue about their own experiences (Brooks, 2013; Sue, 2010). Moreover, each of the participants spoke to the benefits of mentoring relationships for both the mentor and mentee and also noted the positive impact that these relationships have on career ascension.

### *Speak Up*

Several study participants agree that current Black female academic leaders must also use their voices to speak up, acknowledge, and underscore when injustices are being used to advance the interests and needs of White individuals over those of people of Color (Harley, 2008). Dr. Lee nuanced this premise when she informed that her position affords her the *“ability to say things, especially on behalf of colleagues, who don't necessarily think they're in a position to speak for themselves.”* Dr. Riley also shared, *“We have to be each other's advocates and mouthpieces. ... We have to stand firmly together when we know our own are being wronged.”* Standing firm must include making new and existing leaders accountable for how they address the gross racial and gender disparities on campus (Brown et al., 2003; Holmes, Land, & Hinton-Hudson, 2007). The leaders need to also seek a partnership with human resources teams and search committees and firms to ensure that those teams have ethnic diversity and that the hiring, retention, and promotion practices are done in the spirit

of fostering equity. Black women must also share their own visions for safe, healthy, and sustainable campuses for all people and hold leaders at all levels accountable (Brooks, 2013).

The leaders in this study affirm that the continued success of Black women is contingent upon each of them lending their voices to evoke creative ideas, tell their stories and counterstories in ways that further counter the majoritarian ideals and further perpetuate the notion of the Black woman as intellectuals (Cole, 2017; Collins, 1990). Black leaders must also be willing to speak out or confront leaders on their institution's race and gender diversity issues. To do so, African American female faculty must first provide White administrators with a baseline understanding of the current situation, if they do not, then it will be difficult to influence any real change (Sherman, 2005). Several respondents also urge Black women leaders to gather information from and listen to other female faculty members and peers about their own experiences so that new and varied ideas for change emerge. Improving gender diversity requires the work of all members of a team, not just women. To that end, it is imperative to challenge the assumption that only women automatically want to be actively involved in improving gender diversity and inclusiveness.

### **Networking and Leveraging Allies, Family Ties, and Embracing Spirituality**

Each of the participants concede that she could not have achieved her senior-level positions without multiple personal pillars of influence. The personal pillars that influenced these women along the pathways were networking, leveraging allies, and having a reliance on faith.

#### *Networking and Allies*

The women leader participants in the study all agreed that networking is imperative for Black women's continued success within the academy. Several participants shared that



having efficient networks aids current and future leaders at PWIs as it forces them to connect with other campus members, which in turn helps to establish relationships with other allies. Dr. Riley contends that networking with colleagues at constituent institutions and at conferences, seminars, and retreats is an experience for which she always welcomes. She states that these situations allow her the opportunity to connect with *“like-minded people who value and appreciate my work and appreciate my frustrations as a Black academic with White privilege and empathize with my daily battles with issues rooted in the intersections of my race and gender.”*

Most respondents also believe their advancement in leadership roles was directly connected with office politics. They contend that having the ability to navigate those politics was many times contingent upon having worthy allies. Thus, participants believe that an effective strategy for Black female leaders is to seek allies from everywhere in the institution and especially those who occupy positions of higher levels. These women warn that having these individuals as allies is crucial because those individuals regularly interact with other upper-level leaders and will exalt you when the opportunity arises.

Chambers (2012) advises that Black women should not be opposed to seek men as allies. Despite the potentially imbalanced campus climate-related dynamics that exists between some men and women, males can be great allies and should not be overlooked (Chambers, 2012; Harley, 2008). Research reveals that male allies often fight for the women they are allied with or are mentoring and tend to promote them even when those women aren't in the room. Thus, seeking and solidifying allies of all genders can help.

Conversely, Black women in leadership positions need to also become allies for others. Black leaders must vow to support coworkers and subordinates who are looking to

leverage relationships and foster new alliances (Applebaum, 2018). The trust developed in these associations can be mutually beneficial and lead even greater alliance opportunities.

### *Family*

All participants conclude that Black women in higher education need to embrace the love and support of their family. Leveraging family can play an important role in support and development of Black females in the academy (Jones, 2009). In fact, each of the seven participants noted familial support as a personal factor illuminating their pathway to the senior-leadership level. For most participants, the notion of family encompassed parents, siblings, husband, and children. For two respondents, the concept of family expanded to include extended family, which were close friends, partners, their church family or those who supported their spirituality.

Accordingly, family networks and supports are critical tools for female leaders of Color. Therefore, Black women in the academy are urged to utilize familial support systems, comprised of people who truly care about them and their success, and with those who have the capacity to provide the help them in a time of crisis (Jones, 2009).

### *Embracing spirituality*

Multiple participants spoke about how their belief in God, and practices grounded in religion and faith, served as an escape from a world where they are often in the minority, and is where they find solace and comfort in knowing that there is a higher power who is in control. In some instances, spirituality provided the women solace when they were in adversarial situations, experiencing racial or gender motivated discrimination, and/or microaggressions and needed to determine the best course of action. Dr. Freeman described her church as a “safe haven” and lamented on how much her church family and spirituality

positively impacted her experience. She notes that having faith helped her combat the often negative workplace climate and served to provide emotional growth throughout her leadership ascent. Still, others described church as a place wherein they were able to surround themselves with positive Black images and voices. Dr. Riley shares that she regularly finds solace in the congregation, and often pre-arranges her schedule so that she is able to attend weekly, noon-day Bible study classes. She believes, *“The mid-week study provides me with the energy to persevere the daily madness that can happen on this campus.”*

Of all the elements in this study, the connection to a higher calling and higher power always kept these women grounded and directed them to make difficult decisions along the journey. As such, Black leaders who believe in a higher calling must continue relying upon their spirituality as a means for coping with daily stressors and as a mode for perseverance as leaders in the academy.

### **Advice for Black Women from Black Women**

The participants were eager to provide advice to other women of Color who are interested in becoming senior-level academic leaders. Their advice is very practical and for the most part, applicable across all levels of higher education. Collectively, the leaders advise those who aspire to become senior-level administrators to stay true to who they are, trust their talents, and learn to “say no.” Individually, the leaders offered these comments and specific guidance:

- **Dr. Battle:** *“Learn how to navigate the political landscape of the campus. Think about how to negotiate and do it without shaming or blaming. And [learn] how to*

*compromise. Learn how to keep your own convictions to yourself while still playing the game. And yes, I do believe that there is a game.”*

- **Dr. Freeman:** *“Be open to mentorship. And you can get mentorship from a lot of different people. I have even learned from people who I have felt were not supportive.”*
- **Dr. Hampton:** *“Take advantage of any opportunity to grow yourself regardless of how minuscule it may look or how grandiose it is.”*
- **Dr. Jacobs:** *“Have more than one mentor. You should have multiple people who you trust and can go to for different pieces of advice.”*
- **Dr. Lee:** *“Temper your attitude just a bit. I have learned to do that because I have a fierce one.”*
- **Dr. Ruth:** *“My advice for future leaders is to be mobile. You should always be open to consider an opportunity that may not be in your current backyard.”*
- **Dr. Riley:** *“Trust your instincts. You’ve haven’t gotten this far by simply being mediocre. Believe in yourself and know that when you smell a mouse, it’s probably a HUGE rat.”*

These leaders also emphasized the importance of securing the terminal degree, as it establishes credibility with colleagues. The participants indicated that it was important for aspiring leaders to always continue honing their craft. They advised future leaders to never stop learning, keep up with new technologies, programs, and pedagogical trends. Preparation was also a constant message concerning the experiences of these women, as many viewed preparedness as the key to their success.

Lastly, several participants believe that women of Color serving in the academy must make concerted efforts to become familiar with the culture of an institution and its surrounding communities before accepting any role. They urge individuals to be aware of any racial and sexist practices that may exist and to make efforts to develop strategies to mitigate such practices.

As an aspiring leader in higher education, much of the advice from these leaders resonates with me. I take with honor each piece of wisdom that those who have already traveled this pathway find enlightening. Because each of these women is respected in her field, as a pillar of her campus community, and as an honorable pioneer, I find value in all of their recommendations. From “learning to play the game” to “being open to mentoring relationships,” I appreciate the guidance in each of their statements.

However, the advice that resonates most at this juncture of my career is that of Dr. Lee, as it relates to “tempering one’s attitude.” Because I am a true believer that our attitude serves as the barometer for our success, I find these words to be truly impactful. Having the right mindset is a great leadership quality, determines how we perceive life, and is also an indication of how others will perceive us. A wise man once told me, “With the right attitude, you can empower yourself, rein in your emotions, and almost certainly ensure success.”

Thanks, Dad.

### **Implications for Future Research**

This study provided insight into the lived experiences of Black women serving as senior-leaders at PWIs in the South. Even as the data provided unique insight for this project, the findings have implications for future research. Since this study dealt with Black, female leaders working in the U.S. South, an opportunity for additional research is to replicate this

study with a different profile of senior-level leaders, such as those serving at PWIs in additional geographic regions of the U.S., such as the Midwest, Northeast, or Northwest. This would help to better determine whether or not Southern ideals and histories with events such as slavery and segregation have any impact on the leaders' experiences.

Because several respondents have reportedly relinquished their leadership positions, an additional research study should be conducted with former Black female academic leaders to better obtain the rationale for why they did not persist. This study should look at issues related to sex and gender discrimination, hostile work environments, negative stereotypes about women of Color in leadership, and implicit bias as factors limiting their ability to persist.

Four participants revealed that, contrary to the literature suggesting that Black women leaders often find refuge and pathways to success at HBCUs (Etters-Lewis, 1993), they have had little success securing positions within these types of institutions. Some even contend that they are too Black for PWIs, and because of their pedigrees at historically White universities, they are simultaneously not Black enough for HBCUs. Hence, an excellent extension of this study would be research designed to better understand the lived experiences of Black women leaders who have been unsuccessful in securing roles at HBCUs.

Even more, because this work only concentrated on Black or African American female senior-level leaders, an additional extension of this research should relate to duplicating this research while engaging senior-level leaders from other marginalized female groups such as Latina, Asian, and/or Native American women.

## **Researcher's Reflections**

Upon reflection, I now realize that this project will serve as my own critical incident, as it relates to my career in higher education. Mertova and Webster (2009) inform that a critical event is an unplanned and unstructured occurrence that significantly impacts the professional practice of an academic. I acknowledge that the study was planned, yet I concede that much of the outcome was unanticipated and will significantly impact my own practice and pedagogy.

More specifically, I indicated in chapter one that my conscious impetus for selecting this topic is because I have never experienced learning from a Black or any ethnic minority teacher/professor. I convinced myself that I needed to complete this work to better understand why Black women were noticeably absent from the leadership landscape at PWIs. However, completing this work has enhanced my awareness of my unconscious rationale for taking on this subject and revealed how my own professional journey has been immersed in racialized stereotypes and microaggressions.

This realization was solidified when I began documenting the narratives and remembered that I could not begin to count how many times throughout my adolescence and when working in corporate America I've heard the microaggression, "You are very articulate." The shame I carry with this now is that for years I was ignorant of the fact that this was White America's way of assigning intelligence to people of Color based on race (Sue, 2010). I now know what those individuals were telling me, which is that people of Color are generally not as intelligent as Whites, and that I was abnormal or an exception to the rule. Thus, each time that I failed to challenge those who thought they were complimenting me, I too was instead perpetuating the majoritarian tale.

Through this research, it has been confirmed that my race and gender have always been on trial. Like these leaders, I have simply only managed and coped by fancying myself the resilient type or as an anomaly. Now more than ever, I realize their stories are mine, and mine theirs. I acknowledge that any success I achieve in this career is a direct reflection upon everything they have endured. I owe it to their legacies to do everything possible to make higher education better for all, and especially for those who continue to be marginalized.



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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Interview Questions

#### Interview Protocol

##### Pre-Interview Phase:

Prior to the initial interview, all participants will be required to complete a background and demographic information form prior to the interview to collect the following information:

1. Educational attainment (history)
2. Dissertation title
3. Career progression
4. Professional identities: title, number of total years working in higher education, number of years at current institution, department/division/unit, and highest level of education completed

##### Introductory Phase:

1. Allow for introductions
2. Provide brief overview of the study
3. Allow time for participants to ask the research pre-interview questions
4. Present and obtain signed informed consent document

##### Individual Interview #1:

The following interview questions will guide the initial interview with each participant. The interview questions attempt to address the following research questions:

- What are the challenges, barriers, and experiences confronting Black women in senior leadership positions in higher education at these predominantly White institutions?
- What are the leadership experiences of Black women senior-level leaders at predominantly White institutions within the Southern Regional University System?
  1. Tell me about the personal factors in your life that led you to pursue a career as a leader in academia?
  2. Can you identify a critical event/incident that influenced your decision to pursue a career as a senior leader in higher education?
  3. Describe your experiences as a Black, female, senior-leader at a PWI.
  4. How do you perceive it to be different than your non-Black woman or male counterparts? How do they perceive you to be different?
  5. What do you see as some of the biggest challenges of being a Black woman senior-level academic leader at this institution?

##### Individual Interview #2:

The following interview questions will guide the initial interview with each participant. The interview questions attempt to address the following research questions:

- How has race, gender, and cultural differences influenced Black women’s journeys toward obtaining a senior leadership position at a Predominantly White Institution?
  6. Do you feel that race and gender play a significant role in how you are perceived at this PWI? Why and How?
  7. Do you feel that your ascension and experience as a leader would have been different if you were serving at an HBCU? How? Why?
  8. What issues, if any, are you confronted with as the one of or quite possibly the only woman at this level of leadership at this institution?

**Individual Interview #3:**

During the second interview, interview questions will address the following research question:

- **What are the strengths leveraged by Black women leaders in higher education to successfully navigate the challenges and conflicts they encounter?**
  9. What strategies do you utilize to successfully continue in your position, seek advancement to the next level, and motivate you to stay in academic leadership roles in higher education?
  10. Do you have, or have you had, a mentor? If so, describe them (gender, ethnicity, position, etc.). Tell how your mentor has impacted your career in higher education leadership. Was it a good experience?
  11. Have personal and/or professional support networks impacted your success as a leader in higher education? If so, what are those networks and how have they had influence?
  12. What advice can you offer that will help to prepare other Black women to be senior-level academic leaders?

## Appendix B: Invitation to Participate

### Transforming the Academy: Black Women Leaders at Predominantly White Institutions in the South ~ Invitation to Participate (IRB #18-0174)

Dear Dr. \_\_\_\_\_,

My name is Jana Walser-Smith and I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership program at Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina. I am currently conducting research under the direction of Dr. Brandy Bryson on Black female leaders in higher education institutions in the South as part of my completion of the doctoral degree in higher education leadership. Toward this end, I wish to invite you to participate in a study designed to better understand the lived experiences of Black, female, senior-level academic leaders.

This is a qualitative study that will use semi-structured interviews to explore how race, gender, and culture influence the Black woman's journey to senior-level academic leadership positions at predominantly White institutions of higher education in the U. S. South. The study is important given the underrepresentation of Black women in faculty and leadership positions in higher education.

If you agree to contribute, you will be asked to participate in three individual interviews scheduled at your convenience throughout the fall, 2019 semester. The interviews will take place at a mutually agreed upon time and place and are anticipated to last approximately 60 minutes each. All interviews will be audio recorded and subsequently transcribed so that I can accurately reflect on what has been discussed.

Please know that you will never have to answer any questions that you do not wish to and your participation will be kept strictly confidential. All data gleaned from the study will be coded, retained, and securely stored in a locked cabinet owned by the researcher. While the results of the study will be presented in my dissertation, neither your identity nor the name of your institution will be revealed.

Your response to this request is important to the advancement of my research on Black women in higher education academic leadership. What's more, your contribution is greatly needed, valued and would be deeply appreciated. If you are interested in participating please contact me at the phone number or email address listed below.

Best regards,



Jana Walser-Smith  
Doctoral Student – Higher Education Leadership  
Reich College of Education  
walsersmithjf@appstate.edu ~ (336)-671-0217

## **Appendix C: Consent Letter**

### **Transforming the Academy: Black Women Leaders at Predominantly White Institutions in the South**

#### **Introduction and Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to examine the unique leadership experiences of Black women serving in senior-level academic leadership positions at predominantly White institutions in the U.S. South. Using qualitative methods and a critical events narrative approach, the study seeks to understand how race, gender, and culture have influenced Black women's journey toward obtaining a senior-level leadership position.

#### **Description of Study Procedures**

If you agree to take part in this study, you will participate in three 60-minute, semi-structured interviews at an agreed upon time and place. You will be asked open-ended questions about your professional experiences working in higher education. You may also be contacted via email or telephone for clarification or follow-up questions. With your permission, an audio recording device and notes will be taken on paper or on a computer during the interview. Interviews will be subsequently transcribed. Transcribed interviews and audio recordings will be coded, anonymized, kept confidential, and securely stored in a locked cabinet owned by the researcher.

#### **Risk of Participation**

Interview questions for this study will ask questions regarding your beliefs about your experience at your institution; thus, there are certain risks or discomforts that you might expect if you take part in this research. These risks may include emotional or social distress based on your past experiences. An additional minimal risk associated with this study is the possibility of one's identity being discovered. Precautions to reduce the likelihood of this risk occurring include your information and the name of your institution being coded with a pseudonym so that your identity can remain confidential.

#### **Benefits of Participation**

The information gleaned from this research has the propensity to help us to understand the experiences of underrepresented women in senior-level academic leadership roles in higher education. This research is also significant in that it has the propensity to advance the body of knowledge in the field of education on cultural and diversity issues and Black women's professional development. It is critical that the views and perspectives of Black female leaders inform the efforts of policymakers.

#### **Contact Information**

If you have any question or concerns about this study or if any problems arise, please feel welcome to contact Jana Walser-Smith, Principal Investigator, at 336-671-0217 or at [walsersmithjf@appstate.edu](mailto:walsersmithjf@appstate.edu). You may also contact Dr. Brandy Bryson, Dissertation Advisor with the Reich College of Education at [brysonbs@appstate.edu](mailto:brysonbs@appstate.edu) or at 828-262-6093.

For questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Ms. Robin Tyndall, IRB administrator at Appalachian State University at 828-262-2692 or at [tyndallrs@appstate.edu](mailto:tyndallrs@appstate.edu).

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Your signature below means that you understand the information in this consent form. Your signature also means that you agree to participate in the study and have retained a copy of this information and consent form for your own records and future reference. By signing this consent form, you have not waived any legal rights you otherwise would have as a participant in a research study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Your signature)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)



## **Vita**

Jana Walser-Smith is a native of Lexington, North Carolina. She earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration and Economics at High Point University, a Master of Arts degree at Wake Forest University, an Education Specialist degree at Appalachian State University, and a Doctor of Education degrees in Community College and University Leadership at Appalachian State University.

Jana spent more than 20 years working in corporate finance with two fortune 200 companies, maintaining several positions in the areas of finance, accounting, and international trade. During that period Jana also worked as an adjunct instructor at a local community college before deciding to pursue a full-time career in higher education. Jana currently works in higher education administration at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro where she also serves as a lecturer in the Liberal Studies department.

Jana is very active in her church, St. Paul United Methodist Church, in Winston-Salem where she serves on several boards and committees. Jana is the mother of three adult children and resides in Winston-Salem, NC with her husband and great-niece.