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THE IMPACT OF INTERLOCKING SYSTEMS OF OPPRESSION ON THE
LEADERSHIP AND DECISION-MAKING EXPERIENCES OF BLACK WOMEN IN
EXECUTIVE-LEVEL LEADERSHIP POSITIONS AT PREDOMINANTLY WHITE
PUBLIC RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS IN THE UNITED STATES

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy
Educational Leadership

by
Altheia Lesley Richardson
December 2021

Accepted by:
Dr. Natasha Croom, Committee Chair
Dr. Michelle Boettcher
Dr. Tony Cawthon
Dr. Cassie Quigley

ABSTRACT

Despite having the necessary credentials to assume executive-level leadership positions at institutions of higher education, Black women continue to be among the least represented in these roles, especially at predominantly White institutions. The purpose of this qualitative study was to illuminate and understand how interlocking systems of oppression impact the leadership and decision-making experiences of Black women in executive-level leadership positions at predominantly White public research institutions in the U.S. The research question was: How do Black women in executive-level leadership positions at predominantly White public research institutions in the U.S. make sense of misogynoir in relation to their leadership and decision-making experiences? Misogynoir is the “anti-Black racist misogyny that Black women experience” (Bailey & Trudy, 2018, p. 2).

Eight Black women in executive-level leadership positions at predominantly White public research institutions in the U.S. took part in the study, each participating in a semi-structured interview lasting approximately 90 minutes. Basic Interpretive Inquiry was the methodology utilized in the study. The experiences of the research participants shed light on the ways in which operating within educational systems built upon White supremacist patriarchy impact the experiences of the Black women administrators they employ. The ways the participants made sense of misogynoir in relation to their leadership and decision-making experiences included the pervasive nature of the controlling images (Collins, 2009) about Black women in their interactions with students, faculty, and staff. They also made sense of misogynoir in how their strong sense of

purpose to advocate for the needs of minoritized communities led them to use their agency to challenge the oppressive systems in their work environment. This was juxtaposed with how the policies, practices, and norms of the predominantly White public research institutions in the U.S. that employed them made it difficult for them to live out their purpose in this regard. The research participants also made sense of how exercising their agency, as well as the sense of responsibility to advocate for minoritized communities, had consequences for them—mentally, physically, and professionally.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents and my daughters. Charles and Sylvene Lesley, my parents, are the ones who instilled in me the values of hard work, dedication, integrity, and compassion. They knew the value of an education and always pushed me to be excellent in everything I pursued. I will be forever grateful for their love (even when it was tough love) and support. I know they're still with me, guiding my steps each day. And I know they would be extremely proud of all my accomplishments.

And to my two beautiful and brilliant daughters, Zari and Akilah. Thank you for the pride you have always shown in my work—even when you did not always understand what I was doing. I know you had to sacrifice time with me, and attention from me, during this process. Yet you were always understanding and supportive. One of the reasons I pursued my PhD was to role model for you that learning is a lifelong journey. I also wanted to make sure you were exposed to as many Black women as possible who have obtained their doctorate so you know this is a path you can choose if you so desire. I love you both dearly and am constantly in awe of you and your many talents.

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To my additional committee members, Dr. Tony Cawthon, Dr. Michelle Boettcher, and Dr. Cassie Quigley, I would like to thank you as well for your support

throughout this process. I was very fortunate to have such a “dream team” committee to provide me with love, support, and constructive feedback. And to Dr. Cawthon, thank you for being there with me from the beginning of my journey to the end. Your friendship and encouragement throughout this process meant a great deal to me.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The identities of Black women in the United States (U.S.) intersect to create unique experiences for them when operating within interlocking systems of oppression such as racism and sexism (Crenshaw, 1989). My research study centered the experiences of Black women currently holding executive-level leadership positions at predominantly White public research institutions in the U.S., with a focus on how racism and sexism intersected to impact their experiences. This chapter provides an overview of my study, to include: (1) The problem of practice highlighted by the study, (2) the purpose of the study and related research question, (3) an overview of the theories grounding the study, (4) the research design utilized in the study, (5) limitations and delimitations, and (6) information regarding the significance of the study. The chapter also includes definitions of key concepts relevant to the study.

Background of Problem

Although the pool of Black women with the educational backgrounds and other credentials necessary to position them to assume executive-level leadership positions in higher education in the U.S. is increasing, these positions continue to remain elusive for Black women (Hunter, 2019; Mainah & Perkins, 2015). Black women are among the least represented groups in administrative positions at predominantly White colleges and universities in the U.S. (Carter-Frye, 2015; Rolle et al., 2000; Smith & Crawford, 2007). According to the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (2017), at predominantly White four-year public and four-year private non-

profit institutions, White people occupy 84.6% of the managerial positions, with 45.4% held by White women and 39.2% held by White men. Black women make up only 4.2% of people in these managerial positions.

At predominantly White four-year public and four-year private non-profit institutions classified as doctoral granting research institutions, Black women are similarly represented with White people occupying 83% of the managerial positions at these institutions—44.7% White women and 38.3% White men and Black women occupying only 4.6%. This lack of representation provides an interesting “contradiction between achievement ideology and social inequities created by race, gender and social class” (Lloyd-Jones, 2009, p. 607). The achievement ideology proposes education and hard work alone lead to success. However, as indicated above, Black women are among the most well-educated groups in the U.S., yet they are the least represented in administrative positions at predominantly White colleges and universities. The next section provides an overview of some of the systemic issues impacting the lack of representation of Black women in these executive-level positions at predominantly White colleges and universities in the U.S.

Problem

Predominantly White higher education institutions in the U.S. were founded on values associated with White supremacist patriarchy (Vine, 1976). As such, interlocking systems of oppression at these institutions (such as racism and sexism) can intersect to create barriers for Black women in their access to executive-level leadership positions. These institutions play a significant role not only in the lives of the students they educate,

but also in their surrounding communities, states, and regions. The absence of Black women in executive-level leadership positions at these institutions means they are missing out on the ontological and epistemological contributions of Black women in their decision-making.

Black women often work in environments at these institutions where acts of mistreatment, discrimination and harassment are commonplace, despite laws and policies that have been put in place to mitigate them (Coker-Kolo & Murray, 2018; Mainah & Perkins, 2015; Mosley, 1980; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). From microaggressions (Sue, 2010), to stereotypes of intellectual inferiority (Carter-Frye, 2015, Stanley, 2009), to controlling images (Collins, 2009) that place Black women in categories that suit the dominant narrative (i.e., the mammy and the angry Black woman), Black women are often forced to navigate both their professional and personal lives in hostile environments.

Navigating these hostile environments without proper resources and support can be difficult for any minoritized community. Yet, this is just the type of environment experienced by many Black women employed by predominantly White colleges and universities in the U.S. The absence of appropriate sources of support, coupled with the lack of representation of Black women in general at predominantly White institutions (PWIs), can lead to feelings of isolation (Carter-Frye, 2015).

Mentors and sponsors can be especially helpful for Black women who are working within predominantly White environments. Individuals in these roles can help Black women avoid political landmines, identify informal networks within the

organization, adjust to the culture of the institution, as well as gain access to opportunities that can provide the exposure and competencies necessary for advancing to the next level in their careers (Allen, 2018; Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Waring, 2003; Washington, 2018). And having mentors who share similar cultural backgrounds and experiences can help lessen the feelings of isolation for Black women working in these predominantly White environments, while at the same time providing advice and support on how to navigate successfully within systems of oppression (Henry & Glenn, 2009; Myers, 2002).

As a Black woman who has worked at one predominantly White public university (now classified by Carnegie as a Research 1 institution) for my entire career, I have an intimate understanding of the absence of Black women and other Women of Color at the executive levels of the institution. My introduction to higher education as a profession began in student affairs—even before I knew what student affairs was. I graduated from an in-state college with an undergraduate degree in Business Administration and returned home without successfully securing my first professional position. After a couple of months of searching, I obtained an entry-level position in student affairs at my current institution. As my career progressed at the institution, I often found myself in places and spaces where I was the only Black woman (and sometimes the only Black person) in the room.

My experiences parallel those of many of the women in the literature regarding some of the barriers for Black women aspiring to attain executive-level positions at PWIs. I can certainly attest to the feelings of isolation that came from lack of representation of other Black women in administrative positions at my institution. During

my 30 years at my current institution, there has never been a Black woman who has held an executive-level leadership position at the university.

Because I currently report to someone in an executive-level position (a Black man), the natural next step in my career trajectory would be one of these executive-level positions at an institution in the U.S. However, I have had to navigate my entire professional career with limited access to mentors, especially Black women, who could help me prepare for the different steps along my professional journey. Although there were many supportive colleagues, finding a Black woman in a position to which I aspired to obtain, or whose professional behaviors I wanted to emulate, remained mostly elusive. For that reason, I have tried to be available to serve in a mentor/sponsor capacity for many colleagues and students. I know how important it is for Black women to have that source of support, so I consider it my responsibility as a Black woman in an administrative position at a PWI to help others be successful within that type of environment.

Issues facing Black women at predominantly White institutions are more complex than simply looking at issues of racism and sexism in isolation. The experiences of Black women at these institutions cannot be lumped into those centering White women (when looking at sexism) or Black men (when looking at racism). It is the intersection of the two that creates unique experiences of Black women (Collins, 2009) and research involving an intersectional approach needs to be more prevalent in the literature.

Although research centering the experiences of Black women in higher education is increasing, the focus on Black women in executive-level leadership positions at PWIs

remains limited (Patitu & Hinton, 2003; Rolle et al., 2000; Stanley, 2009). My study adds to the body of knowledge that centers the experiences of Black women working within systems of oppression and how they make sense of these experiences. It also sheds light on the implications to institutions of higher education when they lack the knowledge and praxis of Black women in their decision-making processes.

Purpose and Research Question

The purpose of my study was to illuminate and understand how interlocking systems of oppression impact the leadership and decision-making experiences of Black women in executive-level leadership positions at predominantly White public research institutions in the U.S. My research question was: How do Black women in executive-level leadership positions at predominantly White public research institutions in the U.S. make sense of misogynoir in relation to their leadership and decision-making experiences? Misogynoir is the “anti-Black racist misogyny that Black women experience” (Bailey & Trudy, 2018, p.2). Although the research centering the experiences of Black women in administrative positions at PWIs is increasing, there remains a gap, especially when looking at the experiences of Black women at predominantly White, public *research* institutions (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2008; Lloyd-Jones, 2009).

Definition of Key Terms

My research centered the experiences of Black women currently holding executive-level positions of leadership at predominantly White colleges and universities in the U.S. I define Black as women who identify as belonging to this racialized and

gendered group, to include the full diaspora of Blackness. Any reference to African American in the study will be due to quotations used in the literature or language used by the participants.

At most colleges and universities, the president and the provost are the top two leaders at the institution, with the president focusing on administrative issues and the provost focusing on academic issues. For the purpose of my study, executive-level leaders were those who: (1) worked in close proximity to either the president or the provost (or were themselves the president or provost), (2) were the primary decision maker for an academic college or university-level division, and (3) were directly involved in decision-making that determined the direction of the institution. This could include presidents, provosts, chancellors, vice presidents, vice provosts, vice chancellors, and academic deans.

The context of my research study was public research institutions in the U.S. According to The Lincoln Project (2016), public research institutions are institutions of higher education that receive a portion of their funding from state and local appropriations, educate undergraduate and graduate students, are Carnegie-classified as Very High and High Research Activity universities, and are located in one of the fifty states. (p. 2)

I used this definition for public research institutions for my study.

Delimitations

Recognizing institution type matters, I chose to situate my research study amongst predominately White public research institutions in the U.S. I chose this type of

institution because I wanted to understand the experiences of Black women who have successfully obtained executive-level leadership positions at institutions similar to the one where I have spent my entire career. Due to issues of systemic oppression and marginalization of Black women at predominantly White colleges and universities, I wanted to illuminate the barriers created for Black women in these settings.

I chose research institutions due to the opportunity they have to impact not only the people who study and work there, but also the surrounding community and the nation. Although they only make up three percent of U.S. institutions of higher education, research institutions are responsible for educating approximately 20% of students nationwide (The Lincoln Project, 2016). Moreover, public institutions make decisions due to perceived and actual pressure from state legislatures on whom they are dependent for funding. These types of influences impact the decision-making at the executive level, as well as the demographic make-up of the people making those decisions. This in turn impacts the future of these institutions and the communities they serve.

Frameworks Summary

Antiracism and feminist theories have traditionally favored the most privileged group as their focus of analysis (Crenshaw, 1990). For example, traditional feminist theories have historically excluded the unique experiences of Women of Color, instead centering the experiences of Western, middle-class, White women (Collins, 2009). In similar fashion, antiracist theories have focused on the experiences of Men of Color.

Due to the impact of interlocking systems of oppressions on Black women, I utilized the theoretical frameworks of Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2009) and

Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1990) for my study. As a critical social theory centering Black women as the focus of analysis, Black Feminist Thought surfaces how interlocking systems of oppression like racism and sexism impact Black women, while at the same time exploring ways to fight against these systems of oppression. Intersectionality also focuses on interlocking systems of oppression such as racism, sexism, and classism (Crenshaw, 1990; Stanley, 2009) and the ways the focus on the most privileged group within antiracist and feminist politics minimizes the experiences of Women of Color. The use of Intersectionality as part of my theoretical framework allowed me to call attention to the unique experiences that the intersection of race and gender compound to create for Black women. My study reinforced the need for the experiences of Black women to be shared and ensured Black women were given agency to construct their own narratives about their experiences.

Research Design Summary

I employed Basic Interpretive Inquiry as my research methodology. This method was well suited to my research topic and question as this type of methodology is used when researchers desire to understand how their research participants make meaning of their experiences within a particular context (Smith, 1992). I ensured my methodological choices aligned with a Basic Interpretive Inquiry design.

I utilized purposive sampling (Robinson, 2014) to identify potential research participants, focusing on Black women in executive-level leadership positions at predominantly White public research institutions in the U.S. In-depth interviews (Patton,

2014) via the Zoom video conferencing platform were my source of data collection.

Pseudonyms were used in my findings to protect the identities of the participants.

Reflective notes were included in Chapters Three and Four to highlight some of my thoughts and observations before, during and after the study. These reflections primarily focused on my experiences while identifying and interviewing the research participants, but also included reflections around the themes from the findings. The reflective notes are labeled “Personal Reflections” and italicized to distinguish them from other aspects of the study.

Limitations

Because my research was conducted during the COVID-19 global pandemic, my access to potential research participants was impacted. Under normal circumstances I would have conducted my interviews in person whenever proximity allowed. In person interviews would help me create a more intimate environment with the research participants. The global pandemic and related guidelines around social distancing dictated conducting all interviews using teleconferencing technology. Also, because of the way the global pandemic has impacted normal business operations for colleges and universities across the globe, this may have caused some participants to choose not to participate in my study who may have done so under normal circumstances.

Significance

According to Bunch (2015), there are three categories of epistemic violence, two of which are discriminatory and testimonial. Discriminatory epistemic violence against Black women involves the actual conceptualization of the otherization of Black women.

This violence includes the ways Black women are dehumanized, assumed to be inferior and denied intellectual agency. Testimonial epistemic violence against Black women involves how attempts are made to discredit their knowledge and expertise, as well as silence their voices.

When predominantly White colleges and universities in the U.S deny Black women the opportunity to assume executive-level roles at these institutions, they are perpetrating both discriminatory and epistemic violence against Black women. This lack of representation also means these institutions lack the unique knowledge and praxis of Black women as part of their decision-making processes. Consequently, Black women are not able to exercise their epistemic agency (Bunch, 2015) within these institutions.

Operating from multiple minoritized identities places Black women in the unique position of being able to understand the plight of people from other minoritized identities (Wheaton & Kezar, 2019). The struggles experienced by Black women also equip them with unique qualities with which to view and engage in leadership (Parker, 2004). Black women often exhibit leadership skills that are collaborative and transformational in nature (Parker, 2004). And when Black women engage in university-level decision-making, their impact can be transformational for their institutions as well. Likewise, their absence in these positions at PWIs is not just a loss for Black women, but a loss for these institutions and the communities they serve.

Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of my research study centering the experiences of Black women in executive-level leadership positions at predominantly White public

research institutions in the U.S. This overview included the purpose of the research study, the problem at the center of the study, as well as the research question I answered as part of my study. An overview of the theoretical frameworks provided information on the theories that grounded the study. The chapter also provided a brief overview of the research design employed to answer my research question. The chapter concluded with the significance of the study to higher education. The next chapter provides an overview of how others have studied the experiences of Black women in administrative positions at predominantly White colleges and universities in the U.S.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to illuminate and understand how interlocking systems of oppression impact the leadership and decision-making experiences of Black women in executive-level leadership positions at predominantly White public research institutions in the U.S. My research question was: How do Black women in executive-level leadership positions at predominantly White public research institutions in the U.S. make sense of misogynoir in relation to their leadership and decision-making experiences? This chapter provides an overview of how others have studied similar questions and the concepts and theories that help explain the experiences of the Black women in the literature.

It would be challenging to begin a conversation about Black women in higher education without situating them within this context from a historical perspective. Therefore, I begin this chapter with an historical overview of Black women in post-secondary education. I then examine the literature that addresses professional experiences that have facilitated the advancement of Black women in higher education administration. I also address challenges experienced by Black women in administrative positions facilitated by the culture and climate of their institutions. Coping mechanisms Black women have utilized to overcome the challenges they encountered are also explored.

Because race and gender are not mutually exclusive identities for Black women, I discuss how the interlocking systems of oppression of racism and sexism work together

to further marginalize Black women. I use the theoretical frameworks of Black Feminist Thought and Intersectionality to explain this phenomenon. I conclude the chapter with an explanation of the focus on predominantly White public research institutions and why it is important to look at the experiences of Black women at these types of institutions.

Black Women Administrators

Despite the growing pool of Black women with doctoral degrees and other credentials necessary to assume senior-level leadership positions in higher education, these positions continue to be held mostly by White people (Hunter, 2019; Mainah & Perkins, 2015). Although the number of Black women in executive-level leadership positions is on the rise, they are still less likely to advance to these types of positions than White people and Men of Color (McChesney, 2018). And though the research on Black women in higher education is becoming more prevalent, the focus on Black women in executive-level positions of leadership—especially at PWIs—remains limited (Patitu & Hinton, 2003; Rolle et al., 2000; Stanley, 2009). A review of the historical context of Black women in postsecondary education in the U.S. helps explain these phenomena.

Black Women in Post-Secondary Education in the U.S.: Historical Context

The philosophy of “racial uplift” places emphasis on the need to uplift the Black community (Perkins, 1983). Black women have always played a pivotal role in their families and within their communities when it comes to uplifting the Black community. Even during periods of enslavement, Black women served as early educators for other Black people, having learned to read and write by self-instruction or by the wives of slaveholders, freed slaves, or abolitionists (Glover, 2012). Black women in the North and

South opened schools to educate Black people, many of them breaking established laws to educate themselves despite the fear of retribution from White people (Evans, 2008; Glover, 2012). Many White people viewed the education of Black people as a threat to their dominance in society (Perkins, 1983).

The original purpose of 18th-century higher education in the U.S. was to educate the male children of elite White people (Vine, 1976). Religious leaders were concerned about the moral character of youth as well as the overindulgence of mothers on their young sons. Not coincidentally, many early institutions were led by ministers. These ministers believed family influences created weak leaders who were ill-prepared for future leadership. Parents, on the other hand, were concerned with the ability to maintain and pass down elite social status to their sons (Vine, 1976). They also wanted to make sure their male children were making important social connections with influential people and families. An additional concern of parents was their children's ability to obtain valuable skills through specialized training and apprenticeships. These interests converged to create institutions that would allow for separation from maternal influence and provide valuable personal and professional development (Vine, 1976).

Before the Civil War, only a select number of liberal predominantly White colleges provided opportunities for Black women to take courses (Evans, 2008). Most notable among these institutions was Oberlin College in Ohio, which, in 1833, began enrolling both women and Black people on the same level as White men (Perkins, 1983). Oberlin enrolled their first Black woman, Lucy Stanton, in 1837 (Evans, 2008). Lucy Stanton went on to become the first Black woman to earn a college degree in the U.S.

when she obtained a literary degree from Oberlin. Mary Jane Patterson graduated from Oberlin in 1862, making her the first Black woman to earn a bachelor's degree in the U.S. (Evans, 2008).

Despite these institutions' willingness to admit Black women, there were still systems in place that perpetuated continued discrimination and isolation for these women. Strongly held stereotypes by White people about Black women placed their value on a lesser level than Black men and White women (Evans, 2008). Black women were viewed as less feminine than White women, considered to be of low moral character, and deemed intellectually inferior to their White counterparts.

During the post-Civil War era, Black women were forced to take on jobs considered undesirable for White men and women as well as Black men (Collins, 2009; Parker, 2004). These jobs included domestic and agricultural roles, often still linked to the plantations of former slave owners. Even as these women were able to connect themselves to White families of stature, often caring for the children of the wealthy, they held a peculiar *outsider-within* (Collins, 2009) status within the White social structure. This meant that though Black women were able to build personal connections with White people within an elite social structure, they were never part of that social structure themselves.

During Reconstruction, Black women began to take on more professional and entrepreneurial roles in American society. These roles included education, law, military, arts, and business—though these roles continued to be subordinate to White men and women and Black men (Parker, 2004). Following Reconstruction, historically Black

colleges and universities (HBCUs) were formed to provide higher education opportunities for Black men and women due to discrimination and lack of access at PWIs (Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Evans, 2008). Examples of the HBCUs that provided educational opportunities for Black women were Fisk University, Howard University, Wilberforce University, and Bennett College, which later became a women's college (Evans, 2008).

Even at these early HBCUs, the majority of faculty and governing board positions were held by White people (Evans, 2008). The early HBCUs promoted assimilation and values based on White supremacy, which limited the academic pursuits available for Black students. The education of Black women was focused on gendered roles such as teaching, home economics, and performing arts (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). As more predominantly White colleges and universities began to open their doors to Black women, they continued to create and reinforce stereotypes about the abilities of Black women to pursue higher education. Black women were not afforded the same access to elite colleges and universities and opportunities for degree attainment as Black men. These women's race and gender intersected to create unique barriers that were not present for their White men, White women, and Black men counterparts (Evans, 2008).

As Black women continued to overcome significant obstacles to earn their degrees, they worked to create opportunities for other Black people by teaching and developing schools within Black communities (Evans, 2008). In 1904, Mary McLeod Bethune founded the Daytona Educational and Industrial Training School for Negro Girls, which was later named Bethune-Cookman College (Glover, 2012). Black women

became visible members of the fight for social justice and equality, forming organizations such as the Black Women's Club Movement, the National Association of Colored Women, and the National Council of Negro Women (Parker, 2004). Black sororities were also instrumental in the civil rights movement and other movements around social justice (Evans, 2008). These and other organizations led by Black women were focused on the survival and prosperity of the Black community.

After World War I, Jim Crow laws created a setback for Black people attaining professional degrees at predominantly White colleges and universities (Evans, 2008). During this time, Black people focused even more on HBCUs as an avenue for advanced education. However, inadequate funding of these institutions created an atmosphere of inferiority for degrees conferred by HBCUs. In addition, strongly held negative stereotypes against Black women were often reinforced by White administrators at these institutions, which included a lack of respect for their intellectual capabilities (Evans, 2008). The portrayal of Black women in literature and film further reinforced these negative stereotypes. Movies such as *The Birth of a Nation* and *Gone with the Wind* portrayed Black women as either sexually promiscuous or mindless servants (Evans, 2008).

As more Black women enrolled at HBCUs, Dean of Women positions were created to provide support for them (Evans, 2008). These types of positions created opportunities for Black women to assume leadership roles at HBCUs. Lucy Slowe was the first Black woman to hold such a position at an HBCU when she assumed the role at Howard University in 1923 (Evans, 2008).

In 1921, Eva Dykes, Georgiana Simpson and Sadie Alexander became the first three Black women to obtain their PhDs—in English, German, and Economics respectively (Evans, 2008). By the mid-1900s, Black women experienced increased opportunities to obtain doctoral degrees, many of them choosing the field of Education. As with previous educational pursuits, the journey for Black women was fraught with discrimination. They were often held to higher standards than their counterparts of other races and genders, and the long-held belief that Black women were intellectually inferior continued to create challenges when faculty were judging their level of scholarship. These women often centered Black people in their research, which was not considered valuable, scholarly work by the faculty at their institutions (Evans, 2008). Black women also experienced isolation, as they were often the only, or one of very few, Black women pursuing doctoral studies at their institutions (Evans, 2008).

Following World War II, the access for Black women to education, housing, and jobs previously unattainable to them began to increase significantly (Collins, 2009). In 1946, Dr. Willa B. Player became president of Bennett College, making her the first Black woman president of a four-year, liberal arts college in the U.S. (Glover, 2012). After *Brown v. Board of Education*, a 1954 Supreme Court ruling that deemed racial segregation in public education unconstitutional, Black women began to make notable strides in higher education access (Evans, 2008). The passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and subsequent Executive Orders 11246 and 11375 (in 1965 and 1967 respectively) provided additional protections. These laws were designed to prohibit discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin (Mosley, 1980). This series of

legislation provided an impetus for colleges and universities to recruit more Black faculty and administrators.

As more predominantly White colleges and universities opened their doors to Students of Color, faculty and staff were needed to work with this more diverse student population. Black women began to be hired as teachers and administrators at these institutions. This increase in access did not mean Black women were finally welcomed with open arms. Black scholars at PWIs were often pigeon-holed into positions in Black studies programs (McKay, 1992), the value of which was often minimized by White scholars.

Despite the discrimination and isolation, boundary-breaking Black women persevered to provide opportunities for themselves as well as to pave the way for others. The adage “to whom much is given, much is required” was embodied in the spirit of these women as they worked to overcome obstacles to their educational and professional achievement, while at the same time reaching back and bringing others along with them (Parker, 2004). For every Mary McLeod Bethune and Ida B. Wells (who organized a national anti-lynching campaign), there were thousands of women working in the foreground and background of movements for social change (Parker, 2004).

Other Black women went on to pave the way for higher education “firsts” in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Dr. Shirley Jackson became the first Black woman president of a research institution when she was appointed as president of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in 1999 (Jackson & Harris, 2007). In 2001, Dr. Ruth Simmons became the first Black woman to lead an ivy-league institution when she became the President of Brown

University (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). It is important to note that though the “firsts” I am identifying here are related to predominantly White research institutions in the U.S., as previously stated, Black women were assuming leadership roles at HBCUs in the U.S. long before that.

These Black women did not obtain their executive-level positions simply because they met the qualifications. Their successes were facilitated by key people and opportunities that provided the support, knowledge, and skill development necessary to be ready to take on these positions. These people and opportunities afforded them the ability to interact with key people who could provide valuable advice and support, obtain positions with increasing levels of responsibility, and gain valuable knowledge and skills along the way.

Factors Contributing to the Success of Black Women

Professional and Skill Development

One of the ways Black women acquire the skills to prepare them for executive-level positions is through mid-to-senior level positions (Carter-Frye, 2015; Coker-Kolo & Murray, 2018; Glover, 2012). These positions provide opportunities to obtain greater levels of responsibility, acquire key skills like supervising people, as well as provide increased visibility to be considered for higher level positions (Waring, 2003). These positions of increased responsibility also provide an opportunity for Black women to develop collegial relationships with people in positions of power within the organization (Allen, 2018).

Networking is another skill that has proven useful to Black women in their journey to executive-level positions. Jackson and Harris (2007) conducted a study of Black women college presidents and a key piece of advice they provided to other Black women was to hone their networking skills. This sentiment was echoed in a study by DeFrantz-Dufor (2007) of the American Council on Education (ACE) Fellows Program, which noted the significance of networking in facilitating a path to senior level positions. Avenues that facilitated valuable networking included attending conferences as well as participating in professional organizations (Carter-Frye, 2015; Henry & Glenn, 2009; Smith & Crawford, 2007). For the Black women in these studies, the key to professional networking was being proactive in not only establishing the relationships that might lead to mentors and sponsors, but also taking advantage of opportunities to connect with other professionals in their fields and learn valuable information that might prove helpful for future advancement.

Pursuing their own knowledge and skill development was also a strategy used by the Black women in these studies. This proactive approach included things like attending seminars and workshops to gain and/or enhance needed skills, as well as pursuing advanced degrees such as a doctorate (Carter-Frye, 2015; Davis, 2018; Jackson & Harris, 2007). And because doctoral programs are often considered to be the training ground for people wanting to pursue positions in higher education administration, the attainment of this scholarly credential is desirable for Black women seeking executive-level positions (Davis, 2018). Effective communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving were also

important skills identified by the Black women in the literature (Carter-Frye, 2015; Glover, 2012).

According to Kezar (2002), a Black woman's power in professional settings is contingent upon her relationship with others in those settings. Access to professional networks makes it possible for Black women to cultivate valuable relationships that could result in mentoring and sponsorship opportunities. Mentoring and sponsorship are key elements that facilitate access to opportunities that can impact career trajectories for Black women.

Mentoring and Sponsorship

Mentors perform many valuable support functions for Black women. This support is especially critical when considering a change in career and/or position, getting acclimated to a new position or dealing with a transition in responsibilities (Washington, 2018). In a study by Allen (2018), involving 34 Women of Color at the top of their profession at their respective institutions, 23 of the women noted finding a mentor when asked what helped them ascend to their leadership role. Support and guidance from a mentor can include: (1) identification of political landmines that might exist and how to best navigate them (Allen, 2018; Jackson & Harris, 2007; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010); (2) awareness of informal networks and power structures within an organization, which is often where many decisions are made (Combs, 2003; McKay, 1992; Washington, 2018); (3) navigating institutional culture to advance to higher level positions (DeFrantz-Dufor, 2007; Jackson & Harris, 2007; Lloyd-Jones, 2009); (4) finding balance between work and personal lives (Washington, 2018); (5) advice on how

to obtain the additional skills necessary to position themselves for future career opportunities (Waring, 2003); and (6) leadership identity and self-efficacy (Davis, 2018).

The significance of being mentored by another Black woman was a key theme for the women in these studies, even if they had to look outside their department or even their institution to find them (Henry & Glenn, 2009; Myers, 2002). Having a mentor to relate to on a cultural level helped to reduce feelings of isolation often experienced by Black women in predominantly White environments (Futrell et al., 2012; Washington, 2018). Black women also need a safe space to talk with someone else who understands what it is like working in a predominantly White environment and can share valuable advice on how to successfully navigate these systems of oppression (Allen, 2018; Jackson & Harris, 2007; Smith, 2012). When Black women see other Black women in executive-level leadership roles, they are more likely to feel as though that level is attainable for them as well.

Sponsors perform many of the same functions as a mentor, but they also provide additional support a mentor may not be in a position (or have the political capital) to provide (Bower & Wolverton, 2009; Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Smith & Crawford, 2007). Because of their political capital within an organization, sponsors can provide strong recommendations for various opportunities, appointments and/or positions that can be critical in acquiring the skills as well as the exposure needed for consideration for higher level positions. Sponsors also provide access to formal and informal networks within the organization as well as additional knowledge around unwritten rules and practices within the organization. In a study by Davis and Maldonado (2015) of African

American women in senior leadership positions, the women in the study noted that many of their sponsors were White men, who were often the ones in positions of power.

Mentoring and sponsorship can play a critical role in helping Black women develop the confidence necessary to seek out leadership opportunities when they become available (Davis, 2018). And the attainment of these leadership positions help Black women develop leadership capacity for current and future positions. The next section will explore attributes commonly exhibited by Black women in positions of leadership.

Leadership Attributes Commonly Exhibited by Black Women

Until recently, most of the scholarship around leadership has been conducted by men and focused on men leaders (Dunn et al., 2014; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). As such, men's performance of leadership became the standard upon which all leadership performance was judged. This "traditional" view of leadership that valued traits such as competition and power based upon hierarchy was held up as the model (Enke, 2014). These studies ignored the relevance that characteristics such as gender and race have on the leadership qualities and experiences of those in leadership positions (Dunn et al., 2014; Enke, 2014).

In a study focused on the leadership approach of Black women executives, Parker (2004) challenged the dichotomous (masculine versus feminine) notion of leadership associated with common leadership models. She also contended that though these models purport race neutrality, they are based primarily upon the experiences of White middle and upper-class men and women. In her study, Parker (2004) interviewed 15 Black women executives and their co-workers and developed five themes related to the

leadership communication of Black women, namely (1) interactive communication; (2) empowerment through the challenge to produce results; (3) openness in communication; (4) participative decision-making through collaborative debate, autonomy, and information gathering; and (5) leadership through boundary spanning (p. 66).

Interactive communication involved the ways these women balanced the needs of the employees and the organization. The executives valued face-to-face interaction and communication, as well as developing and sustaining relationships. *Empowerment through the challenge to produce results* involved how these executives communicated high expectations of performance on the part of their employees, while at the same time showing confidence in their employees' ability to perform at that high level. This confidence gave the employees the ability to exercise a high level of freedom within a developed structure.

Openness in communication involved a directness in communication. Parker noted this directness in communication on the part of Black women is often viewed as a negative by their White counterparts. *Participative decision making through collaborative debate, autonomy, and information gathering* involved the ways these executives used a combination of collaborative debate, autonomy, and information gathering to include others in the decision-making process. Collaborative debate allowed employees with opposing viewpoints to express their views and come to consensus on a course of action. *Leadership through boundary spanning* involved how the executives challenged the notion of fixed boundaries for the organization, articulated the organization's mission and connected that mission to the community in positive ways.

This study showed how these Black women's style of leadership embodied qualities formerly defined as both masculine and feminine, using elements that were both direct and relational, and exhibiting control while at the same time empowering others to lead. It was important for the executives in this study that organizational hierarchy involved the participation of people from various backgrounds and at all levels of their organizations. It was also important that employees were recognized for their work and that everyone understood the role they played in the overall mission of the organization. Also noted as an asset was the unique ability of these executives to connect in positive ways with the Black community (within and outside the organization).

The approach to leadership for Black women is guided by a strong sense of values (Bower & Wolverton, 2009). Many Black women believe that with education comes the responsibility for advocacy and service to others (Coker-Kolo & Murray, 2018; Evans, 2008). Servant leadership and advocacy for the needs of others are common themes when looking at the experiences of Black women in leadership positions. When Black women ascend to leadership positions within institutions, they are often the first to identify inequities and work to change policies and procedures to address the inequities (Collins, 2009). These are characteristics of transformational leadership (Parker, 2004), which focuses on "social change, institutional reform and structures, and processes of power and influence" (Jean-Marie et al., 2009, p. 574). Black women also feel their multiple minoritized identities puts them in a unique position to see issues from multiple perspectives when decisions are made (Wheaton & Kezar, 2019).

In *Answering the Call*, Bower and Wolverton (2009) interviewed seven Black women leaders in higher education and government (five of whom were current or previous college presidents). The women in the study all spoke to a higher purpose for their work and focused on issues of education and social change. They also spoke to the need to: (1) cultivate and nurture talented employees, (2) provide opportunities for these employees to contribute to the overall success of the organization, (3) create an environment for open and honest communication, and (4) be a compassionate leader. Many also spoke to the need to be role models for other Black women.

Despite their credentials and positive leadership attributes, Black women still experience challenges obtaining senior level leadership positions at PWIs (Hunter, 2019; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). Institutional climate and culture can reinforce negative stereotypes about Black women and create oppressive climates that inhibit their development and success. In reviewing the literature on institutional barriers that impact Black women in administrative positions at PWIs, I have drawn on the limited research on Black women, as well as women more broadly, to make sense of the overall experiences of Black women leaders.

Institutional Barriers

Studies involving women in higher education leadership have noted differing expectations for men and women, also known as the *double standard* (Allen, 2018; Enke, 2014; Hannum et al., 2015; Mainah & Perkins, 2015). Differing expectations/treatment included things such as women experiencing negative attitudes when they have children or go on maternity leave, having to make decisions about whether to bear children or not

when working towards tenure, and unwanted sexual advances (Allen, 2018). Differing expectations/treatment are often rooted in deeply held stereotypes about women as leaders. These stereotypes about women leaders include things such as being: (1) weaker and less assertive than men, (2) less persuasive, 3) uncomfortable in positions of power, and 4) overly emotional (Wheaton & Kezar, 2019). These stereotypes are often at play when people are making decisions related to hiring and promotion (Wheaton & Kezar, 2019).

In a study involving women in senior leadership roles in higher education (including presidents, provosts, and vice presidents), Diehl (2014) identified several barriers and obstacles these women leaders experienced due to their gender, including discrimination, harassment, exclusion from informal networks, lack of mentoring, tokenism, workplace harassment, and salary inequities. These, and many other, barriers create the proverbial *glass ceiling* for women, defined by Diehl (2014) as “an invisible barrier built into the social structure of organizations that women face in gaining entry into top management positions regardless of their accomplishments or merits” (p. 54). Unequal expectations and stereotypes lead to an environment in which women leaders often feel like they must work harder to prove themselves than their men counterparts. These challenges also create an environment where women have a more difficult time establishing a leadership identity, or do not see themselves as leaders (Eddy, 2009; Hannum et al., 2015).

For Black women and other Women of Color, the barriers created within systems of oppression like higher education go beyond the concept of the glass ceiling. With the

glass ceiling, you can see through it and see the possibilities. This supports the adage “if you can see it, you can achieve it.” The glass ceiling can also be broken, leading to opportunities for advancement. However, the added layer of racism when looking at Black women and other Women of Color creates more of a *concrete ceiling* (Babers, 2016). For Black women, issues of interlocking systems of oppression (which include discrimination and the absence of appropriate support systems and other mechanisms to assist them in their career advancement) create a scenario in which they cannot even see the possibilities because the ceiling is made of concrete, not glass. And a concrete barrier is practically impenetrable without support. Therefore, *concrete ceiling* more accurately reflects the barriers to success experienced by Black women in higher education.

Although scholars have acknowledged the importance of highlighting the differences between the experiences of women and men in leadership, many have neglected to take it a step further and look at how the intersecting identities of women impact their experiences (Coker-Kolo & Murray, 2018). When research does include Women of Color, the data are often not coded in a way that accounts for the differences in experiences related to gender and race/ethnicity (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). Fortunately, some scholars have noted the need to focus on the unique experiences of Women of Color to avoid essentializing women’s leadership (Enke, 2014; Hannum et al., 2015; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010) challenged researchers to identify intersecting identities such as race/ethnicity and gender in their research participants so the differences in experiences around the various identities can be teased out in the findings whenever possible.

In a study involving the perception of senior women leaders in higher education on how best to support women leaders along their journey, Hannum et al. (2015) noted differences in the results when comparing White women to Women of Color. There were 20 women who identified as White and 13 who identified as Women of Color. Notable differences in the feedback from the Women of Color included: (1) 75% of the Women of Color noted being overlooked for opportunities despite their qualifications, in comparison to 35% of the White women; (2) only 7% of Women of Color reported being able to benefit from having a mentor, compared to 20% of White women; and (3) 67% of the Women of Color reported experiences of scrutiny and criticism, compared to 20% of the White women. It is also interesting to note that when asked about the positive aspect of *having an influence* while being in a leadership position, 50% of the Women of Color indicated this was important to them, compared to only 10% of the White women. The Women of Color in the study reported more of a need to make a difference and be a voice for minoritized populations as a motivating factor for seeking leadership positions.

In predominantly White organizations, it is impossible to understand the multiplier effects of discrimination of Black women based upon the experiences of other groups in those settings (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Issues facing Black women are more complex than those of White women and Black men. A quote from Myers (2002) articulates these complexities:

I can never talk of being ‘only Black’ nor can I speak in any genuine way about being ‘only female’ because I find it impossible to hold one constant while I examine the other. In my mind, it is the transactional and interconnectedness

relationship within the selves of African American women that makes our stories so unique...Therefore I must admit that I am affected by both racism and sexism equally in the White academic environment. (p. 99)

This quote underscores the difficulties of looking at racism and sexism in isolation for Black women, because these systems of oppression are interconnected. For this reason, researchers have noted the importance of highlighting the unique experiences of Black women in the literature, particularly around intersectionality and leadership (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010; Wheaton & Kezar, 2019). This type of research not only highlights areas of challenge experienced by Black women in leadership positions, but also provides valuable information for the predominantly White colleges and universities that employ them on how their climate and culture create oppressive environments for Black women leaders.

Institutional Climate

Acts of discrimination, harassment and mistreatment against Black women persist at institutions of higher education, despite the laws and policies that have been put in place to mitigate these types of issues (Coker-Kolo & Murray, 2018; Mainah & Perkins, 2015; Mosley, 1980; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). Unfortunately, many institutions show a lack of institutional leadership in dealing with these issues in a decisive and just manner (Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Smith & Crawford, 2007). The result can lead to a hostile work environment and poor retention for Black women administrators.

Even though negative actions aimed at Black women are not always intentional, this type of behavior perpetrated by colleagues, supervisors, students, and others in the

higher education environment can have a negative impact on the experiences of Black women administrators (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). Usually delivered in the form of microaggressions (Sue, 2010), this behavior is often perpetrated by well-meaning people who do not interact with the intention of committing harm. Microaggressions are “the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership” (Sue, 2010, p. 3). Microaggressions come in three forms—*microassaults*, *microinsults*, and *microinvalidations*. No matter the type, microaggressions serve as a tool on the part of the oppressor to marginalize, exclude, and devalue groups of people (Sue, 2010).

Microassaults are defined as “explicit racial derogations meant to hurt intended victims through name-calling, avoidant behavior or purposeful discriminatory actions” (Sue & Constantine, 2007, p. 137). Examples of microassaults identified by the Black women in the literature included things such as: (1) being yelled at and called a *Black bitch* by a White woman student; (2) negative teaching evaluations by White students who did not like talking about issues of race in the classroom; (3) a White man faculty member telling a student who was enrolling in the class of a Black woman faculty member that she would not learn much in that class; (4) a White man faculty member demanding salary parity with a new Black woman faculty, when not demanding the same parity with his White men colleagues; (5) being accused of tampering with student evaluations because they were positive; (6) being told by a White man colleague that she was only being hired because she was Black; (7) having adjectives like *loud*, *aggressive*,

and intimidating used about them; (8) insinuations of providing sexual favors in return for promotional opportunities; and (9) sexual harassment as well as other overt acts of discrimination (Allen, 2018; Croom, 2017; Lloyd-Jones, 2009; Mainah & Perkins, 2015; Myers, 2002). Overt acts of discrimination occur most when the perpetrator feels safe to exhibit this type of behavior.

Microinsults are “interpersonal interactions (verbal/nonverbal) or environmental cues that communicate rudeness, insensitivity, slights and insults that demean a person’s group identity” (Sue, 2010, p. 9). These types of interactions are usually couched as compliments directed at the target group but are often followed up by an insult of some sort. Microinsults can also take the form of visual images in the workplace that have the impact of excluding different groups. Examples in the literature included things such as: (1) being asked to speak on behalf of an entire race of people; (2) being asked to serve on committees in order to represent the “minority” voice; (3) being the only one consulted when recommendations are needed for People of Color; (4) only being asked to serve on diversity-related committees; and (5) having their competency come as a surprise to colleagues due to low expectations (Myers, 2002).

Microinvalidations are “interpersonal and environmental cues that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, beliefs and experiences of the target group” (Sue, 2010, p. 10). Examples of microinvalidations of the Black women in the literature included: (1) having their thoughts legitimized only when restated by White men colleagues; (2) having White employees circumvent their authority; (3) having colleagues and supervisors take credit for their work; (4) expectations of mentoring

Students of Color, only to have that service devalued during tenure and promotion; (5) their research being devalued because it focused on minoritized populations or was published in journals that focus on diversity-related issues; (6) unequal expectations of proving competence/scholarship when not required by others; (7) unequal pay and promotion rates; and (8) being placed in tokenized positions lacking power and authority (Allen, 2018; Carter-Frye, 2015; Croom, 2017; Hicks & Watson, 2018; Lloyd-Jones, 2009; Mainah & Perkins, 2015; Mosley, 1980; Myers, 2002; Rolle et al., 2000). The women in the literature also expressed that their White colleagues often found it difficult to fathom having a Black woman as their supervisor, especially the White men (Lloyd-Jones, 2009).

These issues underscore the need to examine the effects of a poor institutional climate on the experiences of Black women at predominantly White colleges and universities in the U.S. This examination could illuminate problem areas as well as solutions for creating a more welcoming and inclusive campus climate. Unfortunately, the problem is sometimes more insidious than campus climate, but is indicative of the overall culture of the institution. PWIs create and perpetuate systems that make it difficult for Black women to gain access to the resources and support that facilitate their professional and skill development. This would include things like key mid-level positions that help Black women obtain the skills and exposure necessary for higher level positions, and access to mentors and sponsors to provide valuable advice and support throughout their careers (Bertrand Jones & Dufor, 2012; Carter-Frye, 2015; Glover, 2012; Smith, 2012).

Institutional Culture

Institutions often espouse to lofty values when it comes to issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion, but seldom put in the work to ensure their actions match up to their values. The demographic make-up of the university administration is one way to determine the institution's true values regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion. Smith (2012) defined *homosocial reproduction* as how institutions espouse to valuing diversity, equity, and inclusion while maintaining the status quo of a non-diverse workforce. Many PWIs suffer from homosocial reproduction.

At PWIs, the standard for what is acceptable in terms of leadership and professional behavior continues to be based on the point of view of White men (Carter-Frye, 2015; Hill et al., 2016; Wheaton & Kezar, 2019). This point of view of leadership that idealizes values such as competition, aggression, willingness to engage in conflict, and individuality are inconsistent with how many Black women view and engage in leadership (Hill et al., 2016; Wheaton & Kezar, 2019). To add to the dilemma, most of the people in positions of power who make decisions about the career trajectory of Black women continue to be mostly White men (Hill et al., 2016).

At PWIs, Black women struggle to achieve administrative positions of leadership that impact policy and change for their respective institutions (Glover, 2012). Instead, they are often assigned to positions peripheral to the institutional mission and lacking in power and authority to make change (Hicks & Watson, 2018; Smith & Crawford, 2007). Having professional roles that often evolve into positions at the margins of an institution makes it difficult for Black women to develop a clear career path to roles that are more

desirable. It also makes it difficult for those who are hiring for these desired positions to understand the transferable skills Black women obtain from positions that are not in a more traditional trajectory for executive-level positions. This lack of adequate career development places Black women at a disadvantage when seeking (or being considered for) appointment to executive-level leadership positions.

Standards of scholarship rooted in White supremacist patriarchy also create environments in which the work of Black women is devalued (Evans, 2008; Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2008; Myers, 2002). Because the scholarship interests of Black women often center minoritized populations, their work is frequently viewed as less scholarly by their academic colleagues. Their scholarship is also deemed inferior if it is not published in journals that conform to standards set by the dominant White institutional culture. This stereotype of inferiority calls into question the intellect and ability of Black women to perform their assigned roles, despite their impressive credentials (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2008; Lloyd-Jones, 2009; Mainah & Perkins, 2015).

Black women are often placed in the position of having to prove their competence; when that competence is assumed for other groups (Carter-Frye, 2015; Myers, 2002; Rolle et al., 2000; Stanley, 2009). This puts Black women in a position of having to work much harder to prove themselves worthy to receive the same level of respect given to other colleagues (Croom, 2017; Lloyd-Jones, 2009; Myers, 2002). Because of these issues, Black women sometimes feel compelled to focus on research

issues for which they are less passionate to gain respect and to receive more favorable treatment during promotion and tenure.

Controlling images about Black women can also impact their career opportunities (Coker-Kolo & Murray, 2018; Collins, 2009; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). The mammy image of Black women as caretakers for wealthy White people continues to exist, with the current manifestation being an expectation that Black women are warm and nurturing in their dealings with White people (Collins, 2009). Black women who do not fit this stereotypical mold are often labeled as aggressive and intimidating due to their outspoken nature (Carter-Frye, 2015; McKay, 1992; Myers, 2002; Parker, 2004). These labels are not often attributed to White women who may express themselves in a similar manner. Because of this, the proverbial *angry Black woman* stereotype is often used as a tool to ignore the thoughts and concerns expressed by Black women.

American standards of beauty related to skin color, facial features, and hair most closely associated with White women is another way Black women are subordinated in American culture (Collins, 2009). The further away Black women are from this standard, the more subordinated they become. For example, Black women with dark skin, and/or who wear their hair in natural styles, often have negative attributes associated with them that have nothing to do with their level of intelligence or academic credentials. Higher education is not immune to this phenomenon, especially PWIs that lack a critical mass of Black women.

Another unique challenge encountered by Black women operating within PWIs is the *pet to threat* phenomenon (Thomas et al., 2013). Oftentimes Black women who

assume leadership roles experience a honeymoon period in which they are deemed to be *behaving themselves* (in much the manner a pet would) and following all the unwritten rules operating at a PWI. When they step outside of that box and exercise their agency in challenging the oppressive systems they encounter, they are deemed a threat to the status quo of the institution.

The *good old boy network*, which reinforces the patriarchal view of who is most suitable for leadership, creates unique challenges for Black women. Male-dominated organizations are often reluctant to share power with women, especially Women of Color (Mainah & Perkins, 2015). And when racism is also an issue within these organizations, Black women are further subordinated (Bower & Wolverton, 2009). These systems create a hierarchy with men at the top, women at the bottom, and Black women at the very bottom.

The ways White women position themselves within these systems of oppression also creates challenges for Black women. The standards of woman-ness are predicated on Whiteness, and thus privilege White women (Accapadi, 2007). In addition to the aforementioned standards of beauty, it also includes standards related to behavior and emotion. White women are often depicted as innocent and pure, juxtaposed with the depiction of Black women as angry and aggressive (Accapadi, 2007).

Although White women are oppressed within patriarchal systems, they are privileged within racist systems (Accapadi, 2007). This dichotomy of being oppressed while at the same time being the oppressor often creates cognitive dissonance for White women when considering how they operate within systems of interlocking oppression. As

a result, they are often reluctant to critically examine issues of race and how they operate within those systems (Daniel, 2019). The role of White women operating within systems of White supremacist patriarchy is seldom examined, which maintains their role of innocence as perpetrators within these systems (Daniel, 2019).

This can be especially detrimental for Black women faculty who center issues of power, privilege, and oppression in the classroom as it often leads to negative teaching evaluations from their White women students who do not want to examine their privileges within systems of oppression based on race (Daniel, 2019). It can also be problematic for Black women administrators who attempt to have challenging conversations around race with their White women colleagues. An example of a response on the part of White women that can be particularly problematic for Black women is crying. Tears of White women are often weaponized to reinforce the depiction of Black women as angry and aggressive, and White women as victims (Accapadi, 2007).

Despite these challenges related to institutional climate and culture, Black women have used their own agency to persevere and navigate life at these PWIs. One of the ways Black women have overcome these challenges is through the development of coping strategies. These coping strategies, both professional and personal, have helped Black women be successful despite the challenges experienced working in predominantly White educational environments.

Coping Strategies for Black Women

The challenges associated with microaggressions, poor institutional climate, and the lack of an inclusive institutional culture can take their toll on Black women, causing

“physical, emotional, psychological, and cognitive problems” (Pope & Joseph, 1997, p. 257). Black women in these settings often feel alone and isolated in their work environments, especially when they are the only, or one of very few, Black people (Carter-Frye, 2015; Evans, 2008; Mosley, 1980; Myers, 2002; Rolle et al., 2000; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010; Smith & Crawford, 2007). They also experience *imposter syndrome* (Clance & Imes, 1978; Davis, 2018), which involves feeling as though they are not worthy of the accomplishments they have earned and have somehow fooled others into thinking otherwise. This phenomenon also involves being in constant fear of being “found out” and exposed as an “imposter.” The impact of the imposter syndrome to the Black women and other Women of Color in the literature led to a lack of confidence in their abilities and a reluctance to pursue leadership roles (Davis, 2018; Edwards, 2019; Waring, 2003).

Various coping mechanisms developed and utilized by the women in the literature helped mitigate the negative effects associated with working in oppressive environments. The strategies ranged from professional to personal and were utilized to overcome the everyday stress of working in these types of environments. The themes around coping strategies developed and utilized by the women in these studies include assimilating, personal support networks, and resistance strategies.

Assimilating

Some Black women in the literature developed coping mechanisms that involved changing their appearance, speech, and/or behavior to “fit in” with the dominant culture at their institution or within their department (Shorter-Gooden, 2004). This coping

strategy involved behaviors such as: (1) avoiding wearing their hair in natural styles worn by many Black women to circumvent any negative connotation that might be associated with this type of cultural expression, (2) remaining quiet during conversations to avoid showing emotion that might lead to being labeled unprofessional or angry, and (3) avoiding discussions of their own cultural heritage to ward off anticipated biases and prejudices. Although an understandable coping mechanism, this lack of authentic behavior and expression can lead to further feelings of frustration and isolation on the part of Black women, especially in predominantly White environments.

Personal and Professional Support Networks

Developing support networks inside and outside of the work environment was another strategy used by the Black women in the literature. These networks included family, friends, and colleagues (Allen, 2018; Carter-Frye, 2015; Davis, 2018; Henry & Glenn, 2009; Myers, 2002; Shorter-Gooden, 2004; Smith & Crawford, 2007).

Membership and engagement within professional organizations provided an opportunity for the women in the literature to network with other Black women (Carter-Frye, 2015; Henry & Glenn, 2009).

Family support helped the Black women in the literature foster a sense of positive self-identity (Allen, 2018; Miller & Vaughn, 1997). Family support also helped to reinforce the idea that these women were standing on the shoulders of ancestors that have come before them—ancestors who fought for freedoms and rights they now enjoy (Shorter-Gooden, 2004). This knowledge helped the women understand the need to be the shoulders upon which others who come after them stand.

Faith/spirituality was also a source of personal support (Bower & Wolverton, 2009; Carter-Frye, 2015; Parker, 2004; Shorter-Gooden, 2004). Through prayer and meditation, the women were able to draw strength from their belief in a higher power. The women noted how critical their faith was when dealing with highly challenging situations.

Resistance Strategies

Some Black women in the literature employed resistance strategies (Collins, 2009) to both actively and passively reject the negative stereotypes, perceptions, and mistreatment of Black women. Resistance strategies involve contradicting the negative portrayal of Black women in their everyday professional and personal lives, while at the same time possessing a level of consciousness that causes Black women to question the motives behind the negative portrayal. One resistance strategy utilized by the Black women in the literature involved developing and maintaining a positive self-image to determine their own destiny and self-identity and to counteract the internalization of the dominant White culture's perception of them (Davis, 2018; Evans, 2008; Parker, 2004; Rolle et al., 2000; Shorter-Gooden, 2004; Smith & Crawford, 2007). This resistance strategy included challenging notions of beauty and femininity based on White, western standards (Collins, 2009). Creating professional counter-spaces was another resistance strategy utilized (West, 2019). Professional counter-spaces provided an environment in which Women of Color could gather to uplift and affirm each other, as well as share strategies for coping within oppressive systems.

Another more active resistance strategy utilized was fighting back/challenging the oppressive systems they encountered (Collins, 2009; Rolle et al., 2000; Shorter-Gooden, 2004; Wheaton & Kezar, 2019). This resistance strategy involved the women finding their voice and playing an active role in dealing with challenging situations they encountered, as well as demanding the respect they deserved. Examples of fighting back/challenging oppressive systems included calling out bias and discrimination when they witnessed it, demanding to be included in informal gatherings of White colleagues, and lodging a formal complaint against an oppressor.

These resistance strategies were learned and cultivated through the life and professional experiences of the Black women in the literature. These experiences included growing up and being educated in predominantly White environments (Bower & Wolverson, 2009). They also included being exposed to issues of social justice during their upbringing (Bower & Wolverson, 2009; Coker-Colo & Murray, 2018).

Creating an environment where Black women are not simply coping, but thriving, should be the goal of the colleges and universities who employ them. Unfortunately, institutions of higher education in the U.S. are grounded in a history of White supremacist patriarchy (Kawewe, 1997). Because of this historical subordination of Black women, they are on the receiving end of a phenomena called *double jeopardy* (Mosley, 1980), defined as the “dual and systematic discriminations of racism and sexism” (Jean-Marie et al., 2009, p. 53). These interlocking systems of oppression work together to create disadvantages for Black women (Stanley, 2009). A review of Black Feminist

Thought and Intersectionality will situate interlocking systems of oppression within these theoretical frameworks.

Theoretical Framework

Black Feminist Thought

Although traditional feminist theories have been advanced as inclusive of all women, they tend to center the experiences of White, Western, middle-class women (Collins, 2009). This research study centered the experiences of Black women in executive-level leadership positions at predominantly White public research institutions in the U.S., using the voices of Black women in these positions to articulate their experiences. Because I centered the experiences of Black women, Black Feminist Thought was my primary theoretical framework. With Black Feminist Thought, the experiences and ideas of Black women are the focus of analysis. As a critical social theory, Black Feminist Thought not only looks at the ways race, gender, and class intersect in the oppression of Black women, but also ways to fight against this oppression of not only Black women, but also other oppressed groups.

Collins (2009) identified six distinguishing features of Black Feminist Thought, which are: (1) the need for U.S. Black Feminist Thought, (2) diverse responses to common challenges within Black feminism, (3) Black feminist practice and Black Feminist Thought, (4) dialogical practices and Black women intellectuals, (5) Black feminism as dynamic and changing, and (6) U.S. Black feminism and other social justice projects. I explore each feature below.

The Need for U.S. Black Feminist Thought. The first feature illuminates the need for Black Feminist Thought due to the nature of Black women's subordination within intersecting oppressions such as racism, sexism, and classism in the U.S. Historical issues such as slavery, coupled with institutionalized racism, segregation, and patriarchy that continue to this day, have a unique impact on Black women that is different from their impact on White women and Black men. These common experiences shared by Black women create a level of shared consciousness.

This shared consciousness not only provides the impetus for activism and scholarship by Black women, but also provides survival and resistance strategies for the daily onslaught of oppressive treatment, language, and imagery. As a critical social theory, Black Feminist Thought supports the empowerment of Black women as well as broader issues of social injustice and oppression. My research explored the shared consciousness between the Black women in my study and the resistance strategies they employed to navigate oppressive systems in their work environment.

Diverse Responses to Common Challenges Within Black Feminism. This feature acknowledges the tension between the experiences and ideas of Black women. Although Black women in the U.S. face similar challenges in a society that has historically, and continues to, devalue Black women, this does not mean all Black women in the U.S. have the same experiences. And with these varied experiences comes different levels of significance placed upon these experiences. For example, social class can impact the way Black women interpret and respond to an oppressive environment.

This diversity of experiences and significance leads to diverse responses from Black women, which comprises the group's collective knowledge (or standpoint). However, with the diversity of *individual* experiences among U.S. Black women comes the recognition and understanding that differential *group* treatment is happening. My research provides information on the individual experiences of the Black women in my study and the ways in which their experiences were shaped by their identities and backgrounds.

Black Feminist Practice and Black Feminist Thought. This distinguishing feature focuses on how the actions and thoughts of Black women inform one another. There is a dialogical relationship between the collective experiences of Black women and the group knowledge resulting from the diverse responses to those experiences. Changes in experiences can stimulate changes in consciousness. By the same token, changes in thinking can inform changes in action.

This action has led to many forms of activism on the part of Black women for the purpose of the group's empowerment. As a critical social theory, the activism component is essential. I am motivated to ensure the stories of Black women are shared not only to inform others about their unique experiences but also to empower Black women to create change for themselves and others. I also want to ensure Black women are better represented in executive-level leadership roles at PWIs. This research provided an opportunity for me to use the stories of the Black women in the study to better advocate for the needs of Black women, and Women of Color in general, in higher education.

Dialogical Practices and Black Women Intellectuals. This distinguishing feature underscores the essential nature of the contributions of Black women intellectuals. It also reinforces the need to ensure Black women intellectuals ask the right questions as they explore the many dimensions of Black women's standpoint. This exploration requires dialogue with other Black women to uncover both the often taken-for-granted knowledge of Black women as well as the more specialized knowledge. Both types of knowledge (commonplace and specialized) are interdependent and required to form a collective group consciousness and standpoint.

Black women intellectuals not only play a key role in uncovering and sharing knowledge of Black women broadly, but they also have a vested interest in this endeavor, which motivates them to ensure it happens—even when faced with obstacles and challenges. Black women intellectuals must also empower Black women to define themselves and their own agenda. This feature does not seek to exclude others, but it acknowledges Black women are best positioned to define the experiences of Black women. This solidarity amongst Black women does not preclude being in coalition with other groups for social change.

The dialogical practices of Black women intellectuals allow them to find parallels between the experiences of Black women and those of other groups for the purpose of collective group empowerment. The dialogical relationship that existed between me and my research participants was critical to my study. As a Black woman in an administrative role in higher education, I hoped to create a space conducive for my research participants to provide open and honest feedback that enabled me to answer my research question.

Black Feminism as Dynamic and Changing. This feature reinforces the idea that as social conditions change, the knowledge and action designed to respond to those conditions must also change. Black women scholars are cautioned not to isolate themselves within their institutions, but to stay connected to the larger community of Black women intellectuals to remain aware of the collective experience of Black women. Another caution to Black women scholars is to avoid the pressure to separate their scholarship from activism and to use their spheres of influence to increase the visibility of Black Feminist Thought.

My research study afforded me the opportunity to connect to the larger community of Black women scholars and the collective experience of Black women in higher education administration. The first opportunity was through my literature review. The interview process allowed me to have a more intimate connection with Black women scholars in the field. My research provided another tool to advocate for the needs of Black women in higher education.

U.S. Black Feminism and Other Social Justice Projects. The sixth distinguishing feature of Black Feminist Thought involves how Black women intellectuals situate Black Feminist Thought within the context of the overall fight for empowerment, human dignity, and social justice. This feature recognizes the interconnected nature of the struggle of oppressed people and the need for groups to advocate for the needs of groups other than their own. This “lift as we climb” mentality is second nature to many Black women, as is the understanding that developing coalitions around mutual interests is more powerful than organizations and individuals working

independently. Although my research study centers the experiences of Black women, the information can be used to advocate for the needs of other Women of Color in higher education.

The distinguishing features outlined by Collins (2009) speak to the interlocking systems of oppression Black women experience. These interlocking systems of oppression are the focus of the theoretical framework of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989), which was my secondary theoretical framework for this study. I provide information on this framework in the next section.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality focuses on interlocking systems of oppression, such as racism, sexism, and classism (Crenshaw, 1990; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Stanley, 2009). A pioneer of scholarship around intersectionality, Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) educates on the ways race and gender have been treated as mutually exclusive characteristics when it comes to looking at the experiences of people from different identities, especially as it relates to antidiscrimination law. When separating issues into the single axis framework of race and gender, the interests of Black women are made invisible. This is because when looking at the experience of people around race and gender, the focus is usually on the more privileged group within each category. For gender, that would be White women. For race, it would be Black men. This creates a distorted view of the overall experiences of people within these various identities by only focusing on a subset of people. This distorted view further marginalizes the experiences of Black women within feminist and anti-racist politics (Crenshaw, 1989).

Discrimination cases in the mid-1990s brought by Black women against their employers were often met with an unwillingness by the courts to recognize Black women as a group separate from White women or Black men. Black women were often told if they could not make a case for sex discrimination (which would include discrimination against White women), or overall race discrimination (which would include discrimination against Black men), then their cases for discrimination had no grounds. The courts failed to recognize Black women could be discriminated against based solely on being Black women.

Because antiracism and feminist politics often have competing agendas, Black women are often forced to divide their political energies in a way that disempowers their overall efforts. This disempowerment caused by splitting their energies between opposing groups is not something Black men and White women have to face. The failure of feminist politics to address issues of race, and the failure of antiracist politics to address issue of patriarchy, often lead to the reinforcement of the subordination of Black women within both.

This focus on the most privileged group is how antiracist and feminist theories operated until the development of scholarship around critical social theory such as Intersectionality and Black Feminist Thought. Intersectionality underscores how identity politics ignores within-group differences and contends a monolithic experience for women and for People of Color (Crenshaw, 1990). The argument against this assumed monolithic experience is at the core of *antiessentialism* (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

Antiessentialism looks at how within group experiences are minimized or ignored in a way that privileges one group over another within the group.

Intersectionality and antiessentialism call attention to the ways antiracist and feminist politics do not adequately, or appropriately, address the unique experiences the intersection of race and gender compound to create for Black women. This reinforces the needs to ensure the stories of Black women are shared to provide valuable information on the experiences of the least privileged groups within systems of oppression. Although the research centering the experiences of Black women in executive-level leadership positions at PWIs is increasing, there remains a paucity of research exploring these women's experiences at predominantly White, public *research* institutions (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2008; Lloyd-Jones, 2009). My research contributes to the body of knowledge in this area, while at the same time creating a space for Black women to utilize their own agency to share information regarding their experiences.

Why Predominantly White Public Research Institutions?

The Lincoln Project (2016) defined public research institutions as institutions of higher education that receive a portion of their funding from state and local appropriations, educate undergraduate and graduate students, are Carnegie-classified as Very High and High Research Activity universities, and are located in one of the fifty states. (p. 2)

Although they only represent three percent of higher education institutions in the U.S.

(The Lincoln Project, 2016), public research universities have a profound impact.

According to Altbach and Salmi (2011), research universities perform several functions,

to include: (1) providing advanced education for not only the academy, but also for policy makers and professions in both the public and private sector; (2) contributing to economic development; (3) serving as cultural institutions and intellectual hubs for social commentary and criticism; and (4) generating new knowledge to support innovation.

Advanced Education

A well-educated citizenry is essential to equip the next generation of leaders with the knowledge and skills necessary to lead in a 21st century democracy. Public research institutions not only prepare future teachers and faculty to maintain and enhance the educational enterprise, but they also educate and train a skilled workforce to meet the demands of our nation's economic growth and vitality (The Lincoln Project, 2015). A primary beneficiary of the educational benefits at public research institutions are the undergraduate and graduate students who matriculate through them. Educating about 20 percent of students nationwide (approximately 3.8 million), public research institutions award 65 percent of all master's degrees and 68 percent of all research doctorate degrees in the U.S. (The Lincoln Project, 2016).

Students at public research institutions benefit from being mentored and instructed by leading scholars and researchers in their fields. Students actively engage in research alongside their faculty and fellow students, which increases students' analytical and critical thinking skills, their level of engagement on campus, and provides them with valuable skills for the future (Andrews & Becker, 2004; The Lincoln Project, 2015). This level of engagement is part of the reason why public research universities have the distinction of having the second highest graduation rate among all public colleges and

universities classified by Carnegie, second only to public art, music, and design schools (The Lincoln Project, 2015).

Through the outreach efforts of public research universities, people who might not otherwise have access to the educational benefits of a college or university are served. This is especially true for people from low socio-economic backgrounds. Thirty-one percent of undergraduate students at public research institutions receive Pell grants (The Lincoln Project, 2016). The work performed by the extension centers and lifelong learning institutes connected to these institutions help to facilitate access for these underrepresented and underserved populations.

Public research universities also partner with local community colleges to provide bridge programs that make it more affordable for students to complete their degrees (The Lincoln Project, 2016). And to ensure a more well-prepared pipeline of students, educational outreach with K-12 schools provides opportunities to ensure students are better prepared to continue their education after high school (The Lincoln Project, 2016). Public research universities also work with local and state governments to provide critical expertise, technical assistance, and workforce development (The Lincoln Project, 2015).

Economic Development

Outside of government entities, public research universities are often the largest employers in their respective states (The Lincoln Project, 2016). In addition, they develop valuable partnerships with corporate, non-profit, and government sectors for research and innovation. These partnerships connect academic and business leaders to foster growth and development in mutually beneficial ways. Public research universities also foster a

culture of entrepreneurship by providing seed funding, sponsoring start-up competitions, and offering catalyst grants, which fund ideas that address pressing global challenges.

Cultural Centers and Intellectual Hubs for Social Commentary and Criticism

Public research universities serve as social and intellectual hubs for their local communities. Many of them have museums and theaters open to the public, as well as provide cultural activities for the campus and community (The Lincoln Project, 2016). Research institutions also provide a better understanding of the human condition through programs in the social sciences and humanities (Altbach, 2011).

Public research institutions aspire to create an environment of engagement with local, national, and global communities. This requires that faculty generate knowledge that will provide solutions to complex social, civic, and ethical problems (Cherwitz, 2010). The students who work alongside the faculty also benefit from this environment of being agents for change.

True engagement requires two-way communication and sharing of ideas so solutions account for the needs of diverse populations. This two-way engagement is not an easy proposition and requires university staff and administration to have the knowledge, skills, and backgrounds to effectively engage with people from local, national, and global communities. This is one of the reasons why it is important to have diverse representation in the administrative ranks of the institution.

Generating New Knowledge to Support Innovation

Public research universities provide the foundational research that drives innovation and discovery in science and technology. Societies benefit every day from the

discovery and knowledge advanced by public research universities. Examples of this knowledge and discovery include things like the internet, antibiotics, smartphones, ATM machines, and laser eye surgery (The Lincoln Project, 2015).

Between 2012 and 2013, public research institutions generated more than 13,322 patent applications, 522 start-up companies and 3,094 intellectual property licenses (The Lincoln Project, 2016). Many public research institutions help create innovation districts in which anchoring research institutions partner with companies to support start-up companies and surround them with resources to accelerate their development (The Lincoln Project, 2016). The Research Triangle in the Raleigh-Durham areas of North Carolina is a prime example of this type of collaboration.

Current Threat to Public Research Institutions

Despite all the ways that public research institutions have the capacity to provide a positive impact to the communities they serve, there remains an ever-present threat to their survival and vitality. The primary threat for public research institutions is the decline in state funding of an average of 34 percent over the last decade (The Lincoln Project, 2016). In response, many institutions have become more selective with enrollment as well as more revenue-driven in their decision making (Haycock et al., 2010). In a 2000 report funded by the Kellogg Commission entitled *Renewing the Covenant: Learning, Discovery and Engagement in a New Age and Different World*, a task force of university presidents shared their views on the future of state and land grant universities. In the report, the presidents tried to create a sense of urgency for public institutions to recommit themselves to advancing the “public good” and ensuring access

to a diverse population of students—especially those from underrepresented and underserved populations.

In a critique of the “public good” agenda for higher education, Gildersleeve et al. (2010) reviewed some of the dominant discourse in public agendas for higher education through the lens of critical inquiry. They conducted a review of two public agendas for higher education, namely *Setting a Public Agenda for Higher education in the States* (Davies, 2006) and the U.S. Secretary of Education’s Commission on the Future of Higher Education (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Their analysis revealed an ideology of *conservative modernization*, which is “a hegemonic bloc of social forces that collude to effect conservative changes in education ... to sustain the dominant power structure and exacerbate social inequalities, under the guise of rhetoric that espouses freedom and purports the values of meritocracy” (p. 88). The people who determine these agendas for higher education include government officials, college presidents, corporate executives, and nonprofit education policy groups. This underscores the need to ensure the people involved in determining how we define and develop strategy for the “public good” are as diverse as possible.

The Need for Diversity in Administrative Positions at Public Research Institutions

To effectively meet the challenge of ensuring access to their institutions and engagement with diverse communities, while at the same time dealing with declining state funding, public research institutions must ensure they have a diverse group of institutional leaders making decisions that impact the future of their institutions and the populations they serve. As our nation becomes more diverse, having the same diverse

representation in executive-level leadership of these public research institutions will ensure the needs of all our citizens, especially those who have been historically marginalized/excluded from this educational enterprise, are taken into consideration when decisions are made.

Having people from diverse identities and perspectives at the executive level at predominantly White public research institutions in the U.S. will help ensure: (1) when policies are developed and implemented, any potential negative impact on minoritized populations is minimized; (2) when decisions are made regarding curriculum, issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion are part of student learning and development; (3) faculty who center these issues in their research and scholarship are supported instead of devalued; and (4) underserved populations are considered and supported through the service focus of the institution.

When predominantly White institutions lack representation of Black women in their executive leadership, they are excluding the perspectives, experiences, and collective knowledge of a group of people with significant contributions to make to the teaching, research, and service goals of these institutions. And because Black women often exhibit leadership skills that are more collaborative and transformational in nature (Parker, 2004), their engagement in university-level decision making can be transformational for those institutions as well. The representation of Black women in these types of positions also reinforces the institution's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Conclusion

This chapter provided an historical perspective of Black women in postsecondary education, which helped to explain how Black women have been subordinated in these educational settings. The literature review focused on Black women in higher education administration and reinforced the ways Black women continue to face discrimination and mistreatment, especially at PWIs. The chapter also showed how the culture and climate at these institutions provide the breeding ground for stereotypes and continued subordination of Black women. An overview of Black Feminist Thought and Intersectionality helped situate the research topic within these theoretical frameworks. The chapter concluded with the rationale for the focus on predominantly White public research institutions as the context for the study.

Public research institutions drive education, research and innovation that impacts not only their state and region, but the nation and the world. Unfortunately, Black women remain underrepresented in executive-level positions at these institutions. It is critically important to explore the ways in which interlocking systems of oppression impact Black women and impede their progress to executive-level positions. This study provided voice and agency for Black women to articulate the ways in which their intersecting identities have impacted their leadership and decision-making experiences. Learning more about the unique experiences of Black women who have achieved executive-level positions at predominantly White public research institutions, and the challenges they have experienced along the way (and continue to experience), provides valuable information to predominantly White public research institutions on ways to better support the pipeline of

Black women who aspire to executive-level positions as well as those who currently hold these types of positions.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to illuminate and understand how interlocking systems of oppression impact the leadership and decision-making experiences of Black women in executive-level leadership positions at predominantly White public research institutions in the U.S. My research question was: How do Black women in executive-level leadership positions at predominantly White public research institutions in the U.S. make sense of misogynoir in relation to their leadership and decision-making experiences? This chapter provides an overview of the methodology I utilized for the study.

I begin the chapter with a positionality statement to be transparent in my relationship with both the subject matter as well as the potential research participants. I then share my epistemology as a researcher and discuss how it connects to my methodological choices. I conclude the chapter with a thorough review of my chosen methodology, its suitability to my research and how I applied it to my research through data collection and analysis.

Positionality Statement

I am a Black woman born and raised in Anderson, South Carolina. The youngest of seven children, I come from a large household with numerous extended family members living within close proximity. Our family gatherings are filled with lots of food, fellowship, laughter, and trash talking.

I attended public schools in South Carolina for the duration of my educational experiences, all of which were predominantly White. My parents always extolled the value of an education for their children. They wanted to make we had access to things and experiences that they did not while growing up.

I attended the University of South Carolina in Columbia, SC as a first-generation college student. Two of my older sisters paved the way for me by attending and graduating from four-year colleges in the state. An older brother received an associate degree from an in-state community college as well.

Although the student body at the University of South Carolina was more diverse in terms of race than other PWIs in the state, I still encountered many classrooms in which I was the only Black person, or one of very few. And I never had a Black professor during my time at the university. Nevertheless, I became engaged in student life and enjoyed my undergraduate experience. I graduated with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Business Administration.

Despite an earlier design on a career in banking, I began working at Clemson University in the fall of 1991 after moving back home to Anderson, SC. My first position at Clemson was an entry-level one in the division of Student Affairs. Working at Clemson was not unfamiliar territory for me, being yet another predominantly White educational/work environment. I obtained my Master of Business Administration degree from Clemson University within my first five years of working there.

A particularly painful (for many) reorganization within Student Affairs set me on a path of working with and advocating for the needs of underrepresented and underserved

populations at the university. Throughout my tenure at Clemson, I have had the wonderful and unique opportunity to work closely with people from many different backgrounds and identities. This included Students of Color, international students, people from the LGBTQ+ community as well as people from minoritized religions and faith traditions. Learning with and from them has impacted me in ways I may never truly be able to articulate.

I was provided the opportunity to build and lead the first Multicultural Affairs Department at Clemson University, which is currently the Harvey and Lucina Gantt Multicultural Center. Additional noteworthy points along my journey include: (1) developing the first comprehensive diversity training initiative for the university, which involved creating the first National Coalition Building Institute (NCBI) affiliate in the state of South Carolina; (2) co-chairing the task force that developed the first diversity plan for the university; (3) co-authoring the proposal to create the first Chief Diversity Officer position at the university; and (4) developing a proposal to institutionalize university-wide strategic planning focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion. My current role at Clemson University involves leading the university through this strategic planning process.

My career at Clemson University has spanned over 30 years. During this time, there has never been a Black woman in an executive-level leadership position at the University. Black women have reported to people in these executive-level positions, but none have been successful at breaking the concrete barrier into one of these positions at Clemson University. I currently report to someone in one of these executive-level

positions, and I have been in this supporting cast role in two different divisions during my tenure at the university.

Because of this lack of representation in the executive ranks of Clemson University, I have never had a Black woman in a position that I aspired to obtain to mentor and advise me along my journey. Due to this lack of access to mentors who shared my identities and could understand the complexities of navigating predominantly White systems as a Black woman, I have worked hard to be that mentor/advocate for countless individuals (students, faculty, and staff) with whom I have built relationships over the years. I consider providing this type of support/advocacy for others, especially members of the Black community, as a responsibility that comes along with my level of education and standing within the university community. But what it really comes down to is my sense of responsibility as a Black woman to her community. Having grown up with an “othermother” who happened to be my very own mother, I had a wonderful role model for what that could look like as she opened her arms, our home, her kitchen, and her purse to extended family members and others throughout her life.

This lack of representation of Black women in executive-level roles, and the environments in which these women work and lead, are the primary drivers for my research interests around Black women. I want to identify Black women who have been successful at reaching executive-level positions at predominantly White public research institutions U.S. to find out how working within interlocking systems of oppression have impacted their experiences. My hope is this opportunity to share the experiences of Black

women, by Black women, will help to illuminate their unique experiences for others in ways that compel them to act in solidarity and support.

I bring certain assumptions to my research on this topic. My primary assumption is that predominantly White colleges and universities in the U.S. are rooted in White supremacist patriarchy. As such, interlocking systems of oppression are part of the fabric of these institutions—despite guiding principles that might state otherwise. Another assumption I bring to my research is that Black women working within predominantly White systems of higher education experience both racism and sexism simultaneously. This means the negative impact for Black women is multiplicative, as they hold membership in socially subordinated groups within both systems of oppression. A final assumption is that interlocking systems of oppression impact the opportunities for Black women to assume executive-level leadership roles at PWIs in the U.S.

Research Paradigm

A research paradigm is the basic belief system that guides a researcher (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), the three fundamental questions a researcher must ask themselves to ensure their ontology, epistemology, and methodology are aligned are: (1) What is the form and nature of reality and, therefore, what is there that can be known about it (ontology)?; (2) What is the nature of the relationship between the knower and the known (epistemology)?; and (3) How can the would-be knower go about finding out what they believe can be known (methodology)? (p. 108).

My research paradigm is critical theory (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Critical theory seeks to “expose ways in which discourses are socially and historically constructed and how these discourses support and maintain conditions of inequality, oppression and exploitation” (Glesne, 2016, p.11). Critical researchers approach their work knowing there are unequal power relationships in society that disadvantage groups of people, and the purpose of their research is to uncover these relationships and highlight how they advantage some groups while disadvantaging others. I respond to each of the questions posed by Guba and Lincoln (1994) below to ensure epistemological alignment.

Ontology

The ontology of critical theory is *historical realism* (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). In historical realism, reality is “shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender values” (p. 109). This reality is conceptualized over time by the individual person or group and is impacted by the person or group’s identities and experiences. My research participants were Black women in executive-level leadership positions at predominantly White public research institutions in the U.S. Their realities were shaped by their multiple identities, the subsequent interlocking systems of privilege and oppression, and how those identities and systems impacted and informed their experiences.

Epistemology

For critical theory, the epistemology is *transactional and subjectivist* (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The researcher and the research participants are assumed to be interactively linked in such a way that the values of the researcher will inevitably

influence the research. Because I share identities with my research participants, my analysis of the data was undoubtedly influenced by my own identities and experiences.

Methodology

In critical theory, the methodology should be *dialogic and dialectical* (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This means the research requires a dialogue between the researcher and the research participants. This dialogic approach enables the researcher and the research participants to critique values and assumptions that reinforce inequities, with the goal of empowerment and action (Willis et al., 2007). In my research, I explored the impact of interlocking systems of oppression (in particular, racism and sexism) on my research participants' experiences. Using the theoretical framework of Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2009), with an emphasis on Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017), helped ensure alignment of my epistemology and theoretical framework.

Methodology

According to Patton (2014), qualitative research “inquires into, documents, and interprets the meaning-making process” (p. 2). Patton (2014) identified several contributions of qualitative inquiry, three of which fit well with the purpose of my research study and the related research question. The contributions most salient to my study were: (1) illuminating meanings; (2) capturing stories to understand people's perspectives and experiences; and (3) understanding context: how and why it matters (p. 13). I describe each contribution below and connect it to my study.

The contribution of *illuminating meanings* involves how people construct and make meaning of their experiences. The capacity to make meaning of things is what sets us apart from other animals (Patton, 2014). My interview protocol provided numerous opportunities for my research participants to engage in this meaning-making process regarding their leadership and decision-making experiences as Black women administrators at predominantly White public research institutions in the U.S.

The contribution of *capturing stories* involves the use of stories from research participants that help the reader understand their perspectives and experiences. The use of stories in my research was particularly important in providing counter-stories to the dominant narratives about Black women in higher education. The use of in-depth interviews with open-ended questions provided the space for my research participants to describe and contextualize their experiences. The information shared by the research participants also provided the opportunity for thick, rich descriptions using the participants' own words.

The third contribution is *understanding context*. Patton (2014) described qualitative inquiry without attention to context as “a fine painting without a frame” (p. 69). Understanding the perspectives of research participants not only requires understanding their backgrounds and experiences, but also contextual issues such as institutional culture and politics, as well as systems of oppression like racism and sexism, and how these contextual issues influence the experiences and perceptions of the research participants. Because my research involved the leadership and decision-making

experiences of Black women within interlocking systems of oppression, these contextual issues were important components in the analysis of the findings.

Basic Interpretive Inquiry

Drawing on the tenets of qualitative research in the previous section, I used *Basic Interpretive Inquiry* as the methodology for my study. Interpretive Inquiry is used when the researcher wants to understand how research participants make meaning of something within a particular context (Smith, 1992). As such, the purpose of my study and the related research question was well suited to this research methodology.

A primary goal of Interpretive Inquiry is to “focus on the interpretation of meaningful human expression” (Smith, 1992, p. 102). Smith (1992) highlighted *human action* and *social action* as two key concepts of Interpretive Inquiry. He described human action as “those expressions people make based on reasons, intentions and motivations” (p. 102). Social action underscores how this meaning-making process (for both the research participants and the researcher) is impacted by the social context of the study.

According to Ellis (1998), it is difficult to discuss Interpretive Inquiry without connecting it to some of the themes present in hermeneutics, the most salient ones being: (1) the creativity involved in interpretation; (2) the back and forth that takes place between the micro and the macro, or the specific and the general; and (3) the role of language in understanding human dynamics. The first theme involves the effort on the part of the interpreter to discern the meaning or intent behind the expressions of others. The second theme involves the movement of the interpreter between the expressions of others and the meanings connected to those expressions. The third theme underscores

how critical the language available to the interpreter is to the capacity for others to understand the interpretation.

Researchers using Interpretive Inquiry are encouraged to select a research topic for which they are passionate about and/or want to make a difference (Ellis, 1998). This ensures intentional engagement with the research question(s) as well as fosters creativity on the part of the inquirer. For this reason, many researchers who choose Interpretive Inquiry as a methodology have a close, personal connection to their research topic. This certainly held true for me and my topic of study, as illuminated in my Positionality Statement.

Researchers using Interpretive Inquiry should be able to understand the background of the research participants and the associated context to fully interpret their responses (Muganga, 2015). At the same time, Interpretive Inquiry reinforces the need for the researcher to acknowledge their biases and assumptions that might get in the way of data interpretation. This will ensure the researcher remains open to gaining new knowledge from the study.

Ellis (1998) described Interpretive Inquiry as an “unfolding spiral” (p. 20), with each loop in the spiral representing a separate activity associated with data collection and analysis. And each loop influences and informs the activities in the next loop. In multi-loop studies, the researcher has multiple opportunities to have conversations with and/or observe their research participants. Single-loop studies are primarily limited to one data collection activity (i.e., a single interview with the research participants). In these instances, the researcher often makes repeated loops with the same data.

Because the primary source of data for my study was a single interview with my research participants, my study would be considered a single-loop study. Each loop (or research activity) generates findings, some of which may be expected, while others may come as a surprise to the researcher. These unexpected findings are called *uncoverings*. Uncoverings often lead to an increased understanding of the research question(s), which can prove useful when determining next steps in the research process.

The procedures for Interpretive Inquiry align well with those used by qualitative researchers for data gathering, such as the use of interviews, observations, and document analysis (Muganga, 2015; Smith, 1992). Open-ended interview protocols are often used in Interpretive Inquiry to facilitate obtaining thick, rich descriptions using the participants' own words, as well as gathering information that could lead to additional inquiry from the researcher. Interpretive Inquiry also allows for flexibility on the part of researchers when making methodological choices, to include adapting to changing situations (Muganga, 2015; Smith, 1992). These choices are not deemed arbitrary on the part of the researcher. In all decisions, the researcher must be able to justify the decisions they make and articulate how those decisions are in the best interest of their study.

Research Methods

Recruitment of Participants

My research centered Black women in executive-level leadership positions at predominantly White public research institutions in the U.S. Because the pool of potential research participants for my study was small, I employed focused recruitment strategies.

These strategies helped ensure the potential research participants possessed the identities necessary for my study and were situated within the chosen context for my study.

Participant Selection Strategies. I utilized purposive sampling to identify potential research participants. According to Robinson (2014), purposive sampling is used when the researcher assumes “certain categories of individuals may have a unique, different or important perspective on the phenomenon in question and their presence in the sample should be ensured” (p. 32). Purposive sampling supports an Interpretive Inquiry research design by ensuring the participants fit the criteria for the study as well as ensuring they are situated within the appropriate context for the study.

The process I followed to identify potential research participants included obtaining a list of predominantly White public research institutions in the U.S. and then conducting a web search of these institutions to see if I could visually identify women who might fit the criteria for my study. For institutions that did a good job of visually representing the people in their leadership positions, the process was fairly simple. For others, I utilized the search engine for the institution as well as Google searches to find photographs of the women holding executive leadership positions at these institutions. This visual identification allowed me to develop a pool of women holding executive-level positions who might identify as Black women. I also enlisted the aid of colleagues to assist me with identifying potential research participants for my study.

Communication to Potential Research Participants. Communication to potential research participants is a critical step in introducing them to a research study and reinforcing the importance of their participation. I sent an introductory email (see

Appendix A) to all potential research participants and attached an informed consent document (see Appendix B) that provided important information regarding my study, to include: (1) the purpose of the study, (2) criteria for participation in the study, (3) data collection methods and time commitment, (4) risks and benefits associated with the study, (5) steps that would be taken to maintain the confidentiality of research participants, and (6) contact information for obtaining additional information about the study.

Participant Information

According to Patton (2014), “there are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry” (p. 311). He indicated the number of participants in qualitative research should be based on things like the purpose of the study, what information will be useful, what will have credibility, and what resources are available for the study (including the time of the researcher). Researchers seeking more depth of information might opt for a smaller number of research participants to allow for a broader focus on experiences, especially when the cases are rich with information.

I initially hoped to identify five to eight research participants for my study. I was fortunate to have eight women agree to participate. Due to the systemic oppression and exclusion of Black women in higher education already outlined, the number of Black women currently holding executive-level leadership positions at predominantly White public research institutions in the U.S. is limited. As such, I focused on providing depth in terms of the information provided. Because the research participants directly embodied the desired characteristics of my participants, within the chosen context, they provided

information extremely relevant to the purpose of my study. I both learned from, and resonated with, the voices and experiences of these women.

Each participant identified as either a Black or African American woman, or both. The pseudonyms chosen by the research participants were Angela, Elaine, Jasmine, Kay, Melanie, Rebekah, Sasha, and Tabitha. Each participant held an executive-level leadership position at a predominantly White public research institution in the U.S. at the time of their interview. The positions of the research participants ranged from provost/vice provost to academic dean to vice chancellor. The supervisors of the participants included provosts, presidents, and chancellors. Each participant had held executive-level positions at predominantly White public research institutions in the U.S. (either at their current institution or a combination of their current and previous institution) for at least two years. The geographic regions of the participants' institutions included the Mid-Atlantic, Midwest, Northeast, Southeast, and Southwest regions of the U.S.

Data Collection Methods

In-Depth Interviews. One of the methods used frequently in Interpretive Inquiry to obtain information on the perceptions and experiences of research participants is in-depth interviews (Smith, 1992). Semi-structured interview protocols (Brenner, 2006; Seidman, 2019) provide a basic set of questions the researcher can utilize, while providing the flexibility of asking additional probing questions based upon the responses from the research participants. I used a semi-structured interview protocol consisting of a series of open-ended questions (see Appendix C). Each interview lasted approximately 90

minutes. I provided the interview protocol to the research participants a week in advance of the scheduled interview to allow them time to think about their responses and to ensure their interview yielded as much rich detail as possible.

Ideally, I would have liked to interview the research participants in person. However, with limitations due to COVID-19, as well as issues of proximity to the research participants' respective institutions, the interviews took place via the use of the Zoom video conferencing platform. I recorded the interviews using this feature in Zoom. The recording function provided an audio and video recording of each interview, as well as a written transcript. I also used a hand-held audio recording device as back-up in case internet access on either side was unreliable at the time of the interviews. Fortunately, I did not experience any technical difficulties related to the use of Zoom, thus I did not have to rely on any of the recordings from the hand-held device.

Reflexive Journaling. I engaged in reflexive journaling/memo writing (Glesne, 2016) to make note of my thoughts and observations before, during and after the interviews, as well as during the data analysis phase. Patton (2014) described reflexivity as “a way of emphasizing the importance of deep introspection, political consciousness, cultural awareness, and ownership of one’s perspective” (p. 70). Because I shared identities and experiences with the participants, reflexive journaling allowed me to make note of my own personal thoughts and feelings during the data gathering process in order to focus on the thoughts and feelings of the participants as much as possible, both during the interviews as well as during the analysis phase.

The process of acknowledging my biases and assumptions about the research topic is an important step in Interpretive Inquiry (Ellis, 1998; Smith, 1992). I asked myself questions such as: (1) What assumptions am I making about my research participants' experiences?; (2) How are my research participants' experiences both similar to and different from each other as well as from my own personal experiences?; and (3) What is this process like for me personally as someone who shares identities with the research participants? Reflexive journaling was also utilized during the analysis phase to uncover emerging patterns in the data.

Protection of Human Subjects

Extra care was taken to avoid sharing information that could potentially identify a research participant. Once research participants were selected for the study, they were asked to identify a desired pseudonym for use when sharing the findings. The pseudonyms the participants selected are utilized in all study materials. Interview recordings and transcriptions are stored in a password-protected environment.

Trustworthiness

Experimental and quasi-experimental research designs traditionally focus on internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity when trying to determine the level of rigor associated with a research study (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Qualitative research designs focus on trustworthiness, which encompasses issues of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). I ensured my research met the different criteria for trustworthiness as described below.

Credibility. Credibility is the counterpart of internal validity in traditional experimental/quasi-experimental research. For my study, I demonstrated credibility by spending a significant amount of time interviewing my research participants, listening to the recordings, reviewing the transcripts, and reviewing my reflexive memos. This allowed me to have prolonged engagement with the research participants and the data collected through the research. This level of engagement allowed me to remain close to the information, looking for similarities and differences as well as identifying the information most salient to my research question.

My background and experiences also provided credibility for my study. I am a Black woman who has held an administrative position at a predominantly White public research university in the U.S. for over 30 years. I was able to process the information provided by the research participants with a certain level of understanding of what it is like to professionally navigate within interlocking systems of oppression as a Black woman.

Transferability. Transferability is the counterpart of external validity in traditional experimental/quasi-experimental research. Qualitative research does not seek to generalize, knowing that human behavior is highly contextual in nature. Application of knowledge produced within one context is not assumed to be replicable within another context when using qualitative inquiry. The desired outcome is that knowledge produced can be used to make “plausible inferences” (Lincoln & Guba, 1986, p. 17) about human behavior in other contexts.

For my study, I demonstrated transferability by providing rich, thick descriptions (Schwandt et al., 2007) from the narratives provided by my research participants, situated within the context of my research study. Whenever possible, I used the words of the research participants when providing these descriptions. These rich, thick descriptions allow the reader to draw their own conclusions regarding the applicability of the findings (all or in part) within other contexts.

Dependability and Confirmability. Dependability and confirmability are the counterparts of reliability and objectivity in traditional experimental/quasi-experimental research. Qualitative inquiry rejects the notion of objectivity between the researcher and the research participants, allowing for transparency in the ways a researcher is influenced by their subject of study and vice versa (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). For my study, I demonstrated dependability and confirmability by providing a clear path from the interview transcripts to the analysis. This included written interview transcripts with any identifying information redacted, as well as my research codes and the process of theme development. I was also transparent about the biases and assumptions I had regarding the research subject, as provided through my Positionality Statement as well as the use of reflexive memos during data collection and analysis.

Limitations

The limitations of my research study included the types of things that impacted my study that were beyond the scope of my control as the researcher. I conducted my research during the COVID-19 global pandemic. As such, a limitation that impacted my study was the inability to conduct the interviews in person, which would have been my

desire whenever proximity would allow. Due to social distancing restrictions, I relied upon video conferencing technology for all the interviews. Although I note this as a limitation, I acknowledge that due to the pandemic, video conferencing had become a normal way of conducting business at colleges and universities in the U.S.

Data Analysis

The purpose of qualitative research is not to generalize the findings to a broader population (Seidman, 2019). Qualitative data tells a story (Patton, 2014). With thick, rich descriptions using the participants' own words, including contextual details, qualitative data takes the reader into the experience of the person(s) experiencing it in such a way that we know what it was like to have been there. Patton (2014) described the role of the researcher as “a credible, authoritative, authentic, and trustworthy voice that engages the reader through rich description, thoughtful sequencing, appropriate use of quotes, and contextual clarity, so that the reader joins the inquirer in the search for meaning” (p. 73).

Coding and Theming the Data.

To perform a thorough analysis of the data, I spent a significant amount of time with the interview transcripts. My first interaction with the transcripts was during the process of listening to the interview recordings while reading the transcripts provided via Zoom. I tried to do this as soon as possible following the interviews. This allowed me to make any necessary corrections to the transcripts provided via the Zoom platform. Listening to the recordings also allowed me to hear the voices of the participants a second time and engage with the information they provided.

I engaged with the transcripts a second time during the process of looking for words or phrases from the transcripts I thought were the most salient in terms of my research question. I developed an initial set of *codes* during this process. According to Saldaña (2013), codes are “a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (p. 3). I performed a second round of coding on the initial codes to collapse codes together and streamline the codes.

During the first round of coding, I used affective coding methods (Saldaña, 2013), such as emotion and values coding, to uncover the feelings, values, attitudes, and beliefs of the research participants as described by them during the interviews. The second round of coding consisted of pattern coding (Saldaña, 2013), during which I looked for patterns among the codes that could be grouped into themes. I conducted a couple of rounds of theming to collapse smaller themes into larger, more overarching themes.

Once the themes were developed, I engaged with the transcripts a third time when I used the MAXQDA Qualitative Data Analysis software to identify excerpts from the transcripts that were connected to my themes. I engaged with these excerpts again during the process of identifying the most salient quotes to bring life to the themes. I share these salient quotes and my findings in Chapter Four.

Personal Reflections

Searching for Research Participants

As noted previously, I conducted a web search of predominantly White public research institutions in the U.S. to identify potential research participants. During this

process I made a few observations. The first observation was that some institutions do a great job of providing visual representation of the people in their leadership positions, and others do not. For those that did a good job, I was able to maneuver their websites and identify potential research participants. For the institutions that did not do a good job, I had to use other methods to find photographs of the people in their leadership roles. This included putting their name into the search engine for the institution and hoping there was a photo somewhere in their archives. If that failed, I conducted a Google search or used LinkedIn.

The second observation was the executive-level leadership positions at these institutions continue to be dominated by White people, primarily White men. The lack of racial and ethnic diversity at these institutions was jarring in some cases. Searching for Black women in these roles was like searching for a rare, beautiful unicorn. I expected this to be the case due to the data I used to underscore the purpose of my research; however, seeing the visual representation of the leadership at these institutions was both striking and disheartening.

The third observation during my search for research participants was the proliferation of Black women in chief diversity officer type positions since the murder of George Floyd in May of 2020. The death of George Floyd impacted many PWIs as they struggled to come to terms with issues of racial justice on their campuses. I do not have any data to support that the proliferation of Black women in these roles was the direct impact of calls for broadening the diversity of people in leadership roles, but it was striking to see how many Black women were coming into these roles since that time. I

also made note of the number of Black women who were new to other executive-level roles since May of 2020. Since I was looking for Black women with at least two years at their current institution (or a total of at least two years if coming from an executive-level position at another predominantly White public research institution prior to their current role), I was unable to consider these women for my study.

My final observation involved the time it took to reach my desired level of research participants. I was originally hoping to get at least five, but hopefully eight, participants for my study. I was excited to find eight women who were willing and able to participate. When I sent the initial email to solicit participation, I was surprised by how quickly the eight women responded to my request. Many of them expressed excitement in my study and seemed eager to tell their stories. It made me reflect on how often the voices and experiences of Black women get left out of the equation.

Interviewing the Research Participants. *The process of interviewing and learning from the research participants was indeed a journey for me. I was pleasantly surprised by the eagerness with which each of the participants approached me and my research. None of the research participants rescheduled their interviews, which was something I was anticipating considering the types of roles they performed at their respective institutions. The only request I received from a participant was to meet 30 minutes earlier than our originally scheduled time due to another meeting being placed on her calendar. One participant even conducted the interview while riding in her car due to an unscheduled family obligation. All of this underscored the research participants' desire to be a part of this study and share their experiences.*

Realities of Virtual Space. *Conducting the interviews over Zoom was a unique experience for me. Although Zoom has become a natural way of conducting business amidst the COVID-19 global pandemic, it still impacted the intimate environment I hoped to create for these interviews, especially when proximity would have allowed for an in-person interview. I was very fortunate that technical difficulties did not come into play during my interviews with the research participants. But there were other distractions that had an impact that probably would not have been a factor during an in-person interview.*

For example, as indicated above, one participant had an unscheduled family commitment that dictated that we conduct her interview while she was traveling in the car with her spouse. I could hear her spouse talking in the background, which made it difficult for me to hear her responses. I had to let her know I was hearing someone else in the background, which prompted her to remedy the situation. She also kept her camera off during the entire interview, so I was not able to see her face or use nonverbal cues to determine when it made sense to move on to the next question. I had to request that she let me know when she had completed a thought so I would not interrupt her sharing by moving on to the next question prematurely.

Bonding Around Shared Experiences. *Fortunately, the virtual environment did not seem to limit the amount of sharing by the research participants. As I was conducting the interviews, I was struck by the immediate rapport I was able to develop with the participants. It was like we were old acquaintances who were just catching up with each other over Zoom. Throughout the interviews, I had to maintain my excitement enough to*

process the information that was being shared and think of any follow-up questions that might solicit additional information relevant to my research question—all the while thinking about all the great data I was getting and wondering how I was going to choose from among them.

I was pleased that the women felt comfortable sharing their experiences with me. As disheartening as some of their experiences were, they were not at all surprising. Many of them shared things that I had also felt and experienced during my professional journey. And as affirming as the experience of interviewing these women was for me, my gut told me that the process was also a cathartic one for the research participants—a rare opportunity for them to have a safe and supportive environment in which they could be transparent about their experiences working within interlocking systems of oppression.

***No Explanation Needed.** There were also several moments that are primarily situated within Black womanhood that I shared with the research participants. Some involved discovering our affiliation with an NPHC Greek letter organization and having a moment around that shared experience. Another moment that stood out to me was when a participant shared an experience that made me think of “A Black Lady Sketch Show” —in particular the “Black Lady Courtroom” sketch. The participant agreed to check it out and circle back when she had done so. She did exactly as promised, even sharing some of her favorite lines from the sketch. I validated her favorites and shared one of my own during the exchange. There was also a lot of shared laughter with the research participants that comes with a deep understanding and knowing that goes beyond words.*

Sometimes the laughter started even before the sentence was complete, or simply based upon a look on the face of the participant (or my own).

***Personal/Professional Network.** Following the interviews, many of the women invited me to stay in touch with them. And many asked me to keep them informed regarding my dissertation defense. I feel as though this process created a unique opportunity for me to form my own personal and professional network of exceptional Black women with whom I can share experiences and receive advice and support along my professional journey.*

Conclusion

This chapter began with an overview of my personal connection to the research topic to be transparent as a researcher on the biases and assumptions I brought to the research topic. Sharing my epistemology provided information on the lens through which I viewed the research participants as well as their lived experiences. This set the context for a discussion of my chosen methodology and how it was applied to my research, particularly as it related to my methodological choices.

The chapter also included the ways I worked to protect the identities of the research participants as well as ensure the trustworthiness of the information shared in my analysis. Information about the research participants was shared, to include pseudonyms, titles, and geographic regions of their institutions. The chapter concluded with the steps utilized to analyze the data. I also shared personal reflections of my experiences with both identifying and interviewing the research participants. In the next chapter, I share the findings from my research.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

This chapter includes the themes related to my findings. There were three overarching themes from the experiences of the research participants. The first theme, *sense of purpose*, encompassed the ways in which the research participants articulated a strong sense of responsibility to advocate for the needs of others, especially Communities of Color, and how they used their agency to carry out this responsibility. Theme two, *good old boys ... and girls?*, included the participants experiences with, and comparison to, White people across gender identities. The third theme, *personal toll*, recognized how working within interlocking systems of oppression took a toll on the research participants—mentally, physically, and professionally. I explore each theme below. I redacted information that might identify the participants' name, age, position and/or institution. I also include personal reflections at the end of the chapter.

Findings

Although the women in my study all identified as Black women, their experiences, as well as the significance they placed upon those experiences, varied. However, there are collective experiences shared by Black women operating within raced and gendered systems of oppression that lead to a collective standpoint for Black women (Collins, 2009). Some of the research participants articulated this collective standpoint for Black women during their interview. Angela stated,

Even if you and I were in the space ... we may see some things in common, but ... we could also see [them] differently, because we come at it from different life experiences ... But there's some things we're *all* [emphasis added] experiencing. When noting the need to avoid connecting my own personal experiences to hers during my interview with Elaine, she countered with, "But you are every Black woman ... That is not a new story. That is my story. That is a story of many sister colleagues that I have."

Sense of Purpose

This theme involved the ways the research participants shared a strong sense of purpose around issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion. This included a sense of responsibility to advocate and create opportunities for minoritized populations—especially Communities of Color. It also included how they carried out this advocacy role, using their agency to challenge the oppressive systems they encountered in their work environments. Calling things out, asking tough questions, picking and choosing their battles, and showing up as their full authentic selves were forms of agency they employed.

When expressing her sense of responsibility to advocate for the needs of others, Angela said,

We all feel a responsibility of taking care of our own. If we're not doing it, and we're one of a few, who else can they go to? So, this need to be nurturing and supportive of the larger community will always be there.

Tabitha talked about this sense of responsibility and feeling as though she was standing upon the shoulders of others who paved the way for people like her to succeed. She said:

I absolutely feel that sense of responsibility ... I am here because of others. I stand on the shoulders of amazing people, particularly Black people, who came before me ... ancestors who could not imagine the life that I lead and the spaces that I'm in. And I owe it all to all of that. So how do I pay it forward?

Sasha talked about feeling a strong sense of responsibility to right the wrongs that she sees going on around her. She said:

I think it's as I've gotten older and realized that there are things going on around me that just aren't right. And that if I don't try to do something about them, if I don't point them out, if I don't work against them, then they're going to persist ... I don't know how you live with yourself if you don't try to right those wrongs.

Kay noted faith as a driver for her in doing what she feels like she is called to do.

She said,

I feel like I have led such a blessed life ... I believe in God and I just believe ... to whom much is given, much is expected. And so, I just have kind of felt that this is what I'm supposed to do.

Melanie also mentioned faith as a force in creating a sense of responsibility for her to provide opportunities for others. She said,

I feel like God would be really angry with me if I took all of this that came my way and either convinced myself that it was due or owed, or not that important. ... And so, I feel it is my absolute responsibility.

She also spoke of the sense of responsibility to use her position to open doors for People/Women of Color, but also the importance of giving other People/Women of Color something to which they can aspire. She said:

I have a tremendous sense of obligation to People of Color, Women of Color. I have to make the world better for them than it was for me in the sense of providing opportunities to them. That's something I can do. I can help open doors. I can kick through doors. I can tell them to go push the door. But I also can help them dream ... You have to be able to see things that you might aspire to.

This sense of responsibility also seemed to be reinforced by the expectations of people connected to the research participants. For Angela, the expectations went beyond just colleagues. She shared how multiple groups had expectations of her as a Black woman in her role. Here is how she put it:

Why can't I just do the things I want to do, and nothing more, and have no one expecting anything of me? ... As a leader, in particular as a Black woman, you get it from all sides. There's the institutional structures of PWI. There's the relationship structures in terms of you're a Person of Color versus White ... You're the one that everybody thinks you have arrived, right? And the people in your group, be it female, be it Black female, be it People of Color in general—they all have a whole lot of expectations of you. And you're thinking, wait a minute, I didn't sign up for that. You never told me you expected that of me. And had you told me, I would have told you *no* [emphasis added]. But everybody has this expectation of what they need you to do for them.

The research participants shared myriad ways they exercised their agency to fulfill their purpose of advocating for the needs of minoritized communities. This included challenging oppressive systems by pointing out to their colleagues when they saw or heard things that were not consistent with their institution's values around diversity, equity, and inclusion. It also included asking the tough questions when discussing issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. They expressed they were usually the first ones to call things out in that way.

When discussing her propensity to call things out, Elaine said, "I'm going to have to be me and I'm going to have to wade into these conversations. Because I can't look the other way ... I'm here, and I'm going to tell you the truth, even if it makes you mad." Angela added, "Particularly at a PWI ... there's those lines, and you don't cross them. And I just decide that I will cross the lines ... So, I don't buy into the existing structures." Some of the women had reached a point in their lives and careers where they were no longer afraid to exercise their agency in voicing concerns about these types of issues. Elaine had this to say:

I'm at that point in my life that I'm not afraid of anything. If it doesn't work out, if you don't need me here, okay. Because God will create my next opportunity. It may be next door, or it may be somewhere else. But I'm not pressed ... That's a professional growth thing that leaders have to evolve into.

She went on to say, "I think the more experience you get, the more comfortable you are in speaking truth and getting into good trouble." Sasha concurred with this sentiment, stating:

I think some folks don't speak up because they're afraid, you know, I'll lose my job. I'm not afraid of that anymore. I don't want to lose my job. It would suck. But you know, I'd find another one ... You don't leave a legacy if you don't stand up and speak from time to time. Sometimes you have to speak truth to people who don't want your truth.

The participants also made sure their colleagues were considering the impact of their decisions on people from diverse populations by asking the tough questions necessary to ensure this level of critical thinking. They shared the types of questions they posed to their colleagues. Angela expressed her approach in this way:

When people say does it work, I always ask the question, "Who does it work for? And under what circumstances does it work? Who benefits from it? And if somebody is benefiting, who loses out as a result of it?"

Sasha shared she felt compelled to ask the tough questions because she did not feel her colleagues would. She said:

We had monthly meetings with the provost [and] all the deans. And I was the one who would raise her hand and say, "Wait a minute, have we thought at all about our diverse students? Are we thinking about diverse faculty and why Black faculty are leaving this particular department?" And so, I was known for asking those questions. And I felt like I had to ask those questions because nobody else was going to ask them. And that was my role ... I wish I could have relied on my other colleagues to ask them.

The participants also expressed how they exercised their agency of Black Woman-ness by showing up as their full, authentic selves in their engagement with university stakeholders. In speaking of her identity as a Black woman, Elaine said, “It’s omnipresent and I don’t try to hide it.” When describing the intersection of race and gender for her, Angela said, “Being a Black woman, sitting at the intersection ... you just can’t escape it. I mean, it just *is* [emphasis added] ... It’s like you just walk in with it. You can’t separate from it.”

The women in my study also spoke of how Black Woman-ness showed up in their leadership and decision-making. Sasha said, “I’ve been a Black woman for almost [X] years. And it influences everything I say, everything I do, every place I go.” Melanie said, “I think the thing that has had the greatest impact on my decision-making is a comfortable sense of self. And clearly, I am a Black woman, so my sense of self is as a Black woman.” She went on to say,

I think that we can’t just be a successful leader. You have to be a successful *Black woman* [emphasis added] leader. And I have to know what that means and realize that that is a part of who I am, and part of what I’m trying to say to the world—that I know who I am, and you can expect that to be a part of what I do. But a fair part of what I do, in the same way that White people have been doing that for years. So yeah, not going to wear it on my sleeve, but it’s going to be a real part of who I am.

Adding to this sentiment, while also giving an example of the type of influence Black Woman-ness had on her leadership, Elaine said, “Black women have a way of ... leading

in some ways with their heart, and with the righteous indignation to do the right thing.” She went on to talk about her multiple intersecting identities that impact the way she leads and makes decisions.

That comes from my faith, from my sense of my Blackness ... And so, it's really, largely how I lead and the work that I do ... as an opportunity to do justice.

Because I work at an institution that's ... not always had a great history with how it treated Black people ... Black folks been loving this place and it hasn't loved them back. And so ... I'm here in this position ... I'm going to do something to make sure that folk have opportunities and are acknowledged and supported. To me, that's a big part of being a first-generation college student, being a Black woman, all those things. All those identities come to bear in how I lead, and also in the decisions I make.

Exercising their agency by calling things out, asking the tough questions and Black Woman-ness did not come without consequences for the participants. According to Elaine, “Sometimes in solving the problem, you can ... become the problem.” She went on to share an experience of being hired into a position with the expectation of solving a particular issue, but in doing that she challenged the system in ways that were not comfortable for the university administration. She said:

They said, “We've got all these problems. We want you to change the culture, to fix these problems” ... And I was the only Person of Color on cabinet. And in the end, I think it became too uncomfortable for them, because they didn't really want to change ... And I think I reminded them of the fact that they didn't want to

change. Like, my presence and me moving forward and saying, “Okay, well, we said that we want to do XYZ, then here's a plan. Let's do it.” And the organization really didn't want to change. And they needed somebody to blame.

Elaine shared an additional thought about how showing up as her full authentic self as a Black woman could be perceived as a threat. She said:

Knowing you're Black, that's also a problem. If you can laugh at all the jokes and just fit in and make people feel comfortable. But when you know who you are, and you're comfortable in that, and you're comfortable enough to challenge the patriarchy, people get nervous.

Angela noted the threat she became was to the perceived loss of power on the part of her White colleagues when she challenged existing systems for resource allocation. She summed it up this way:

I think because I ... see things differently and operate differently, it's jarring for people who've been here for a long time. And many of the staff have been here for a long time. And whether or not what was done was inequitable, it was what they've done. And to call it out and say, “Because it's inequitable, we're going to do it differently.” That means, “Oh wait, if I had power manufactured otherwise, that's being taken away now. If I had access to resources because I have this one-to-one with the dean ... now you're saying I can't just get this.”

There was a sentiment amongst some of the women in the study that they needed to be strategic in determining what and when to challenge when it came to issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion. They noted they could not tackle every issue, and thus

needed to pick and choose their battles wisely. According to Elaine, “You can’t go in on every single thing.” For Jasmine, there was the idea that if she tried to address every issue, then she would not be invited to the table in the future. She expressed it this way: “My attitude is, if we're not in the room at the table, we can't make an impact. So sometimes that means you got to let some shit go.” Angela agreed, saying:

As a Person of Color, we see a whole lot. We can't take it all on. So being strategic ... I'm going to take this and this on, and *that* [emphasis added], you can monitor and see how bad it gets. But being strategic about what things are important.

This theme encompassed the ways the research participants felt a sense of responsibility to advocate for the needs of minoritized communities. It included how the research participants exercised their agency to push back against the oppressive systems in their work environment, as well as the need to be strategic in deciding which things to push back against. The consequences they encountered for exercising their agency were also included.

Good Old Boys ... And Girls?

This theme included the ways the research participants engaged with White people across gender identities in their work environment, as well as how they were compared to their White colleagues. The theme included the good old boy network, comparison to White men, and stereotypes about Black women. It also included their engagement with White women and how their institutions worked to protect White

femininity. Lastly, it included the challenges they experienced specific to the predominantly White public research institution context.

Participants shared how their leadership and decision-making was impacted by the *good old boy network* that prioritizes men, to include Black men, over Black women. This network placed Black women at the bottom of the pecking order at their respective institutions. Sasha said, “The boys’ club, it’s a club. And you can be Black and be in the boys’ club.” Melanie added, “The good old boy network was historically White. It mostly is still White, but it’s still a good old *boy* [emphasis added] network.”

Kay also commented on this type of network, noting the personal relationships that are often involved. She said, “There's sort of this kind of good ole boy thing that gets to exist because people went to high school together, or they went to college here together.” Sasha shared how informal networks often developed in male-dominated environments frequently exclude women, especially Women of Color. She said:

I’m not out on the golf course every Saturday with the provost and the chancellor. And I’m not sitting next to them at the basketball game or the football game. And that makes a difference in the end. It makes a huge difference. I think it's hard enough as a woman in [a] leadership position. It's much, much harder as a Woman of Color.

Tabitha talked about how White men, who are often making the hiring decisions, are more comfortable hiring a Black man than a Black woman:

I do think that higher ed has been an incredibly male-dominated area. And I think when people who are the decision makers, who are the hiring authorities, who

may tend to be White men—when they see a person and think about diversity in the role, the most they can probably see is a Black male ... There's so much language around fit, and how someone looks. And people trying to find people who remind them of themselves. I think oftentimes the farthest that a White male can go in terms of higher ed and seeing someone who's similar to himself is possibly a Black male ... The Black woman for him, in terms of leadership positions, is such an unknown animal, that it's just hard for them to visualize that, and to know what that experience is going to be like, and to trust that that experience is going to be in the best interest of their institution.

Many of the experiences shared by the participants underscored the stereotypes commonly held about Black women. No matter the credentials and title, these stereotypes are still employed within systems of interlocking oppression. Sasha said:

Don't think just because you have dean in front of your name, or associate vice president, or whatever, that that changes the fact that you're a Black woman, and that people look at you and see you as a Black woman.

In sharing her thoughts about the ways in which Black women were labeled, Elaine had this to say: “If you have too much confidence, then you're cocky and you're difficult. And if you don't have any confidence, you're never going to be in a senior leadership position unless you're a token.” The stereotypes shared by the research participants included the angry Black woman, inferiority/incompetence, the mules of the institution, and the chief diversity officer.

The women in my study shared their experiences with the stereotype of the angry Black woman. They also shared how they tried to mitigate and work against this perception of them. Jasmine talked about feeling the need to explain to her colleagues why she might talk more loudly than they do. She said:

I can be passionate, which gets construed sometimes as angry, or loud, or whatever. And so, what I do is when I come in new, I tell people who I am. I'm like, "So, you might think I'm mad at you because I get excited, and I get animated. I come from a big family where everybody yells to get heard ... When you get everybody together, if you want to be heard, you're yelling. So, don't construe that as me being mad."

Kay concurred and expressed having to control her tone of voice to combat this stereotype. This is how she described it:

I talk loudly when I'm really passionate about something. And I had to really kind of be conscious about that because with people that you're not interacting with often, they could decide that you're the angry Black woman in a conversation. And so, I had to learn how to try to control that some, so that I could be perceived as effective.

In sharing her thoughts about this image, Elaine pushed back against it, suggesting another reason Black women are labeled as angry. She said, "That's not anger, that's straightforward. And you struggle with Black women being straightforward with you ... That is part of the moniker that we get. And it's just because we'll tell you the truth."

The research participants shared how they were assumed to be incompetent and inferior in comparison to their colleagues of other identities. According to Kay, “I just still think it's this unconscious bias part about seeing us as weak people. And maybe we don't speak the way they want us ... We don't have that look that they want, and therefore ... you're not capable.” Kay went on to share how when she engages with people, she is assumed to be in a lesser position than the one she holds. She said:

Even to this day, you can go around to meetings and things like that, and if you are engaging with people who don't know you, there will never be this where they think that you are who you are. It will be that they think you're someone in a lesser position ... So, then, you have to kind of build up to who you are within them. And that's sometimes a challenge.

Jasmine had similar experiences, and shared, “I have been considered to be the janitor if I go into the building in sweats and a baseball cap on a Saturday because I left something.”

This assumption of inferiority also included the ways the Black women were addressed by students, faculty, and staff. Sasha shared a common experience for Black women of not being addressed in a way that protocol would dictate they be addressed when they have an earned doctorate. She said:

It doesn't matter ... what title is in front of your name. You're still a Black woman. And the vast majority of folks on campus - faculty, staff, and students - ... that's the way they're going to see [you]. And so, when ... the student comes in the room and talks to your direct report and calls him or her “Doctor something,”

and then turns around and calls you by your first name, don't be surprised. It's going to happen.

Rebekah shared a specific example of being addressed in this manner by a White student during a contentious meeting between students and administrators, and the way the Black students confronted their peer for addressing her by her first name. Here are some of Rebekah's thoughts regarding the incident:

It was a coalition of Students of Color and allies ... They were questioning me, and I was responding. One of their White peers said “[Rebekah], can you tell me...” ... My Black students said, “Who’s [Rebekah]?” [*mimicking the Black students looking around to find this mysterious Rebekah*]. “You mean Dr. [Smith]?” And the student said, “Oh, yeah, yeah, Dr. [Smith].” ... I mean, they still mad at me, but they like, “Oh no you not about to call her [Rebekah]. We still mad, but that's Dr. [Smith].” And that's one of the times that it mattered ... It warmed my heart in that moment ... I appreciated them demanding that respect of me.

Elaine shared an experience she had while serving on a panel for a program organized by students. The sentiment expressed was one of Black women not deserving to be compensated at the same level as their White colleagues. This is how she described the encounter:

I'm sitting there with two of my colleagues from senior administration who've worked there longer... But what was interesting is when they talked about ... the

low wage workers needed to make more money, they said, “and Vice Chancellor [Jones] makes [her current salary].”

Elaine shared how she challenged the student who made the comment to reflect on why they questioned her salary and not those of the other senior administrators on the panel. Her response to the student was, “I find it very interesting that you're choosing to single me out of all the senior leaders that are here. So, I want you to ask yourself why that is?” Elaine went on to note that when sharing this experience with her colleagues in administration, the response from one of them was, “I think you're being a little sensitive.” She shared how this experience, and the subsequent lack of support from her colleague, made her feel extremely devalued and dehumanized, both as a person and a professional.

So that's the kind of thing that as a Black woman, when you have White children saying we are fighting for the workers ... I'm not human. I'm just making too much money, because I should be paid the same amount as the janitors. That's what the supposition is, right? ... I don't see a lot of people questioning why White faculty or staff make what they make. It's an issue when Black *women* [emphasis added] in particular, have decent salaries.

The participants spoke of the ways their White colleagues made assumptions about their competencies due to their identity as Black women. Melanie said, “It's never going to occur to people that I'm walking in with an air of competence.” Elaine had the same sentiment, sharing the ways she had to prepare for the pushback that she knew would come due to this assumed incompetence. She said, “I have to ask and answer the

question as well as solve the problem before it ever gets presented, because I know it'll be second-guessed.” Angela shared a particular incident with a White man colleague who assumed she was incompetent in her role and how she handled the situation. She said:

I did have one who was a challenge ... My being a Black woman, he wasn't supportive because he didn't trust that I knew. And what was interesting is I had more administrative ... literally, I'll be honest with you, once I figured out his issues, I literally sent him a page from my CV and told him, “I've done everything you are doing now. Let's elevate conversations.”

Participants shared experiences of being expected to be the workhorses of the institution, which they did not feel was an expectation of administrators of other identities. These expectations included things like being the ones to constantly put out fires, work long hours, mentor students, etc. —all without seeking balance and with little reward for their efforts. Elaine summed it up this way:

I am solving problems, typically proactively and behind the scenes. And this is a problem ... as Black women. Because the more we do, the reward for good work is more work. And organizationally, institutions who, regardless of their perceived commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, will treat Black women like the mule, and never think about, oh, well, maybe *she* [emphasis added] needs a break.

Sasha shared how this phenomenon manifests itself for Black women faculty, especially as it relates to unequal service loads associated with mentoring and supporting Students of Color. She said:

As a Black woman faculty member ... in addition to having to keep your scholarship up and do the teaching and do the bits of service, there's all the unrecognized and unpaid work you do in terms of interacting with students, especially Students of Color, and all the other pieces that go along with that.

When noting the image people conjure up when thinking of a person in an executive-level position at a predominately White institution, Melanie had this to say: “I think we still live in a world where people do not close their eyes, imagine a university leader, and pick anybody that looks like me or you.” It is interesting to note that Tabitha, the participant in a chief diversity officer type role at her institution, indicated people do not seem surprised at all when she introduces herself as such, because that position is consistent with their image of the types of roles Black women should hold. She said, “They aren't surprised when I introduce myself as the chief diversity officer. Like, oh okay, the Black woman, she's a chief diversity officer. I get it.”

Several of the research participants shared their thoughts on the proliferation of Black people being hired into chief diversity officer types of positions at colleges and universities, especially since the murder of George Floyd. They expressed concerns that people were being placed in these positions with little thought for their suitability for the role, or with the only thought regarding their suitability being because they are Black. Their concerns also included the lack of institutional support for the work of the people being placed into these roles. Rebekah had this to share regarding her thoughts on this phenomenon and how the individuals placed into these positions under these circumstances were being set up for failure:

On the George Floyd effect ... all these [institutions] who suddenly realized they needed a [chief diversity officer] position ... Every person who took that position they set up to fail. There's no real structure in place. They just threw this human in there. They have no scope of responsibility. They're just, "Okay, look what we did over here." Look in two years.

Angela agreed, noting the qualification for such an appointment following the murder of George Floyd simply seemed to be a Black person employed by the institution. She said, "It's like, oh, so professor so-and-so... so now *he's* [emphasis added] the diversity officer? And the qualification wassss [stretching out the word] being Black? And that bothers me." She went on to talk about her respect for the expertise brought to the table by people who have the appropriate knowledge and expertise to assume the role of a chief diversity:

I don't think everybody honors that expertise. So, you have a lot of people with the title now, without the skill set. And I hate to say that because ... I don't want to deny people like us the opportunity, the advancement, the increased salary. But I think if we're going to move, really move, in ways that are productive, we also have to honor the skill set. And if they don't have it at the beginning, they need to do something to ensure that they can build the skills that are needed. But I don't see that equal investment in that.

When sharing her thoughts about the way Black women are treated as though they only have value when discussing issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion, such as with the chief diversity officer role, Tabitha had the following to share:

Often Black administrators, and particularly [Black] women, we have to show that we can be *administrators* [emphasis added]. That I'm not just good talking to the Black folks, or the minorities, on campus. I can talk to the White folks too. I'm not just good at being a mentor to Black students, I can be a mentor to White students too, or Asian students ... I can sit on the ...curriculum committee. Not the curriculum committee when we're talking about diversifying the curriculum ... I can sit on just the regular curriculum committee. I have some thoughts there.

The participants shared the ways they were treated differently in comparison to White men. This included being compared to their White men predecessors, as well as their perception of treatment by others that would have been different if they were White men. Melanie shared her thoughts on the mindset often held by many in higher education about what someone in her type of position should *look* like. She said, "I still think that many of us—I put myself in that category—you think of the quintessential university president, it's a bearded, erudite White guy with gray hair."

Angela talked about how the personality and work style of her predecessor differed from hers, and how this was especially problematic as she was trying to implement more efficient practices due to budget cuts. She said:

Our work style was very different ... He was the charismatic White male who made everybody happy. He said "yes" all the time. And I came on at a time where we had budget cuts. And when you cut budgets, you by necessity have to deal with, "No we can't do that. I know you've been doing it, but we just have to stop." So, there was a lot of, I guess for the faculty, grappling with the White man who's

charismatic—didn't do right by you, but made you feel really good. And then a Black woman who says, “I'm going to put everything on the table.” And by putting everything on the table, I exposed some things, and some inequities ... I think it was like, “Wait, did this Black woman just tell me ‘no’? And I have been getting ‘yes’ for a long time?”

Some of the women shared the ways they experienced negative treatment by colleagues and others they thought would have happened differently if they were White men. Melanie said, “People take a familiarity with us that they would never take with a White guy.” Angela had this to say when speaking about how colleagues try to circumvent authority to get what they need and how that might look different for Black women in comparison to White men:

Now I think that would be true for any new leader. But I think *that* [emphasis added], coupled with a Black woman ... adds a different layer that, whether or not they know it, is also there. And it may make them feel more comfortable saying, “So, clearly she doesn't know what she's talking about, so I'm going to go above her head and check.” Whereas they may be upset ... if a White male came and did the same things ... but ... they wouldn't question his competence.

Sasha shared a similar experience of trying to improve upon a flawed system of resource allocation and being met with resistance from a White man who did not like the new method that had been developed. Instead of sharing his concerns with Sasha, he went directly to the provost, her supervisor, to complain. She explained the situation this way:

They dug in their heels, and then they ran it up the food chain to my boss, the provost ... The fallout from that is still unclear. But I don't think that would have happened if I had been a White man making that decision ... Or if they had been tempted to do that, I think they would have been a whole lot more collegial in the way they approached it had I been a White man. No question about that.

Kay shared an experience she had with a White man she supervised who tried to undermine her authority when making decisions. She said:

[In] making a decision that wasn't the one he wanted [me] to make, then that's when I think things started to kind of go sour. And what would happen is sometimes then, if he didn't agree with what I had made as a decision, he would tell someone. So, it could be that he told some other staff in the office. Or it could be that it was in a meeting, and he might have made it known to some other people who were in the meeting. And so, to me ... he's undermining me, because he's sort of saying, "I wouldn't have made that decision," and questioning it, and bringing attention to it.

Several of the participants expressed surprise that many (if not most) of their negative experiences with individuals in their work and other professional environments centered around their interactions with their White women colleagues. Their responses included the ways White women supported systems of oppression, as well as how these systems supported White women.

Melanie lamented the lack of solidarity and mutual support from her White women colleagues in working against systems of oppression by saying, "We don't have a

good old girl network ... So, we can't even tackle it with any kind of uniform approach.” In sharing her thoughts about how White women operate within these systems, Tabitha shared, “I think there's a lot of discomfort on the part of both White males, but also White females, in terms of having Black women be in some of these roles.”

When Kay started her current position, she explained some of the pushback she received from White women colleagues. She said,

I spent a year trying to understand what was going on, identifying issues, and then starting to try to work on an agenda. I did have some individuals, and it turns out, surprisingly, they were White females, who had a problem with a Black female leader.

She went on to speak of a specific example of getting pushback from White women when she wanted to focus on initiatives involving race, which had been identified as the area of greatest need for improvement in her area in terms of increasing the diversity of the student body. Despite this, the White women were more interested in focusing on other issues, like gender. She explained:

This commission was started because we haven't had any movement in African Americans. And so, I was meeting with two different groups on the same topic ... And they were like, “I don't understand why we want to start focusing on pipelines with historically Black colleges. Why can't we [address] gender issues?” ... And I said, “But [race] is the most difficult problem. That is what they've acknowledged. We haven't made any progress. And so, we have to focus on that one first. Because if you make progress on that, we can make progress on the

others.” And they had to acknowledge, but it was both times actually White females.

Sasha shared her thoughts about her relationship with White women over the course of her career by saying,

I didn't go into my leadership positions with any preconceived notions about having this built-in network of support with other women. In fact, quite frankly, White men have been more allies to me than White women have throughout my career.

She went on to share an impactful example of her own that involved a leadership development program for women that she attended earlier in her career. During one of the sessions, a White woman from another institution began speaking negatively about the Black women she supervised. Sasha explained the situation as follows:

The White women in that program didn't treat Black women very well ... We didn't have a term for it back then, but now we know it's called microaggressions, and maybe some macro ... Everybody was supposed to tell their personal stories as a way to get to know each other ... One woman in our group, who was a lesbian, told the story of angst and ... finally she came out of the closet and ... now she's in this perfect position ... if only, essentially, these dumb Black women weren't her direct reports. Because they couldn't get their job done. And it was so egregious that I kind of went “What? Did she just say that?” And then the other White women around the table went “Uh oh.” That's the honest truth. She just went through this whole thing about all the discrimination and harassment she's

faced in her life, and then in the very next sentence, she said something nasty about the Black women who worked with her ... And the [other] White women in the group said, ... “This is a teaching moment. We need to unpack this.” I was like, I am not teaching you a doggone thing. But I’ve learned something.

Some of the women in the study shared how they felt there was an effort on the part of their colleagues to protect White women that was not a courtesy shown for them. Angela shared an experience of a White woman colleague singling out her Black colleagues in a meeting and asking them, and only them, to speak on a particular topic. Angela indicated that after the meeting, some of her White colleagues shared with her they wanted to speak up and say something, but they did not want to make the White woman colleague feel uncomfortable. This was Angela’s reaction to a White colleague who expressed hesitancy about singling out the White woman:

And they ... were like “Yeah, I wanted to say [something] but I didn’t feel empowered” And I had the chance to say to them, “Imagine how we felt.” And they said, “But it would have been uncomfortable.” And I said, “For whom? Because it was already uncomfortable for us since she called us out.” And they’re like, “Well, we didn't want to single her out.” I said, “Oh, but you didn’t have a problem with her singling us out? ... You all were working really hard to make *her* [emphasis added] feel comfortable—this White woman who called us out.”

When discussing the expectations of Black women to produce at a high level without a thought towards their own physical and mental well-being, Elaine had this to say as it relates to the desire to protect White women:

I think that the expectation is we're not supposed to have feelings. Nobody's worried about me crying in a meeting ... Nobody's worried about my feelings. Nobody's interested if I have childcare, eldercare, any of those issues. Because I just get stuff done. So, there is a taking for granted, there is a taking of personhood, there are a lot of little subtle things that happen that are often not acknowledged. There's a dumping of work. And I think that if I were a White woman, it would be perceived as different. There would be a desire to rescue me. And there is not as a Black woman leader.

The participants shared how they felt navigating at a predominantly White public research institution might be different from other types of institutions. This included the ways the climate and culture of these types of institutions created challenges for Black women. The general sentiment was that private institutions were able to exercise more freedom to ensure congruence between their stated values and their actions. Melanie put it this way, "If you're a private institution ... I can say to a dean, 'You go hire two People of Color and I'll pay half of each of their salaries.' I can't do that in the public institution."

Elaine shared her thoughts about the public versus private aspect, noting the elitism public research institutions sometimes endeavor to espouse and how that stance is often contrary to their mission:

Privates will hire Black folks sometimes before publics will. And the thing with public RIs is they want you to moon walk on water while chewing bubble gum, and never miss a beat. You have to be damn near perfect. [They] want to know

your scholarship. You have to be a full professor to be a provost ... or to be anything, really. Because credentials matter so much, in such an odd way. So, they're not taking a chance on anybody who doesn't meet some unrealistic standards. So, there's an elitism there that, in some ways, is undeserved. Because if you're a public research institution, then part of your mission is typically connected to people, improving the human condition, service, teaching, all those things. Not just research.

Tabitha reinforced the differences in publics versus privates, but also added the layer of land grant status to the mix:

Public research, those institutions typically, honestly, are like the last holdouts of that old guard of higher ed in terms of how they envision higher education ... And oftentimes, many of them are land grant institutions ... And I know that that definitely impacts our institution. Our land grant status, and therefore our connection to agriculture, and agriculture in the state, kind of doubles down on our conservatism and the conservatism of individuals who look at our institution ... I'm a graduate of private institutions ... and I feel like there was a little bit more openness to ideas of Black female leadership at those institutions than I have sensed in my own institution.

Despite seeing improvement in the last few years, Kay talked about the challenges for public research institutions, especially those located in the South. She said:

Thinking about public research institutions, and southern versus not southern, I think ... that has been ... a challenge, just because of sort of the dynamics of the

South. I couldn't even imagine being president of this university. I don't even think that they would allow that to happen. So, I think as you get up the ladder, it's harder for Black females ... in some of these southern public research institutions, just because of the history and how influential alumni are in those decisions.

Sasha shared a similar sentiment regarding the impact of the politics of the state on public institutions' decisions, but with the added thought around how the scholarship interests of Black women are often devalued by research institutions:

When you put the research institution in there, it probably becomes even harder. Because now you have to prove yourself as a scholar. And let's face it, for some of us, the topics that we investigate are not topics that are valued by our institution. And so, proving yourself as a scholar becomes a much more challenging endeavor if your institution doesn't value your scholarship or understand the value of your scholarship. And then the public piece is fascinating because, especially here in the South, so many of our institutions are ... well, our Board of Governors, they're *political appointees* [emphasis added]. And so, the politics of the state influence the way that higher education is conducted in the state. And so, being in a public institution, you might think you're protected because there's so many rules and regulations in the public space, but this is an additional political piece you have to layer on top of it.

This theme encompassed the ways the research participants experienced otherization in comparison to White people across gender identities. It included being

compared to White men and operating within the good old boy network. It also included their engagement with White women and the ways their institutions protected White femininity. Stereotypes and the participants' subordination as a result of these stereotypes was also part of this theme, as well as the particular challenges they experienced within the public research PWI context.

Personal Toll

This theme involved how the participants spoke of the toll (emotional, physical, and otherwise) of working within environments of interlocking systems of oppression as well as the sense of responsibility to support people with minoritized identities. "Not for the faint of heart" was a descriptor used by Angela and Elaine when talking about being a Black woman in an executive-level leadership position at a public research PWI. The personal toll expressed by the participants included fatigue, the weight of every move, imposter syndrome, and overpreparation.

Participants experienced both physical and mental fatigue working within systems of interlocking oppression. Angela had this to say about the physical toll the sense of responsibility to care for Communities of Color had on her, coupled with the small number of Black women to shoulder that burden. She said, "We're *all* [emphasis added] tired. We don't have the bandwidth ... You don't have enough people supporting each other." Tabitha concurred, calling the sense of responsibility "incredibly exhausting."

Issues around race have been magnified since the murder of George Floyd. Colleges and universities grappled with how to appropriately respond amidst growing

calls for accountability from their constituents. Tabitha shared how this heightened awareness created racial fatigue for her:

What's been hard is just kind of being Black in this space ... To some extent it has exacerbated and set a magnifying glass to those kinds of microaggressions that we suffer, those kinds of areas of White privilege that others have that we don't, that we just kind of have gotten used to and that we're used to navigating around. And sometimes, there's some days when ... I don't want to be Black [Tabitha], I just want to be [Tabitha]. I don't want to come in and have to help you understand why that statement you made could be offensive ... I just want to kind of come in and do my job. And I think that that's kind of a burden that we all tend to have to carry, of trying to be a Person of Color, and then a woman, of course, in this context. And ... it's not just our professional identity, it's our lived identity ... It can be incredibly exhausting.

The women in the study spoke of how, due to issues regarding assumed incompetence as well as unequal expectations and treatment, their leadership and decision-making received extreme levels of scrutiny in comparison to their colleagues of other identities. When talking about the amount of scrutiny she received and its impact on her, Angela shared, “Everything I do is being scrutinized.” She added:

I think the one thing I would share is just the weight of every move ... As a Black woman, we don't get to make a decision and say “Oh, it might work, it might not work.” We can't just say, “Oh let's try this, and if it doesn't work, we can try

something else,” because we don’t get the benefit of the doubt that others might get.

Sasha had similar thoughts, adding:

Both my White male and female colleagues can take chances. They can make these rash, or apparently rash, decisions, and they don't worry that if I haven't dotted every I and crossed every T, people are going to think that I'm an idiot and that I don't belong in this role. I can't do that. Every decision I make it's an emotional struggle to figure out, “Am I taking a chance? Am I taking enough of a chance? Am I taking too much of a chance?” And I really don't think my majority colleagues go through that. I don't think they have to worry about that.

The participants talked about having to practice extreme deliberation in their decision-making due to this high level of scrutiny, often second-guessing themselves during the process. Sasha said, “I probably spend more time second-guessing myself and wondering how and if and when I should share, *because* [emphasis added] I'm a Black woman in leadership.” She went on to share a particular example of how being a Black woman made the decision about whether or not to release a statement following the murder of George Floyd much more difficult. This is how she described the experience:

When the stuff [murder of George Floyd] happened last summer, that [being a Black woman] was my filter. When the stuff happened on January 6, 2021, my decisions came through my filter. Among the decisions I had to make, both last summer and on January 6, was do I release a statement? Do I say anything about this? And if I do release a statement, what do I say? How personal do I make it?

Do I talk about White supremacy? Do I talk about the history of racism in the country and what its impact has been on me?

Participants shared the ways the constant scrutiny, coupled with assumptions of inferiority and incompetence, contributed to them feeling as though they did not deserve to be in their roles. Melanie admitted to similar feelings, but also expressed shame in having those feelings. She said, “I think I’m part of the generation of women who still isn’t entirely sure that I deserve to be here ... It’s not something I’m proud of. It’s something I *work at* [emphasis added].” Melanie went on to share a similar thought as it relates to faculty aspirations:

This is just a pervasive sense of self in our community ... Most of us don't assume we're smart enough to be a professor. Think about the sadness of that sentence.

I'd love to think I'm wrong ... But I don't think many of us think about that.

When looking at how working within interlocking systems of oppression takes a toll on the confidence of Black women in executive-level leadership positions at PWIs, Sasha had this message for the institutions who employ them:

You need to be attentive to the likelihood that the Black women you bring onto your leadership team are experiencing it, that they're experiencing it every day, that it's chipping, chipping, chipping away at their confidence.

One way the scrutiny and assumptions of incompetence and inferiority about Black women manifested itself for the participants was feeling the need to overprepare, even in routine matters. This included things like preparing for presentations and meetings as well as ensuring decisions they made are evidence-based whenever possible.

It also involved them having to get into the minds of their White counterparts to think of all the ways in which they might receive pushback from them so they could prepare for that level of critique.

Kay shared the following about how she experiences the burden of overpreparation:

I overprepare. And I feel that I have to go there and show that I know what I'm doing and that I know my stuff. And so, whenever I go to meetings, I've always prepared ahead, read whatever, and have my notes. And sometimes they're surprised that I've read the thing that they sent ahead ... I might be working on something, a presentation, till the last minute ... But I feel that that's what I have to do.

Elaine agreed, and said:

You can never be anything but overprepared because there's a need to validate almost, for some people, everything that's said, every decision that's made. And so, I think that for Black women to be successful in these roles, we have to be strategists—masterful strategists. We have to be able to work behind the scenes. We have to be able to think through all of the potential roadblocks, and then figure out how we're going to control for it.

This theme encompassed how the experiences shared in the first two themes had a collective toll on the participants. This included the toll of working within oppressive systems, but also the toll of the strong sense of responsibility to advocate for the needs of

minoritized communities. This toll manifested in both mental and physical ways for the participants.

Personal Reflections

Sense of Responsibility. *As a Black woman who has been in an administrative role at a public PWI for over 30 years, I have operated with a strong sense of responsibility to advocate for the needs of Communities of Color and other minoritized populations at the university. I have been fortunate that my career has afforded me the opportunity to exercise my agency in that regard.*

Outside of the advocacy role inherent in my positions at my institution, I have a strong personal desire to provide support and mentorship for Black people and other Communities of Color. I have mentored (formally and informally) countless students, faculty, and staff during my tenure in higher education. This sense of responsibility comes partly from knowing there are not many Black women in these roles to serve as mentors for other People of Color. I want Communities of Color to know that I see them, I hear them, and will take the time to support them in any way that I can.

In addition, whenever I hear of a new Black faculty or staff member, I will often reach out to welcome them to the university and invite them to lunch. I want them to know that there is someone at the university they can come to when they have questions or need support. Many have indicated how special that made them feel to have a stranger reach out to them and welcome them to the institution in that way. I have also written countless letters of recommendation for students, faculty, and staff who are pursuing educational, professional development, and career opportunities.

Consequences of Challenging the System and White Women. *Listening to the research participants was a cathartic experience for me. There were so many ways in which their experiences paralleled my own at my current institution—which is also a predominately White public research institution in the U.S. I have high standards, not only for myself but for those with whom I interact (on both a personal and professional level). As such, I am constantly trying to find ways in which my institution can improve upon the work we do. Because the majority of my work at my current institution has been related to diversity, equity, and inclusion, there is always room for improvement.*

Over the years, I have garnered the reputation of being a straight shooter in the way I communicate. I believe in honesty and integrity, and I try to lead with these values at all times. This includes my interactions with university leadership. If there is something said or done that is not, in my opinion, in the best interests of the institution and its diverse constituents, I will more than likely call that to someone's attention. I did not always have that level of confidence in exercising my own agency in that way. That developed over time. But once developed, I have tried to exercise it whenever I can—respectfully and strategically.

What I have noticed over the course of my career at my current institution is that there have been consequences for me as a Black woman who is not afraid to challenge the system and ask the tough questions. Sometimes the university administration does not want to be challenged in that way. And there have been negative consequences for me in my professional career as a result.

I spent the majority of my career at my current institution in a division led by White women. This not only included the vice president, but also many other leadership positions within the division. Most of my experiences working in that division were positive. I had a long-time supervisor (a White woman) who was very supportive of me and my career, and we have remained friends to this day.

Having said that, I definitely came away with some scars at the hands of White women in that division. Examples include being demoted by a supervisor who did not appreciate my directness and honesty when challenging systems and asking tough questions—especially when those challenges and questions were directed at her leadership and decision-making. I also had a White woman in a leadership role in that division blame me for negative attention she received from Black students and their supporters during a contentious period of student protest—and did so openly in group settings with other people who had the power to impact my work and my career. I have developed great working relationships with people at all levels during my tenure at my current institution, and I take it quite personally when I think someone is trying to tarnish my reputation and undermine those relationships.

I have had negative experiences with White men as well, but the ones that stand out to me the most are at the hands of White women. And in one particular instance, the negative interactions I had with a White man who supervised me temporarily were, I believe, as a direct result of the guidance he received from the White woman who supervised him.

***Personal Toll.** I know all too well the personal toll of working within systems of interlocking oppression, as well as the sense of responsibility to advocate for minoritized populations. I have suffered from both mental and physical fatigue due to the weight of these experiences. I vividly remember one day, earlier in my career, walking across campus to meet with a colleague and experiencing a pain in my chest that made me think I might be having a heart attack. I called the colleague to let her know what was happening and, to her chagrin, told her I was driving myself to the hospital.*

After walking into the emergency room, going up to the person at the desk and telling them I thought I might be having a heart attack, I was surprised at the speed with which they moved to get me onto a gurney and begin checking my vitals. After a couple of hours of monitoring me, the doctor who was working with me pressed on my chest area and indicated that the pain I experienced from the pressure of his touch indicated I was suffering from stress, not a heart attack. I was relieved, but also concerned that my stress had gotten to the point of such a physical response. I vowed to try to avoid letting my stress level reach that point in the future.

Conclusion

This chapter was dedicated to the findings from my study, which included the ways my research participants made sense of interlocking systems of oppression in their work environment and the toll their experiences working within these environments had on them. The findings included the participants' sense of purpose in advocating for the needs of minoritized populations, using their agency to actively challenge and work

against the oppressive systems they encountered. It also involved how just being their authentic selves as Black women was a form of agency.

The findings included how the research participants made sense of their place in their institutions' social hierarchy in comparison to White people across gender identities. They shared the ways stereotypes held about them impacted their ability to lead and make decisions. They also shared how the summation of all the negative experiences they encountered, along with the strong sense of responsibility to advocate for minoritized populations, took a physical and emotional toll on them.

The chapter concluded with personal reflections. These reflections included similar experiences related to the themes from the findings. In the next chapter, I share how my findings connect to my research question as well as how they support or differ from the literature which grounded my study.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

My research question was: How do Black women in executive-level leadership positions at predominantly White public research institutions in the U.S. make sense of misogynoir in relation to their leadership and decision-making experiences? In the sections below, I answer the research question and connect the answer to the themes from the findings. I also connect the answer and related themes to the literature.

Answer to Research Question

In making sense of their experiences with misogynoir and how it impacted their leadership and decision-making experiences, there were three common threads throughout the themes from the findings. One thread throughout most of the negative experiences shared by the research participants was controlling images (Collins, 2009). Controlling images are the negative images that have been developed about Black women and used to subordinate them in American society. Whether it is the mammy image whose role it is to work hard in caring for White people and their property, or the image of intellectual inferiority and incompetence, these are forms of epistemic violence (Bunch, 2015) that have been perpetrated against Black women to deny their knowledge and praxis in higher education settings.

The research participants often connected their negative experiences to how they were viewed in the eyes of the perpetrator. The negative images colleagues and students had about the participants shaped how they responded to the participants' leadership and decision-making as well as how the respondents navigated these perceptions of them.

Images of intellectual inferiority and professional incompetence led to intense scrutiny, mistrust, and challenging of the participants' leadership and decision-making. It also led to the participants being treated with disrespect in the way they were addressed by students, faculty, and staff.

Images of inferiority regarding womanhood, especially in comparison to White women, was another controlling image impacting the experiences of the research participants. This image impacted the participants' interactions with White women. It also impacted the ways the participants were treated in comparison to White women.

Images of the angry Black woman led to the participants feeling as though they had to provide disclaimers to their colleagues before and during interactions with them to avoid misunderstandings regarding their level of passion and energy around a particular topic. The image of the workhorse or mule (the current version of the historical mammy image) reinforced the expectation of the participants to work hard in service to their institutions. For the women in the study, this involved expectations of putting in long hours without a thought to their mental and physical well-being or appropriate compensation.

A second common thread in the information shared by the participants was how working within the context of a predominantly White public research institution impacted their ability to lead and make decisions in ways consistent with their sense of purpose. This included expressions from the participants of the public research PWIs that employed them not being congruent between their stated values and their actions. It also included how the politics of the state impacted these institutions in negative ways

regarding their ability to make decisions around diversity, equity, and inclusion consistent with their stated values. Because of the participants' strong sense of purpose in advocating for the needs of minoritized populations, these dynamics stifled their ability to lead and make decisions that were congruent with their own values around diversity, equity, and inclusion.

A third common thread in how the Black women made sense of misogynoir in relation to their leadership and decision-making experiences was the mental, physical, and professional consequences of working within systems of interlocking oppression. The consequences were expressed in two ways. One was the consequence of being perceived as a threat to their institution in living out their purpose. Pushing back and challenging the oppressive systems they encountered, which included being authentic to who they were as Black women, meant the participants were sometimes seen as a threat in exercising their agency in this manner.

Another consequence was the mental and physical toll the negative experiences associated with working within interlocking systems of oppression had on them. Expressions of exhaustion involving their work loads, mental fatigue associated with operating within these oppressive systems, as well as how their fatigue was taken to a new level following the murder of George Floyd, were sentiments shared by the participants. The physical and mental toll of having to work even harder to lead and make decisions in anticipation of pushback and challenge from their colleagues was another toll shared. And acting on their strong sense of responsibility to advocate for the needs of Communities of Color and other minoritized communities was also expressed as a toll.

In making sense of their experience with misogynoir and how it impacted their ability to lead and make decisions, the participants provided myriad experiences that helped to answer my research question. They made sense of the controlling images held about them and how these images, and the actions on the part of students, faculty and staff that were driven by these images, impacted their ability to lead and make decisions. They also shared how working within the context of the public research PWI often created barriers for them in living out their purpose to advocate for the needs of minoritized communities. The physical, mental, and professional consequences they experienced from misogynoir were also provided as a response to the research question. In the next section, I connect the answers to the research question to the themes from the findings.

Connection to Themes from Findings

The common thread of controlling images showed up throughout the themes from the findings. The strongest connection to this thread was in the *good old boys ... and girls?* theme. Controlling images manifested themselves in how the good old boy network reinforced the subordination of Black women in prioritizing Black men in leadership roles over Black women. It also included the ways the participants expressed feeling the need to explain to their colleagues why they might raise their voice or express a certain level of passion during a meeting to avoid being labeled as the angry Black woman.

Controlling images of incompetence and inferiority were expressed throughout this theme as well. This included the participants being addressed by their first names

instead of Doctor, which is customary for someone who has an earned doctorate. It also included the ways the participants were often assumed to be in lesser roles at their institutions, as well as the participant who was in a chief diversity officer type role indicating that people were not surprised at all when she indicated her role at the institution. The image of a chief diversity officer, a position often lacking in power and decision-making authority at public research PWIs, was deemed an appropriate role for this Black woman. The participants also shared how their knowledge and expertise were assumed to only be suitable for issues involving minoritized communities, not all areas of the academic enterprise.

The participants shared the ways their colleagues and employees often made assumptions about their competencies and intellectual abilities in the way they responded to their leadership and decision-making. Having colleagues go over their head to their supervisor to share their concerns instead of coming directly to them, as well as undermining their authority in unprofessional ways, were practices exhibited by the colleagues and employees of the participants.

Images of the mule/workhorse of the institution were also included in this theme, as the participants expressed expectations of working long hours to solve problems for the institution and support students with minoritized identities, with the main reward being more work. The participants shared how this dehumanizing controlling image of the mule/workhorse meant there was not a concern for their mental and physical well-being.

Images of inferiority in comparison to White women was a part of this theme as well. This included how White women were agents in the oppression of Black women at their institutions. The participants expressed surprise that many, if not most, of the negative experiences with colleagues and employees involved White women. These experiences also included how the image of femininity that prioritizes White women showed up in their institutions' protection of White women in a manner that was not duplicated for the participants. This included attempts to ensure the comfortability of White women around discussions involving diversity, equity, and inclusion, as well as protecting them from the workloads common for Black women.

In the *sense of purpose* theme, the participants shared how they, as Black women, needed to be strategic regarding the issues they used their agency to challenge and push back against. This was due to the controlling images they knew their colleagues and supervisors had about them as Black women. Pushing back too much might conjure up the angry Black woman image, so they needed to prioritize the issues they chose to address and navigate in a manner to minimize the controlling images others had of them.

In *personal toll*, controlling images were expressed in how stereotypes of inferiority and incompetence manifested in a physical and mental toll on the participants. This included the need to overprepare for meetings and other interactions with their colleagues and supervisors. This overpreparation was done to counteract the scrutiny, questioning, and challenge they knew would come in sharing their ideas and decisions with their colleagues of other identities.

Controlling images of Black women were woven throughout each theme from the findings. These controlling images were conceptualized and enacted upon the participants by students, faculty, and staff at their institutions. The controlling images and the subsequent actions from university stakeholders reinforced the subordination of the participants in their work environments.

The common thread of the public research PWI in juxtaposition to the participants' sense of purpose also showed up in a number of ways in the themes from the findings. In the *sense of purpose* theme, participants talked about how they used their agency in challenging the system and asking the tough questions at their public research PWIs because these institutions had systemic issues related to privilege and oppression. They discussed how they often felt compelled to speak up on these issues because they did not feel their colleagues of other identities would. Their sense of purpose in doing so was so pervasive they risked losing their jobs and angering their colleagues and supervisors in advocating for the needs of minoritized communities. They talked about reaching a point in their lives and their careers where they had made a conscious decision to boldly approach these issues without fear of retribution.

In the theme *good old boys ... and girls?* the participants shared the ways the public research PWI context created unique challenges for Black women. They felt private institutions demonstrated a greater propensity to make decisions consistent with their values around diversity, equity, and inclusion, such as targeted hiring of Black women in administrative roles. The political leaning of the state legislatures was also noted as a challenge for public research PWIs in living their values around diversity,

equity, and inclusion—especially the institutions located in the South. It was expressed that a Southern public research PWI would probably never hire a Black woman as president due to the conservative nature of those state legislatures and their influence on the decisions made at their public research PWIs.

This theme also included how the standards set around teaching, research, and service at public research PWIs created unique challenges for Black women. These challenges included the expectations related to the type and amount of research and publications that were not always consistent with the research interests of Black women. They also expressed the sentiment that the expectations around research and publications was inconsistent with the mission of public research institutions, which were supposed to be just as focused on teaching and service, with a special focus on the states in which they operate. This was deemed to be especially true for public research PWIs that are land grant institutions.

Lastly, the common thread of consequences was expressed throughout the themes from the findings. The consequence of becoming a threat to the institution showed up in *sense of purpose* when the research participants talked about how exercising their agency in challenging the system, asking the tough questions, and showing up as their full authentic selves as Black women led to them being perceived as a threat to the status quo of their institutions. Attempts to address systemic issues as well as their ways of being and knowing as Black women created discomfort for those in positions of power.

The consequence of the physical and mental toll associated with the constant barrage of negative treatment within systems of interlocking oppression was expressed in

the themes as well. In *personal toll*, connections to this thread included the physical toll of their work and service loads. The service loads often included significant amounts of service in advocating for the needs of Communities of Color due to a strong sense of purpose for this type of advocacy. This toll was compounded by having so few Black women in leadership roles to share in this burden.

The participants also shared the mental fatigue associated with dealing with issues as Black women operating within systems of interlocking oppression. This toll was exacerbated following the murder of George Floyd. Many of the participants found themselves in a position of having to educate their colleagues around issues of race in America, which was a mentally and emotionally taxing experience for them.

The mental toll of weighing every move they made due to the increased scrutiny placed upon their leadership and decision-making was noted in this theme. The participants shared the ways they had to weigh every move in anticipation of the responses they would receive from their colleagues of other identities. This extreme deliberation often involved second-guessing themselves in their decision-making. It also involved the ways this constant scrutiny and negative treatment in their leadership and decision-making made them feel as though they did not deserve to be in an executive-level role at their institution.

The mental and physical toll of feeling the need to overprepare for meetings and other interactions with their peers was another consequence shared by the participants. This included spending extra time working on presentations and reading materials in preparation for meetings. This overpreparation was done to counteract the negative

treatment and perceptions they knew they would experience when sharing their thoughts and ideas with their colleagues and supervisors.

The consequences expressed throughout the themes manifested in a mental, physical, and professional toll on the research participants. These consequences were a direct result of the participants' negative experiences working within environments of interlocking systems of oppression. The next section connects the experiences of the participants to the literature.

Connection to the Literature

The common threads noted in answering the research question, as well as their connection to the themes from the findings, were consistent with the literatures on the experiences of Black women administrators in higher education. The epistemic violence (Bunch, 2015) perpetrated against the Black women in the literature created an environment in which their very identities as Black women were otherized in comparison to people of other identities. The epistemic violence also served to exclude Black women's knowledge and praxis within systems of interlocking oppression.

Regarding the common thread of controlling images (Collins, 2009) and their connection to the themes in the findings, there were many parallels within the literature. The Black women in the literature shared similar controlling images of aggressiveness, anger, as well as being the workhorse in caring for White people (Carter-Frye, 2015; McKay, 1992; Myers, 2002; Parker, 2004). The controlling images in the literature also included assumptions of inferiority and incompetence, despite the Black women's hierarchical level, knowledge, and experience (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2008; Lloyd-

Jones, 2009; Mainah & Perkins, 2015). And the ways the Black women in the literature articulated being assigned to tokenized positions on the periphery of the institution, lacking in power and authority (Hicks & Watson, 2018; Smith & Crawford, 2007) supports the controlling image of Black women being more suited to chief diversity officer roles.

The Black women in the literature shared how operating within *good old boy* systems subordinated Black women (Bower & Wolverton, 2009; Mainah & Perkins, 2015). They also discussed how the image of what is deemed acceptable as it relates to leadership and decision-making is predicated on the point of view of White men (Carter-Frye, 2015; Hill et al., 2016; Wheaton & Kezar, 2019), which reinforces the subordination of Black women who do not operate within these narrow parameters. The Black women in the literature also talked about having their authority called into question by White men subordinates who had challenges being led by a Black woman (Lloyd-Jones, 2009; Mosley, 1980) due to this being inconsistent with their view of who was fit to serve in that capacity. The Black women in the literature also shared examples of microinvalidations (Sue, 2010) designed to minimize and devalue their credentials and experience, which is consistent with being referred to by their first names instead of “Doctor.”

The literature also exposed how the ideals around femininity are predicated on White women, depicting them as innocent and pure, and thus incapable of being perpetrators of oppressive behaviors (Accapadi, 2007). In addition, the literature addressed the ways White women are often reluctant to critically examine their role in

maintaining systems of oppression, which can be particularly detrimental to Black women in their interactions with White women (Daniel, 2019). An example in the literature included how the tears of White women can be weaponized against Black women, reinforcing the stereotype of Black women being angry and aggressive (Accapadi, 2007). The Hannum et al. (2015) study also underscored the differences in the treatment and support for White women leaders in comparison to Women of Color.

The common thread involving how working within the context of a predominantly White public research institution impacted the research participants' ability to lead and make decisions in ways that were consistent with their sense of purpose also paralleled the experiences of the Black women in the literature. They expressed a sense of responsibility to advocate for the needs of minoritized communities as part of their leadership. The study by Bower and Wolverton (2009) reinforced the sentiments of the women in my study in many ways. This study involved Black women leaders in higher education and government. They spoke to a higher purpose for their work and being guided by a strong sense of values. They also shared a philosophy of servant leadership that included a sense of responsibility for serving and advocating for others. These values are also consistent with Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2009) and the ways Black women are inclined to work in solidarity with others for collective group empowerment.

The resistance strategies employed in the literature showed how the Black women used their agency to push back against oppressive systems, which included calling out bias and discrimination when they witnessed it as well as developing and maintaining a

positive self-image as a way to counteract the negative perceptions of Black women (Collins, 2009; Rolle et al., 2000; Shorter-Gooden, 2004; Wheaton & Kezar, 2019). Being the first to exercise their agency in calling things out is consistent with Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2009) and how Black women are often the first to identify inequities in their environment and use their leadership positions to try to effect positive change. The expectations of Black women that came from other Black people was also consistent with the literature, especially as it relates to Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2009) and expectations around shared consciousness and activism on the part of Black women intellectuals.

The idea of picking and choosing their battles is also supported by the Black women in the literature. They shared the ways mentors helped them identify political landmines as well as informal power structures within their organizations (Allen, 2018; Jackson & Harris, 2007; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010; Washington, 2018). This type of advice assisted the Black women in the literature in making strategic decisions throughout their careers.

The literature related to public research institutions, their impact, and current threats to these types of institutions supports the information provided by the participants of the ways the public research PWI context created challenges for them in carrying out their purpose to advocate for the needs of minoritized communities. The literature on declining state funding (The Lincoln Project, 2016) underscored the dependence on state legislatures and how these entities exert an undue influence on institutions who are trying to live out their values while operating in conservative states. In *Renewing the Covenant:*

Learning, Discovery and Engagement in a New Age and Different World (2000), university presidents tried to create a sense of urgency for public research institutions to recommit themselves to the “public good,” which included living out their values related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Gildersleeve et al. (2010) provided a critical analysis of public research institutions that reinforced the conservative ideology impacting these types of institutions as well as the influence of government officials in shaping their agenda.

The literature also supported how the work and service of the women in my study was subordinated by the policies, practices, and norms of public research PWIs. This included the devaluation of the research interests of Black women, which often centers Black people and other minoritized communities (Evans, 2008; Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2008; Myers, 2002). It also included the unequal service loads often shouldered by Black women, especially when it comes to mentoring and supporting Students of Color (Myers, 2002).

Regarding the common thread of consequences of working within systems of interlocking oppression, the experiences of the research participants outlined in the findings are also supported by the experiences of the Black women in the literature. Their experiences were consistent with the *pet to threat* (Thomas et al., 2013) phenomenon. This included the ways in which their resistance strategies and unwillingness to maintain the status quo led to them being perceived as a threat to their institutions’ established culture and practices.

The experiences of the research participants were also consistent with those of the Black women in the literature regarding the physical and mental toll of working within systems of interlocking oppression (Pope & Johnson, 1997). This included how they felt the need to overprepare and work harder to overcome the negative stereotypes held about them (Croom, 2017; Lloyd-Jones, 2009; Myers, 2002). It also included imposter syndrome (Clance & Imes, 1978), which involved the Black women being made to feel as though they were not worthy of their leadership roles and accomplishments.

Conclusion

The women in my study shared myriad experiences that helped answer my research question. This chapter included the answer to the research question, expressed by the common threads in their responses. These common threads included the ways in which controlling images (Collins, 2009) about Black women permeated their interactions with students, faculty, and staff of other identities, the challenges with exercising their sense of purpose at public research PWIs, and the consequences of working in environments of interlocking systems of oppression. Examples in the themes from the findings were given to support the common threads. Lastly, I shared how the literature on Black women administrators reinforced the themes from the findings. In the next chapter, I share the implications of my findings for practice as well as topics for potential future research.

CHAPTER SIX

IMPLICATIONS & CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to illuminate and understand how interlocking systems of oppression impact the leadership and decision-making experiences of Black women in executive-level leadership positions at predominantly White public research institutions in the U.S. In this chapter, I provide implications for practice for public research PWIs based upon the findings from my research participants. I also explore areas for possible additional research, or enhancements to existing research, related to the experiences of Black women administrators at public research PWIs.

Implications for Practice

Interlocking systems of oppression at public research PWIs have a negative impact on the leadership experiences of Black women in executive-level positions. These types of environments impact the institution's climate and culture as well as their ability to recruit and retain Black women in key leadership roles. This, in turn, negatively impacts these colleges and universities at an individual, institutional, and societal level.

In *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice*, oppression is referred to as an “interlocking, multilevel system that consolidates social power to the benefit of members of privileged groups” (Adams et al., 2013, p.27). According to Adams et al. (2013), the three contextual dimensions that work to maintain and operationalize oppression are *individual, institutional, and societal/cultural*.

Maintaining and operationalizing oppression at the *individual* level is facilitated by the attitudes and behaviors of individuals within a setting. These attitudes and

behaviors include an individual's consciousness around issues such as privilege and inequality, as well as the ways in which their attitudes and behaviors play out in their interactions with others. The attitudes and behaviors can be either conscious or unconscious; however, both can be equally detrimental for the oppressed group(s).

Oppression at the *institutional* level is maintained and operationalized via the policies, practices, and norms of the institution. These policies, practices, and norms can be either intentional or unintentional, but as is the case with the individual level, both have a detrimental impact on the oppressed group(s). Oppression at the institutional level can include the larger institutions themselves (such as higher education), as well as smaller units within these institutions (such as individual colleges and universities).

Oppression at the *societal/cultural* level is maintained and operationalized by the ways the dominant group imposes its cultural perspective and values on individuals and institutions. This would include what is deemed to be normal and expected for the individuals and institutions within a given society. These perspectives can be implicit or explicit, both being powerful forces for maintaining social oppression.

In the sections below, I provide implications around both the individual as well as the institutional levels for public research PWIs. I reference societal/cultural implications in as much as they are influenced by some of the implications on the individual and institutional levels. As part of the discussion on implications, I suggest strategies that colleges and universities can employ to overcome the challenges outlined.

Individual Level

As indicated in both the literature as well as from my research participants, the way Black women are treated by individuals at their respective institutions contributes greatly to their negative experiences. Black women experience microaggressions and other forms of oppressive treatment on a regular basis. It is important for public research PWIs to acknowledge this and work to develop intercultural competencies for their faculty, staff, students, and administrators. The more competencies university stakeholders have around engaging with people who are different from themselves, the more they are equipped to play a role in creating a more inclusive and equitable institutional environment for everyone.

Intercultural Competence of Students, Faculty and Staff. The women in my study shared myriad examples of negative interactions with individual faculty, staff, and students. They also shared the subsequent toll these experiences had on them. Many of the negative interactions with faculty, staff, and students could be attributed to a lack of intercultural competence on the part of the perpetrators. Increasing the intercultural competence of faculty, staff, students, and administrators can go a long way in creating the type of environment in which Black women in key leadership roles can do more than just survive—but thrive.

For faculty, staff, and administrators, these competencies help ensure the decisions they make, and the policies and practices they create and maintain, are inclusive and equitable. This has a direct impact on the climate and culture of the institution. These competencies also facilitate an environment for more productive dialogue when dealing with difficult issues around diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Institutions of higher education often espouse to values associated with educating students to become global citizens and agents of positive change. To accomplish this goal, institutions need to ensure they are facilitating students' development of key competencies involving awareness, understanding, and engagement with people from diverse backgrounds and cultures. This would include an awareness of biases they may possess towards people with identities that are different from their own. The development of these competencies for students has a larger societal impact once they graduate and enter the workforce or other institutions beyond higher education.

Competencies around engagement across differences should be included as part of the onboarding process for new students, faculty, staff, and administrators. It should also be included as part of the ongoing training and development of all university constituents. This ensures all students, faculty, staff, and administrators are receiving regular and ongoing training related to these competencies and that it is not a "one and done" type of proposition. Training at different levels of understanding on these issues should also be offered so the training meets the needs of the constituents and can be tailored to their current competency levels.

Competencies that include microaggressions, intersectionality, and systemic privilege and oppression would be especially helpful for public research PWIs and their constituents. Developing an understanding of microaggressions can help people understand how their everyday interactions and language can marginalize people from diverse communities. Intersectionality would deepen constituents' understanding of how Black women are impacted differently within systems of interlocking oppression. And

engagement with systemic privilege and oppression would help people understand how these issues are playing out within systems like higher education, and how they impact Black women and other minoritized communities.

The women in my study also talked about the ways in which their engagement with White people created a negative work environment for them. Competencies for White people on whiteness could help them understand how their identity as a White person, and the ways they have been conditioned to think, believe, and behave related to whiteness and privilege, can have a negative impact on Communities of Color. There should also be an intersectional approach to training around whiteness that would help White people across gender identities understand how they operate similarly and differently within interlocking systems of oppression.

Institutional Level

Research supports the stance that diverse teams of people make better decisions and develop better solutions to an organization's problems (Rock et al., 2016). Institutions of higher education also benefit from having diverse teams of people in key positions of decision-making authority. As our institutions become, or strive to become, more diverse, it is important that the people making decisions about fulfilling the institution's mission are as diverse as the people they represent (or desire to represent). The absence of diverse voices at the executive level of an institution can facilitate the creation and maintenance of policies, practices, and norms that perpetuate the subordination of Black women and other people from minoritized identities.

Black women bring a unique perspective and set of experiences to their leadership and decision making that cannot be replicated by people from other identities. When Black women are not a part of the teams responsible for making decisions that impact institutions of higher education and their various stakeholders, a very important voice and perspective is missing. The ways the literature highlighted the qualities that Black women bring to their approach to leadership and decision-making, coupled with the validation of these qualities from the Black women in the literature, reinforces these institutions are better served by ensuring Black women are represented at the executive leadership level.

The absence of Black women can lead to less-than-optimal decisions that can have a detrimental impact on the institutions and the communities they serve. Institutions must work to eliminate the epistemic violence (Bunch, 2015) perpetrated against Black women. This will ensure they are able to benefit from the knowledge and praxis of Black women in creating more inclusive and equitable environments at their institutions. One of the ways public research PWIs can do this is recruiting and retaining Black women in executive-level leadership positions. This requires a commitment to intentional recruitment and retention strategies that go beyond business as usual.

Recruitment and Retention of Diverse Populations of Administrators. The women in the literature, as well as in my study, shared how being the only (or one of very few), Black women in leadership roles had a negative impact on their experience. The lack of other Black women at the executive level made them feel as though they had to represent all Black women when leading and making decisions. It also meant they had to shoulder a disproportionate burden of advocating for the needs of minoritized

populations. One of the ways colleges and universities can alleviate this burden is by recruiting more Black women into executive-level leadership positions. Unfortunately, recruitment of university administrators from diverse populations is an area in which many public research PWIs continue to struggle.

These institutions often find themselves in a catch 22 situation where this is concerned. Their lack of diversity often makes it difficult for them to convince people from diverse populations their institution is a place where they should further their career. However, having more Black women in key positions can help to provide tangible evidence of these institutions' commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. This evidence of commitment is important for Black women who are considering employment at these institutions.

Representation matters. Black women need to know they are seen and that they matter. Seeing Black women at the highest levels of an institution not only provides evidence of institutional commitment, but it also creates an opportunity for other Black women to see themselves in these types of positions in ways they might not otherwise. It also provides an opportunity for White people to witness Black women in key leadership roles. Seeing Black women in positions of decision-making authority helps to normalize that experience for all members of the campus community. It should not be looked upon as an anomaly. Giving students, faculty, and staff the opportunity to see, and interact with, Black women in key leadership roles central to the institution's mission can have an impact on their mindset about this type of representation in settings outside of their respective institutions. This has a larger societal impact beyond the institution.

Public research PWIs should employ targeted recruitment strategies to ensure a diverse pool of applicants to consider for vacant positions. Once they become more successful at hiring Black women to fill administrative roles, strategies should also be employed to assist with the retention of these women. I discuss some of these strategies below, which include targeted recruitment initiatives, mentoring programs, and pathway and leadership development programs.

Targeted Recruitment Initiatives. Public research PWIs often have a *field of dreams* mentality when it comes to recruiting individuals from diverse populations for vacant positions. This means these institutions think that just because they advertise a position, and perhaps put an ad in a couple of publications focused on diverse populations, that should yield the desired results when it comes to ensuring a diverse pool of applicants. At the very least, it gives them the opportunity to say, “Well, we tried.” This passive approach to recruiting has been proven to be ineffective.

For institutions who are serious about making sure their applicant pools include well-qualified people from diverse populations, they must engage in *active* recruitment. This goes beyond simply placing an ad in a few well-known publications. It involves things like sending announcements via professional associations focused on Communities of Color, asking colleagues to nominate potential candidates for vacant positions, as well as identifying potential candidates and contacting them directly to request their application. Many people who would be wonderful assets to another institution are not actively seeking employment elsewhere.

Another strategy involves establishing relationships with potential candidates before a vacancy becomes available. This can be done by networking at professional conferences that include individuals in the desired fields and getting their information for future outreach. This will ensure institutions have a pool of potential candidates to reach out to when a position becomes available.

Mentoring Programs. Creating an environment conducive for Black women at the executive level to thrive does not simply mean recruiting them and crossing that task off the list. Retention of these women is just as important. Many of the participants, as well as the Black women in the literature, spoke to the value of mentoring to their educational and career pursuits. Mentoring programs ensure Black women, who are often not mentored in the same way as their White counterparts, receive the support and professional advice they need to be successful at a public research PWI.

Making mentoring of Black women a priority will demonstrate the institution's commitment to developing and maintaining a diverse team of institutional leaders. These mentoring programs can be formal or informal; however, ensuring the intercultural competence of the people performing the mentoring role is key to the success of such programs. Institutions should consider incentivizing faculty and staff who take on this critical role, and/or ensure they receive credit for it in their tenure/promotion/evaluation submissions. These programs should also be evaluated on a regular basis by the Black women who are being mentored to ensure they are having the desired impact.

Pathway and Leadership Development Programs. The Black women in the literature, as well as in my study, spoke to feelings of insecurity when it came to their

administrative roles. For various reasons many Black women question whether they are a good fit for these types of roles. This is sometimes due to the lack of representation of Black women in these roles at their institutions. It is often difficult to imagine something you cannot see. It is also because many are made to feel as though they are not qualified, and thus do not deserve to be in these roles. Institutions of higher education can help Black women see these roles as a natural trajectory for them by developing pathway programs that help not only develop awareness of various careers in higher education, but also support and prepare Black women who want to pursue these roles. Pathway programs also ensure Black women are receiving the necessary visibility to be considered for higher level positions.

Leadership development programs can also be a tool to assist with retention of Black women in administrative roles. These types of programs help equip Black women with knowledge and skills that help them prepare for roles with increasing authority and responsibility. As institutions commit to these types of programs, they should understand that they are helping to contribute to the overall pool of Black women who are ready to assume leadership positions at institutions of higher education at large, not just their own.

Institutional Policies, Practices, and Norms. Many institutions espouse to lofty values when it comes to diversity, equity, and inclusion but do little to live out those values in their policies, practices, and norms. The policies, practices and norms of an institution determine the climate and culture of the institution. They can also perpetuate racism, patriarchy, and other systems of oppression.

The Black women in my study and in the literature spoke of how they used their agency to push back against the oppressive systems operating in their work environment. Institutions who want to be successful at creating a diverse, equitable, and inclusive environment need to be congruent in their stated values and their policies, practices, and norms. When institutions make a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, they must first acknowledge these systems are operating within their institutions and then make a commitment to actively engage in the development and maintenance of institutional policies, practices, and norms that create the type of environment they desire. The acknowledgement of the issues will create an environment for Black women that is more supportive when they are calling attention to things the institution has already acknowledged are issues. Black women can then be seen more as allies in addressing those issues instead of threats.

Institutions can demonstrate a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion through the ways in which they critically examine their policies, practices, and norms to ensure they are inclusive and equitable for all university constituents. There are myriad ways in which institutions can demonstrate this commitment to inclusive and equitable policies, practices, and norms. I discuss some of these below, which include: (1) making diversity, equity, and inclusion a stated value for the institution; (2) strategic planning focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion; (3) committing appropriate resources to diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts; and (4) placing a higher value on service.

Making Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion a Stated Value for the Institution. As the women in my study articulated, Black women often operate with a strong set of

values around how they approach their work and their interactions with others. If the values of the institution are not in alignment with their personal values, they will not be retained. To ensure institutional alignment between stated values and policies, practices, and norms, institutions must first determine what their values are related to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Once these values are established, they should be broadly communicated to all constituents. These values should be prominently displayed on the institution's website as well as the websites of individual units within the university. They should also be included in recruitment materials for potential students and employees.

Strategic Planning Focused on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. One of the ways an institution can live out its values around diversity, equity, and inclusion is to engage in strategic planning focused on these areas. Most institutions engage in some sort of strategic planning, albeit many in a perfunctory way. In order for the climate and culture of institutions to change in a positive way, the institutions must ensure all units are a part of the process and are held accountable for playing an active role in creating a more diverse, inclusive, and equitable environment for all their constituents. Strategic planning focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion should include accountability measures as well as transparency to ensure progress is being made and shared with university stakeholders. This could include an annual process of reporting out to the institution on the progress of each college and division at the university.

Committing Appropriate Resources to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Efforts. I have often heard the adage, "If you want to know what an institution values, follow the

money.” This sentiment underscores the practice of institutions providing appropriate resources to programs and initiatives upon which they place a high value. For institutions who espouse to values around diversity, equity, and inclusion, they must ensure appropriate resources are allocated for initiatives that are impactful and produce (or have the potential to produce) desired results. The allocation of resources could be directly connected to the strategic planning mentioned in the previous section, with university-level resources allocated as seed money for new initiatives or funding to increase support for established initiatives.

Placing Higher Value on Service. It has been stated that the professoriate is often the bridge to administrative positions in higher education, especially in the academic areas. As such, successful navigation of the tenure and promotion process is critical to ensure Black women are positioned to assume these leadership positions. Black women often have service loads that make it difficult for them to focus on the research and related publications needed to satisfy tenure and promotion requirements. These service loads can sometimes be self-imposed, as Black women often desire to support Black people, and other Communities of Color, in their academic and career pursuits. These service loads can also be imposed upon Black women by their respective institutions.

One of the ways institutions can support Black women who place a high personal value on service to Communities of Color is to value service at the same level as teaching and research. This would ensure the time Black women put into supporting the things important to them is receiving the appropriate weight when being evaluated. This would

primarily apply to faculty, but it could also apply to staff in the ways in which goals are written into their performance evaluations.

Implications for Future Research

During the process of conducting research for this study, several areas of opportunity were illuminated as potential areas for further research on the experiences of Black women in executive-level leadership positions at PWIs, or enhancements to existing research in these areas. The areas for potential research included: (1) negative experiences with White women, (2) hiring Black women during institutional crisis, (3) experiences of Black women by institution type and location, (4) the proliferation of Black women hired into chief diversity officer roles following the murder of George Floyd, and (5) the mental and emotional toll on Black women in executive-level positions following the murder of George Floyd. I explore each opportunity for future research below.

Negative Experiences with White Women

Some of the research participants indicated the majority of their negative experiences at their institutions were with White women. When articulating their experiences, they expressed surprise that White women were not more supportive of them as Black women in these roles since they were all women. This provides an area of opportunity for further research on the experiences of Black women in executive-level leadership positions at PWIs and the ways those experiences are impacted by White women. This would help provide a critical analysis of how White women are perpetrators in maintaining and reinforcing systems of oppression impacting Black women.

Hiring Black Women Administrators During Institutional Crisis

During the interview process, it was suggested by at least one of the research participants PWIs are often only willing to take a chance on a Black woman in an executive-level position during times of institutional crisis. It was also insinuated that institutions would intentionally avoid retaining these Black women once the crisis was over, or if the Black women did not conform to the expectations of the institution during the crisis. This would be an opportunity for additional research to see if this phenomenon is occurring, and if so, how it is impacting the work experiences and career opportunities for Black women in these roles.

Experiences of Black Women by Institution Type and Location

Some of my research participants alluded to the different experiences Black women had depending upon the geographic location of their institutions. This discussion of geography also included the ways in which the political climate of the state impacted the decision-making of the institution—especially for public PWIs. They also indicated private institutions were able to exercise greater freedom in making decisions congruent with their values around diversity, equity and inclusion and that liberal arts institutions created a less stressful environment than research institutions when it came to the criteria for promotion and tenure. This provides an opportunity for additional research that compares the experiences of Black women in executive-level positions at higher education institutions by type and geographic location. This could include publics vs. privates, PWIs vs. HBCUs, research vs. liberal arts, as well as different geographic areas of the country.

Proliferation of Black Women Hired into Chief Diversity Officer Roles Following the Murder of George Floyd

One of my observations during the process of identifying potential research participants was the number of Black women who had been appointed to chief diversity officer type roles since the murder of George Floyd. This was also a sentiment expressed by a couple of the women in my study. Many institutions of higher education were grappling with systemic issues of oppression and trying to chart a course for the future after this tragic series of events. An opportunity for further research would involve studying if the creation of a chief diversity officer position was a strategy employed by PWIs, how many of them appointed a Black woman to that inaugural role, and what power and authority (to include reporting structure) was given to them to perform this role. This could possibly connect to the potential research area of hiring Black women only in times of institutional crisis.

The Toll on Black Women in Executive-Level Positions Following the Murder of George Floyd

As institutions of higher education struggled to chart a path forward following the murder of George Floyd, Black people at these institutions were often called upon to provide context and educate others on their experiences. As someone who was also impacted in this way, the mental and emotional toll on me and many of my Black colleagues was significant. This provides another opportunity for research on the experiences of Black women in executive-level roles and the ways in which the myriad

conversations they had to endure at their respective institutions following the murder of George Floyd impacted them.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to illuminate and understand how interlocking systems of oppression impact the leadership and decision-making experiences of Black women in executive-level leadership positions at predominantly White public research institutions in the U.S. My research question was: How do Black women in executive-level leadership positions at predominantly White public research institutions in the U.S. make sense of misogynoir in relation to their leadership and decision-making experiences? To answer this question, I interviewed eight Black women who held executive-level leadership positions at predominantly White public research institutions in the U.S. These interviews provided a window into the experiences of Black women in executive-level leadership positions at public research PWIs and how working in these oppressive environments impacted their leadership and decision-making experiences. The themes from the findings helped provide a definitive response to the research question, as well as reinforced the experiences from the Black women in the literature.

The experiences shared by the research participants not only have an impact on the Black women in these roles, but also on the institutions themselves and the communities they serve. The impact to the institutions happens at the individual, institutional and societal levels. Strategies can be employed to mitigate challenges associated with each level, many of which were outlined in this chapter.

As institutions become more diverse, they need to ensure the people making the decisions that determine the direction of the institution mirror that diversity. And for those institutions seeking to increase the diversity of their faculty, staff, administrators, and students, they need to ensure they are actively engaged in creating a more welcoming, inclusive, and equitable environment to attract people from diverse populations. Creating this environment requires people from diverse identities and backgrounds being part of the decision-making process to ensure the institution's approach meets the needs of their diverse constituents.

Black women can provide a unique perspective shaped by their identities and lived experiences that cannot be duplicated by another demographic group. They can be valuable assets to institutions willing to provide opportunities for them at the executive level. And the institutions who appoint Black women to their executive levels need to be true to their values around diversity, equity, and inclusion issues if they are to retain these women. They also need to be comfortable with being uncomfortable, as Black women are often the first to challenge their institutions to create congruence between their stated values and their policies, practices, and norms.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Introductory Email

Dear _____

I hope this email finds you safe and healthy. My name is Altheia L. Richardson and I am the Assistant Vice President for Strategic Diversity Leadership at Clemson University. I am also a Doctoral Candidate in Clemson University's Educational Leadership Program in the College of Education. I am at the critical stage of conducting the research for my study and I hope you will consider participating.

The purpose of my study is to illuminate and understand how interlocking systems of oppression impact the leadership and decision-making experiences of **Black women in executive-level leadership positions at predominantly White public research institutions in the U.S.** For the purpose of my study, executive-level leaders will be those who currently work in close proximity to either the president or the provost (or are themselves the president or provost), are the primary decision-maker for an academic college or university-level division, and are directly involved in decision-making that determines the direction of the institution. This could include presidents, provosts, chancellors, vice presidents, vice provosts, vice chancellors, and academic deans. I would ideally like to include women who have been in their current role (or another executive-level role at a predominantly White public research institution in the U.S.) for at least two years.

I am sharing information regarding my study with you because (1) I think you might fit the criteria for my study, and (2) sharing your story can help others better

understand the unique experiences of Black women in these types of positions at predominantly White public research institutions in the U.S. Because I am a Black woman in an administrative position at a predominantly White public research institution, my research topic is near and dear to my heart. And I want to provide an additional opportunity for Black women to share their stories through my research.

Research participants will participate in an interview lasting approximately 90 minutes. Interview questions will be provided to the participants in advance. If additional questions develop during the study, I may reach out to research participants for a brief follow-up interview.

If you are interested in participating, please respond to this email **by Friday, February 19, 2021** and I will send you the Informed Consent document for your review. If you have any questions about the study, please let me know. We could schedule time to chat if that would be helpful.

I appreciate your consideration for this very important research study.

Sincerely,

Altheia L. Richardson
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Educational Leadership
College of Education
Clemson University

Appendix B

Informed Consent Document

Key Information About This Research Study

I, Altheia L. Richardson, am requesting the honor of your voluntary participation in a very important research study. I am the Assistant Vice President for Strategic Diversity Leadership at Clemson University as well as a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership Program in the College of Education at Clemson University.

The purpose of my study is to illuminate and understand how interlocking systems of oppression impact the leadership and decision-making experiences of Black women in executive-level leadership positions at predominantly White public research institutions in the U.S. For the purpose of my study, executive-level leaders will be those who work in close proximity to either the president or the provost (or are themselves the president or provost), are the primary decision-maker for an academic college or university-level division, and are directly involved in decision-making that determines the direction of the institution. This could include presidents, provosts, chancellors, vice presidents, vice provosts, vice chancellors, and academic deans.

I am requesting your participation in this study because I think you can help others better understand the unique experiences of Black women in these types of positions at predominantly White public research institutions. Below is some key information about this research study:

Time Commitment: Research participants will participate in an interview which will last **approximately 90 minutes**. I will provide the interview questions to the research participants in advance of the scheduled interview so they can reflect on the questions beforehand. If additional questions develop during the study, I may reach out to research participants for a brief follow-up interview.

Voluntary Consent: You may choose not to take part and you may choose to stop taking part at any time. You will not be penalized in any way if you decide not to be in the study or to stop taking part in the study. If you choose to stop taking part in this study, the information you have already provided will not be included in the study.

Data Collection Methods: Interviews will be the primary method of data collection for this study. The interviews will be recorded using the Zoom videoconferencing platform. The information provided will be used for the purpose of my dissertation and possible related publications or presentations.

Protection of Privacy and Confidentiality: Several steps will be taken to protect the identity of the research participants and their respective institutions, to include the following: (1) pseudonyms will be used for each research participant throughout the study; (2) pseudonyms will also be used for all the names of people and institutions used in the interviews; (3) recordings from the interviews will be saved in a password-protected environment to which only I as the researcher have access and will be used solely for the purpose of transcription verification and accuracy; and (4) care will be taken to exclude any other information in the study that might identify a research participant and/or their institution. The results of this study may be published in journals,

professional publications, or used for educational presentations. Identifiable information retained for this study will not be used for future research studies.

Risks and Discomforts: As with any research there are risks involved. The risks to the research participants could include the subject matter of the interview causing discomfort. I will work to minimize this discomfort, even if it means discontinuing the interview to support the participant. Participants can withdraw from the study at any time. Any interview materials and other information connected to a participant who has withdrawn from the study will be permanently deleted.

Possible Benefits: The potential benefits of a research study of this type are often only fully realized after the information is shared with others. But I am anticipating several potential benefits to this study, to include: (1) the research participants learning some new things about themselves and how they make meaning of their experiences; (2) the research participants discovering how their experiences align with or diverge from other Black women in similar positions; (3) consumers of the research (to include me as the researcher) learning more about the experiences of Black women in these types of positions and how those experiences might align with or differ from their own; (4) the institutions who currently employ Black women in these types of positions (or may employ them in the future) learning more about how they can better support Black women who currently hold, or seek to obtain, these types of positions.

Contact Information: Thank you for your consideration of participation in this important study. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this research study, please contact Altheia L. Richardson at lalthei@clermson.edu or via phone at 864-354-

5441. You may also contact Dr. Natasha Croom, Associate Professor in Educational and Organizational Leadership Development at nncroom@clemson.edu. Dr. Croom is my dissertation committee chair. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights in this research study, please contact the Clemson University Office of Research Compliance (ORC) at 864-656-0636 or irb@clemson.edu.

Consent: By participating in this study, you indicate that you have read the information written above, are at least 18 years of age, have been allowed to ask any questions, and you are voluntarily choosing to take part in this research. You do not give up any legal rights by taking part in this research study.

Appendix C

Interview Protocol

The following questions will be asked of each research participant at the beginning of their interview in order to obtain important demographic information for the study as well as ensure they fit the criteria for the study.

Participant Information Questions:

1. What is your name?
2. Do you identify as a Black or African American woman?
3. What is the name of your current institution and where is it located?
4. Is your institution classified by Carnegie as a Research institution (Very High and High Research Activity)?
5. What is your current position at this institution?
6. How long have you served in this role?
7. What is the title of your supervisor?
8. What is your desired pseudonym for this study?

The questions below are part of the interview protocol and will be asked of each research participant to obtain information relevant to the research question. Additional follow-up questions may be asked depending upon the participant's responses to these questions.

Interview Protocol:

1. What life experiences have led you to do the work you do?
2. Describe your work in your current role.

3. What does a typical week look like for you in your current role? What are you doing? With whom are you interacting? What issues are being discussed / addressed? What types of decisions are you making?
4. Describe your relationship with your colleagues in the university administration.
5. How would you describe the impact that being a Black woman has had on your leadership experiences at your current institution?
6. How would you describe the impact that being a Black woman has had on your decision-making experiences at your current institution?
7. Do you think people respond to you differently as a Black woman than they would, say, a White woman in the same position? Why or why not?
 - a. If so, in what way is the response different? What is an example of when this occurred?
8. How have you learned to navigate being a Black woman in an executive-level position of leadership at a predominantly White public research institution?
9. How has being a Black woman shaped your approach to your work?
10. Why do you think there are so few Black women in executive-level leadership positions at predominantly White institutions in the U.S.?
 - a. Does that answer change for predominantly White *public research* institutions? If so, how?
11. What impact do you think this lack of representation has on these institutions?

12. Based on what you have learned along the way, what advice would you give Black women who may be seeking executive-level positions of leadership at predominantly White public research institutions?
13. What advice would you give to predominantly White public research institutions on how to ensure better representation of Black women at the executive leadership level?
14. Is there anything else you would like to share with me to help me better understand your leadership and decision-making experiences as a Black woman in an executive-level leadership position at a predominantly White public research institution?

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