

ABSTRACT OF CAPSTONE

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April 13, 2022

AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN PERCEPTIONS OF ADVANCEMENT
BARRIERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Abstract of Capstone

A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in the
Ernst and Sara Lane Volgenau College of Education
At Morehead State University

By

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Vicksburg, Mississippi

Committee Chair: Fujuan Tan, Associate Professor

Morehead, Kentucky

April 13, 2022

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With one glance at higher education web pages across the nation, one consistent factor is the absence of African American women in higher education leadership roles. Equally significant to Black women's absence is the lack of advancement for Black females. Even though colleges and universities hiring practices normalized the notion of equity and inclusion, the promise of gender parity for Black women remains unchanged. This qualitative study examines Black women's perceptions of leadership advancement barriers at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) through analysis and discussion of the responses from four Black women graduates of the Higher Education Leadership Foundation (HELFF). The study's intent is to understand Black women's experiences in the chief of staff, vice president, and executive director roles, how barriers impacted their advancement, and strategies used to overcome barriers. This study found that the high expectations of participants' parents served as an educational success imperative. Themes that emerged illustrated that the value of relationships, visibility, voice, and work ethic were factors in the participants' journeys. The Black women's transcendence of racial and gender discrimination became the catalyst for developing a leadership style focused on students' success. This study's ultimate goal is to use the participants' lived experiences to encourage Black women who aspire to be leaders, equipping them

with strategies to overcome advancement barriers in higher education.

Recommendations based on the findings provide insights into how Black women in higher education suffer from complex circumstances and what institutions can do to overcome barriers for Black women.

KEYWORDS: Black women, HBCUs, Leadership, Barriers, Career advancement

Candidate Signature

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DEDICATION

God, I thank you for your grace and mercy and the covering over my life. I will praise you, God. To all the people I love and who love me—thank you for your support as I continue to navigate this journey called life.

To my most significant achievements in this life, my sons, Damon Jr. and Damonte, may you always rise above discrimination, recognizing we all have privilege and power: use yours for the greater good. Damon Sr., thank you for teaching me that silence is not a sign of weakness but wisdom. Mom, thank you for always being that steady guide amid any devastation in my life. I will never forget you saying, “Remember who you are!” My soul is anchored, thank you. Bob, I love you and miss you every day. I am staying near the cross. To my Granny Geneva, great aunts, and aunts—I love you so much for your prayers and for investing wisdom and knowledge in me. To my sister (Karaya), Goddaughter (Kiara), my nieces, and all the women in my family know that you are enough and never let your race, gender, or class hinder your success.

Finally, for every Black woman silenced and struggling at the intersection of all the “isms,” I see you and applaud your resilience and commitment to the next generation of female leaders and Black excellence.

Black women, you are enough. And at this moment, the world needs you to shine.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This journey would not be possible without my committee chair, Dr. Fujuan Tan, and committee members, Dr. Daryl Privott and Dr. Elaine Farris. I thank each of you for your guidance, advice (even when I did not want to hear it), and incredible patience. All of you provided invaluable feedback and I am forever grateful.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Colleges and universities executives worldwide have normalized the notion of equity and inclusion in their campus mission and vision statements, proclaiming to students and employees that campuses are safe learning and working environments for all populations, providing opportunities for growth, development, and advancement through education. Higher education institutions, which should be affirming spaces that encourage women's participation and open windows of opportunity, have failed to diversify their senior-level leadership to reflect the rapidly changing demographics of their student bodies (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Research shows that women are less likely to experience adverse effects with promotions in leadership when they can influence policy, be empowered, and have satisfaction in their work-life balance (Sabharwal, 2013).

This capstone examines the experiences and perceptions of four African American women administrators of leadership advancement barriers at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). The Black women are graduates of the Higher Education Leadership Foundation, an organization dedicated to strengthening the leadership pipeline at HBCUs. Unfortunately, most Black female academic leaders become symbols of diversity and inclusion and role models by default and not by choice (Price-Williams & Maatita, 2019). The success of a Black woman is not valued without being linked to historical marginalization, results of affirmative action, and stereotypes. Johnson (2021) notes that these existing paradigms cannot be

uprooted without transparent conversations about the presence of gender and racial inequities in higher education.

Moreover, given the unique experiences of women leaders at large and Black women, a multidimensional approach is required to create equitable pathways to leadership. In addition, when supervisors and their employees share similar demographic backgrounds, it can provide a better working experience (Smith, 2015). The representative bureaucratic theory asserts, "... that individuals from different backgrounds experience socialization processes that influence their attitudes, values, and decisions in ways beneficial to the groups they represent" (Smith, 2015, p. 491). The general problem is that African American women holding leadership positions in higher education institutions continue to be underrepresented in leadership positions (Smith et al., 2019).

Senior leadership positions remain deficient of African American women regardless of the attempts made to diversify equality in terms of race and gender in the United States (Beckwith, Carter, and Peters, 2016). This capstone explores African American women's perceptions toward advancement barriers that hinder Black female administrators from advancing to higher education leadership positions at HBCUs. Additionally, this capstone seeks to identify successful strategies used by African American women currently employed in higher education to overcome advancement barriers.

According to the 2017 report from the American Council on Education, women led slightly more than 30 percent of all colleges and universities in the United

States. Women of color represented just five percent of that population. They were more likely than any other presidents to be serving in their first presidency even though their credentials outweighed those of male presidents. Unlike their White counterparts, women of color have to contend with the duality of race and gender and the bias that goes with each of them if they are to improve their organizational standing and career advancement opportunities to make it to the top (Combs, 2003). The low number of Black women in leadership roles in higher education deserves attention and creates a need to understand how Black women access and navigate career advancement barriers.

Statement of the Problem

Black women administrators face unique challenges in their roles at colleges and universities across the country. The lack of African American women in higher education leadership positions is a noticeable problem. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2019), White men are 54 percent of full-time faculty. Nash and Allen (2021) offer the diversity of thought based on experience that Black faculty add through scholarship and teaching expands and improves higher education contexts because it offers more than a single, prototypical perspective. This research shows why intersectionality matters in understanding and responding to the needs of Black students. However, little research focuses solely on the plight of Black women administrators, even though women surpassed men in terms of advanced degrees earned (Johnson, 2017).

Women hold more entry-level and service positions in higher education than men, with worsened conditions for women of color (Johnson, 2017). There is a distinct difference between African American men and women regarding what positions of influence they hold in academic spaces. Black women have been relegated to lower-level roles (Lewis, 2017) that provide a face of diversity but not the power or influence needed to yield change. The research supports the argument that African American women have distinctive experiences and challenges when seeking advancement opportunities in higher education, including specific hindrances of societal race and gender discrimination. Gender stereotypes, biases, discrimination, and various types of family roles and responsibilities all hinder females and push them to conform gender roles (Garlow, 2018).

Being Black in the workplace often leads to bias in one form or another (Jones et al., 2016). For example, Black job seekers are expected to negotiate less than white job seekers and receive lower starting salaries if this expectation is violated (Hernandez et al., 2019). However, this research suggests that Black women may experience unique hurdles that Black men do not face because they suffer stereotypes that affect how they are treated in the workplace. For example, Black men receive similar reactions to White men when expressing anger. Yet, on the other hand, Black women receive significantly different reactions from White women. In sum, merely examining differences based on race hinders our understanding of the experiences of Black employees in organizations, and future research should consider how and why being Black and female matters.

The deficiency of Black women administrators also gives rise to the difficulty these aspiring leaders have in identifying role models who have been successful in breaking advancement barriers. Most of the literature relating to mentoring focuses on the business world and males within the business world, this study adds to the scholarly literature on African American females (Beckwith et al., 2016). Research is lacking that fully investigates the relationship between mentoring implications and career advancement for Black women administrators in higher education (Corneille et al., 2019). Despite years of systemic oppression, Black women excel in all careers as authors, performers, athletes, caregivers, and teachers. However, Black women are often overlooked for leadership positions within higher education (Candia-Bailey, 2016).

The systems and tools used to measure Black female leadership capabilities are based on a Caucasian male prototype, against a background of conscious, systematic strategies and processes that exclude the Black female (Ortiz, 2013; Phillips, 2012). This undermines and dismisses their unique knowledge, skills, competencies, and talents. Research further indicates that women leadership styles, emotional and social intelligence, and related competencies are generally accepted and used in leadership job descriptions, and yet women and Black women specifically, are still not as visible as men in top positions (Thomas, 2019).

A desirable outcome of the study is to provide awareness of the possible challenges and difficulties that Black women face in seeking leadership positions in higher education. The lack of visibility of Black women in the ranks demonstrates

that inequality still exists (Lewis, 2017). If the study inspires higher education executives to be courageous and close the leadership gap by facilitating the reduction of advancement barriers (family responsibilities, mentorship, development, socialization, leadership styles, stereotypes, and exclusion from informal networks) for African American women. Then institutions can influence the representation of other organizations and industries in the future and for future generations.

Purpose Statement

This qualitative research explores lived experiences of Black women leaders in higher education at four Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). It is essential for this study and future research to investigate how Black women senior leaders have navigated the complex U.S educational system and developed strategies for success (Johnson, 2016). Such an exploration acknowledges the intersection of race and gender as experienced by Black women and how Black women navigated the system to reach the top of leadership at HBCUs. The qualitative study approach is appropriate as qualitative researchers seek to answer questions that emphasize how life experiences are created and given meaning (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008) by considering participants' underlying values, merits, and lived experiences. The study's intent is to understand Black women's experiences in the chief of staff, vice president, and executive director roles, how barriers impacted their leadership advancement, and what institutions and Black women can do to overcome leadership advancement barriers.

Research Questions

The purpose of the study explores four African American women's perceptions toward advancement barriers that hinder Black female administrators from advancing to higher education leadership positions at HBCUs. Additionally, the study identifies successful strategies used by four African American women currently employed in higher education to overcome advancement barriers. This study focuses on the following research questions: (1) What barriers did four African American women identify as they pursued leadership positions at Historically Black Colleges and Universities? (2) What strategies do African American women identify as effective in overcoming leadership advancement barriers?

These questions are important given the fact that higher education institutions have a responsibility to foster an academic climate conducive to the advancement of African American women administrators. Consistent with Johnson's (2020) study that concluded the leadership disparity of Black women is even more stark within the US educational realm. In the study, all the Black women spoke to the many encounters that they were minimally and/or ill-prepared for and the various times in which they were confronted with both their 'Blackness' and 'womanhood' (Johnson, 2020, pp. 633). Research in this area is vital for African American women aspiring to hold leadership positions in higher education.

Breeden (2021) posits while more attention has been given to women in educational leadership, very few studies have focused on issues pertaining to African American women administrators in institutions of higher education. This remains

because the opportunity to study Black women administrators in numbers and content similar to men is void and professional organizations in higher education do not maintain statistical data on women of ethnic groups (Breedon, 2021). Past university policies were formulated on the assumption that White and Black women or Black men and women have the same experiences.

Additionally, other administrators and individuals of different races and gender can understand the institutions' environment, barriers, and contexts of African American women in higher education. This study advocates the importance of African American women's perspectives in understanding their circumstances in higher education. This study provides insights into the challenges of four African American women's experiences in the chief of staff, vice president, and executive director roles in higher education at HBCUs, and the strategies employed to overcome leadership advancement barriers.

Significance of the Study

Higher education institutions, educational boards, job search firms, and other individuals across all race and gender lines, and the Black women who seek leadership advancement, may find this study significant in understanding the barriers and strategies of Black women leaders at HBCUs. This study advocates the importance of African American women's perspectives in understanding their situations in higher education. Though tensions exist when discussing gender issues at HBCUs, these challenges must be explored generally and specifically when attempting to understand possible contributing factors of the "underrepresentation of

Black women” in HBCU leadership (Bonner 2001; Jean-Marie and Tickles 2017, 105). This lack of representation of Black women in HBCU leadership does not mirror HBCU student-body demographics, in which Black women are the majority. Across all HBCUs, women make up 62% of the student population (NCES 2018). “Ascending to the presidency is fraught with challenges that seek to limit the power and authority of female presidents” (Jean-Marie and Tickles 2017, 107). If there are challenges and barriers that create difficulty for Black women not only to reach the HBCU presidency but to do so without compromising their authentic selves, these challenges and barriers should be explored.

In 2021, African Americans represented less than one-tenth of administrators (7%) in higher education in positions (CUPA-HR) such as Chief of Staffs (9.9%), Executive Vice Presidents (5.6%), Chief Academic Officers (3.9%), Chief Student Affairs Offices or Enrollment Management Officers (12%), and an overwhelming 72.7% of Chief Diversity Officers at public institutions (Gasman et al., 2015). In addition, women of color hold only a 5 percent share of the 30 percent of all women presidents (Gagliardi et al., 2017). Women are challenged with following in the footsteps of their male colleagues, but African American women face added racial, historical, and organizational adversities that their Caucasian counterparts do not (BlackChen, 2015). The study is expected to contribute to the body of knowledge needed to increase awareness and to understand the meaning of experiences and perceptions of leadership advancement barriers of Black women in higher education.

This study will be beneficial because higher education institutions and society can use the participants' suggested strategies to understand what Black women require to be successful in seeking leadership advancement opportunities and overcome the challenges commonly experienced by Black female leaders. This study's ultimate goal is to use the participants' stories to provide a blueprint for African American women who aspire to seek leadership positions in higher education and equip them with the tools to enable progress.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions and terms will be used for the purpose of this study. For this research, Black equals Black/African American, as defined in the definition of terms. Additionally, all study participants identified as Black/African American.

Administrator – a dean, provost, vice or deputy provost, executive vice president, senior vice president, vice president, assistant or associate vice president, executive director, chief of staff, or president of a postsecondary institution.

African American/Black – a Black American, relating to Black Americans, and pertaining to or belonging to the African American population referred to those defined by the USA's census reports as "having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa" and based upon self-identification. (Census Bureau, 2011, p. 2).

Bias – unreasonably hostile feelings or opinions about a social group; prejudice

Women of color – refer collectively to African American, Asian/Pacific American, Hispanic/Latina, and Native American women. (Census Bureau, 2011, p. 2).

Women –adult female persons as assigned at birth.

Gender – refers to socially constructed roles of behavior and activities that society deems appropriate for male and female behavior (WHO, 2003).

Social isolation – is a multi-dimensional construct that can be defined as the inadequate quantity and/or quality of interactions with other people, including those interactions that occur at the individual, group, and/or community level (Nicholson, 2012; Smith and Lim, 2020; Umberson and Karas Montez, 2010; Zavaleta et al., 2017).

Socialization – constructs of acceptable male and female behavior.

Leadership styles – methods and approaches used to manage, direct and motivate people.

Marginalization – may refer to a systematic process where persons are pushed away from economic, sociopolitical and cultural participation (Sharma, 2014)

Family responsibilities – socially enforced barrier where females are viewed as the main caretakers.

Stereotypes – preconceptions of a person or group of people.

Summary

This chapter focused on presenting the background of the issue in the study. The first chapter contains the introduction, problem statement, research questions, significance of the study, and definition of key terms. Overall, this study will facilitate an understanding of the broad concept of African American women leaders and the journey that Black women have traveled who have achieved senior-level administrative leadership positions in higher education at Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

This literature review examines the history of the lack of African American women administrators in higher education leadership and perceived barriers to advancement for Black women in higher education. Even with the passing of laws to protect Black women from discrimination, they are still at a disadvantage. African American women experience hindrances that do not exist for white women or their male counterparts. The 1960s represented an era of change in the United States in which social and political policies deprived African Americans equal access to pursuing a post-secondary degree (Todd-Breland, 2018). African Americans' enrollment in predominately white institutions of higher learning increased significantly after the 1954 decision by the U.S. Supreme Court in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka Kansas* (Harper, 2019).

The review of literature for this study provides a brief perspective on the history of race and education in America as well as the social and political legislation that presented barriers and opened doors of opportunities in higher education for African Americans. Increasing the representation of African American administrators in higher education will not be achieved until all parties involved are consciously aware of race and gender-specific barriers that must be eliminated to ensure career advancement for Black women. Moreover, Black women students, faculty, and administrators face additional barriers on college campuses due to their race and gender (Candia-Bailey, 2016; Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003).

One way to increase diversity on higher education campuses is to recruit and retain women, especially African American women, into senior-level ranks at the academy (Alexander-Lee, 2014). Strong professional competencies and psychological factors of African American women in academia are needed for Black women to succeed as senior-level administrators in their field (Alexander-Lee, 2014). In addition, some factors, such as knowledge, skills, and specific abilities of African American women, will help advance the educational institution (Javed, Abdullah, Zaffar, & Hague, 2018).

History of Black Women in Higher Education

Around the globe, education is a male-centric environment, and scholarly research on access and leadership is mostly conducted by men with a focus on male leaders. Consequently, gender discrimination has limited access and opportunities for women worldwide. Since slavery in the United States, African American women have been involved in education efforts. It was illegal for enslaved persons to learn to read or write. African American women secretly learned to read and write and taught others to do the same (Poon, 2018). In the late 1750s, a small portion of institutions of higher education permitted African American students to enter their doors. Oberlin College was the first institution of higher education to admit students of color and the first to award degrees to African American women before the Civil War (Fletcher, 1943).

Oberlin College produced some very well-known African American female graduates who made significant contributions to the history of education in Black

America. Although Oberlin College admitted women beginning in 1837, the first educational institution conferring higher degrees to women was Wesleyan Female College of Macon, Georgia (Brubacher & Rudy, 1958). African American women were often denied admissions at multiple colleges and universities throughout America. For example, by the year 1890, only 30 African American women had college degrees in comparison to 300 African American men and 250 White women (Perkins, 2015). The discriminatory practice of not permitting African American men and women to enroll in institutions of higher education created the development of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).

Over a span of 35 years, HBCUs grew and offered increased options for African American women to pursue postsecondary education. Also, the Morrill Land-Grant of 1862 aided in the number of African American women who enrolled in institutions of higher education (Faragher & Howe, 1988). This act required states to admit students to colleges and universities indifferent to their race, or to designate land for colleges to be built to admit students of color. Although land grant institutions and HBCUs offered additional opportunities for African American women to enroll in institutions of higher education, the cost of tuition often prevented many African American women from pursuing postsecondary studies (Faragher & Howe, 1988).

Leadership Perceptions. Historical and contemporary experiences differ from those of White women and Black women. These differing experiences, shaped by the intersection of race and gender, inform the “biases and stereotypes to which

Black women are subject” (Jones & Norwood, 2017, p. 2045). For example, Black women, students, faculty, and administrators face additional barriers on college campuses due to stereotypes related to race and gender (Candia-Bailey, 2016; Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003). These stereotypes impact people’s desires to collaborate with Black women professionally. For example, Lais (2018) described how Black women in leadership positions in education are perceived as “aggressive, strong-willed, difficult to work with, or too pushy” (p. 1). Sanchez-Hucles & Davis (2010) state that popular culture and the media perpetuate stereotypes of Black women, hindering others’ perceptions of them as effective leaders. In addition, stereotypes of White women are focused on their skills; however, Black women encounter stereotypes first about their identity (Brown, 2007). Black women constantly have to control their image and behavior to progress in their chosen careers.

To fully understand the leadership experiences of Black women, one must acknowledge history and oppression through the lens of Black people. Although American history was not always supportive of Black people as a whole, this did not stop Black women from becoming leaders and fighting against racial inequalities.

According to Allen and Lewis (2016):

Well before the civil rights legislation and equal opportunity policies created cracks for some African American women to make their way into leadership positions within corporate, academic, and legal arenas. African American women forged paths of leadership and power in religions, civil rights, and

local community organizations, as well as through less formal channels (Allen & Lewis, 2016, p. 1).

Ida B. Wells-Barnett and Rosa Parks were anti-lynching and anti-rape activists as well as “surrogate mothers” to extended family and community members (Collins, 2000). Mary Bethune, the child of former slaves, is credited for work accomplishments that promoted social justice, including establishing her own institution for “Negro girls” that later became a Historically Black College and University (HBCU) named Bethune Cookman College. Also, she was the president of the National Association of Colored Women of the Florida Chapter (Bonaparte, 2015). In a recent study by Johnson (2021), Black females share lived experiences of identity, equity, isolation, and limited opportunities in higher education. When asked about her transition from K-12 to higher educational leadership, Annie C. said:

You know, academia is very White. It's different. I just feel like there are many more barriers and restrictions or less opportunity for Black women in academia than there are in K-12. I feel like if I wanted to be a building principal or to go in at the district level, honestly, it has crossed my mind, just because I feel like it is not a lot of opportunities or I have not been getting the success that I want from different types of opportunities in higher education. I was like, well, maybe I should just go back in a district and start as an AP [Assistant Principal] and work my way up again because I feel like that would be easier if that's what I really wanted to do. It's not really what I want to do. I really want to teach at the higher education level. (p. 633)

Black Women Leadership at HBCUs

Dean of women was the first leadership position available to women in coeducational institutions dating back as early as the 1890s. As the female population grew on college campuses, women were hired to manage student affairs for female students. For example, Alice Freeman Palmer was the first dean of women at the University of Chicago in 1892 (Sartorius, 2020). In 1922, Lucy Diggs Slowe was hired as a professor of English at Howard University, her alma mater. Concurrently, Slowe became the first African American female to serve as dean of women at the university, making her the first Black woman to hold this position at any university in the United States (Sartorius, 2020). Sarah Jane Woodson Early taught in Ohio at black community schools and was the first principal at a public school in Xenia, Ohio. In 1858, she was hired to teach English at Wilberforce University, making her the first African American woman college instructor and the first to teach at a historically Black college or university (Majors, 1893).

The representation of women in senior leadership in higher education has grown though men still hold most executive leadership positions. In higher education, women account for 71 percent of leadership positions in fiscal affairs, 69 percent in academic affairs, 66 percent in student affairs, and 60 percent in both external affairs and institutional affairs. In these areas, Black or Hispanic women make up just 17 percent, 9 percent, 14 percent, 6 percent, and 12 percent, respectively. In addition, Black or Hispanic women represent only 2 percent of leadership positions in athletics compared to 29 percent of professional women (Bichsel et al., 2019).

Mary McLeod Bethune was the first African American woman to serve as a college president in 1931. In 1990, Marguerite Ross Barnett became the eighth president of the University of Houston, making her the first Black woman to lead a major university. Though the percentage of minorities serving as college presidents has gradually increased over the last 30 years, women of color remain vastly underrepresented in the college presidency. Representation was approximately 9 percent in 2011 at two- and four-year institutions (Cook & Kim, 2012) and shrank to 5 percent in 2016 (American Council on Education, 2017).

The National Center for Education Statistics (2020) defines Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) as institutions established before 1964 with the principal mission of educating Black Americans. These institutions were founded and developed in an environment of legal segregation. By providing access to higher education, HBCUs contributed substantially to Black Americans' progress in improving their status. HBCUs have traditionally been incubators for African American talent in higher education. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, HBCUs have consistently enrolled more Black women than men every year since 1976. In 2020, female enrollment was 64 percent at HBCUs, increasing 53 percent in 1976 (*HBCU Times*). Though most degrees since 2006 have been earned by women (Johnson, 2016), this high level of academic participation does not translate to high representation in leadership roles. Women are disproportionately underrepresented in all leadership positions compared to males (World Economic Forum 2018).

Race and Gender Discrimination

Race and gender discrimination are often concerned with the preservation of privilege. Hossain (2015) points out that White privilege refers to any advantage, opportunity, benefit, head start, or general protection from negative societal mistreatment that persons deemed White will typically enjoy but which others will generally not enjoy. Race and gender discrimination can occur without actually hating another person. African American women in higher education face racism, sexism, climate isolation, and institutional ethos that impact Black women's ability to ascend in their careers (Selzer, Howton, & Wallace, 2017). Research indicates that although leadership opportunities for women in higher education have increased in recent years, there is still a concern for the lack of representation across the academy.

African American women outnumber their Black male counterparts in both degree attainment and academic achievement; however, Black males are represented at higher levels of rank and success (Johnson, 2017). Racism has been a constant in America for more than 400 years and continues today with African American women experiencing double jeopardy—due to their race and gender. Despite advances and breakthroughs by some African American women, they continue to have slower professional mobility, are paid less, and rarely ascend to key leadership positions (CUPA-HR, 2022).

According to the American Council on Education (2017), Leadership at the college and university level is most often that of a married, Caucasian male. The average college president in 2016 was a 62-year-old married white male with a

doctorate (ACE, 2017). The experiences of Black women obviously bring a unique approach and perspective to administrative positions in higher education. In more recent scholarship, the question was raised as to why women are not represented in more upper levels of leadership, considering their gains in being academically credentialed (Johnson, 2017; Smith, 2015). The American Council on Education (ACE) projects that 107,000 women will have attained doctoral degrees by 2024 (Johnson, 2017).

Legislative Action. Despite constitutional advancements, lawmakers have passed legislation suppressing African Americans and other marginalized groups (Lopez, 2006). For many African American students and other disadvantaged students, the passing of the Higher Education Act of 1965 made education more accessible (Ria & Critzer, 2000). The Higher Education Act of 1965 allowed tremendous gains for African American women to have access to institutions of higher education. Efforts of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) during the 1970s also helped African American women and other people of color to gain access to higher education. In 1970, the NAACP filed a lawsuit against the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. This lawsuit forced all public schools that wanted federal funding to cease segregation practices (Roebuck & Murty, 1977). The success of the lawsuit dramatically increased the enrollment of African American women in predominately white institutions.

In the late 1960s and during part of the 1970s, the Civil Rights period unfolded in the United States. Often, African American students enrolled at

predominately White institutions protested and demanded that institutions make greater efforts to accept more African American students, increase the number of African American studies programs being offered, and hire more African American instructors (Allen et al., 2018). Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 also brought forth changes as it forbids “workplace discrimination with regard to hiring, firing, compensation, classification, promotion, and other employment decisions on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion and gender” (Crampton et al., 1997, p. 336). For females, this breakthrough means that they can no longer be discriminated against based on gender. Affirmative Action soon followed the Civil Rights period and resulted in an increase in the number of African Americans who were hired as professors and administrators at colleges and universities (Roebuck & Murty, 1977). It appears that the affirmative action initiatives provided for the hiring of minorities and women did little for promotion and retention (Edwards, 1997; Rusher, 1996). Even today, African American women are still restricted to previously held minority positions and face race and gender discrimination.

Unique Barriers to Leadership for Black Women

Family responsibilities. According to Minoff (2020), African Americans were more consistently a part of the nation’s working class, over a more extended period of time, than any other social, ethnic, or racial group. For Black women and men, slavery required full employment. For Black women being the nucleus or glue for the family while contributing financially is a social norm (Minoff, 2020). According to the study, the two decades following emancipation, when prevailing

norms among the White middle-class held that White women should not work outside the home, Black women living in Southern cities participated in the wage labor force on average three times more than did White women, and married Black women averaged almost six times the labor market participation rate of married White women. Black women worked significantly more than White women in formal, paid, employment, and their labor force participation has been higher ever since (Minoff, 2020).

Banks (2019) noted that Black women always held “the highest levels of labor market participation regardless of age, marital status, or presence of children at home. In 1880, 35.4 percent of married Black women and 73.3 percent of single Black women were in the labor force, compared with only 7.3 percent of married white women and 23.8 percent of single white women” (Banks, 2019, para. 3). For African American women, finding a balance between work and family are essential. In turn, these roles influence the age at which females obtain administrative jobs, a personal barrier that many Black women encounter (Selzer et al., 2017). Nevertheless, their family responsibilities and loyalty to the family is valued. Administrative work involves hard work, lots of people, and politics, which is stressful. African American women are often asked in interviews if family responsibilities, including traveling or working extended hours, will be a problem. These questions are almost never asked of men; thus, family responsibilities can hinder advancement progression for women (Selzer et al., 2017).

Mentorship. Mentorship is essential to leadership development for Black women. According to Helms, Arfken, & Bellar (2016), mentors provide emotional support and feedback, share information about navigating organizational politics, personal interest in increasing their mentee's confidence, and puts an emphasis on not only their mentee's professional development, but their personal growth and development as well. Rising through the ranks of leadership in higher education for Black women is strenuous and likely unachievable without role models and mentors, encouraging women to seek leadership positions. Given the lack of African Americans in leadership positions in higher education, it is to a certain extent challenging to identify peer-to-peer mentors. This barrier limits opportunities for career advancement for African American women in higher education. Having an effective support system aids in developing career opportunities and advancing in higher education (Patitu & Hinton, 2003; West, 2017b). Additionally, Black women are "underrepresented and lack direct access to culturally similar colleagues, mentors, and role models in senior-level leadership positions," which creates the need for supportive, safe spaces for Black women (West, 2017b, p. 82).

Sullivan (2015) notes that mentoring is a goal-centered relationship between mentor and protégé to develop knowledge and competency. Additionally, a mentor is one who "enters into a relationship with a student to offer guidance and encouragement" (p. 7). The definitions above indicate that there must be a relationship between the mentor and mentee that fosters growth and support. Menges (2015) noted career support, psychological support, and personal development

benefits from formal mentoring processes. Literature shows that many Black women face challenges related to academic success, social interactions, finding same-race mentors, and relying on cross-cultural mentoring relationships. Developing the means better to support Black women students through mentorship in higher education is crucial for their overall academic success (Bartman, 2015).

Johnson (2015) noted the significance of mentors in providing social and emotional support for students. Without mentors, Black women lose components of psychological support they may need to be successful on campus. Psychological support includes “affirmation, encouragement, counseling, and friendship” (Johnson, 2015, p. 24). Mentoring has long been suggested as a way to increase female representation in leadership roles (Parker, 2015). Wallace et al., (2014) provided a description of the thought process for choosing mentors from the perspective of Black women in the academy: Black women scholars often seek out their own mentors – both inside and outside of their respective departments, universities, and professional disciplines – with those who not only share their research interests, but also who share similar backgrounds or characteristics, mainly because they view such mentors as trustworthy advocates (Wallace et al., 2014, p. 56).

A common barrier among professional women is competition and a lack of encouragement (Kellerman & Rhode, 2017). Women are usually afraid of seeking advancement opportunities due to a lack of support and encouragement. Because some leadership qualities emulate masculine tendencies, women in leadership positions tend to hold stereotypical gender beliefs against other women (Kellerman &

Rhode, 2017). As a result, women are held to double standards by their male and female colleagues, and bias plays a role in how women are perceived in leadership roles (Kellerman & Rhode, 2017; Zenger & Folkman, 2019). Seeking support, many Black women faculty and administrators connect with other Black women in the academy during professional conferences (Henry & Glenn, 2009). Within higher education, it is suggested that African American women should mentor other African American women. This network of scholars being engaged in mentorship is essential if African American women are expected to see continued success in administration within higher education. Wallace et al., (2014) noted that mentoring relationships aide in overcoming challenges associated with career-advancement for Black women: finding informal networks, monetary resources, and managing professional expectations.

Development. Organizations must invest in developing African American women. By providing opportunities for the development and training of Black women, the institution is investing in the entire organization. According to Pew Research Center (2018), the public sees benefits to female leadership. Majorities say having more women in top positions in business and government would improve the quality of life at least somewhat for all Americans (69%) and for women (77%) and men (57%) specifically. Women are far more likely than men to say having more women in top leadership positions would be beneficial. Two-thirds of women say having more female leaders would improve the quality of life for men at least somewhat, compared with 47% of men. And while majorities in both groups say this

would improve the quality of life for all Americans, women are far more likely than men to say this is the case (78% vs. 59%). In higher education, Black women are often forgotten when it comes to leadership and managerial training. Development opportunities are often provided for those who will hold the top executive positions — their male counterparts or white women.

Lewis (2007) demonstrated diminishing gains in the growth of the number of African Americans who are ascending, in particular, to upper-level administrative positions at institutions of higher learning. The lack of institutional support, the shortage of African American women in entry and mid-level positions, and Black women leaving higher education after attaining their doctoral degrees have all been identified as factors that contribute to their absence from academia at a variety of levels within the USA (Wolfe and Dilworth, 2015). Marginalization, social isolation, limited mentoring opportunities, and unwelcoming campus communities are all environmental factors that have affected the leadership experiences and potential for African American women to be retained and ascend in their careers (Jones, 2013; Wallace et al., 2014).

Socialization. Offermann et al. (2020) found that women have a more difficult time achieving high-status positions in the workplace and in maintaining these positions through achievement and success. Socialization involves both social structure and interpersonal relations. Since the founding of the United States, very few people have controlled wealth and power — and they have historically been white and male. Given that racism is embedded in core social institutions like

education, law, and politics, the social structure also results in a systemically racist society Haslanger (2018). This is also the case for the problem of gender bias and sexism. Brown et al. (2017) found that Black women have simultaneous membership in multiple stigmatized groups based on their racial, ethnic background, and gender. Researchers have advocated for a better understanding of African American women's lived experiences resulting from their intersecting racial and gender identities (Cole 2009; Lewis et al. 2013).

Society assumes females in administrative and leadership positions must behave like males and push their feminine qualities aside. Social constructs dictate how we view leaders and who we accept as leaders (Christmas & McClellan, 2012). The social acceptance of male traits sometimes leads to women imitating their leadership styles, and for Black women this can be problematic, especially considering they are often labeled as "angry Black women." Motro et al. (2021) investigated the implications of the "angry Black woman" stereotype, which depicts Black women as aggressive and hostile in their interactions with others. The study suggests that it is not always appropriate to group all Black employees as the experiences of Black women may be different from the experiences of Black men. Moreover, the study finds that Black men are not penalized for expressing anger at work, only Black women. The angry Black woman stereotype depicts a verbally aggressive, unfeminine Black woman who continuously destroys her Black male partner (Salerno et al., 2017; Walley-Jean, 2009).

Leadership styles. Perceptions on the ways in which women lead are another potential barrier for Black women seeking job advancement. While there is research pointing to the different behaviors that men exhibit from women in leadership, there is no empirical evidence which suggests, regardless of those differences, that women cannot lead at least as well as men (Bolman and Deal, 2013). A leadership style refers to a leader's characteristic behaviors when directing, motivating, guiding, and managing groups of people (Cherry, 2019). Great leaders can inspire political movements and social change. They can also motivate others to perform, create, and innovate (Cherry, 2019). Researchers who have studied the leadership characteristics of African American females generally suggest that these women adopt leadership characteristics of the culture of the institution where they serve (Agosto & Roland, 2018).

Research also shows that Black women leaders face different disadvantages such as being harshly punished for mistakes (Hill, 2016). In one study, researchers found that, given a scenario when a company is presented as failing, participants judged a Black woman CEO more negatively than either a Black man or a White woman executive. Because Black women violate both the gender and racial stereotypes of what a leader or scientist looks like, they are held to higher standards of competence than people who violate only one of these stereotypes (i.e., Black men or White women) (Hill, 2016).

Stereotypes. Stereotypes are a reality for African American women who are often depicted as being too loud, angry, ghetto and even churchy. Because of these

and many more stereotypes, Black women in America face numerous unconscious biases that affect their health, happiness, educational and economic opportunities, from inequality in healthcare to discrimination in the workplace. Gender stereotypical behavior also generates an additional barrier. Females are often viewed as too weak, emotional, irrational, moody, and dramatic to lead others (Elsesser & Lever, 2011). There are several negative stereotypes surrounding women and their abilities to be an effective leader, however, as proven by Hentschel et al. (2019), women have been shown to be just as, if not more, effective than men regarding senior-level leadership. Despite this, there are still negative perceptions, stereotypes, and biases that surround women and the leadership capabilities.

Studies have shown that women possess a leadership style that emphasizes team management as one of the most beneficial leadership styles due to its high regard for people and tasks (De Mascia, 2015). Despite this, there is still a preference for male over female senior managers, making it more difficult for women to ascend to these male-dominated, senior-level positions (Rishani et al., 2015). Women trying to obtain leadership positions often receive a lack of support from their female peers as a result of an unconscious bias. This gender bias has been created by the stereotyping, both conscious and subconscious, of women (Neck, 2015). In contrast to men, women are expected to be compassionate, kind, and nurturing, with a take care disposition.

Men are seen as confident, assertive, and opinionated with a take-charge disposition (Perdue, 2017). In addition, this stereotype makes women appear less

capable of problem-solving, which affects their ability to be seen as effective leaders. Regarding complex decision-making, men are viewed as possessing a “take charge” approach to leadership. Men are thought of as decisive, and women placed in the same position are considered brash and impulsive. Therefore, leadership characteristics seen as positive for men are perceived as unfavorable when displayed by women (Gallagher & Morison, 2019).

Exclusion from informal networks. Another barrier or challenge African American women administrators often face is isolation and underrepresentation. Arnold et al. (2016) contended that when Black faculty members constantly have their credentials questioned, have a heavy workload, are not respected by White colleagues, and are culturally, socially, and professionally alienated, their frustrations can result in strained relationships. Thorpe-Moscon and Pollack (2014) noted that people who feel like an ‘other’ not only feel different but also feel separated from the essential group. . . . People who are different may take on the status of an outsider: they are not truly embraced as part of the team, and they are excluded from opportunities. (p. 2) This exclusion contributes to the lack of African American women in senior-leadership positions.

There is usually just one African American woman in a senior-level administrative position at an institution, and she may never be invited to the table. Past research indicates that members of stigmatized intersectional groups such as Black women perceive both racism and sexism to influence perceptions and reactions against them (Remedios et al., 2020).

The hate and competition from other women, even other Black women not at the table, can be fierce and unfair. Male counterparts in academia with less experience and education possess the power and decide who they invite to sit at the table.

Theoretical Framework

This research uses Black Feminist Thought as the theoretical framework, examining the experiences of Black women's leadership barriers in higher education at HBCUs. In *Black Feminist Thought, 30th Anniversary Edition*, Patricia Hill Collins explores the words and ideas of Black feminist intellectuals. Collins asserts that Black women cannot fully be a member of feminist thought nor Black social thought because the former assumes whiteness while the latter assumes maleness. The makeup of their identity and experiences as Black women maintain their position as outsiders within spaces of oppression (Collins, 2022).

However, as Collins notes, the Black woman's position as an outsider-within provides her with a unique perspective on social, political, intellectual, and economic realities. Therefore, although Black women are marginalized, they can bring a more nuanced outlook to feminist and social thought. (Collins, 2022). Collins highlights that Black feminist thought, as a critical social theory, provides Black women with the tools to resist intersecting oppression. By critical social theory, Collins means that the knowledge of Black feminist thought serves the purpose of ending social and economic injustices.

The goal of Black feminist thought is the realization of justice and empowerment for U.S. Black women and other groups that are similarly oppressed within society (Collins, 2018). The essential tenets of Black feminist thought hold that:

- the economic, political, and social status of Black women in society provides them with a unique set of experiences that give them a viewpoint that is distinct from other member groups,
- as a result of their experiences, Black women have particular knowledge about the world and society that operates on two different levels (race and gender), and
- Black feminist thought encourages self-definition and provides a space for Black women to develop a new consciousness that serves as another tool of resistance to their subordination

The researcher relies on the Black feminist lens to challenge and extend a rigorous research methodology in this study. To examine the experiences of four Black women in leadership roles at HBCUs, the researcher employs Black Feminist Thought (BFT) as a critical social theory and embraces a more comprehensive understanding of BFT as an essential methodology to analyze the Black women experiences shared through narrative. This theoretical and methodological approach offers a pathway for education and research communities to account for the expansive possibilities that black feminism has for theorizing the lives of Black women.

According to Patton et al. (2015), three approaches define Black feminist thought. First, the framework is shaped and produced by Black women (although it may be documented by others); second, there are many commonalities of their experiences and perceptions shared as a group; and third, although commonalities exist, there are distinct differences and diversities (such as class, region, age, and sexual orientation). Craig et al. (2020) posits that those individuals who are classified as marginal are discriminated against due to their membership in a particular group and rendered as invisible. Sims and Carter (2022), however, has extensively researched the interpretation of marginality and argues that it can be constructive for Black female administrators.

Dickens and Chavez (2018) suggest that the double identity of Black women can result in being forced to reject her culture, feminism, or both. For acceptance, which can result in Black women being tolerated or temporarily included, but still subject to unique experiences of discrimination based on Black women's race and gender. Although progress has been slowly attained in the last several years, it remains that the inclusion of Black female professionals within the senior ranks of the academy is particularly difficult, primarily due to the dominance of White males. Fundamentally, the primary concern is defined as a power struggle, a struggle in which White males view the construct of power as non-accessible to others, and as Dickens and Chavez (2018) argues, the less power they obtain and control, the weaker position they are in.

Women can experience additional career development challenges, including gender discrimination and competing responsibilities. Women CEOs reported feeling they needed to take a more cautious approach to make decisions (Athanasopoulou *et al.*, 2018). Further, the leadership positions offered to women might indeed be riskier than positions taken up by men. Stereotypes of career paths and expected behaviors serve to undermine the rate and level of women's professional development and advancement. Women experience challenges in career advancement in part due to stereotypical gender bias (Oh *et al.*, 2019). Kurupparachchi and Surangi (2020) identified the glass ceiling as a barrier to women's career advancement since baby boomer generation women began confronting gender bias in the 1970s (Howe & Strauss, 2007).

Despite public proclamations from university leaders that college campuses are committed to advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion in their organizations, faculty demographics have generally remained stagnant, suggesting little progress in institutionalizing these aspirations. Approximately 75 percent of all faculty members in U.S. colleges and universities are White, whereas only 55 percent of the overall student population is White (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). Mentoring is primarily viewed as an institutional investment to set up a faculty member to meet prescribed reappointment, promotion, and tenure expectations (Dolan *et al.*, 2018; Filetti, 2009).

Even though African American women have earned more degrees and have vastly more experience than their White counterparts, they still face numerous

barriers that prevent career advancement. The lack of African American females in the ranks of higher education proves racial, and gender inequity still exists. Education is a strong attribute among many African American women due to their ability to rise above challenges and master goals (Craig et. al, 2020). The road to establishing change is based upon breaking barriers and on building bridges to success.

Conscience actions contribute to a more inclusive work environment. Institutions must be intentional in providing opportunities for Black women at every level of the organization. All employees including current leaders, no matter their gender or race, should be committed to creating a culture where all voices are heard, and all perspectives are considered without judgment. Furthermore, African American women must proactively address inequities that continue to exist. This, coupled with development opportunities for women, is key in overcoming advancement barriers for African American women in higher education.

This research draws attention to a significant gap in the literature on African American female administrators and how race and gender impacts their career advancement experiences in higher education. By sharing their experiences and perspectives regarding advancement barriers, the women contribute to the legacy of African American females in higher education roles. This research allows the participants to share their perceptions of the constructs of the study, and to share their challenges, successes, and goals in higher education. This research serves as an opportunity for Black women to offer recommendations and ideas for those women who will seek senior-level positions in higher education.

Higher Education Leadership Foundation

According to its website, the Higher Education Leadership Foundation (HELFF), founded in March 2015, aims to develop leaders by exposing them to innovative ideas, scholars, successful practitioners, and expert administrators from across the country. Through this work, the Foundation seeks to reframe the narrative around leadership at HBCUs, enabling these historic institutions to continue their growth and sustainability while advancing the institutions' missions and HELFF's mission to lead, inspire, and lift. The primary focus of HELFF is to strengthen the leadership pipeline for administrators at the nation's Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

HELFF believes in the importance of HBCUs and preparing visionary leadership through best practices and time-honored traditions of success. Since its establishment, seven percent of HELFF fellows (27) have ascended to the rank of president or cabinet-level positions. These 27 leaders impact over 70,000 students across 19 universities, 13 states, and the District of Columbia. The four women participating in this study represent various HBCUs in the Southern states and are graduates of HELFF. This study examines the women's perceptions of leadership barriers while working in the chief of staff, vice president, and executive director roles and how the barriers impacted leadership advancement and strategies used to overcome the barriers.

Summary

The researcher presents a review of literature providing historical highlights of the political and social issues affecting African Americans and African American women in their pursuit of equal access to educational opportunities. To date, the most renowned piece of academic legislation is *Brown v. Board of Education 1954* (McNeal, 2009). Ria and Critzer (2002) also contend that the passing of the Higher Education Act of 1965 made education more accessible for many African American students. Chapter II provides the credibility required to justify the study and closely examine the relationship between race, gender, and barriers in higher education. The chapter concludes with an overview of Black Feminist Thought as the theoretical framework to examine the issues reflected in African American women's experiences.

Chapter 3

Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative research is to investigate the perceptions of leadership advancement barriers of African American women who have attained mid-level or higher leadership positions in higher education, successful strategies used to overcome barriers. A qualitative research methodology was selected for this study to help higher education institutions understand more about the barriers African American women face in their pursuit of leadership positions.

A Qualitative Approach

This study employed a qualitative approach to investigate the two research questions:

- (1) What barriers did four African American women identify as they pursued leadership positions at Historically Black Colleges and Universities?
- (2) What strategies do African American women identify as effective in overcoming leadership advancement barriers?

Creswell and Creswell (2018) note qualitative data is used to understand complex concepts, experiences, and opinions to develop new insights into problems and highlight the participants' stories. This qualitative study explores Black women administrators' perceptions with leadership barriers in higher education at HBCUs. Researchers conducting phenomenological studies are interested in understanding the essence of particular group or individual experiences (Davis, 2012).

Phenomenology was the methodology selected because it provides a detailed description of the women's experiences (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). This phenomenological study explores the lived experiences of four African American female administrators who are graduates of HELF, serving in mid-to senior-level positions at HBCUs. This study highlighted the essence of those experiences. With this method and the focus on Black female administrators' experiences, the study seeks to gather rich data on the experiences of study participants.

Not only does a phenomenological approach allow researchers to describe how and what participants experience, but it also requires researchers to look for the underlying meaning in the ways respondents talk about their experiences (Vagle, 2010). Such an examination, in the end, informs an understanding of how the interaction of both race and gender affects Black female administrators' experiences in higher education. By using qualitative methods, the study offers discourse to enhance my understanding as an African American female researcher, the administrators' understanding as participants, and the readers' understanding. The researcher engages this study and contributes to the research on African American female administrators with respect to her background, race, gender, and lived experiences. Generett and Jeffries (2003) propose that Black women researchers must consider the places they are reared, their gender, race, class, and ability that play a crucial role in developing and shaping their experiences and also the experiences of their participants.

Participants

Thirteen African American women who self-identified as Black and serve in mid-to senior-level leadership positions at HBCUs were qualified to participate in the study. Black women holding mid-to senior-level leadership positions at HBCUs who graduated from HELF were identified. Four women agreed to be interviewed, and returned their demographic questionnaire and informed consent form. Participants were selected using purposeful sampling. Patton (2002) describes the design strategy of purposeful sampling as one in which participants are selected because they are, “information rich and illuminative and offer useful manifestation of the phenomenon of interest” (p. 40). Palinkas, et al. (2015) note that purposeful sampling is advantageous when participants are included according to the relevancy of the criteria, based on the emerging research questions and also the researcher’s perception of their ability to contribute to the study.

The research criteria for participants for this study included the following: self-identified as African American, female, served in a leadership position that is mid-to senior-level, and employed at an HBCU. Four African American women were identified who worked in various mid-to senior-level leadership positions at HBCUs. Participants who responded to the original email represented a cross-section of university positions and a sampling of the experiences of African American women at public institutions. While public or private was not specified as a criterion, all women had their mid-level or above rank experiences at public HBCUs. The participants

represented a diverse group of positions—chief of staff, vice president, and executive director from institutions throughout the Southern states.

The Black females were selected in an effort to investigate their perceived barriers to leadership advancement, mentoring relationships they experienced in HELF, and more importantly, the career path they took to get to their current positions. Their experiences, particularly achieving mid-to senior-level roles, contributes to the body of literature on African American females and the relevancy of their perceptions of leadership advancement barriers. For the purpose of anonymity, neither participants' names nor their institutions will be identified in the findings. The study uses pseudonyms instead of identifiable information.

Participants' Demographic Characteristics

This research included Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). There are currently 101 HBCUs, and the majority are concentrated in the Southern United States. This research included four states: Alabama, Tennessee, Kentucky, and Mississippi. Individuals who met the inclusion criteria were selected, and the researcher emailed a demographic questionnaire. Participation was sought from Black women educational leaders who graduated from the Higher Education Leadership Foundation. In addition, the women must be currently working for a Historically Black College and University (HBCU).

The Higher Education Leadership Foundation (HELF) believes in the importance of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and preparing visionary leadership through best practices and time-honored traditions of success.

The overall population of this group is 13. Out of 13 Black female leaders, only four participants responded to various methods of communication for study inclusion, such as phone calls, emails, letters, texts, and requests of colleagues in the HELF leadership. These interviews lasted 45 to 60 minutes and were conducted remotely via Zoom platform, recording only the audio version of responses. After recorded interviews, individual responses were transcribed and later coded.

Establishing Validity

To ensure the interview questions (Appendix D) used in the study were free of bias and were clear, the researcher consulted colleagues. Student Affairs professionals (3 Black professionals and one White professional) and two human resource professionals (1 Black and 1 White) were identified as content experts to review questions, share feedback, and validate that the questions aligned with the study's research questions. Student Affairs was selected as the area of focus since most African American women working in higher education are administrators in residence life, diversity and inclusion, student conduct, and student success. Human resource professionals were selected because of their knowledge and expertise in hiring policies. In addition, University colleagues were familiar with African American administrators in higher education and used this familiarity to provide feedback on the study's interview questions (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Data Collection

The researcher secured Morehead State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. To gain a better understanding of Black women's lived experiences as

leaders in higher education, the researcher employed a qualitative approach. The researcher recruited Black women from HELF who serve as administrators for HBCUs. HELF provides its membership with the names, email addresses and other identifiable information, so the researcher communicated electronically with Black females that met the criteria for participation. The purpose of the study was explained along with an invitation to participate. Once the Black women accepted the invitation to participate in the study, the researcher emailed an electronic copy of the consent form (Appendix A) and the demographic questionnaire (Appendix C).

The demographic questionnaire provides the researcher with demographic and preliminary background information prior to the interview. Respondents were given an opportunity to review the consent form prior to participating in the study and encouraged to ask any questions of the researcher. Indicative of qualitative studies, ethical issues relating to the protection of the participants is a primary concern (Merriam, 2015). Confidentiality is the process of protecting the identity of participants in research. To ensure confidentiality, each participant was assigned a pseudonym for the study, and the name of the university was kept confidential.

The researcher used Zoom to conduct the interviews. The interview protocol was emailed to each participant, allowing an opportunity to ask any questions or express any concerns with the process. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) posit three types of interview processes: structured, semi-structured, and unstructured/informal. This research used semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews allowed for a combination of more and less structured interview questions, flexibility in questions

posed, and the order questions were presented. According to Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014), semi-structured questions allow the interviewer and the interviewee to participate in discussions in real-time. Conducting semi-structured interviews also provides opportunity and flexibility for unanticipated topics to arise, allowing the interviewer to explore the interviewee's responses in greater detail.

The researcher recorded each interview session and listened carefully to each recording at least three times. First, the researcher listened to transcribe for accuracy. The second time was to pay attention to key issues and categories of participants' responses. The researcher used member checking, also known as participant or respondent validation, as a technique for exploring the credibility of results (Birt et al., 2016). Member checking occurred when the researcher emailed a copy of the findings to each participant and then followed up via email to clarify any aspects of the transcribed recording.

The researcher collected survey responses of the demographic questionnaire via Qualtrics online software, and the researcher concurrently collected further information through a review of the participants' vita. Research questions were addressed by using an established interview protocol with each participant. The researcher identified themes in participants' responses related to the research questions. Themes included: visibility and voice, race versus gender, knowing the culture and strategies to support Black women. Sub-themes were also identified as appropriate.

Data Analysis

Qualitative case study methodology relies on qualitative data analysis guidelines. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) note that the researcher in a qualitative study is simultaneously involved in data analysis while collecting the data. The data analysis for this study coincided with the data collection process. Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) recommend reviewing the transcript a few times and listening to it as well. The researcher made notes while reflecting on the interviews. The researcher observed body language, voice tone, and ways to improve upon the interview techniques the next time and responses made by the participants in which the researcher may have wanted to probe into more.

According to Bogdan and Biklen (2003), data analysis is defined as a process that involves “working with data, organizing and breaking into manageable units, synthesizing and searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others” (p. 145). The researcher utilized member checking throughout this study. After transcribing the data, the researcher sent the transcript to the participant for member verification. Participants had the opportunity to make revisions by removing or revising statements for confidentiality or clarification. While awaiting confirmation of member checks, the initial data review began with personal interview notes. Analysis was ongoing as the researcher continually reviewed the transcripts. For this study, the recorded interviews were transcribed, read several times by the researcher, and hand coded by the researcher

into themes and categories related to the research question. Participants verified and offered feedback upon review of the interview transcripts.

Gall et al. (2003) define interpretive analysis as a method by which researchers closely analyze data to identify emerging themes and patterns to explain a phenomenon being examined. The researcher organized individual interviews and questionnaires responses into a Microsoft Word document for review. The researcher then organized data into groups that revealed recurring themes and patterns. Next, the researcher examined the data according to similar themes to investigate relationships within the categories. This allowed the researcher to develop constructs that emerged from each category (Ary et al., 2002). The researcher also determined how these data answered the study's research questions. As the data were analyzed, themes gradually emerged, allowing the researcher to connect the data and the interview questions and the results of the interviews with the review of existing literature.

Ethical Considerations

Given this study involved people participating and contributing to the understanding of lived experiences of Black women in higher education leadership roles at HBCUs, the researcher established safeguards to protect and respect participants' rights. Creswell (2014) pointed out some ethical issues that may occur during a study and ways to avoid those issues from happening. Therefore, the researcher protected participants' rights by: obtaining IRB approval for the research design, securing written and verbal consent from participants before participation in the study, and using pseudonyms to protect identities. Therefore, it is critical as a

researcher to consider biases and preferences brought to the study. To safeguard against this, all the study participants received a copy of transcripts to confirm accuracy. The researcher remained transparent throughout the study to ensure its credibility and trustworthiness.

Researcher Bias

Researcher's Voice as a Black Female Administrator. As a Black female raised in the heart of the South of Mississippi, the researcher was taught at an early age — the power of education. This lesson the researcher learned from her illiterate grandmother, who had no formal education. Even today, the researcher is in frequent communication with her first-grade teacher, Mrs. Crump. As a young child, the researcher was often told she talked too much and to be quiet. Crump instilled in the researcher that her voice was powerful and to use her voice. She articulated to the researcher that she was a leader, and allowed her five minutes at the end of the day to recap what the class had learned. Crump gave the researcher a stage to speak up. In second grade and throughout her K-12 education, the researcher experienced racism. Still, the researcher learned always to use her voice to balance matters of challenge and conflict. The researcher acquired the ability to financially support her family and the underserved community at a young age.

At the age of 16, sports participation ended, the researcher started working two jobs while in high school. The researcher discovered quickly that females were treated differently in the workplace. This fueled the researcher's desire to find ways to end injustices and inequities one often faces during life's journey. The researcher

pursued positions of leadership throughout her career. As such, the researcher was well aware of the mistreatment of African American women in the workplace. When the researcher transitioned from the corporate sector to higher education, she faced persistent advancement barriers and unfair treatment as an educated, Black woman.

In the corporate sector, the researcher was often the only Black person employed in her area. The researcher navigated the space of being “invisible” or being left out of the decision-making process. However, the barriers, the researcher encountered in higher education proved to be beyond challenging. The researcher’s experiences in higher education have fueled her interest to understand the lack of Black female representation in senior-level positions in the academy. The literature in higher education lacks a focus on African American female administrators, who unlike students, do not experience supportive measures for advancement in their careers. This is why the researcher selected to investigate this dilemma in her research. A qualitative research design affords the researcher the opportunity to examine the rich experiences of educated Black women who have achieved a level of success and have a story to voice.

Although African American women are pursuing and completing academic degrees, they are not yet fully visible within the senior ranks of administration in the academy. Thus, the focus of the researcher’s doctoral work is to add to the literature on the barriers Black women face in seeking career advancement, and to generate change in higher education as well. The researcher feels this study provides substantive knowledge on the perceptions of advancement barriers of African

American female administrators. Investigating the intersections of race and gender for the African American female is a necessary task.

Anna Julia Cooper conveyed, “Only the Black woman can say when and where I enter, in the quiet, undisputed dignity of my womanhood, without violence and without suing or special patronage, then and there the whole Negro race enters with me” (Alexander, 2019, p.31). The double identity of the African American female requires her to build upon her strengths and challenge those weaknesses that may hinder her career advancement. Having a solid understanding of the barriers preventing career advancement, and the success strategies to eliminate them can be effective as a tool for African American women seeking advancement in higher education.

The researcher acknowledges being a Black female with lived experiences in higher education, having worked for Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) and HBCUs. The researcher has observed that expanding our notion of leadership is paramount to increasing the representation of African American women in senior positions in higher education. The researcher acknowledges that every institution must question what policies, practices, or team-level processes the institution has implemented to reduce bias, enhance inclusion, and drive more significant team outcomes.

As an African American woman, the researcher was excluded from experiences that would have given her access and knowledge to navigate the culture and climate of higher education that may have facilitated career development and

advancement. With this in mind and to mitigate possible biases as a researcher, the researcher made a conscious effort to avoid giving voice to my empathy during interviews while participants narrated their lived experiences and described their perceptions about what had happened to them. Before conducting this research, the researcher reflected on her path to becoming an administrator in higher education.

The researcher acknowledges being a Black female with lived experiences as a Black woman administrator in higher education at an HBCU. Creswell and Creswell and Creswell (2018) defined reflexivity as the researcher's ability to reflect on their "biases, values, and personal backgrounds, culture, and experiences hold for shaping their interpretations" (p.182). The researcher is not very different from the participants in the study in terms of race, gender, education, and social-economic class.

Triangulation

Triangulation is another way to maintain the study's trustworthiness because it helps to minimize the threat of researcher bias. Triangulation is a method used to judge the validity and accuracy of data by comparing differing points of view (Creswell, 2014). Source triangulation was used throughout this study. In this study, the various triangulated sources included interviews, sharing of published works, and resumes.

Transferability

According to Polit and Beck (2014), the nature of transferability, the extent to which findings are useful to persons in other settings, is different from other aspects

of research in that readers determine how applicable the findings are to their situations. To ensure transferability, background demographic data was collected from each participant. Additionally, each participant's institutional website was viewed for gender bias by checking the makeup of the university leadership. Finally, to help ensure transferability, the researcher documented and described the research process, including data collection and analysis procedures and participant recruitment.

Summary

Chapter III describes the research methodology used to collect data about the lived experiences of African American women graduates of HELF employed at HBCUs in the Southern states. The phenomenological research is detailed and pertinent to ensuring the data collected is in-depth using multiple sources of information-rich in context (Creswell, 2014). This chapter also provided information on the research and target population for this study and selected participants. Using purposeful sampling to select the sample population, the researcher collected data from participants who met the selection criteria. The researcher used semi-structured questions to conduct interviews.

Chapter 4

Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine the leadership journey and experiences of four African American women in senior-level positions working in higher education. Specifically, it investigated Black women's perceptions of leadership barriers and identified strategies to overcome factors contributing to the lack of advancement of Black women into leadership roles at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). In addition, this qualitative phenomenological investigation was to give voice to the lived experiences of African American women administrators who graduated from the Higher Educational Leadership Foundation (HELFF) and work at four-year HBCUs.

This chapter discusses the concepts that emerged from the qualitative data collected and an analysis of the data obtained from the participants in the study. This chapter will present findings that emerged from data collected and analyzed using the theoretical framework for this study. Black Feminist Thought was the theoretical framework that informed the study. The theoretical framework provided a better understanding of Black women leaders' experiences in higher education as they strived for leadership positions. This chapter explores the four Black women executive leaders working at four different HBCUs in the Southern States. Additionally, it captures the common themes and patterns that emerged.

Given that the names of the participants and their institutions are confidential within this study, the researcher has given the participants pseudonym names, P1

through P4, have summarized each participant's leadership journey and experiences. Any identifiable information that could potentially identify the participants has been omitted. Table 1 describes the participants as it relates to demographics such as age, marital status, the number of children, and who raised the participants as a child. Additionally, Table 1 reveals that all of the participants in the study were between the ages of 39 to 64, and most were reared with both parents in the home. In addition, it indicates that the immediate family structure of the participants included the following: Three participants were married, and one participant was divorced. One participant had no children, while another had only one child, one had four children, and the remaining participant had two children. Therefore, most participants have had families throughout their leadership journey and balanced the demands of a career with family responsibilities.

Table 1.

Participants' Demographics

Participant's Pseudonym	Age	Marital Status	# of Children	Primary Rearing
P1	51	Married	1	Both Parents
P2	42	Married	4	Both Parents
P3	64	Divorced	2	Mother
P4	39	Married	0	Both Parents

Table 2 displays the educational and leadership characteristics of the participants. Two participants hold doctoral degrees considering education attainment: a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) and a Doctor of Education (EdD), P1 and

P2. It is important to note that all participants except one earned graduate degrees. Table 2 shows that all participants have between 15 to 21 years of higher education experience, including their current position in executive leadership. Table 2 also shows that only one participant has been in their current leadership position for one year. In contrast, the other participants have two to five years of experience in existing roles. It describes that all the participants work at 4-year HBCUs in four Southern states, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, and Kentucky.

Table 2.

Participants’ Leadership Profile

Participant’s Pseudonym	Current Position	# of Years in Position	# of Years in Higher ED	Degrees Attained	Institution Type/State
P1	Executive Director	2	16	Bachelor’s Master’s EdD	4-year HBCU/TN
P2	Vice President	2	19	Bachelor’s Master’s PhD	4-year HBCU/AL
P3	Chief of Staff	5	21	Bachelor’s	4-year HBCU/KY
P4	Vice President	1	15	Bachelor’s Master’s	4-year HBCU/MS

P1 began her professional career as an adjunct professor in 2006 and now serves as an executive director at an HBCU in Tennessee where she has been employed for three years. P1 has always worked in higher education and served as a vice provost prior to her current role which she has held for two years. P1 holds a

doctoral degree in women in education leadership. She is 51 years of age and married with one child.

P2 describes herself as an HBCU enthusiast and has worked in higher education for more than 19 years. She was promoted from dean of students to vice president for an HBCU in Alabama. She has served in her current role for two years. P2 began her professional career as an assistant professor at a community college. She earned a doctoral degree in counseling psychology. P2 is 42 years of age and married with four children.

P3 is a chief of staff at an HBCU in Kentucky. P3 has over 30 years of executive management experience. She worked her way up from a receptionist to an administrator. P3 has worked in higher education for 21 years and in her current position for five years. She is currently pursuing a master's degree in accounting and holds Bachelor's degrees in business administration. She is 64 years of age, divorced and has two adult children.

P4 transitioned from a director of communications to vice president role at an HBCU in Mississippi. She began her career as an administrative assistant and others encouraged her to climb the corporate ladder and pursue roles in leadership. P4 is 39 years of age, married and does not have any children. She has worked at her current institution for five years and in her current role for one year. P4 earned her master's degree in communications from a Predominately White Institution (PWI).

Detailed Analysis

The four African American women who participated in this study yielded significant findings aligned with the current literature on difficulties Black women face in obtaining and retaining leadership roles in higher education. Each participant shared their lived truths navigating a system not constructed with Black women in mind. Interviews were conducted via the Zoom platform. During the interviews, the researcher invited participants to share what they were most comfortable sharing and allowed the space for flexibility and grace. Given all the women were instrumental in leading change on their campuses during the COVID-19 pandemic, they all shared the burden of being overworked and the obligation they felt to ensure student success. With the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the pressure of establishing a new higher education normal, the women expressed the exhaustion they were feeling and appreciation to the researcher for documenting their experiences. Below are a set of detailed findings collected from participants related to each of the research questions and questions that guided interviews.

Interview Questions

Interview questions were designed based on these research questions and literature: (1) What barriers did African American women identify as they pursued leadership positions? (2) What strategies do African American women identify as effective in overcoming leadership advancement barriers?

The following interview questions guided this study (Appendix D):

1. Describe your experiences as an African American woman working in a leadership role in higher education?
2. How, if any, do you believe your experiences have differed as an African American woman?
3. How do those differences impact your daily experiences and responsibilities in your leadership role?
4. Tell me about some barriers you experienced, if any, when you entered or while serving in your current leadership role?
5. Please share how you dealt with barriers you have experienced?
6. If any, what barriers exist within your institution that currently impact your career progression or that of other African American women?
7. What strategies, if any, have you identified that will assist in advancing Black women to leadership roles at your institution?

Themes and Sub-themes

Table 3 summarizes the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the participants’ responses to the interview questions.

Table 3.

Themes and Subthemes

Research Question Phrase	Theme	Sub-theme
Major experiences	Visibility and voice	Racism and sexism Exclusion Lack of diversity
Black and female	Race and gender discrimination	Intellectually inferior The only and the first Institutional culture
Career progression	Relationships matter	Development Student success Mentoring

Strategies for success	Above and beyond expectations	Over prepared/over worked Know who you are Flexibility and adaptability
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The pathways that led to higher education leadership positions for the African American women who participated in this research study are diverse. However, all of the participants indicated that their background and educational experiences prepared them to face the academy’s invisibility and use their voice.

Theme 1. Visibility and Voice. Black women experience unique consequences due to their race and gender identities. This was illustrated in the participants’ responses.

P4 stated that she started her academic career as an administrative assistant in the communication division, and she had earned her master's degree in communications. Still, none of her male supervisors would consider her viewpoints or suggestions. P4 recalled:

None of my male supervisors saw me or took an interest in my career aspirations. I was never invited to attend our divisional meetings, but I always set up the technology and prepared the coffee. The white female receptionist was allowed to attend the meetings. She had a GED. I eventually stopped trying to be a part of the team. Then, she enters, a Black female boss, and on day one, she requests my resume. She informs me that I have the freedom to rewrite my job description. The exclusion of Black women in our division ended that day. (P4, personal communication, December 5, 2021)

P3 credits strong women at her institution for teaching other women how to use their voices. P3 explained how she received an invitation to attend a homecoming meeting in the President's conference room, easily sitting 20 people at the conference table and having just as many seats around the wall. Well, a female director sat in the male CFO chair. She did not know it was where he usually sat. Upon his arrival, he requested she move out of his seat. She replied, "I did not know we had assigned seats." He said, "That's my seat." She moved out of his chair. He left the conference room to retrieve a file. This Black female vice president immediately took his seat. She was not even seated at the table but on the wall. Everyone looked at her with amazement. Like did she not just witness what he did. The CFO returns and begins to walk towards his seat. She looked up and said, "Every seat in this room is important. I recommend you take a vacant seat." Every woman on campus still speaks of that day when a woman used her voice to teach: women belong in the room, at the table, and in the coveted seat.

P1 shared Black women had to balance being outspoken and speaking their truth at her institution. She stated:

I cannot express my truth because it severely impacts my career progression when I speak up for my students, myself, or others. When I speak up, I am uninvited to meetings and networking events. The lack of support and diversity creates an environment that suffocates and strategically silences Black women. (P1, personal communication, December 11, 2021)

In speaking of being visible and using one's voice, P1 mentioned the terms in some combination six times. Overall, participants in the study used some variation 27 times.

Sub-themes. In navigating the intersections of racism, sexism, exclusion, and lack of diversity (Research Question 1), participants collectively shared, “there is usually only one Black female in a leadership role, and that does not mean she has any power. It is lonely at the top.” In addition, all four participants spoke about the lack of diversity at their institutions, exclusion from relevant meetings and information, and how they experience racism and sexism because they are both Black and female.

Sub-theme 1: racism and sexism

All of the participants described how their identities had impacted their leadership journey in higher education. The participants are fully aware of how it feels to be judged negatively as a woman, a Black person, and a Black woman. The participants expressed that as a Black female, they do not get to decide how others view them. When asked how they identified, all paused and carefully answered as a “Black woman.” According to Rosenthal (2016), intersectionality highlights the importance of attending to multiple, intersecting identities and ascribed social positions (e.g., race, gender, sexual identity, class) along with associated power dynamics, as people are at the same time members of many different social groups and have unique experiences with privilege and disadvantage because of those intersections (p. 475). P4 shared her perceptions as it relates to her identity:

I never have to be reminded that I am Black, a woman, and young. Yet, there is not a door that I enter that others in academia do not interject my race, gender, and or age. I have heard, “You are the first Black person we’ve ever hired... I didn’t know Black people ate sushi. “Or” That hairstyle makes you look so much younger.” (P4, personal communication, December 5, 2021)

Sub-theme 2: exclusion

P2 candidly discussed her feelings about exclusion from divisional meetings and information on development opportunities, tenure, and promotion. P2 described her racial identity as complicated. “I am a dark-skinned Black woman. Colorism is an additional racial barrier for me as a Black woman.” I stopped questioning if my skin color was lighter or brown if my colleagues would feel more comfortable including me. As a Black woman, I was often the last to receive information to benefit my career aspirations. My tenure and promotion packet got flagged because all of my research appeared in the same journals. A White colleague shared her tenure and promotion packet (she received tenure and promotion three years ago). She only published her research in the local newspaper, which does not meet the qualification for promotion. Even if this was grounds to flag my packet, and it was not, excluding me from meetings concerning the process was a challenge. (P2, personal communication, December 4, 2021)

Sub-theme 3: lack of diversity

All participants spoke about the lack of diversity regarding the representation of Black females in leadership positions at their HBCUs. “Many women in leadership

roles appear to be non-African American women now, and it seems that HBCUs are hiring more females that are not Black.” P2 shared. P1 believes that Black female faculty members are leaving HBCUs because it is difficult to move through the ranks as a Black woman at HBCUs. After all, men maintain the decision-making control. P4 mentioned that she experienced job satisfaction and promotion while working with a female leader versus a male leader. P4 also stated that she has had only one Black female leader in her 15-year higher education career.

Theme 2. Race and Gender Discrimination. All participants in the study spoke of their lived experiences of being the “first” or “only” Black female in the room. P2 had to gather herself as she shared a painful memory of being overlooked for a job that went to a white female with no experience. All participants in the study spoke of their lived experiences of being the “first” or “only” Black female in the room. P2 paused on more than one occasion to gather herself as she recalled the painful disappointment of being Black and qualified. P2 shared:

This job was a perfect match for my educational background and experience. It was like the institution designed the job specifically for me. But unfortunately, I was informed that I was too young to get the job in my final interview. I was asked to train a White woman with seniority but no experience or necessary credentials. I immediately looked for another position. My entire career as a short, dark-skinned Black woman, I have been overlooked for leadership opportunities because of how I look or am

considered to be intellectually inferior? (P2, personal communication, December 4, 2021)

P3 discussed how Black women must know every student regardless of their race and gender but primarily deal with all of the Black or students of color. P3 said:

As a Black woman in this male-dominated profession, I believe that everyone thinks it is my responsibility to take care of the children. I don't know if this is a reality linked to slavery. It feels as if they want you to work in the fields, cook in the main house, take care of the master's family, and take care of your family with permission. It is all too much being a woman is taxing and my most significant barrier. (P3, personal communication, December 12, 2021)

Sub-themes. Participants agreed that learning how others see you will help you manage potential barriers to promotion (Research Question 1). In addition, the participants expressed concerns about the institutional culture, being the first or only Black female, and being viewed as intellectually inferior.

Sub-theme 1: intellectually inferior

As Black women, we are automatically accepted as a recipient of a less advantaged background, according to P3. It does not matter how credentialed you are or how much experience you have. You will never appear as “capable” in your coworkers’ reality. P3 shared:

There are more assumptions about what I know because of how I speak, how I dress, and how they think I was raised. But, what is so amazing to me is that they do not understand that our mothers, grandmothers, aunts, and teachers

trained us (Black women) always to show up prepared. Because if we show up incomplete, they win. That's why we are over-prepared and overworked. It is unfair, and we should not have to be three times as good as our counterparts to be considered competent. My experience has been that they will see you as intellectually inferior until you prove them wrong. (P3, personal communication, December 12, 2021)

Sub-theme 2: the only and the first

Three participants expressed holding a position in their careers because the employer had to have a Black woman in a leadership position. P1 described her experience in a job that would determine if other Black women would be allowed to follow. She said:

Whether you are the first or only Black woman to serve in a leadership position, you will suffer from having your credentials and expertise questioned. The workload will be heavy, and the students will need you to be all things to them. In addition, the job is lonely and challenging because you cannot be "all" and "do" all, and the White faculty will not respect you.

Sub-theme 3: institutional culture

Participants in the study expressed that institutional culture response or lack thereof affects if Black women in leadership roles are considered tokens or treated with respect. P4 noted that Black women are marginalized and often not respected in public spaces in higher education. This general disrespect from faculty and other institutional employees lessens our "power" and "influence." P4 believes institutions

must do more to protect and promote Black women. Creating a policy on policies committee to ensure equity and inclusion should be an easy decision for all institutions but it is not.

Theme 3. Relationships matter. Despite having years of experience coupled with credentials and degrees to obtain a leadership role, the theme of feeling like leadership roles were based on relationships or support from peers was highlighted throughout interviews by participants. P1 and P2 expressed difficulties with the tenure and promotion process and spoke to the value of developing relationships with those seeking to exclude you from the academy. All four Black women leaders' institutions have an espoused value of representation and diversity. However, all of them note that it is not reflected in leadership. All participants acknowledged that the overall lack of representation was a burden they carried while many of their institutions espoused values, including diversifying the workforce. As Black female leaders, some worked with several other people of color (i.e., Black women and men) and had the space to speak to common experiences. P1 said:

It is sad to have discussions with your peers about how you will be discriminated against because you do not fit their description of what the academy historically looks like, white and male. We have to lose ourselves to fit into their box to pass every test and jump over every hurdle. It impacts your mental health and ability to thrive. (P1, personal communication, December 11, 2021)

P3 expressed how important it is to have the support of your family and a network of peers to support you in an environment that is not designed for you. She noted:

Everyone knows that there will only be one or two Black people in leadership. And the chances that a Black woman will hold one of the positions are always slim. Black women have pressure balancing being a wife, mother, successful employee, and community leader, among other roles. There is no support system or a safe place to discuss how I feel at my institution. (P3, personal communication, December 12, 2021)

Sub-themes. The Black women in the study feel passionately that their work is a calling. P4 shared that it was a blessing to support the dreams and aspirations of Black students and underserved populations. Even though I love my job, I could not do it without my faith and support system, including my family and mentors (Research Question 2). P4 explained how vital it was for her as a Black woman to attend professional development conferences and ensure student success.

Sub-theme 1: development

P4 explained that she could not perform at the level she does without her Lord and Savior. “I believe that all power rests with God and not men that gets me through the storm,” she said. P4 linked her personal development to her faith and said:

I am leading while Black and female. For me, it would not be possible without God. I am a “survivor” and “resilient,” just like others serving in this capacity. As Black women, we learned how to survive obstacles and failures, strengthening our faith and character. I know I am in this position because

God trusts me to do what is right for my students and humanity. You cannot work in higher education leadership and be successful without having a spirit of service and goodwill for all people. My faith development and growth is my most effective coping strategy. Another strategy that works for us is attending higher education development conferences. The conferences I attend are affirming spaces where I can use my voice freely without penalty and network with individuals with similar circumstances. If institutions believe in equity and Black women, then provide us with the same professional development opportunities. We need those opportunities. (P4, personal communication, December 5, 2021)

Sub-theme 2: student success

P1 attributes her dedication to her student success to the firm foundation her parents instilled in her concerning education. She said:

There is a saying that students do not care to learn until they know how much you care about them. I have experienced this first-hand with students who come to college not academically prepared to perform at the college level because a teacher did not care enough to believe in the student. However, students will rise to the occasion if they know you care and if you set clear expectations. As a Black woman working at an HBCU, it is important to me that every student leaves college with a college degree. The success of students matters to me. (P1, personal communication, December 11, 2021)

Sub-theme 3: mentoring

The participants in the study attributed their successes to the mentoring relationships developed in the academy. One participant described that Black female mentors are limited. The participant explained that she had a Black male mentor, White male and female mentors but has never found an available Black female mentor. P2 said that she enjoys serving as a mentor to her students:

At HBCUs, our students suffer from poverty, home, and food insecurities and may come from violent homes or neighborhoods. As a Black woman, I must give them what I did not experience early in my career—mentorship. My mentors have supported me through some highly challenging matters. Without my mentors, I would not be the leader I am today. Every Black woman in higher education must be sponge-like. That is how I survived early in my career without mentors. I observed those individuals in leadership—their behaviors, actions, what they wore, and how they carried themselves. (P2, personal communication, December 4, 2021)

All participants characterized mentoring experience in terms of both formal and informal. For example, when defining the word mentor, participants used the word support/help 13 times. Additionally, the participants used a variation of the word guide (guidance) six times, the word accountable (accountability) five times, and the word prepared (preparation) five times.

Theme 4. Above and Beyond Expectations. When asked about factors that contribute to their continued success, the four participants said they were determined to persevere, regardless of obstacles. Typical sub-themes included knowing who you

are, staying focused on their values and vision until they are in a position where they can bring their lived truth and persevere. P4 explained:

We, as Black women, will always have something to prove, so we must always be at the top of our game. They can smell fear and unpreparedness. Sometimes I will research and research and do more research until I am considered an expert on a topic for one 15-minute meeting. We carry the hopes and dreams of all Black women on our shoulders. If I fail when I enter a space, it could take 100 years before another Black woman is given an opportunity. We are all overworked and paid less than our male counterparts. (P4, personal communication, December 5, 2021)

P3 strongly believes that she is called to work for the good of others, especially her students. She said:

This is God's work. I believe in my students. I am hopeful about my students' future. In Exodus 35, God granted artists the wisdom needed to create works of art and to teach others. In education, we call this academic excellence, and for me, it is my commitment to helping every student reach their God-given potential.

Sub-themes. Strategies for overcoming barriers to advancement for the four Black women in this study aligned with their faith and their work ethic, which was instilled in them by other Black women.

Sub-theme 1: over prepared/over worked

“The Black tax” was a common phrase from the women in this study when describing their workload. I asked P3 to explain what black tax is. P3 said the additional duties assigned, like committee work, will not help you in the tenure and promotion process. P1 explained it as all duties you are assigned because you are Black. Like mentoring Black students or being the Black voice on issues that matter to the majority. This topic allowed P4 also to discuss code-switching, a strategy used to survive hostile environments. All the women in the study spoke about being named overachievers and credit their support systems for building their sense of pride in their identity, self-esteem, and confidence.

Sub-theme 2: know who you are

“I have no problem being the Black face because someone has to be the first,” said P2. So use me as the face of diversity and watch me make a difference. P2 said her workload is always heavy, and she does what it always takes to be prepared. P1 said, “I know who I am before entering any space.” P1 explained this as not compromising your reputation and integrity for advancement. Black women get more respect from their White counterparts when they recognize they will always do what is right, even in uncomfortable situations.

Sub-theme 3: flexibility and adaptability

P2 recalled this comment: “I do not do politics.” That is what one of my mentees said to me. I politely told her to look for another job. Higher education is all about people, politics, and the institution’s place of existence. As a Black woman, you do not have the option of not being willing to adapt to change or to be flexible in

your decisions and actions. There are unwritten rules concerning when and if Black women are selected for job advancement in higher education. The reality is that we navigate hostile work environments because of our identity. Therefore, I focus on influencing policy at the institutions I serve to ensure that Black women who follow the leadership track would not experience the adverse effects of seeking promotion.

Summary

This qualitative study examined the lived experiences of Black women in higher education leadership roles at HBCUs. Overall, these findings provide robust context and content to address varied experiences, barriers Black women face, and day-to-day challenges they navigate in the academy. Three out of four of the participants shared their spirituality and connections to the generations that stood before them. That support—this sense of needing to be resilient and lean on their legacy for strength—has allowed them to endure the emotional impacts and daily stressors of working in a male-dominant and white profession such as higher education.

Chapter 5

Conclusions and Discussions

This qualitative study explored the lived experiences of Black women leaders in higher education at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Four African American women who served in mid-to senior-level leadership positions participated in the study. Participants were selected using purposeful sampling. The study's intent was to understand Black women's experiences in the chief of staff, vice president, and executive director roles, how barriers impacted their advancement, and strategies used to overcome barriers.

Research findings revealed that the data presented aligns with the literature found in Chapter II of this research study and lends itself to follow-up research to obtain a deeper understanding of the African American women's experiences and perceptions as higher education professionals and aspiring leaders. Chapter 5 highlights conclusions, an overview of the study's findings, reflections, limitations and implications of the study, and recommendations.

Conclusions

Participants, Black women administrators at HBCUs in the Southern states, shared perceptions of barriers and strategies used to overcome barriers. Additionally, these women provided insights in answering the following research questions: (1) What barriers did African American women identify as they pursued leadership positions? (2) What strategies do African American women identify as effective in overcoming leadership advancement barriers? The emergent themes resulting from

the interviews are (1) visibility and voice, (2) race and gender discrimination, (3) relationships matter, and (4) above and beyond expectations.

The theme, visibility and voice, and race and gender discrimination, emerged as participants spoke regularly of specific occurrences identified as ‘being invisible’ or afraid to use their ‘voice.’ Regarding participants’ personal and professional backgrounds, the initial interview question concerning identifiable barriers provided rich information about the pivotal factors that set the stage for each participant’s leadership path. Participants expressed strong sentiments regarding some of the barriers that impacted navigating their leadership journey. These barriers included race and gender identity, stereotypes of Black women, family obligations, lack of Black women mentors, lack of development opportunities, and exclusion from informal networks. For example, P1 had this to say about her early experiences as the only Black woman professor in her college: “It was strange for me to experience and see the discrepancies and mistreatment in how faculty members would interact with other White faculty members and the Black male faculty members versus how they would interact with me. I always had to be aware of how my presence made others feel. I was not accepted and could not connect with my colleagues.”

Motro et al. (2021) note that it is not always appropriate to group all Black employees as the experiences of Black women may be different from the experiences of Black men. Hentschel et al. (2019), women are just as, if not more, effective than men regarding senior-level leadership. Despite this, there are still negative perceptions, stereotypes, and biases surrounding women and their leadership

capabilities. Arnold et al. (2016) contended that when Black faculty members constantly have their credentials questioned, have a heavy workload, are not respected by White colleagues, and are culturally, socially, and professionally alienated, their frustrations can result in strained relationships.

The theme, relationships matter and above and beyond expectations, arose as participants spoke about their experiences as Black women administrators, wives, mothers, and family and community obligations. The final interview question concerning what strategies Black women use to overcome barriers was answered as the participants shared strategies executed on their leadership journey. Despite the adversity and barriers to their leadership, our participants found ways to address those challenges using more affirming coping strategies.

These strategies included advocacy approaches to coping. The Black women in this study focused on helping and supporting students, families, and community members or working toward solutions to address barriers experienced. P2 captured this sentiment and was one participant who described leaving as a strategy. P2 reflected on why she left a position she loved, “I know there is a bigger purpose related to the work I am doing, but I could not train another White woman to be my boss. My goal is to advocate for students, so I decided to find an environment that would allow me to help students while accepting me for who I am.”

The participants developed coping strategies to navigate some of the barriers encountered. Still, the participants also described some hardships associated with coping strategies. For example, P4 understood the value of addressing stereotypes and

prejudices associated with her Blackness and womanhood. P4 explained, “The best strategy to address racism and those uncomfortable with my identity is head-on. I no longer ignore the comments or allow those who ignore lousy behavior to continue.”

In a 2018 study, some participants mentioned negative impacts on their physical well-being and the adverse effects on their emotional well-being (Corbin et al., 2018). In addition, gender and race discrimination must be named and discussed in educational leadership and professional development programs (Weiner et al., 2019). These discussions are not “only” for Black women but for all emerging professionals. The burden of addressing gendered racism must shift from those who experience it to those who witness it and, by their silence, allow it to continue and negatively harm their colleagues. Again, this research is especially relevant to and for Black women, considering their heightened levels of educational attainment compared to the absence of Black women administrators in higher education.

Themes that emerged illustrated that the value of relationships, visibility, voice, and work ethic were factors in the participants’ journeys. The Black women’s transcendence of racial and gender discrimination became the catalyst for developing a leadership style focused on students’ success. This study’s ultimate goal is to use the participants’ lived experiences to encourage Black women who aspire to be leaders, equipping them with strategies to overcome advancement barriers in higher education. Recommendations based on the findings provide insights into how Black women in higher education suffer from complex circumstances and what institutions can do to overcome barriers for Black women.

Discussions

In this study, Black women described how they navigated roles as senior administrators at HBCUs. This study presented emerging themes and sub-themes that allowed further insights into the individual lived experiences of the participants. Challenges, such as racism and sexism, are a part of these Black women's lives, regardless of their positions serving at HBCUs. Racism has been a challenge throughout their lives, and all experienced sexism in higher education. Yet, the women learned to quickly identify racism and sexism and not allow any form of discrimination to stop their efforts, deem them invisible or silence their voices. Research on intersectional invisibility finds that individuals associate Blackness with masculinity, leading to errors when categorizing Black women's gender (Goff et al., 2008). Similarly, people seem to have difficulty correctly attributing Black women's statements to them in group settings and recognizing Black women's faces (Sesko & Biernat, 2010).

The social phenomenon of race and gender are relevant factors in the academy and compel African American women to navigate leadership differently. Discrimination manifests in more subtle forms of devaluation and power dynamics, and Black women suffer from racial discrimination and sexism (Eagan & Garvey, 2015). Goff and Kahn (2013) note that Black women are further erased because discussions on racism center on issues associated with Black men, and discussions of sexism center on the perspectives of White women. Sanchez-Hucles & Davis (2010)

state that popular culture and the media perpetuate stereotypes of Black women, hindering others' perceptions of them as effective leaders.

In addition, stereotypes of White women are focused on their skills; however, Black women encounter stereotypes first about their identity (Brown, 2007). These stereotypes impact people's desire to collaborate with Black women professionally. Black women constantly have to control their image and behavior to progress in their chosen careers. Despite years of systemic oppression, Black women excel in all careers as authors, performers, athletes, caregivers, and teachers. However, Black women are often overlooked for leadership positions within higher education (Candia-Bailey, 2016).

The findings revealed that Black women are more likely to be driven by social justice goals and spirituality (Newcomb and Niemeyer, 2015). Spirituality can be a driving influence of Black women's leadership, too, as some describe "heeding the call" (Newcomb and Niemeyer, 2015, p. 792) to serve as leaders (Witherspoon and Taylor, 2010). They also tend to lead in more culturally competent ways (Woods and Eagly, 2012; (Newcomb and Niemeyer, 2015) and emphasize "shared" forms of leadership, approaches shown as successful in fostering continuous improvement (e.g., Hallinger and Heck, 2009). Gregory (2001) purported, "Support systems in the lives of Black faculty women have been found to be important because of these women's needs for guidance, strength, and encouragement to help them negotiate academic settings that are often unfriendly and isolating" (p. 131).

Using a qualitative, phenomenological approach emphasizing the theoretical concepts surrounding Black Feminist Thought, this study aided in identifying issues and experiences had by the Black women administrators at HBCUs. The theoretical framework connects with the findings in this study as the participants strongly believed that both race and gender impact leadership advancement experienced by Black women. Furthermore, Black Feminist Thought conveys that Black women have similar yet different experiences from White women and similar yet different experiences from Black men. Therefore, research questions in this study aimed to give a voice to Black women working at HBCUs in mid-to senior-level positions regarding advancement barriers, their experiences, and strategies used in overcoming the barriers.

For this reason, it was essential to look at the issues Black women administrators face from a Black feminist perspective. Further, analyzing barriers and strategies related to Black women through a Black feminist lens helps to understand better the role that race and gender play in advancement. Using interviews to understand the stories of Black women in higher education in their own words coincides with a central tenet of Black Feminist Thought—letting Black women tell their own stories. By allowing the participants to tell their own stories, the repetitiveness of similar concepts and occurrences creates legitimacy and validation of the stories of Black women as shared by Black women. To amplify the authentic experiences of Black women administrators, it is the researcher's intention, in taking a

phenomenological approach, to provide a space and opportunity to tell their story in their words.

Reflections

This research produced qualitative data from four African American women working as higher education administrators at HBCUs. This research is significant for individuals seeking to understand and create advancement opportunities for Black women. Also, this research will inform Black women aspiring to become leaders in the academy. The following reflections describe the participants' views and present a narrative of the qualitative findings the researcher extracted from the interview.

Life-long Learning. Examining the participants' backgrounds and educational experiences revealed a commitment to life-long learning. The participants' parents played a significant role in each participant's personal and professional development. The women in the study noted a deep understanding of the importance of education, giving credit to their parents, churches, and former educators who helped inspire them to be leaders. The participants expressed an intrinsic appreciation for education that was instilled early in their childhood. The participants involvement in higher education, both as student and practitioner, results from the emphasis placed on the value of education early in their youth.

Advocates for Education and Social Change. Although the participants in the study traveled different career paths to secure their leadership positions, each leader expressed the importance of using their positions to serve as champions of change. Participants expressed a commitment to education and a desire to help their

families and society. They each noted that they felt they had been called to fulfill a higher purpose by serving as leaders in higher education. Some women cited a commitment to social change through their connection to the community, while other participants viewed their students as mediums for social change. Each participant expressed a genuine passion for what they do. They are not in the profession for prestige, power, or money; they are simply in it to make a difference in the lives of their students and their communities.

Race vs. Gender. Issues of race and gender emerged as barriers that participants encountered along their career paths. The participants explained that they know that being both Black and female in the academy are barriers to career advancement. However, the challenge of being a woman seemed to outweigh the challenge of being African American. The absence of Black female leaders in higher education has also contributed to the race vs. gender dichotomy. The participants unanimously expressed sentiments of confronting racial and gender stereotypes every step of their journey. Thomas (2019) offers information on the historical vestiges of racist and sexist ideologies and why women of color are underrepresented in various levels of higher education leadership. It is a vital reference source for educational administrators, professors, higher education professionals, academicians, and researchers seeking information on gender studies and Black women's roles in higher education.

Limitations of the Study

There are five limitations to this research study. A significant limitation is this research was conducted during the COVID-19 global pandemic. Many of the Black women leaders were in the process of managing their institution's new path forward while also maintaining additional duties usually assigned to Black women, and their valuable time was limited. Secondly, in addition to the pandemic of COVID, many Black women leaders were experiencing the racial reckoning across the country (Monahan, 2021). Given these limitations, this study purposely focused on four African American female leaders who graduated from the Higher Education Leadership Foundation to gain insight into their lived experiences.

Thirdly, although the number of participants in the study was small, the overall strategy was an effort to reduce bias and enhance credibility because sample selection was not predicated on the study's outcome (McMillan, 2016). A fourth limitation of the study was the potential for researcher bias because the researcher of this study is also an African American female. Patton (2002) emphasizes for research to be considered credible, the researcher must remain neutral while conducting the study. Finally, the validity and reliability of the data collected depended on the participants' truthfulness.

Implication of the Study

This study was limited to four African American females who serve as senior-level administrators in higher education in a specific geographic region. Future researchers may wish to examine the career paths, perceived obstacles, and leadership

preparation of administrators in other areas of the United States to determine if the same themes and patterns emerge. The personal and professional experiences of African American women may differ depending on the geographic location of their institutions. It may also be of particular interest to compare the experiences of African American female leaders who serve at Historically Black University and Colleges (HBCUs) and African American female leaders who serve at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs). The Black women's leadership experiences in the academy, the level of support received at their institutions, and the opportunities for upward mobility would be interesting areas to explore.

Black women who achieve leadership positions in higher education are history makers by becoming the first and face the many challenges of such a groundbreaking role (Paige, 2018). An additional area for further research is Black women's perception of other Black women in the academy and whether they support one another. All participants mentioned not being able to trust Black women at their institution and the level of competition due to only one being allowed in senior-level leadership positions.

Recommendations

The findings of this study inspired multiple recommendations about the experiences of Black women and the barriers they face in higher education leadership roles. Recommendations for future research would involve identifying and assessing programs that facilitate networking, connect aspiring leaders with mentors, and develop leadership pipelines in higher education for Black women. These

recommendations result from the participants' responses that reference such a need. Education boards and administrators should ensure that federal policies such as affirmative action, and policies established to prevent discrimination against marginalized groups, including Black women, are properly implemented and enforced.

This implementation should also include instituting effective measures to ensure transparency and accountability in recruitment and promotion practices. University officials should work towards closing the gender gap through the development of more gender diverse policies. These policy updates should include regulations that would promote women into leadership through pay equity, as laid out in the Paycheck Fairness Act, salary transparency, and family support, per the Family and Medical Insurance Leave Act (Hill et al., 2016). Promotional policies should be fair, reviewed and updated regularly, and include employee input (Surawicz, 2016).

Suggestions for recruiting more Blacks for positions of influence and power on campus include broadening candidate pools restricted by institutional and operational biases (Lewis, 2017). More specifically, implementing trainings that encourage and enhance diversity and inclusion can help administrators put the challenges faced by Black women in context of their own lived experiences and responsibilities (Anderson, 2018). Thus, human resource departments must change, or set the standard for developing a culture of inclusion for processes related to hiring and retaining Black women faculty and staff (McManigell Grijalva, 2018). Five recommendations are made consistent with research findings: (a) align organizational

values and culture, (b) ensure policies to prevent discrimination against Black women and address lack of diversity (c) support the creation of an HR committee that focuses on equity and inclusion with the representation of Black women, and (d) create a leadership pipeline within the institution for Black women and (e) foster an environment for transformational change.

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[women-score-higher-than-men-in-most-leadership-skills](https://hbr.org/2019/06/research-women-score-higher-than-men-in-most-leadership-skills)

Appendix A: Informed Consent

CONSENT FORM AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN PERCEPTIONS OF ADVANCEMENT BARRIERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Clara Ross Stamps
Morehead State University
School of Education

The purpose of this study is to gather perceptions of African American women toward advancement barriers that hinder Black female administrators from advancing to higher education leadership positions. The data collected will be used to complete a research project entitled “African American Women Perceptions of Advancement Barriers in Higher Education.”

This study is being conducted by Clara Ross Stamps in the Foundational and Graduate Studies in Education at Morehead State University. Please read this consent form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

The formal interview will take approximately 45 minutes. Your identity will remain confidential, and only the researcher will have access to records of responses. Participation is voluntary. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled, and you may discontinue participation at any time.

The interview in which you will participate will be audio recorded. Records of responses will be deleted six months after completion of the project. Please indicate your consent to participate by signing the statement below:

I understand the information expressed above. I consent to participate in an interview for this research project and to allow my interview data to be used in a research report. I understand that my responses will remain confidential. My name will not be used in any reporting or publication of research data. I also agree to allow my responses to be audio recorded.

Participant Printed Name: _____

Participant Signature: _____

Date: _____

Contact Information of the researchers:

Clara Ross Stamps
crossstamps@moreheadstate.edu
(601) 415-3393

MSU Institutional Review Board Office:
Janet L. Cline, Director for Research Integrity and Compliance
901 Ginger Hall, Morehead, KY 40351
(606) 783-2278
JL.Cline@moreheadstate.edu

Appendix B: Letter to Participants

November 17, 2021

Dear Potential Research Participant,

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Morehead State University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education. I am conducting this research to understand a phenomenon better. The purpose of my research is to explore African American women's perceptions toward advancement barriers that hinder Black female administrators from advancing to higher education leadership positions.

I am writing to invite you to participate in the study. If you are a self-identified African American female graduate of HELF, working at a Historically Black College and University (HBCU), and are willing to participate, you will be asked to complete a demographic questionnaire, and submit to a formal interview.

The entire research process should take 2.5 to 3 hours to be completed in separate intervals. Your participation will be completely anonymous, and no personal, identifying information will be disclosed.

To participate, you must complete a consent form. Please complete this form in its entirety. The consent document is attached to this email. Please sign the consent document and return it via email.

Sincerely,

Clara Ross Stamps
Doctoral Candidate
Morehead State University

Appendix C: Demographic Questionnaire**DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE**

1. Do you identify as African American or Black?
 - Yes
 - No

2. Do you work in higher education?
 - Yes
 - No

3. Do you work for a Historically Black College or University?
 - Yes
 - NoIf yes, where? _____

4. Are you in a leadership role? If so, what is that role?
 - Department Chair
 - Dean
 - Chief of Staff
 - Chief Strategic Officer
 - Deputy or Vice Provost
 - Provost
 - Assistant Vice President
 - Associate Vice President
 - Vice President
 - President
 - Other _____
 - I prefer not to say

5. How many years have you held your current position?
 - Less than one year
 - 1-2 years
 - 3-5 years
 - 6-10 years
 - 11-15 years
 - More than 15 years

6. How many years have you worked for your current institution?
 - Less than one year

- 1-2 years
 - 3-5 years
 - 6-10 years
 - 11-15 years
 - More than 15 years
7. What is your educational background? List all degrees earned.
8. Are you married?
- Yes
 - No
9. Do you have any children?
- Yes (If yes, how many_____)
 - No
10. What is your age? _____

This is the end of the questionnaire. Thank you for your participation.

Appendix D: Interview Questions**INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

8. Describe your experiences as an African American woman working in a leadership role in higher education?
9. How, if any, do you believe your experiences have differed as an African American woman?
10. How do those differences impact your daily experiences and responsibilities in your leadership role?
11. Tell me about some barriers you experienced, if any, when you entered or while serving in your current leadership role?
12. Please share how you dealt with barriers you have experienced?
13. If any, what barriers exist within your institution that currently impact your career progression or that of other African American women?
14. What strategies, if any, have you identified that will assist in advancing Black women to leadership roles at your institution?

Appendix E: IRB Approval

MSU Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research NOTIFICATION OF EXEMPT PROTOCOL REVIEW			
Principal Investigator/Researcher			
First Name	Clara	Last Name	Stamps
Title:	Student-Doctoral		
Campus Address	503 Ginger Hall		Campus Phone: (601) 415-3393
E-Mail:	crossstamps@moreheadstate.edu		
Department:	Foundational & Grad Studies in Ed		
CITI Trainin	Yes	Date Completed	11/27/2021
Other Personnel	Other Personn		

Purpose:	
Title of Project/Course:	African American Women Perceptions of Advancement Barriers in Higher Education
Funding Source/Agenc	NA N/A
Protocol Review Num	21-12-56
The human subject use protocol described above has been reviewed by the MSU Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research with the following results:	
The IRB determined the project, as stated, is exempt based on federal regula46.101 (2)	
Federal regulations require that the IRB be notified if anything in the research changes, as additional review may be necessary.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	Approved, may proceed as writte
Begin Dat	12/16/2021 End Dat 12/15/2027
In accordance with new procedures instituted by the IRB, and because your study is exempt, you are not required to complete continuation or final review reports. However, it is your responsibility to notify the IRB prior to making any changes to the study. Please note that changes made to an exempt protocol may disqualify it from exempt status and may require an expedited or convened review. Your exempt protocol is approved for six years. At the end of six years the protocol will close and interaction with human subjects must cease. If you would like to continue your project, you must submit a new exemption application and have it approved before the project can continue.	
<input type="checkbox"/> N/A	Regulatory requirements have been met for the waiver of documentation of cons
<input type="checkbox"/> N/A	Regulatory requirements have been met for the waiver of informed consent
<input type="checkbox"/> N/A	Criteria for use of children has been met

Signed: Elizabeth B. Perkins Date: 12/16/2021
 Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Resear

Please refer to the protocol review number in any future references to this protocol. If any revisions are made to a project or if any unforeseen risks arise during an investigation, the principal investigator must submit Form H to the IRB, fully explaining all changes or unexpected risks.

pc: Protocol Fi

VITA

CLARA ROSS STAMPS

EDUCATION

- December, 2007 Bachelor of Science in Business Administration
Mississippi College
Clinton, Mississippi
- February, 2010 Master of Business Administration
University of Phoenix
Jackson, Mississippi
- Pending Doctor of Education
Morehead State University
Morehead, Kentucky

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCES

- July 2021-Present Acting President
Kentucky State University
Frankfort, Kentucky
- July 2017-July 2021 Senior Vice President
Kentucky State University
Frankfort, Kentucky
- Oct. 2009-July 2017 Vice President
Alcorn State University
Lorman, Mississippi

HONORS

- April 2019 Charter member, Omicron Delta Kappa
The Omicron Delta Kappa Leadership Honor Society
Frankfort, Kentucky

PUBLICATIONS

Ross Stamps, C. (2017). KSU Forward: Special homecoming edition. *Onward + Upward*, The University's magazine. Kentucky State University, Frankfort, Kentucky.

Ross Stamps, C. (2019). Coming home. *Onward + Upward*, The University's magazine. Kentucky State University, Frankfort, Kentucky.

Ross Stamps, C. (2019). Thoroughbred strong: Growing forward and standing together amid global crisis. *Onward + Upward*, The University's magazine. Kentucky State University, Frankfort, Kentucky.

Ross Stamps, C. (2020). COVID-19 Communications strategy. Kentucky State University, Frankfort, Kentucky.

Ross Stamps, C. (2020). BREDS back on the hill COVID-19: A safe return to the fall. Kentucky State University, Frankfort, Kentucky.

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