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BENDING BARRIERS: AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN IN
EDUCATION LEADERSHIP

by

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Dedication

To my Heavenly Father, creator of all things. I am grateful for the Blessings bestowed upon me! Thank you for all that I am and all that I will become! This dissertation is dedicated to my little sister Priscilla McNeil-Boone. You left us too soon. I think of you every day and know that you have been my guardian angel continuing to watch over me. To my mother, Pearlie Demart and my children, David McNeil, Tacarra McNeil-Thomas, & Arrianna Ramirez, thank you. I love you all so much!

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“Strength doesn't come from what you can do. It comes from overcoming the things you once thought you couldn't.” – Rikki Rogers

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ABSTRACT

BENDING BARRIERS: AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN IN EDUCATION LEADERSHIP

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The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of African American women in institutions of higher education in the state of Texas regarding career progression and potential barriers to leadership. Of specific interest is a more in-depth understanding of perceived barriers along the career pathway and strategies suggested by leaders that have reached or exceed beyond what is considered the pinnacle level of achievement in higher education. Oikelome (2017) recognizes what some consider achieving a level of success in higher education by stating, “The college presidency is a benchmark of status and achievement in the academy” (p. 23). A sample of educators at the level of dean or higher was selected to participate in this study to explore their individual perception of barriers that affect the career pathways of African American women pursuing positions in higher education at executive level.

The selected literature corroborates the disparity in African American women at the college and university senior executive level. The literature will highlight various challenges related to race and gender. Lastly, the study will review strategies used to overcome barriers to educational leadership. Further research on this topic should include an examination of the career pathways of African American women in two and four-year institutions.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

For more than 30 years, two of the most consistent themes appearing in studies exploring barriers reported by women pursuing career paths toward leadership roles in higher education has been sexism and the perception of the glass ceiling effect (Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Madera, 2017; Yancy-Tookes, 2012). The glass ceiling theory is defined as invisible barriers that hinder career advancement among women (Whitehead, 2017). An article presented in *Inside Higher Education* reported, though women account for more than half of the conferred college degrees in the United States (U.S.), career progression and pay continue to be less than their male counterparts (American Council on Education, 2020). An article in Time (Coleman, 2019) credits the black feminist movement during the 1970s with boosting awareness of the inequities of African American women in the workplace. The most noted theory used to promote an increased awareness or understanding of the oppression of African American women has been Crenshaw's Theory of Intersectionality (Keucheniuss & Mugge, 2020).

Recent studies acknowledged a minor increase in African American female representation in higher education leadership (Dennis-Jackson, 2018; McKinney, 2018; Tanner, 2019). However, African American women continue to be the most underrepresented group to serve in executive roles in higher education institutions (American Council on Education, 2020; Mitchell, 2021). Additionally, Dennis-Jackson (2018) research reports historically, the limitations in the career progression of African American women is due primarily to racism, sexism, and prejudice while further saying that Black women were seen as the "modern mammy" (Seo & Hinton, 2009, p. 204). The stereotypical fictitious caricature of the "mammy" has been historically used to characterize African American women as obedient, loyal domestic servants (Seo &

Hinton, 2009, p. 207). “The Modern Mammy is expected to be tough, independent, smart, asexual, devoted to their organizations/jobs/Caucasian male bosses, and team players” (Seo & Hinton, 2009, p. 207). Other variations of stereotypical language have been used to describe African American women in the workplace such as, nurturers, having personality issues, aggressive communication, supporters, and lacking leadership (Dennis-Jackson, 2018; Beckwith et al., 2016).

Prior research suggests that African American women are likely to respond with an extensive list of barriers that hinder professional advancement when responding to questions regarding their career paths and available opportunities in pursuing advanced leadership positions in higher education (Whitehead, 2017). The present study seeks to examine the perceived barriers faced by African American women seeking executive leadership roles in higher education as well as explore some of the strategies applied by those that were able to break through the glass ceiling. This chapter will describe the research problem in the study, the significance of the study, the research purpose, and questions, and will provide definitions of key terms.

Research Problem

The disparity of African American women holding advance leadership positions in higher education and the theory of the glass ceiling effect has galvanized the interest of researchers for more than two decades, leading to a rejuvenated increase of scholarly work in this area (Beckwith et al., 2016; Preston, 2019; Queen, 2016; Reeves, 2018; Smith-Ligon, 2011; Tanner, 2019; Whitehead, 2017). Recent studies seek to examine the correlation, if any exists, between barriers and the perceived glass-ceiling phenomenon on the selection process and promotion of African American women (Polk-Johnson, 2019; Reeves, 2018; Tanner, 2019; Saleem et al., 2017). Additionally, more in-depth studies have been conducted on the possible effects of barriers hindering women seeking

executive leadership positions by expanding the list of barriers ranging from subtle to overt (Gamble & Turner 2015; Braxton, 2018; Whitehead, 2017).

Findings from previous research on the challenges facing all women seeking advanced leadership opportunities parallel similar studies conducted today. The parameters of modern research conducted in this area have been expanded from solely examining the external barriers to leadership perceived by women to include internal barriers that African American females have identified and placed upon themselves while pursuing career paths to senior leadership positions (Dennis-Jackson, 2018; Dubose, 2017). Gender remains the primary focus of literary works seeking to explain the driving force behind the lack of representation of all women aspiring to achieve top leadership roles in higher education (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016). Older studies reported that the generalization of the experience of African American women within the plight of all women seeking career advancement; therefore, reveals an unclear picture as to how much more difficult their path may be compared to other women (Banks, 1984; Howard-Vital, 1989).

The generalization of the experience of women in studies examining the disparity, without the consideration of race as a factor to distinguish obstacles that may differ between specified groups, has done little to improve the underrepresentation of African American women achieving advanced leadership roles in higher education (Beckwith et al., 2016; Howard-Vital, 1989; Mainah & Perkins, 2015; Tanner, 2019). Through the examination of previous research, available data, and participant responses, Gamble and Turner (2015) suggests that the creation of an organization diversity board could be a potential solution to discriminative recruitment and hiring practices leading to increased diversity, career advancement, and job retention for African American women.

According to Moody (2018), women in the U.S. earn over half of the awarded professional degrees, yet men appear to be making advancements in their career paths at higher rates. Past research acknowledges that African American women are faced with increased hardships pursuing increased roles of responsibility in the workplace; these studies provide extremely limited suggestions for strategies and viable solutions to overcome or eliminate these barriers (Mainah & Perkins, 2015). Despite hundreds of documented cases, involving race and gender discrimination reported annually to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and Fair Employment Practices Agencies, the Mainah and Perkins (2015) study stated institutions of higher education have not implemented adequate strategies to eliminate the problem. The underrepresentation of African American women holding executive leadership positions in institutions of higher education mirrors the lack of representation across the U.S. in many major corporations (Whitehead, 2017).

Oikelome (2017) reported, “The college presidency is a benchmark of status and achievement in the academy” (p. 23). This statement sets the foundation for the current study exploring the perception of barriers that affect the career pathways of African American women pursuing leadership roles in higher education and the challenges they face achieving that first level of what some consider a pivotal point of advancement. The exploratory study conducted by Oikelome (2017) acknowledged the emergence of African American males in higher education leadership over the past 15 years; however, women of color continue to account for less than 6% of college presidents or above in the U.S. As student demographics continue to increase in diversity across college campuses, equality in the decision-making leadership roles is slow and stagnant; consisting of mainly the perspectives of older White males (Burton, 2015; Jackson, 2018; Oikelome, 2017).

African American women surveyed in a study conducted by Beckwith et al., (2016) discussed difficulties in career progression, facing the perceived glass ceiling and the lack of confidence in their ability to co-exist in a system they feel is working against them. Researchers discussed the importance of past studies in this area, as they provide a historical foundation of the longevity regarding the issue of disparity among African American women in higher education leadership (Beckwith et al., 2016; Jackson & Harris, 2007). Additionally, looking into past research exemplifies the limited availability of research in this area and the need for continued exploration into potential solutions (Beckwith et al., 2016). Perceptions among some African American women as reported in previous research is that the overall professional pathways of higher education leadership are not designed for them to advance (Jackson & Harris, 2007).

Significance of the Study

The societal impact on the lack of diversity in the U.S. education system has been researched and documented. However, these studies are lacking in certain areas specifically focused on the plight of African American women in higher education (Beckwith et al., 2016; Bilen-Green et al., 2008; Chenoweth, 2007; Howard-Vital, 1989; Jackson & Harris, 2007; Jo, 2008; Madera, 2017; Whitehead, 2017). Researchers have acknowledged the increase in minority students attending colleges and universities; moreover, the studies report a higher level of satisfaction among those attending institutions with increased diversity of faculty and administration, therefore producing more qualified individuals to serve (Braxton, 2018; Dennis-Jackson, 2018). Examining, understanding, and overcoming the internal as well as systemic barriers hindering the achievement of African American women is part of the solution to begin the transition to successfully eliminate the glass ceiling effect (Whitehead, 2017).

The small percentage of African American women that are successful in navigating and breaking through the glass ceiling; frequently have their celebratory period short lived due to a different set of obstacles and challenges that await them in their new leadership roles. There is a great need for this study to increase the knowledge and scholarly research in a limited field of work that will be useful in providing in-depth insight into the relationship between barriers and the disparity of African American women holding advanced roles or responsibility in institutions of higher education (Whitehead, 2017).

Research Purpose and Questions

The purpose of this study is to explore the potential barriers encountered by African American women along their career paths to obtaining advanced leadership positions in higher education institutions. The following research questions guided this study:

R1: What barriers do African American women face while pursuing their career pathways to higher education's advanced leadership positions?

R2: What challenges do African American women encounter while employed in advanced leadership roles as Deans and above in higher education?

R3: What strategies are suggested by African American females to overcome barriers to obtain leadership positions in higher education?

Definitions of Key Terms

Barriers: "Things that get in the way, slowing progress, stopping improvement or programs from succeeding" (De Silva, 2015, p. 4). Barriers refers to visible and non-visible things that hinder professional growth (Whitehead, 2017).

Classism: “Refers to the marginalization (i.e. labelling, prejudice, discrimination, and stigmatization) of those who are perceived to be in a lower social class” (Simons et al., 2017, p. 433).

Diversity: Definition includes the existence of different cultures or ethnicities within a group or organization. These differences have been identified, as a highly problematic concept for African American women is gender disparity (Whitehead, 2017)

Federal Glass Ceiling Commission: The Legislative branch commissioned a twenty-one-person committee under the Civil Rights Act in 1991 and findings of the committee reported evidence that barriers did exist for women and other minorities of color (Kephart & Schumacher, 2005). According the Kephart and Schumacher (2005) study, After a period of gathering data to report on workplace issues faced by women and other, the *Glass Ceiling Commission* was dissolved in January 1996 (Parmaxi & Vasiliou, 2015).

Glass Ceiling: As defined in a study by Kephart and Schumacher (2005), the *Glass Ceiling Effect* is the artificial barriers that hinder advancement specifically to women and minorities.

Inclusion: This term was introduced as a replacement word for diversity (Whitehead, 2017).

Leadership: According to Whitehead (2017), leadership applies to the process in which individuals can influence others to achieve a common goal.

Sexism: Sexism has been defined in modern terms as discriminatory and prejudicial attitudes, beliefs and practices directed against a person based on their sex (Zehnter et al., 2021).

Stereotypes: The definition provided is certain perceived terms that influence the way others process information concerning a group or group members (Northouse, 2019).

Triple Jeopardy: The term *Triple jeopardy* is based on the premise of having “multiple stereotypes associated with gender, race, and ethnicity that they [African American women] trigger in others” (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010, p. 176).

Conclusion

During the past 50 years, civil rights legislation has been implemented with the intention of combating injustices affecting women in the workplace and increasing career advancement opportunities; however, the impact of these strategies have not been highly successful, with less than 5% of all executive leadership positions held by women at Fortune 500 companies and educational institutions (Dubose, 2017). This research focuses on the experiences of African American women in the position of Dean and above in higher education career pathways. This chapter provided an overview of the need for the study, significance of the problem, research purpose and questions, as well as definition of key terms relevant to the study. The current study will be a contribution and expansion of former research that has provided insight into a continuously asked question: Is the glass ceiling still intact? The next chapter provides an examination of literature relevant to the topic including the impact of barriers on career progression, types of barriers, internal perceptions affecting professional growth, the impact of perceptions on future leaders, and improving the disparity in higher education leadership.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter will present literature related to the topic that involve African American women in their pursuit of executive leadership roles in higher education. In support of the purpose of this study, this review of the literature will examine the following: (a) understanding the impact of barriers to leadership progression, (b) perceived challenges encountered by females selected to lead, (c) impact of perceptions on future leaders, and (d) strategies improving the disparity. Additionally, the chapter will include a summary of findings and the theoretical framework.

Understanding the Impact of Barriers to Leadership Progression

Women have continued to report perceived barriers encountered for more than 50 years, navigating their professional pathways in pursuit of advance leadership positions (Bilen-Green et al., 2008; Whitehead, 2017). Recently, researchers have shown an increased interest in documenting the lived experiences and storytelling of those struggling to improve equal representation of all women in the hierarchy of organizations throughout the U.S. (Braxton, 2018; Whitehead, 2017). Furthermore, the study by Taylor (2018) suggest that the avoidance or limited availability of research on African American women in leadership has roots deeper than that of higher education studies with in-depth historical connotations regarding suppression.

Several researchers mentioned that past contributions in this area, highlighting African American women, usually focused or examined the historical hardship or suffrage endured instead of examining the contributions they have made to society and the educational community Hull et al., 1982; Taylor, 2018). More research of the past is needed to provide historical context in this area as well as identify the growth and comparison between the different periods of research. A comprehensive study conducted

by Clemmons, (2012) compared the educational experience of African American women and White women beginning with the antebellum period. According to Perkins (1983), since the 1800s, African American women have been strongly encouraged at very young ages to achieve higher education goals as an effort to assist in the improving and uplifting the Black race. Over the past 15 years, research has slowly increased to include more studies on the disparity of African American women seeking or holding executive leadership positions in higher education, with deeper exploration into internalized perceptions of racial barriers (Beckwith et al., 2016; Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Hannum et al., 2015; Jackson & Harris, 2007; Michael et al., 2013; Whitehead, 2017).

Furthermore, Davis and Maldonado (2015) supported studying the phenomenon of the experiences of African American women through the theoretical framework of intersectionality. Barriers to leadership role attainment, as presented in Davis and Maldonado (2015), are those that could be personal or organizational. The study also found that the most reported barriers to career leadership opportunities for Black women are related to racism (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Despite recent advancements in gender equality within some industries, recent studies discuss the continuous impactful nature of overt racism hindering the achievement of African

American women seeking to advance to the position of college presidents and above in higher education (Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Smith-Ligon, 2011; Whitehead, 2017). A purposeful sample of African American women provided extended details on their lived experiences navigating the “intersectionality of race and gender” during the pathway to college presidency roles in higher education (Davis & Maldonado, 2015, p. 56). The researchers in the presidency study conducted interviews utilizing the phenomenological research method in which the women reflected on their lived experiences in leadership (Davis & Maldonado, 2015).

Prior studies usually focused on “barriers to equal opportunity and a lack of career advancement for African American women rather than focusing on individual experiences” (Davis & Maldonado, 2015, p. 49). Additionally, researchers have begun to look extensively at identifying strategies for leadership development in an effort to increase opportunities (Beall-Davis, 2019; Davis & Maldonado, 2015). The data reported in the research revealed that women made up only 26% of the total number of college presidents in 2012 and of that percentage, women of color accounted for approximately 8% nationwide (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Additional findings of the study suggest that race and gender impact leadership development of African American women in higher education, further supporting the need for increased research and understanding on the intersectionality of the two constructs (Davis & Maldonado, 2015).

An analysis of the barriers perceived to affect women across two different career sectors, which included higher education and evangelical religious organizations, revealed a discovery of “twenty-seven gender-based barriers” (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016, p. 181). According to the information provided within the research, the first twelve barriers were identified through the examination of previous studies and the additional barriers were identified from interviews conducted in the current study (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016). Subsequently, the twenty-seven barriers identified in this study were grouped into three subgroup areas labeled as macro, meso, and micro (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016).

Previous research consistently focused on a small number of barriers affecting women; more specifically, ones that existed within the organizations included in the study. Nevertheless, recurring themes obtained from the examination of studies in this area centered primarily on sexism and the feminist movement according to Whitehead (2017). As an extension to previously identified barriers, Diehl and Dzubinski (2016)

expanded their study to explore perceived barriers that are normally overlooked, such as control of women's voices, scrutiny, tokenism, male gatekeeping, and personalizing, among others. Findings of the Diehl and Dzubinski (2016) study provided a fundamental foundation to warrant a more extensive exploration into a multi range of barriers affecting women in the workplace.

Additionally, the researchers noted the unexpected results between the diverse types of organizations. Furthermore, the study found that the perception of leadership experiences among women in the generally "progressive and liberal" institutions of higher education and "conservative" evangelical religion organizations, shared "strikingly similar" results (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016, p. 186). However, the research noted many barriers may have overlapped with representation across organization types, and there was a slight difference in the strength of some barriers represented in the more male-dominated religious sector (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016).

Recent studies have begun to explore the difference in experiences of African American women pursuing professional leadership advancement in two year and four-year educational institutions, and the impact of gender, race, and other barriers (Bean, 2021; Clarke, 2019; Ingram, 2021; Taylor, 2018). Researchers have documented the disparity in the numbers African American women in advanced leadership roles across the nation in the private sector, Fortune 500 companies, and educational institutions (Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Taylor, 2018). The purpose of Taylor (2018) qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of the barriers faced by African American women who attained advanced higher education leadership positions. Additionally, the comprehensive study found that in addition to sexism and racism, African American females contended with additional perceived stereotypes that hinder career progression such as being labeled aggressive and substandard (Taylor, 2018). The next section will

discuss the glass ceiling effect on the progression of African American women in higher education leadership.

Glass Ceiling Effect

In 1995, the Glass Ceiling Commission defined the *Glass Ceiling Effect* as “artificial barriers to the advancement of women and minorities” (Cotter et al., 2001 p. 656). Additionally, research has acknowledged a persistence of the perceived glass ceiling effect, especially as a perceived barrier to African American women in the workplace (Cotter et al., 2001). Studies also acknowledges the use of the glass ceiling term in the late 1970’s, however, the term did not gain mainstream popularity until it was used in a 1984 book written by Gay Bryant, titled “*The Working Woman Report.*” (Kephart & Schumacher, 2005), Additionally, the article, defines the glass ceiling as perceived invisible barriers that prevents women from reaching high ranking employment positions (Kephart & Schumacher, 2005). A more detailed definition of the term was also provided defining the glass ceiling as “artificial barriers based on attitudinal or organizational bias that prevent qualified individuals from advancing upward” in their organizations into management-level position (U.S. Department of Labor, 1991, p.1).

Women have referred to the perceived glass ceiling effect as a hindrance to their career progression as early as 1980 (Mainah & Perkins, 2015). Furthermore, in 1991, the newly created Glass Ceiling Commission was tasked with the exploration of barriers faced by women and minorities in the workplace (Mainah & Perkins, 2015). An investigation into the glass-ceiling phenomenon and its impact on career advancement perceived by women as was conducted by the Glass Ceiling Commission reported that higher education institutions were ineffective in adhering to affirmative action laws (Whitehead, 2017). Additional findings credited gender inequality with leading the narration of the women’s civil rights movement and galvanized the fight of women

seeking to achieve career achievements in the workplace equal to their male counterparts (Whitehead, 2017). Lastly, the study revealed that African American women reported having to contend with additional barriers different from those of White women such as racial and class discrimination in their pursuit of leadership roles in higher education (Whitehead, 2017).

The glass ceiling effect, according to Jackson and Harris (2007), can be witnessed within the systems of higher education at all levels along the career pathways to leadership in academic organizations. As part of the research purpose, Jackson and Harris (2007) sought to identify barriers reported by African American women on their journey to the college presidency through the exploration of previous scholarly work as well as contribute to strategies to assist future aspiring leaders. The percentage of African American women achieving advanced degrees increased significantly during the 20th century; nevertheless, the gains in academic achievement had little impact on removing barriers and improving diversity in the attainment of advanced roles of responsibility in higher education (Dubose, 2017). As African American women continue to increase in degree attainment, men continued to surpass them in promotions and salaries (Sawyer, 2017).

Research suggests that the impact of the perceived barriers by African American females during the selection process has a correlation that can be measured by the disproportionate number of African American women that acquire the presidency or higher positions in two and four-year colleges and universities (Jones et al., 2013; Oikelome, 2017; Smith-Ligon, 2011; Tanner, 2019; Taylor, 2018). A study by Madera (2017) reports the glass ceiling is still affecting advanced degree processes and the selection of women executive leaders in the 21st century. Despite a slow increase in the number of women holding top executive positions, women remain underrepresented

compared to their male counterparts in the senior positions in educational institutions (Madera, 2017). Additionally, information is provided stating, that women earn an estimated 20% less than the male executives in Higher Education (Madera, 2017, p. 13).

Further exploration into the glass ceiling effect is offered in the work of Sawyer, (2017), which expanded the list of previously reported barriers affecting minority women in the workplace. This study also suggested that to better understand the barriers affecting minority women in the workplace, research should be conducted utilizing a holistic approach. This would be accomplished by exploring the direct impact of race, sex, issues of inclusion and exclusion and the internal perceived barriers on education participation (Sawyer, 2017). Primary findings of the Sawyer, 2017 study are the shift from distinct overt discrimination to very subtle biases contributing to the small number of African American women at the CEO level in Fortune 500 companies. Moreover, the study reveals that African American women serving in advanced level positions could provide mentorship and serve as role models for women aspiring to those positions (Sawyer, 2017).

Research scholars Jones and Palmer (2011) used a 52-question survey to gather data on the work environment of African Americans women. A total of 934 women serving as directors, deans, advisors and other positions responded out of the 3,726 that were invited to participate in the study (Jones and Palmer, 2011). The researchers utilized the Likert scale to measure certain components of the data. An analysis of the mixed method study revealed findings that were contradictive of each other (Jones and Palmer, 2011). The analysis of the quantitative responses suggested that women felt their career advancements and leadership roles were not supported by other women; on the other hand, the qualitative data suggests women felt competitiveness could lead their peers to actions to sabotage them (Jones & Palmer, 2011). Although these findings are unusual,

they were not unique. Challenges to the validity of the study could arise from the use of an online survey to collect data, and the pay and promotion section to gather information on perceptions of disparity (Jones & Palmer, 2011). The suggestion derived from the research is that African American women need to be supportive of each other in their efforts to serve in higher levels of leadership (Jones & Palmer, 2011). Another aspect of the study was the discussion on the importance of clarifying the variable perception and the distinction between perception and feelings (Jones & Palmer, 2011). The impact of a person's perception of self is conducive to their surroundings and environment (Jones & Palmer, 2011).

The disparity of African American women has been acknowledged across career fields. However, this research will focus primarily on the inequalities in higher education leadership. The American Council on Education (ACE) released data in 2017 dispelling the myth that women were not qualified to lead as well as reveal inadequacies in advance leadership roles by surveying presidents, chancellors, and chief executive officers. Findings of the Johnson, (2017) study revealed that from 2006 to 2017, women were awarded more than half of all advanced degrees. A phrase "the higher the fewer" is used to acknowledge that women's education achievement is not reflective of the number of women serving in advanced leadership roles in higher education (ACE, 2017). According to the 2017 data, women account for 30% of college and university presidents, further revealing that women of color made up 8% of all presidents (ACE, 2017). Like most studies, the research fails to provide data relevant to the percentages specifically to African American women in leadership. The next section will provide an overview of internal perceptions affecting professional growth.

Internal Perceptions Affecting Professional Growth

Taylor (2018) state that the professional achievement among African American women runs deeper than qualifications and educational achievement. Past research mirrors current research suggesting that for researchers to truly understand the experience of African American women and the barriers faced in pursuit of professional success, a thorough review of their history is necessary (Howard-Vital, 1989; Taylor, 2018). Additionally, the current study reports that the African American community placed high expectations on the females to achieve higher educational goals to improve and uplift the black community (Taylor, 2018). An increase from 25% to 37% of African American women entering post-secondary institutions occurred between 2003 and 2013, as well as having the highest graduation rates among women of color documented at an 11.9% increase (Kirkendoll, 2018).

Older studies reported that some of the major findings of past research suggests the primary barriers reported by the women were the feeling of exclusion as well as unpreparedness and a lack of or ineffective career goals (Jackson & Harris, 2007). Scholars encouraged the importance of exploration into the personal interactions of African American women from a historical context as they faced and overcame challenges navigating their career pathways will contribute significantly to research development (Banks, 1984; Howard-Vital, 1989; Moulds-Greene, 2019; Whitehead, 2017). A repeated perception reported by African American women is the increased challenges they face due to race during the recruitment and career ascension at predominantly white serving institutions; more frequently in higher education (Cain, 2015; Moulds-Greene, 2019; Rawlings-McDowell, 2018; Sutton, 2022; Whitehead, 2017).

Seeking to obtain data on internalized perceptions of African American women and the effect that media may have on how they see and present themselves to others was facilitated by (Rawlings-McDowell, 2018). The qualitative research project sought to explore the lived experiences of African American women that were successful in navigating the path to leadership as well as provide possible strategies for other women with the desire to advance (Rawlings-McDowell, 2018). Several major findings from this study added value to this research area. A recurring theme among the participants' responses centered on self-identity and internalization, controlling the individual's presentation of themselves to others in the workplace (Rawlings-McDowell, 2018). Participants also discussed the effect of media representation on their self-identity, which could not affect how they see themselves, but how others saw them as well (Rawlings-McDowell, 2018).

Results of the study also states that African American women work to control "the image of authentic self" against the media's images and representation (Rawlings-McDowell, 2018 p. 48). A similar study acknowledged that women in general might be better suited for leadership based on their ability to adapt, teamwork, socialization skills and that these abilities could ultimately enhance opportunities for leadership (Rawlings-McDowell, 2018). The following section will explore challenges encountered by African American women after their selection to lead in two and four-year institutions.

Perceived Challenges Encountered by Females Selected to Lead

In a large portion of organizations and higher education institutions, African American women still hold a much lower percentage of upper management position than African American men, Caucasian men, and Caucasian women (Beckwith et al., 2016). According to Chandler (2011), women account for less than 15% of Fortune 500 companies' top leadership positions, which was a slight increase from the study

conducted by Bilen-Green et al., (2008), reporting that only 13.5 % of the top leadership positions were held by women. The information provided in the Chandler (2011) report stated that not only were women underrepresented in top leadership positions compared to men, but also they were least likely to be paid salaries comparable to men holding the same positions. Information provided by sources such as the Johnson (2017) and Forbes Magazine (Moody, 2018) report that women hold approximately 35% of the presidency positions among colleges and universities. However, African American women account for less than 5% of that number, remaining the most underrepresented group holding higher education leadership positions (Johnson, 2017).

Jackson and Harris (2007) conducted an exploratory study into the perception of barriers and strategies implemented by African American female college presidents to excel past challenges. This study focused on the identification of perceived barriers, understanding the experiences, and an explanation of strategies used by African American women on their personal trajectory toward becoming college presidents. The participants in the study consisted of 43 African American female presidents holding various level of degrees (93% held a Ph.D. or Education Doctorate combined, while 8% held at least a master's degree (Jackson & Harris, 2007).

The researchers utilized a survey instrument developed and used previously by the American Council on Education (ACE), (Jackson & Harris, 2007). Surveys were sent to participants with a 73% return rate (Jackson & Harris, 2007). The survey contained series of open-ended questions pertaining to their personal experiences as they were seeking their roles as presidents and responses were collected, coded, and grouped into themes using the statistical software SPSS, then rechecked by an individual to decrease the possibility of data errors (Jackson & Hall, 2007). Significant findings in similar studies reported that African American women suggested introducing mentors in the

preliminary stages of career development as a way to increase leadership skills and improve the possibility of overcoming barriers along career pathways in higher education (Cain, 2015; Jackson & Harris, 2007; McDaniel, 2016; Oikelome, 2017).

Oikelome (2017) analyzed responses on the achievement of African American women currently holding post-secondary education Presidency positions. Results from the study acknowledges there was a decrease between 2011 and 2016 from nine to five percent of African American women holding presidency positions in higher education institutions. The framework of the Oikelome (2017) study was to explore the individual perception of barriers that impact the career pathways of African American women that broke through the roadblocks pursuing positions in higher education at the Dean or higher level. Oikelome (2017) recognizes what some consider achieving a level of success in higher education by stating, “The college presidency is a benchmark of status and achievement in the academy” (p. 23). Utilizing open-ended questions to gather data from participants, Oikelome (2017) interviewed seven White and six African American women college presidents as they reflected upon their career journey (p. 23). The findings of the study resulted in three themes that commonly overlapped.

Themes identified from data collected on challenges faced by African American women leaders serving as Presidents in higher education were competence, identity, and difficulty identifying strategies to navigate the pathways for continued progression (Oikelome, 2017). Research gathered in this study also states that gender continues to be the primary commonality hindering women’s professional growth in the workplace, while race increases challenges encountered by African American women navigating the same systems (Oikelome, 2017). Diversity among the student populations has increased throughout post-secondary educational institutions; however, Oikelome (2017) reveals participants feel it has done little to increase equal representation at the leadership level.

Ultimately, findings reported by this study indicated the resilient nature of African American women needed to provide the necessary strength to face perceived racial barriers and continue along their journey in search of presidency roles in higher education (Oikelome, 2017).

As reported by responses in a recent study, African American women are trying to close the gap by increasing the percentage of advance degrees obtained according to Smith-Ligon (2011). According to information obtained in the study, a surge in educational attainment of advanced degrees by African American women has made this demographic one of the fastest growing educational achievement groups (Smith-Ligon, 2011). In addition to the advancement in degree attainment, African American women are meeting leadership selection criteria through professional development, skills, and experience, however, the lack of equal representation in executive roles in higher education continues to be persistent (Smith-Ligon, 2011; Taylor, 2018). Additional findings of this study encouraged more work in this area to examine the personal reflections of African American women and their lived experiences facing challenges along their career paths (Smith-Ligon, 2011).

Jones et al. (2013) provided an historical overview on the disparity of African American women presidents and their perception of personal, systemic, and socially created barriers that plagued their pathways to success. The Jones et al. (2013) study utilized the phenomenological paradigm method to conduct the study and gather data analyzing the career pathways, challenges, and perceived barriers to leadership identified by African American women college presidents. The findings of the study revealed several common themes among the women interviewed that range from “balancing act, isolation, presidential aspirations, networking and mentorships, challenges, and presidential advice” (Jones et al., 2013, p. 4). Due to the small sample size and all the

subjects holding the same professional title as college presidents from historically Black colleges and universities with no comparison group, Jones et al. (2013) reported this as a limitation for the study.

Jones and Palmer (2011) used a psychodynamic approach to examine the interpersonal relationships between female professional staff in higher education and how the career advancement of other women was supported by their peers. Additionally, Jones and Palmer (2011) stated community colleges are mainly comprised of female employees; however, top executive leadership positions were primarily filled with males. A common theme presented by professional women taking the survey within higher education reported feelings of isolation due to the limited number of female peers at their level of administration (Jones & Palmer, 2011).

Several themes emerged from the Jones and Palmer (2011) study such as the observation that some African American women distrust, sensed a feeling of not being supported by others and the perceptions that women actively engaged in undermining and sabotaging each other. This distrust would sometimes lead to a negative workplace environment among professional women. Jones and Palmer (2011) used previous research findings to frame their study from the premise that the behavior of women in the workplace is guided by their prior workplace experiences and life. The research also yielded results that most professional women did not have a mentor along their professional path (Jones & Palmer, 2011). Townsend (2019) reviewed the work of Hannum et al. (2015), identifying barriers to leadership in higher education institutions as lack of opportunity and support, not having a leadership identity, experiencing differing expectations for men and women, discouragement, and sabotage (p. 65).” The next section will discuss the possible impact of the perceptions formed by previous and current leaders on the experience of future leaders.

Impact of Perceptions on Future Leaders

Based on the examination of several studies, some African American women have successfully navigated and broken through the virtual glass ceiling and are now being asked to share the leadership styles they believed were most effective leading to their success (Michael, 2013; Jones & Palmer, 2011). In recent years, scholars have had an increased interest in conducting studies identifying and exploring common leadership styles of women in education careers, with participants from the positions of Deans, Chancellors, and Presidents that have managed to slide around the glass ceiling (Dubose, 2017; Michael, 2013). Furthermore, researchers are interested in identifying gender stereotypes that are categorized by women in specific roles, making them ineffective leaders (Michael, 2013). The data in the study was collected by utilizing an established leadership survey and an additional interview consisting of various open-ended questions administered by the researcher (Michael, 2013).

The findings cited by Michael (2013) found a correlation between women with transformational leadership styles and career advancement to upper-level positions in Higher Education. Additionally, data from the study suggested that some women changed their leadership style to increase their chances for advance level promotions in higher education institutions (Michael, 2013). Participants in the Michael (2013) study also reported that women felt the barriers they encountered were not faced by their counterparts seeking the same advanced leadership roles. Ultimately, the study revealed that the majority of those that broke through the glass ceiling primarily led by a transformational leadership approach (Michael, 2013).

The exploratory study by Beckwith et al., (2016) established the need to go deeper into the phenomenon faced by African American women seeking advancement to top leadership roles during their careers, by exploring historical data along with their

personal history, but state that information is limited due to a disproportionate number of African American women holding those positions to collect data. The validity of studies involving internal barriers reported by African American women during their quest for executive leadership positions could be challenged based on personal biases, such as internal perceptions on the lack of support, extra duties, stereotypes, isolation, no growth in positions, and classism (Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Mitchell, 2021). The impact of personal perceptions of African American women from lived experiences on future aspiring leaders could lead to both positive and negative feelings based on the information examined in the presented studies.

Numerous studies encouraged the continuation of research identifying the different ways race and sexism could affect the professional growth of African American women as a way to navigate the difficult systems inhibiting leadership attainment (Beall-Davis, 2017; Bean, 2021; Rawlings & McDowell, 2018; Smith et al., 2019). The impact of internal perceptions formed by some African American women due to their experiences and challenges navigating their career paths could lead to biased influences on potential future leaders desiring to achieve advanced roles as presented in Townsend (2019). African American women in the Townsend (2019) study revealed evidence in there being no intentionality to recruit, which has a direct connection to the broken pipeline resulting in low number of African American women in administrative leadership positions in education” recruitment to increase diversity, and no intentionality during the recruiting phase” (p. 146). The Townsend (2019) research also reported that African American women continue to navigate barriers pursuing executive leadership roles in higher education such as “issues of microaggressions and struggled to make connections” (p. 140). Researchers ask the question: What can be done to improve the disparity of African American women in higher education? The following section will discuss

strategies employed by American women who have been successful in their efforts to improve the disparity in higher education by breaking through the glass ceiling.

Improving the Disparity

Research findings supported the effectiveness of mentorship programs for African American women and their career advancement (Billy, 2015; Jones (2013); Simon et al., 2004 suggest that mentoring African American women seeking advancement in higher education career paths could be an asset to the human resource professional development component of higher education institutions. Overall, the benefits of implementing a mentor program could decrease feelings of isolation, inclusiveness, and professional growth could have positive effects on retention (Simon et al., 2004). Studies have begun to not only identify barriers to African American female leadership attainment, but also collect data on strategies used by women who have successfully navigated around challenges faced at historically Black colleges and predominantly white institutions (Bartman, 2015; Bean, 2021; Johnson, 2015; Robinson, 2012).

Findings in numerous scholarly examinations suggest different ways in improving the disparity of African American women in executive leadership attainment in higher education. A common theme among most studies is the need for mentorship beginning in the early stages of career development (Burton et al., 2020; Cain, 2015; Oikelome, 2017). The implementation of a coaching system, career development programs, and pathways to improve leadership development have been identified by studies to have a positive effect on breaking the glass ceiling leading assisting with closing the gap in disparity among African American females in educational institutions (McDaniel, 2016).

Several studies with similar strategies sought to increase the understanding of the experiences of African American women who have successfully achieved inclusion in advance leadership roles (Dubose, 2017; McDaniel, 2016; Mitchell, 2021). The findings

from the Dubose (2017) study were presented as a collective reflection rather than individualized experiences (p. 88). There were three main collective themes reported in the study on things that improved or influenced opportunities for advancement: workplace sponsored programs, internal and external training opportunities, strategic preparation and planning, self-determination, and courage (Dubose, 2017). Several sub themes were identified that assisted in the elevation of those that navigated above the glass ceiling reported as,, “family and community and community influences, preparation to work harder, and education, experience and professional development” (Dubose, 2017, p. 90).

Summary of Findings

Current research suggests the perception of the glass ceiling is still a factor affecting African American women and limiting their career advancement opportunities. Data also revealed African American women are achieving advanced level degrees at rates higher than their male counterparts, with participation in increased professional development and work experience to increase their chances to advance their careers (Smith-Ligon, 2011; Taylor, 2018). In addition to sexism and racism identified as recurring themes in the exploration of primary barriers hindering or slowing the progression of African American women achieving success in attaining executive leadership positions, the data has also recognizes classism as a deterrent to career progression in higher education institutions (Burton et al, 2020; Clarke, 2019; Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Ford et al., 2019; Johnson, 2019; Maloney et al., 2019; McCluney & Rabelo, 2019; Moulds-Greene, 2019; Robinson, 2012; Smith et al., 2019). Personal perceptions identified by African American women with stagnated careers were feelings of exclusion, lack of support, isolation, and the absence of detailed professional development plans; this was a fraction of the list of specific elements hindering

achievement at advanced levels (Jackson & Harris, 2007; Michael, 2013; Whitehead, 2017).

The findings of the literature examined was provided from shared experiences of participants holding leadership roles in both two-year colleges and four-year post-secondary educational institutions. Scholars suggest that the career challenges faced by participants employed in two-year education organizations seemingly intensified at the four-year institution level (Jones, 2013; Michael, 2013). Data also suggested that African American women's career opportunities were enhanced when the women were assigned mentors early in their careers as well as clearer professional goals, improved perceptions of self-worth and view of barriers (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016; Hill & Wheat, 2017; Jones et al., 2013; Oikelome, 2017; Walker, 2016).

African American women continue to be underrepresented and remain a minority in the top hierarchy of businesses (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016). The fact that this research is needed is further emphasized by the fact that as recent as the year 2001, Dr. Ruth Simmons was appointed as the first African American woman president to lead an Ivy League educational institution (Jones, 2016). Exploration into the perceived impact of the barriers gender and race have on the experiences of African American women seeking presidency roles at colleges and universities was conducted by Oikelome (2017) and provides current relevant information. Participants in the Oikelome (2017) study were obtained through purposive sampling of White and African American women who held college president positions at four-year institutions. The findings of the Oikelome (2017) study affirms the similar findings of several other studies that documented the perception of African American females that the glass ceiling is intact and continues to hinder the professional growth and development of African American women. Ultimately, findings reported by this study is that the resilience of African American women provides the

necessary strength to face perceived racial barriers and continue along their journey in search of presidency roles in higher education (Oikelome, 2017).

There are strategies used by some African American women to break through the glass ceiling that have proven effective such as adhering to certain leadership styles. Additionally, results suggested that introducing mentors in the initial stages of career development could increase leadership skills and improve the possibility of overcoming barriers faced by African American women on higher education career pathways (Cain, 2015; Jackson & Harris, 2007; McDaniel, 2016). The list of barriers affecting African American women continue to grow due to the studies that consider the personal bias of individuals as well as overt systemic barriers that are in place (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016). One of the newest areas of barriers that is being considered for future studies include examining African American women leadership in religious organizations. Barriers can affect all women on a micro or a macro level in society (Carroll, 1982). It is noted that there has been a slight increase in the amount of scholarly exploratory work on barriers affecting career achievement among African American women over the recent years. Nonetheless, researchers should continue to examine the lived experiences and strategies leading to the success of African American female leaders in an to improve not only the disparity limited access to opportunities in higher education, but across career paths in top companies nationwide. The following section will elaborate in depth the specifics of these matters.

Theoretical Framework

The primary framework used for this study is grounded in historical context of the Black feminism movement during the 1970s to bring awareness to the inequities of African American women in the workplace (Coleman, 2019). A feminist activist organizer, “Kimberle Crenshaw, is credited with coining the term, intersectionality in

1989” seeking to promote an increased understanding of the oppression of African American women (Keucheniuss & Mugge, 2020, p. 361). In an article addressing the marginalization of African American women in feminist theory, Crenshaw (1989) states, “because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated.” (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 140).

The previous statement enforced the support of utilizing Crenshaw’s *Intersectionality Theory* of race and gender as a theoretical framework for this study. Theorists have used the phenomenon of intersectionality in studies to discuss and explain how race and gender could affect the disparity of African American women in higher education executive leadership roles (Polk-Johnson, 2019). As a collaborative recognition theory, *Rawlsian Theory of Justice and the Utilitarian Theory of Justice* shares a foundation of moral principles and actions of doing what is right in a system of fairness in society (Wesarat & Mathew, 2017).

The examination of the literary work conducted by previous researchers provided details of three impactful barriers reported by African American women in which they felt impeded in their progression to leadership roles. According to information provided in several studies, African American women were subjected to oppressive behaviors such as sexism, racism, and classism (Clarke, 2019; Domingue, 2015; Ferguson, 2021; Hannum et al., 2015; Munden, 2015; Nixon, 2017; Townsend, 2019). Furthermore, according to Townsend, (2019), participants reported additional barriers such as lack of mentors and the lack of trust impairing their leadership development and career progression. Scholars suggests that the glass ceiling continues to reinforce its strength and continues to impact diversity in higher education leadership, as well as decreasing the

motivation or inspiration for African American women to apply for advanced leadership roles (Davis & Maldonado, 2015).

The gap in literature is associated with the limited availability or access to scholarly work specifically addressing the disparities of African American women in higher education leadership. The additional need to fill the gap by providing data on strategies from African American women who have successfully navigated around the glass ceiling effect could lead to increased opportunities. This study seeks to add to the current work that is available.

Conclusion

This literature reviewed presents a relevant examination of the perceptions of barriers perceived by women navigating career pathways providing a framework relating to the purpose of this study, which was to identify the barriers faced by professional women seeking executive leadership roles and the impact on African American women pursuing opportunities to lead higher education institutions. In Chapter III, methodological aspects of this dissertation are detailed to include the research purpose and questions, research design, population and sampling selection, data collection procedures, data analysis, privacy and ethical considerations, and the research limitations for this study.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to explore the potential barriers encountered by African American women along their career paths to obtaining advanced leadership positions in higher education institutions. The phenomenology approach was used to explore perceived barriers that impact professional growth for African American women seeking to achieve executive leadership roles in higher education and strategies used to overcome those challenges. Qualitative research “is used in the exploration of meanings of social phenomena as experience individuals themselves, in their natural context” (Malterud, 2001, p. 483). This study adds to the current literature to advance the discussion into this phenomenon and potential solutions. This chapter presents an overview of the research problem, research purpose, questions, research design, population and sampling selection, data collection procedures, data analysis, privacy and ethical considerations, and the research design limitations for this study.

Overview of Research Problem

The underrepresentation of African American women holding advanced leadership positions at two- and four-year institution continues to be lowest among all racial and gender groups employed within higher education systems (Johnson, 2017; Beckwith et al., 2016; Jo, 2008; Whitehead, 2017). Systemic and internal barriers have been identified through studies that are encountered by African American women in the workplace believed to hinder or slow their professional advancement (McDaniel, 2016; Whitehead, 2017). Research findings suggests that the impact of sexism, racism, and internalized perceptions of the “glass ceiling effect” can cause major disparities in the representation of the African American women organizational leadership structure in higher education (Oikelome, 2017; Robinson, 2012; Townsend, 2019).

Researchers suggest that scholars use historical data to truly evaluate and understand from a holistic perspective, the barriers affecting African American women and the implications of those barriers to their professional growth and career advancement (Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Smith-Ligon, 2011; Whitehead, 2017). Women are the fastest growing demographic attaining advanced degrees, yet 70% of men and only 30% of women are serving as college presidents or higher, while women of color attain only 5% of those positions (Johnson, 2017). However, the lack of available data specifically detailing statistics and lived experiences of African American women continue to fall short. Most available statistical data groups African American women with women of color. Therefore, it is difficult to obtain reliable data pertaining primarily to African American women. As African American women continue to improve academic credentials and leadership selection qualifications, this data is needed to begin the movement toward equality in the workplace. How do we know we have achieved equity without accurate data?

Research Purpose and Questions

The purpose of this study is to explore the potential barriers encountered by African American women along their career paths to obtaining advanced leadership positions in Higher Education institutions. The following research questions guided this study:

- R1: What barriers do African American women face while pursuing their career pathways to higher education's advanced leadership positions?
- R2: What challenges do African American women encounter while employed in advanced leadership roles as Deans and above in higher education?
- R3: What strategies were suggested by African American females to overcome barriers to obtain leadership positions in higher education?

Research Design

This research study utilized the qualitative phenomenological research approach. The phenomenology qualitative research method employs several process components, which include data collection, data analysis, interpretation of the data, and a written description of the results (Creswell & Poth 2016). The advantage to implementing the phenomenology research design is the allowance of an opportunity to provide a more in-depth exploration into the participant responses through counter story telling or a reflective phase during the one-on-one interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The approach used in this study provides an opportunity to explore more in-depth insight into the lived experiences of the participants as they navigate their way through their career pathways to leadership. A purposeful sample of African American women employed or previously employed as Dean or higher at two- and four-year higher education institutions in Texas participated in semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions and counter storytelling to document the experiences of the participants. Responses from the interviews were transcribed, coded, and analyzed using an inductive thematic coding process.

Site and Participant Selection

The population of this study consisted of fifteen African American women employed by various public higher education institutions across the state of Texas, with African American women leadership in the role of Dean or higher. Based on 2016 data released in the year 2017, women account for 30% of college and university presidents, leaving men to comprise 70% of the top leadership roles (Johnson, 2017). Furthermore, the data revealed that women of color made up only 8% of all presidents across the U.S. (Johnson, 2017). For research purposes, women of color includes all nonwhite women. This lack of acknowledgement by not separating women in their distinct ethnicity

breakdown for research decreases the opportunity to provide numbers specifically on the percentage of African American women in advanced leadership roles. According to the National Center for Education Statistics report released in 2018, there are 4,298 institutions of higher education; 1,626 are public colleges and 1,687 are private institutions, with the remaining 985 being for-profit (NCES, 2018). The number and size of these institutions, with less than 8% percent African American women in advanced leadership roles, displays the continued gender and race disparity. The focus of the study was to identify African American women from public colleges and universities in the state of Texas employed or previously employed in leadership roles as Deans or higher.

This study used purposeful sampling to find women that met pre-selected criteria, enabling the researcher to maintain the focus of the study, understand the implications, as well as provide a more detailed analysis of the responses (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The basic participant selection criterion for this research study was based on: (a) gender, (b) race, (c) Dean or higher leadership position in higher education, (d) reside in Texas. To execute the criterion sampling, an initial review of the Texas higher education data system was conducted to gather data on the gender profile of public colleges and universities in the state of Texas with female presidents. The results of this initial screening identified 38 public universities, three state colleges, and 50 community college systems in Texas (NCES, 2018). Of the reported numbers, eleven universities and twenty-two community colleges were identified with women presidents. Further research through various sources outside of the higher education data base identified the number of presidents that met all of study criterion. Additionally, social media groups, emails, and personal referrals were utilized to recruit participants for the study.

This phenomenological qualitative study consisted of a sample size of 10 African American women from the state of Texas employed or previously employed as a dean or

above in higher education institutions. A sample size of 10 participants was suitable for this qualitative study providing an opportunity to detect repetitive themes as well as allowing the opportunity for the researcher to obtain a deeper insight into the participants' lived experiences (Malterud et al., 2016). Purposeful sampling was selected as the preferred method utilized for the recruitment method for this study. This method ensured participants met the following criteria: identified themselves as African American, female, serve or have served as a Dean or higher advanced level leadership position at an institution of higher education. Participants were recruited through various methods such as the referrals, public college directories, personal emails, and social media groups.

The participants confirmed their interest to participate in the study via email, phone, or private messaging via social media. Prospective participants were informed about the research, the purpose, and the benefit of their involvement in research. The participants were then emailed the informed consent form. Once the researcher received the returned signed informed consent form attached, interviews were scheduled and conducted at that time. Participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time. The researcher continued a purposeful selection of participants until a minimum number of ten to fifteen participants was reached. Information that was asked to be shared by participants was relative to their position in higher education, years of experience, educational background, and their perception of barriers to obtaining leadership positions. No participants were compensated for their involvement with the study.

Data Collection Procedure

The researcher obtained permission to conduct the study from the University of Houston-Clear Lake's (UHCL) Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects

(CPHS). Data collection began when the approval was received. The participants were contacted via email, which included a cover letter explaining the study and an informed consent form. All participants submitted the informed consent form before participating in the study (see Appendix B). The participants who returned the completed consent form and agreed to participate in the study were contacted via email or telephone and invited to participate in a one-on-one interview. In the one-on-one interviews, participants shared their perceptions of barriers they faced and how those barriers affected their professional growth and its progression. Additionally, participants had the opportunity to discuss the direct effect they believe the barriers had on their professional advancement and future opportunities.

The dates for the interviews were chosen based on the availability and flexibility of each participant and lasted from 45 to 60 minutes. The researcher utilized a customized set of interview questions reviewed by a qualitative researcher to guide the interviews (see Appendix C). Each participant was sent a copy of the interview questions a few hours in advance to give them enough time to reflect upon the questions as well as assist in staying within the designated interview time of no more than 45 to 60 minutes.

Interviews were conducted via Zoom, as this medium provided the same opportunities as in person interview to observe the person body language of the participants and gauge their comfort level with the interview questions. Through semi-structured interviews, the researcher collected information from participants on barriers that may affect professional growth as well as strategies suggested to overcome those barriers. The participants had the opportunity to express in their own words their experiences navigating their career paths and the barriers they may have faced. The initial questions were asked to obtain more meaningful information about the participants such as the total number of years in any type of leadership position, their educational

experiences, types of positions held, as well as family background. The remaining questions centered around the participants' ability to obtain an advanced leadership position despite the perceived barriers they faced along their journey in higher education. The interview was led by pre-planned discussion topics; however, there were periods for the participants to discuss their topics in more detail and expand upon their experiences.

The recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim using Zoom's transcription service. The collected data were stored in two locations: a laptop hard drive and a flash drive. Both the hard drive and the flash drive are password protected. The computer was kept in a locked room. After the completion of the study, the flash drive will be stored in a safe place for five years, after which time the data will be destroyed.

Data Analysis

The data was coded and analyzed using a thematic analysis process, which assists in the discovery and organization of recurring themes that may arise by grouping the information based on related concepts or ideas (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During the thematic coding phase, the researcher continuously safeguarded against subjective interpretation as themes emerged. The responses from research question one was examined to find emerging themes on the perception of African American women and the barriers faced while following their career pathways to college leadership positions. For research question two, the data analysis focused on the perceptions of challenges faced by African American women while employed in advanced leadership roles in higher education institutions at the level of Dean or higher. The final research question examined strategies employed by African American women that were able to advance to executive leadership positions in higher education. The themes derived from the data represent the relationship between perceptions of participants and their experiences and or beliefs in barriers effect on career progression or achievement. The themes will be

developed into a series of charts and further analyzed for a relationship to the research questions. The findings will then be documented and reported as they emerged from the study.

Qualitative Validity

The qualitative analysis process increased validity by cross-checking data obtained from the interviews among the participants. Interviews were conducted in an impartial manner with the intent to reduce personal bias as much as possible. Member checking with the participants regarding the interview transcripts assisted in ensuring accuracy. The participants also had the opportunity to review their answers to ensure they are accurate and reflective of their thoughts. Peer debriefing was utilized to assist in checking preliminary responses and transcription against the original documentation.

Privacy and Ethical Considerations

The Committee for Protection of Human Subjects reviewed and approved the study prior to data collection. The emails to prospective participants consisted of a cover letter stating the purpose of the study, that participation in the study is voluntary, and that identities will remain confidential using pseudonyms during reporting. Informed consent forms were issued and collected from participants who were willing to participate in the study. The data collected were stored on a computer hard drive and on a flash drive. Both the hard drive and the flash drive are password protected. Data collection processes kept participant confidentiality a priority with any identifying information being removed from final reports, and pseudonyms were used to protect interview participants. Upon conclusion of the study, data will be stored in a locked secure location for five years before destruction.

Limitations of the Study

The research design consisted of several limitations. Primarily, the sample size is limited due to the number of African American women within the region that hold a Dean or higher position within the higher education system (Ferguson, 2021). The second limitation that could potentially impact the validity of the study is the potential bias in the responses from the individuals based on their personal experience navigating through career pathways that they perceived as bias toward them as individuals (Briggs, 2015). There is a limited amount of statistical data from scholarly research reflective specifically toward supplying numbers for African American women in higher education leadership. An additional challenge is, due to the limited data of the study, there are no comparative data regarding African American women presidents at predominantly white institutions (PWI) versus at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU). A final limitation of the study is the ongoing challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic leading to possible limitations of the number of participants willing to participate, or limited access to those participants.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceived barriers encountered by African American women along their career paths to obtaining a leadership role in higher education. This chapter described the methodology used to conduct the study. Additionally, this study will lead to a continuation of the conversation to examine the effect that mentors might have on the career progression of African American women seeking higher education advanced leadership positions. Race and gender appeared to be two of the main guided concepts behind the study. The qualitative phenomenological study used one-on-one interviews to gather perceptions of barriers to African American women in advanced leadership roles from two-year colleges and four-year universities

from the state of Texas to provide strategies used during their journey to attain leadership roles in higher education. The information collected in the interviews was used to add to the literature available and continue the conversation toward changes in the disparities of African American women leadership in higher education. Chapter IV will discuss the findings of this study and Chapter V will present a summary, implications of the study, recommendations for future research, and a conclusion.

CHAPTER IV:

RESULTS

Research has found that though women and minorities have increasingly obtained advance level degrees, however, there continues to be consistent inequities among this group at the highest executive levels in Higher Education leadership (Hannum et al., 2015; Madera, 2017). As stated in Chapter one, the purpose of this study was to explore the potential barriers encountered by African American women along their career paths to obtaining advanced leadership positions in higher education institutions.

According to data identified in the American College President Study (Gargliardi et al., 2017), the inequity of female college and university presidents continues to be an issue in higher education leadership. Utilizing Okie's (2017) presidency benchmark as a base for the study, the researcher sought to collect data from African American women one-step below and higher to gain perspectives on this phenomenon. The focus of this study is the state of Texas; however, the problem is not exclusive to the state, but is considered a phenomenon throughout the United States (Hannum et al., 2015; Whitaker, 2019).

Between the period of 1986 and 2016, researchers documented a growth in women presidents in higher education organizations from 9% to 30% (Oikelome, 2017). Additionally, data presented in the article states that women of color only accounted for 9% of college presidents in 2011, but dropped to 5% in 2016. An article by Winkle-Wagner (2015) suggested that an adequate assessment of the career advancements and struggles of African American women in higher education leadership is hindered by the integration of all women of color into one group for research purposes. This chapter presents a qualitative analysis of data collected from video conferencing and face-to-face interviews with 10 Texas college and university leaders in the positions of dean or higher.

The interviews were then transcribed, reviewed, and checked for accuracy through member checking with participants. As demonstrated in Creswell & Poth (2016), member checking is a process inclusive of crosschecking data, analysis, and interpretations with each participation to increase accuracy and validity of interview.

As demonstrated in qualitative research, an assertive effort must be made to restrict biases formed by past and present experiences, by maintaining an impartial perspective (Creswell & Poth, 2016). This interview portion of this study was formulated by creating questions that would allow the participant to utilize storytelling to provide a detailed view of their lived experiences. According to Creswell and Poth (2016), it is suggested that researchers could make decision to allow for some of their personal considerations in studies. Every effort has been made to remove any personal bias from this research. The focus of this study was to allow each participant an opportunity to tell their story through their responses by sharing their recollection of lived experiences navigating their way to their perspective career paths.

A series of interview questions correlating back to each research question provides the opportunity for a more in-depth discussion of emerging themes and sub themes supported by statements from each participant. The interview questions are used to provide insight into the lived experiences and perceptions of African American women pursuing leadership positions while employed by two year and four-year colleges and universities. The guided interview instrument that was developed to collect data for analysis containing 20 questions can be found in Appendix C of this study.

As presented in Chapter I, the research is organized in terms of three research questions, utilizing a series of carefully constructed interview questions correlating back to each research question. Collected data is presented and followed by an in-depth

discussion. Emergent themes are supported with significant statements from each of the study participants.

Participants' Demographics

Ten Texas college and university women were selected to participate in the study. The primary participant selection criterion for this research study was based on gender, race, and ethnicity, employed as Dean or higher leadership position in Higher Education, reside and or work in a Texas college or university. Additional demographic information was collected through self-identification prior to the interview to gain a deeper perspective to the participant responses.

Each participant was assigned a pseudonym to ensure the anonymity during his or her participation in the study. In line with the agreement pre-interview with the participants, only a limited amount of their personal demography information would be shared in the study that was necessary to accomplish the goals of the study. Participants were concerned with the small sample size, contained geography location, and limited number of African American women currently serving in senior executive roles in their institutions; it would not be difficult to connect them to study and their statements. Therefore, only general participant demography information was shared to accomplish the needs of the study.

Below is a brief description of each participant; their identities, as stated, were protected by the use of pseudonyms throughout the interviews. Interviewees were not asked their specific age, but they were asked to identify which age range they fell under. Four of the interviewees identified their age range as 41-50; the other six participants selected the age range of 51-60. Below is a brief description of participants, leadership level within their current institution, and ultimate career aspirations.

Amber received her undergraduate degree from a historically Black college/institution (HBCU) outside of the state of Texas. She comes from a family of educators. All immediate family members have post-secondary and professional degrees. Additionally, she received both her master's and doctorate degrees outside of the state as well. Education and serving others is her mission in life. Amber states, "I'm going to start off by saying that, I'm a fourth generational college graduate and education is my family's business." Amber considers herself what she called a traditional pathway leader in academia. She worked four years as an adjunct professor prior to seeking leadership roles outside of the faculty area. She is currently working in a two-year educational institution in an executive level position. Her ultimate leadership aspirations would be to serve as a college or university president.

Becky received her undergraduate degree from a predominantly white institution (PWI) within the state of Texas. She received both her graduate degrees from HBCUs. Both she and her husband are prior military. She discussed her pathway to leadership as a nontraditional route, because she did not begin as an adjunct or with student services. Becky also previously worked in PK-12 before moving to higher education. She is currently working at a four-year university in the state at the senior executive level. Her ultimate career aspirations are to possibly leave higher education and go into the corporate sector as a business owner.

Charlene has over twenty-five years in working in higher education. All of Charlene's post-secondary education has been with HBCUs. She began her career in higher education working in the human resource department while pursuing her studies as a law student. Eventually, she transitioned toward education for her post-secondary degree. Charlene provides her reason for changing educational focus:

I was pursuing my JD degree. And after the first semester, I realized that number one; I needed to work full time in order to support myself. Secondly, I grew to love the work that I was doing in higher education.

She is currently working in a two-year college. Charlene held various other leadership positions throughout the college prior to obtaining her current position serving at the senior executive administrative leadership level. Charlene also says that her career pathway in higher education has been nontraditional.

Denise received her undergraduate and graduate level degrees from a predominantly white institution (PWI) within the state of Texas. Her undergraduate degree is in criminal justice. Denise's graduate degrees are in education administration. She has worked in higher education for the past twenty-two years, primarily within the student services area. Denise currently serves at a two-year suburban outskirts institution. She has worked in various leadership positions, but her most enjoyable positions are those that give her the opportunity to interact frequently with students. Her career aspirations are to transition out to a four-year university to obtain senior leadership position. She feels her opportunities are currently limited.

Evelyn received her under graduate and graduate degrees from HBCUs. She has worked in higher education for almost twenty years. She started as an advisor and went on to advising manager. Evelyn continued to progress to her current position. She is currently serving in an advanced leadership dean or higher in a two-year institution. As far as her future aspiration in higher education, she says that she is content with the level she is at and has no desire to move on to the presidency level as she once thought she would.

Francis received her undergraduate degree in the Health Sciences from a HBCU. Her graduate degree was completed through a privately owned educational institution.

She has over twenty-six years of experience working in higher education. Francis began as a work-study student while finishing her undergraduate degree, then transitioned to advising. She is currently serving as a faculty member in a two-year institution and has a position as member of the college administration. Her future career aspirations are to be a college president at a two-year college.

Ginger has over 24 years in higher education. She is an HBCU graduate. She did not give much detail on her career progression or past leadership positions. She is currently employed at a four-year institution. She says that she believes she has reached her ultimate career goal in higher education. She is currently serving in one of the highest-level senior executive administrative leadership positions at the university. She enjoys her current position and does not see any changes or new decisions in the near future.

Helen has worked in higher education for 25 years. She started her career wanting to be a certified public accountant. She fell in love with teaching when she took a position to teach basic accounting and math at the college. She made the transition soon after. She worked her way through the financial aid department to her currently senior leadership position. Her ultimate career aspiration is to be a Vice Chancellor. She is currently working at a four-year institution and has held her current position for three years.

Ingrid is an HBCU graduate for both her undergraduate and graduate degrees. She began her career in higher education outside of Texas and has only been in Texas for about two years. Her current executive level position is at a four-year institution. She says that she made the transition to Texas because she admired the leadership of the current president. Ingrid intends to learn as much as she can under the leadership and

mentorship of the current president. Her ultimate career aspirations are to serve as a college president at a four-year institution.

Jasmine received her undergrad and graduate degrees from PWIs. She has over 21 years in working in higher education. Her degree background is Human Resource development. Jasmine is currently serving as an interim in a senior executive administrative leadership position in a four-year PWI. She hopes to be able to retain the position on a permanent basis. Jasmine has moved around the state of Texas working and worked at several PWIs. Her ultimate career aspirations would be fulfilled if she were able to retain the position she currently holding. Jasmine also says that she began her career in the corporate sector and that she applied much of what she learned to navigate within the higher education pathways. Additionally, Jasmine discussed how her career path in higher education could be viewed as nontraditional. She began in the human resource department and transitioned after some time to student services. She says she switched back and forth for a while, in case she wanted to transition back into the corporate sector for work.

Table 4.1 displays a representation of the participant demographics gathered prior to the interview. A brief amount of demographic information was collected to provide a more detailed view of each participant through self-identification and presented in the table below. Participants were asked to self-identify their age range, race, ethnicity, highest degree attainment, total number of years in higher education, employment status, geographic location of institution & ultimate career aspirations. The frequencies of the participant demographic responses are outlined in Table 4.2.

Table 4.1*Participant Demographics*

	Age Range	Race or Ethnicity	Highest Degree	# years in Higher Education	Hire Status	Geographic Location
Amber	51-60	White or European American	Doctoral or professional degree	25	Employed	Urban
Becky	41-50	White or European American	Doctoral or professional degree	20	Employed	Suburban- Rural Adjacent
Charlene	51-60	White or European American	Doctoral or professional degree	25	Employed	Urban
Denise	41-50	White or European American	Doctoral or professional degree	22	Employed	Suburban City Outskirts
Evelyn	41-50	White or European American	Doctoral or professional degree	20	Employed	Urban-Inner City and Suburban City Outskirts
Francis	51-60	Black or African American	Doctoral or professional degree	26	Employed	Suburban City Outskirts
Ginger	41-50	White or European American	Doctoral or professional degree	24	Employed	Suburban City Outskirts
Helen	51-60	American Indian or Alaska Native	Doctoral or professional degree	25	Employed	Other
Ingrid	51-60	White or European American	Doctoral or professional degree	20	Employed	Urban-Inner City
Jasmine	51-60	White or European American	Doctoral or professional degree	21	Employed	Suburban

Table 4.2*Frequency of Participant Demographic Responses*

	Self-Identified Demographic	Counts	Proportion
Age	41-50	4	0.4
	51-60	6	0.6
		10	1.0
Race or Ethnicity	Black or African American	10	1.0
Total		10	1.0
Years in Higher Education	Under 10	0	0.0
	11-15	0	0.0
	16-20	3	0.3
	21-25	7	0.7
Total		10	1.0
Highest Degree	Doctorate or Professional	10	1.0
Total		10	1.0
Geographic Location	Urban-Inner City	4	0.4
	Urban-Outer City	1	0.1
	Suburban City Outskirts	2	0.2
	Suburban-Rural Adjacent	2	0.2
	Other	0	0.0
	Urban-Inner City and Suburban City Outskirts	1	0.1
Total		10	1.0
Employment Status	Working (paid)	10	1.0
Total		10	1.0

The interview instrument located in Appendix C was used to assist the researcher in gathering reliable data from the participants. Participant identity was protected by assigning pseudonyms to ensure anonymity. The purpose of this study is to explore the potential barriers encountered by African American women along their career paths to obtaining advanced leadership positions in higher education institutions. A code sheet was created to record the data collected from the research questions along with the participant demographic information. Through the phenomenological study, themes emerged from shared experiences of the participants. The researcher wanted to ensure the study was heard from the participants' voices to ensure a deeper understanding of the barriers faced as they navigate the higher education systems. Therefore, detailed accounts and stories are shared with emerging themes relating back to each research question below.

Research Question One

Research question one (RQ1) was: What barriers do African American women face while pursuing their career pathways to advanced leadership positions in higher education? The following interview questions were asked: What in your perception are the greatest challenges/barriers faced by African American women in their effort to obtain college leadership positions at the dean or higher level? Do you feel race has helped or hurt you in your career path to your current leadership role and future leadership aspirations? Do you feel gender helped or hurt you in your career path to your current leadership role and future leadership aspirations? Could you explain how? Do you feel higher education is doing enough to ensure gender and race equality among those holding advance leadership positions? Explain why or why not? Through the responses from the participants, the following themes emerged for RQ1:

When participants were asked to discuss perceived challenges/barriers faced by African American women in their effort to obtain college leadership positions at the dean or higher level, among the list of barriers are self-imposed barriers, gender bias, racial bias, angry Black woman, and imposter syndrome.

Self-Imposed

Murray (2015) discusses self-imposed barriers as, “it is the position of this research that this experience may have created a mindset of multigenerational adaptive behaviors (specifically, ATS) that act as self-imposed barriers or self-sabotaging behaviors that thwart the very efforts African Americans engage in to achieve advancement (p. 17).”

Jasmine stated that the lack of knowledge, not knowing how to navigate the system or the path toward leadership, primarily the career pathway to achieve a position at the presidency level or above is a barrier itself. To support her position on self-imposed barriers Jasmine explained,

Of course, there are very few women presidents. So just by the numbers, you see fewer opportunities, right. But I'd say the barrier would be not knowing the path.

If there is a path, not knowing what associations or programs you should be a part of is a barrier.

The view from Jasmine's perspective would suggest preparation as the key element in overcoming this self-imposed barrier by pursuing knowledge and opportunities prior to navigating the system or pathway.

The self-imposed barrier discussion continued from Evelyn's perspective. She said she was always the quiet one that worked hard and hoped that her work ethic spoke for itself. However, she also said others saw this as a barrier to her career progression and encouraged her to speak up. According to Evelyn, she never wanted to be the loudest one

in the room and that this strategy had worked in her favor. She also said she adapted her quietness as a natural part of her work style. Evelyn explained her view on this barrier:

Always being mindful of toning down the request, not coming off as overly aggressive, so you are not intimidating the people that you are trying to convey the message to. So if I had to list challenges or barriers, I don't even know if I would call them barriers. I would probably say, it's just, you know, taking constructive criticism, if you will. Definitely being mindful of how you are perceived, the message that you're trying to convey, and that it hits its mark, and it doesn't miss the tone, so not having the blinders on. So when you receive that constructive feedback that you can take that and give that to your advantage.

However, Murray's (2015) study found that self-imposed barriers can be derived from internal or external forces. External forces could be the perception of others that African American women are loud; therefore, the quietness that Evelyn places upon herself could be a reaction to this external force without the realization this is happening. It was not clear if she meant to take the feedback as permission to speak up for herself, which would further suggest an external force driving this self-imposed barrier.

Ingrid provided additional insight into her thoughts on the subject by expanding her view on self-imposed barriers and how they consume one without realizing it. Ingrid provided details, which are presented below:

Some of that is self-imposed and some of that is society. Some of that is learned experience, so to be more confident and assured and go for it. So whatever we could do, to help empower people, to give people the courage. I think that's a key word that would eliminate some of the barriers and some of the delays that occur, because sometimes we're so busy making sure we've dotted every I and crossed every T when we should just go for it.

Ingrid listed this under self-imposed barriers, but the argument could be made that this could also fall under imposter syndrome, which was discussed later. There is a saying that was shared a couple of times during the interviews, which is, “get out of your own way”. When asked to elaborate more on her statement, Ingrid suggested that some people spend more time preparing than actually doing.

Ginger discussed her self-imposed barrier as being a lonely place, mentally, that she internalized upon herself. Due to the position that she currently serves in, she finds it difficult to trust individuals due to the nature of her work. Ginger’s concept of a self-imposed barrier is one of self-isolating once you reach a certain level. She explained that leadership could be a lonely place as advanced positions are reached. Ginger expressed her narrative:

This whole idea of this being a lonely place. I know a lot of us live in this place. We do this job, we are hyper focused and then you know, my husband says it all the time, you come home and you tell me everything you download, and I'm like, because this is a safe place. It's a safe place. And the institution does not always seem like a safe place. So maybe a strategy would be finding that safe place, finding that group that is your tribe. You know, where you are able to lean on others’ understanding and effect. I do not think we often get that. Okay. I think that hinders us from not moving forward, but, you know, having the ability to navigate those things and open doors for us. Because it's, again, probably a self-imposed barrier, but it comes from a place of someone else or something that actually put up a barrier as well.

Ginger continued her discussion on self-isolation on her campus, by ensuring all of her mentors are from different institutions. She also stated the tribe she spoke of in her earlier statement was not from any of her peers on her campus. Isolation has been a

repeated barrier reported by African American women that have accomplished certain levels of achievement in their careers. According to Jones, 2013, “isolation and alienation from informal and formal networks have been the norm for African American women in dominant higher education institutions” (p. 40).

Gender Bias

Several participants also listed gender biases as a barrier at some point during their careers. Five out of the ten participants discussed gender biases as a perceived barrier in the higher education leadership pathway.

Amber recently received a promotion to her current executive leadership position; she recalled how she felt dealing with what she believes were gender biases due to her new role. Amber recalled her experience where a male colleague, whose position is one step under her, told that he could do her job. She said her response to him was, “Really?” She further explained that she did not respond to him in more detail immediately, because she did not want to respond in anger, so she waited a few days. She trembled as she explained how the comment still bothered her, as she explained why she did not respond right away to his bias. Amber explained:

I had to let it wait for a minute. You hear me. I had to let it calm down for a minute, but I'm going to go down there and I'm going to tell him that he can't do my job as a Black woman.

To gain a full perspective of the depth of the situation, the researcher asked for additional background information. Amber explained that she was offered the position as an interim. She also stated that the position was previously occupied for more than 10 years by a middle-aged white male. Additionally, she was the first woman and woman of color to sit in that position. With the additional information, it provides a clearer picture behind the emotion of Amber's situation.

Evelyn expressed her concern regarding gender bias and the expectation for women in the workplace to wait their time. Evelyn supported her perception through this statement:

Obviously being a female, it's wait your turn, if there are men, if you will, that are in line. I think the expectation for them to wait their turn is definitely there, in reference to maybe you are not quite ready yet. I do not think that necessarily means that from a skill set, just timing, right. That a male would be chosen in that role, depending on who is making the decisions, before the female would be. The researcher requested additional details from Evelyn on her perception of gender bias in the situation she recalled. She restated that if men and women were in the same line for a particular position, there is the expectation that the male would be selected and the female would have to wait until someone decided to select her; regardless of their skillset, she would have to wait her turn.

When speaking on the issue of gender biases with Ginger, she discussed the importance of gender diversity in the workplace:

I think there is an importance in gender anywhere in any position. I think that one, when you do not diversify like that, you have taken away a whole entire experience from your leadership team and your growth and that experience that Black women bring to the table, or women in general bring to the table. Furthermore, Ginger said gender bias could hurt the dynamics of the team as well prevent the opportunity to gain different perspectives to resolving issues in the workplace.

Racial Bias

During this study, 60% of the participants mentioned racial bias. However, it did receive the overwhelming response, which was expected due to previous research listing racial and gender bias as the top two barriers to leadership attainment for African

American women. Past studies suggest that women of color deal with discrimination and racial bias that white do not face (Hill et al., 2016). Charlene expressed a concern that it is difficult at times to determine whether incidents involving African American women along their career paths were racially motivated or gender related. She provided an example:

A male counterpart was hired in a much greater position, while two specific African American female leaders, who had the demonstrated skillset, who had the knowledge to do it, and this individual was given the opportunity with very little experience. I'm not suggesting that it was on the basis of race, because it could have been just on the basis of gender, it could have been on the basis of a number of things or, just hire, hiring manager preference, right? But the reality is, if you compared the two or the three on paper, you know, if we're looking at the facts and the facts only, there would be no reason why this individual would've been placed in that position. Ultimately, that person was not successful because, not successful. He failed at the job. It was too much.

Both Charlene and Denise conversed about the identification of being double minority, which makes it more difficult to distinguish if incidents crossed the line as bias in direct relation to gender or race. Charlene stated,

So we are, I would say, double minority being an African American female. This, it is not as nuanced as it once was. We are seeing more and more, I would say in the past 15 to 20 years, a trend shifting in higher education. Particularly community colleges, because institutions and governing boards really want the leadership to reflect the student populations that they're serving. So I think there are, you know, very quickly a handful of African American female chancellors

and community college presidents who've made a significant impact, not on the students in the community that they serve, but on the academy itself.

A different sentiment was shared by Denise when she stated,

Well, I have come to realize that being African American and well, being a woman in higher education, it's sometimes difficult being a double minority, trying to make it to the senior executive roles. The numbers are not favorable in our direction.

Providing another view on the identity of being a double minority, one participant's assumption was that this status might help you excel outside of the education sector, but could be a hindrance within education. Evelyn stated,

There's times where, you know, it was viewed as, okay, you are double. You're a female and you are minority, so surely you should be able to excel. Right. But if we're talking about in the education sector and if you look at, you know, just rough numbers right now, and these are not, you know, qualified numbers, but quantified numbers, a lot of women such as yourself. We're trying to get as much education as possible to be able to be positioned, to be in those roles, when those roles become available. Which was my experience. I wanted to make sure that, if I was going to be denied, it wouldn't be because I didn't have the education and I didn't have the experience. So, my path was to make sure that when that time was available, I was ready to move.

Evelyn summed it with her last sentence, when she expressed that if she were going to be denied, it would not be because she was not qualified and that the only thing left would be gender or race at that point.

Earlier in the interviews, each participant was asked about their perception of barriers that may hinder or slow their career progression in higher education career paths.

Two of the leading barriers voiced by the participants were gender and race.

Consequently, there were a couple of opposing views from a couple of the participants on the issue of gender and racial bias along their higher education career path to leadership.

All participants were given an additional opportunity to discuss their viewpoints when they were asked to elaborate on the following questions:

- 1) Do you feel race has helped or hurt you in your career path to your current leadership role and future leadership aspirations? Could you explain how?
- 2) Do you feel gender helped or hurt you in your career path to your current leadership role and future leadership aspirations? Could you explain your answer?

Below are a series of viewpoints and lived experiences from the participants on gender and racial bias in higher education during their career paths. Amber stated that gender and race had been an issue in the past, but she also implemented certain strategies to help even the field as she navigated through her career path. This is by collaborated her recollection of her lived experiences through biases early in her career. Amber reflected:

I've been drug. I've been denied. You name it. And that if it was not for the relationship that I have built with students, I would've left the college a long time ago. Mm-hmm, but the students have always supported me. It probably affected my career pathways in the past, mm-hmm, but as a result of my doctoral program ...the doctorate and community college leadership, it truly changed my perspective. Oh, I look good on paper. Yeah, so you can't use that. And when it got to the point to where I felt like people were putting up a glass ceiling, I went and got my doctorate. I said, okay, now I'm in debt, but now tell me why I can't do this.

Amber also spoke about rising through the ranks in her career and that she felt she had an obligation to help others. Amber expressed these thoughts:

I'm obligated to bring others up. Why? Cause people brought me up. I would not be where I am, if I didn't have the shoulders of folks in my family. So I'm obligated to do that.

Additionally, she shared her thoughts regarding opportunities for African American women to move up in their career as gender and racial biases are influenced by quotas or quotas are influenced by biases. To support this revelation, Evelyn expressed the following statement in regards to quotas:

I think that to a certain point once, there is a quota and again, this is something that's just a perception. But once there's a number of African American females in leadership roles, the likelihood of you being added to that number is not that high. So, I think that in all of this, it's about timing. So, you know, depending on your region, where you're going and what it looks like, you know, if I stay in the south, would I have an opportunity, or the probability to move up another notch up?

Additionally, other participants took the opportunity to elaborate on some of their lived experiences of what they perceived as biases in the workplace as Ginger explained:

You know, I've had experiences that, you know, it's not even a perception. There's some real reality. Some things that have been said to me along the way, where my knowledge has been questioned and my authority has been questioned. I think it comes from those who are at the level and above the level that I am. But I also receive pushback from people who and I don't wanna say in less positions. But people I've supervised, women I've supervised who have not respected my skillset, and have thought that they probably should be in that position instead of me. I've experienced that. That's a real perception. I'll just say, this is transparent.

It's come a lot from white women and then of course, men of color, not necessarily African American men, but other men of color who, I don't think value the gender.

For full disclosure, Ginger also believed the type of behavior she described above sometimes comes from other African American women. This is collaborated in the following statement by Ginger:

Then it's the Black women on top of that. I think the perception is, again, that somehow or another we've made it here by default, by favor. I have heard from some and not because we've worked hard for it, or because we've earned it, or because we have the requisite knowledge for the job.

Jasmine shared an incident where she had to file a grievance on behalf of herself and others in a previous position. Jasmine provided an anecdote on a gender bias challenge she faced:

There was a philosophy to pay staff that worked with undergraduates less money than the MBA staff than to graduate STEM. So I did file a grievance about that and it just so happened that all of the staff that were getting paid lower were of people of color and the staff that were getting paid higher were not. One of the professors that looked like us said, you should just go work for the MBAs, if you want more money. I'm like no, but is this a question that we should ask? It's the same job description. We had the same and in the end, it was about four of us. We got our pay adjusted. You know, some people were nervous about me asking and thought it would be retaliation, but I was in good standing. I was like, I feel like I'm the perfect person to ask. It's just a question of clarification and you know, my salary increased by \$13,000, just by asking that question. Because it was an overall philosophy of the Associate Dean and she had written it. That's when I

really started looking at her research. I used some of her dissertation quotes from her dissertation. Because of her philosophy she had, it was impacting salary, but I didn't think that was, you know, equitable and no one questioned it. They just said, that's just how it is. If you want more money, just go to that position. Yeah, I don't think so. Like I said, it could have been coincidental, but we just also happened to be people of color and we were getting paid less.

Jasmine recalled another incident involving race & gender while working at the institution and having people that look like her, that did not self-identify the same as she did in regards to race or ethnicity. She discussed how a promotion she received created an uncomfortable feeling of gender bias in the workspace. Here are the words of Jasmine as she recalled this encounter:

I did have someone on my team that I would say, look like me, but didn't have the same, you know, identity as far as being gender identity. He was a black male. I remember him leaving a few months into it, you know, my role. Later we had lunch and I just asked him, what made you leave? I just asked, was it because I'm a Black woman? He told me, yes. So, you know, it's one of those reminders where you're doing good work, there are gonna be some challenges. Sometime they don't always come from people that don't look like us. It could be like people that look like us. So that was probably one of the barriers. He left for a better opportunity, but what made him leave is, you know, having to work for me. The guy that was in the role before, actually was probably a baby boomer. He was from Canada and everyone was surprised to know that he was Black, because he probably grew up in the era where he passed. Because he looked like a white man. So, I was never the first black person in the role. Many people thought I was, but actually, I was the first black woman. But that was kind of a little secret that a lot of people didn't

know. That was a milestone for the school. That you were the first one to be in that role. Yeah. That was a milestone.

Jasmine provided an example of how one person's perspective can be different from another perception. The perception that she was replacing a white male who turned out to be a Black male and the implication in her story that the individual may have been passing as another race, could open the dialogue to a new study topic involving fair skinned African Americans and if they face the same barriers as dark complexion individuals.

The researcher shifted the discussion from gender and racial barriers to discuss other emerging themes in the study. The study presented additional barriers perceived by the participants that may warrant expanded future research. Closing out this section on gender and race, a participant expressed her opinion on whether higher education was headed in the right direction or doing enough to limit gender and racial bias in the workplace. Ingrid presents:

I think people are aware. You see a lot of DEI and a committee's mandates across higher education institutions, across corporations, across secondary schools. So people are aware, now have their hearts changed and are they truly embracing doing it or doing it because it's mandated? Some of that exists as well. A lot of that exists. I do think that we are moving in the right direction. We just have to continue to move forward. That's the only way we're going to be able to solve some of the problems of the world. If we bring in other cultures, other genders, because we need those diverse thoughts and we have to respect and embrace them.

Ingrid believes that the implementation of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) training is a step in right direction among Higher Education institutions to begin to decrease

biases in academia. According to recent research Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion office roles and contributions are changing to put more emphases on influencing campus culture (Suarez, Anderson, & Young, 2018). Amber shared that her that her institution recently created an entire department with the DEI renewed focus in mind.

Angry Black Woman

Five out of the ten participants listed what they perceived as the angry Black woman syndrome as a major barrier to the progression of African American women to advanced leadership roles in higher education. According to the participants, this barrier could be self-imposed or a bias imposed by others. Providing some general assumptions of this barrier, Charlene stated:

This stereotype that as an African American woman, when she voices an opinion or when she displays opposition to a topic is that she's angry, right? So, it is often a very fine line that people, particularly African American female leaders have to walk to, number one, dispel the myth that we are not the typical, or we're not a monolithic and we're not all the angry black women. We can very notably engage in Socratic debate just as our white colleagues and male colleagues do without prejudice and without any expectation. So I think that's one of the challenges. It is asserting your will and being as a leader and advocating are sometimes misconstrued. That is a very delicate balance that you have to take. Not suggesting that you compromise it, but you really have to think about how you're articulating that in a way that others do not to misrepresent where you're coming from.

The angry Black woman syndrome is not a new nuance. The term has appeared in other studies regarding African American women. The term has been utilized as a stereotype

to describe African American women labeled as aggressive based on the perception of others.

Evelyn says this stereotype has been around for a while and you have to be careful in the work environment to ensure that you are coming across in the manner that you want to be. Evelyn provides details below:

I think from my experience and from what I see I think, the perception is a little bit angry Black female overly aggressive from the perception that I see. So you constantly trying to be mindful of maybe toning down. I guess your insight and how you apply something, which you choose to apply or implement rather, and just taking others and other cultures into consideration and not to be perceived as the angry Black female.

The conscious act of toning one's self down has been discussed earlier in this study under self-imposed barriers and shared by a different participant. Ginger shares feelings on the angry Black woman syndrome and how she tries to avoid that label. Ginger provides context below:

You know, we hear Black women are aggressive and loud and I don't never wanna be that. So, that's some change that I'm placing on myself, you know, some barriers that I'm placing on myself. And so, I'm always the quiet force behind the scenes.

Participants also discussed being labeled with the stereotype without actually being the loudest one in the room. Francis stated, "I believe a person's preconceived biases affects how they envision others, even if it's not accurate."

Another participant shared her thoughts on the angry Black woman syndrome as Helen added her voice to the topic:

I just believe that as Black women, we are, well, we tend to be very passionate about certain things. Our passion can be misinterpreted or misunderstood as anger. However, my white male counterpart could actually talk in a tone louder than me and they will see him as passionate, whereas I have to be careful not to be considered angry. That concern is always in the back of your mind.

Imposter Syndrome

The imposter syndrome was mentioned by participants using a couple of additional terms, but having the same perceptions, such as imposter suit or imposter ID. As the discussion on barriers to leadership continued, four out of the ten participants used some variation of this barrier with the word “imposter” attached to share their identification with this barrier. Sharing her thoughts on the barrier, Ginger provided her thoughts:

So I think there are barriers that we place upon ourselves, you know? Right.

Cultural and otherwise, but then yes, there are those barriers, or like I said, those that others place on us. I just don't think they value our experience. I think, they think our experience is limited and that we might be only good in this one area.

Like we should not be there.

Expanding the discussion with Ginger on the imposter syndrome, it was expressed that, there times when feelings of doubt in yourself due to happens because of the labels that are placed upon individuals.

Frances discussed her fear of talking in front of her work group outside of her immediate team. She said it sometimes gives her a little slight anxiety preparing for presentations. In her words, Francis explains:

It's not that I can't give presentations. I'm the only African American administrator in the student services area at my institution. The other

administrators are all Latinos and hang out together. I don't always get emails for events that happen in the other building and then it will pop up on Teams. I think every day do I belong here? Why was I hired?

This could be an example discussed earlier on how external forces could affect the barriers individuals place upon themselves that could ultimately hinder their growth and career progression.

One participant discussed how imposter syndrome slowed down her career progression and challenged her confidence. Charlene recalled periods when she doubted herself as she shared parts of her lived experiences with imposter syndrome:

I will say, I make that transition every day, right? Every day, I'm still kind of evolving as a leader. You know, my first journey, it was first like imposter syndrome. When I was chief of staff, it was well wait. Do I deserve this right to be here? You know, how do I command the attention? So, I was guilty of sort of being the quiet mouse in the room. I take the notes and then I'd go back and I would write a dissertation on everything that I reflected, because I had time to think. Part of that was learning how to listen and to understand the group dynamics. But what it didn't do was, I didn't necessarily have a voice and I diffused my own voice. I had a seat at the table, but I didn't appreciate the space that I was given. Over time, I learned that you know, there's time to listen, there's a time to speak. And being able to discern between what, when is that, when that happens, and how that occurs. I think has become something that you just learn, you know, with experience.

As Charlene provided her account of her feelings of imposter syndrome, she also mentioned that she sees imposter syndrome as a form of self-imposed barriers that slow your career progression. Charlene explained:

I can be honest and say that, you know, there are times where, I felt like I was putting on, you know, my imposter suit every day because I wasn't valued by a superior or a supervisor. Yeah. In my role now, I absolutely feel like there's value. Sometimes I feel like you know, the daily grind makes you a little bit of, not an administrator sometimes, but more like a support person. Yeah. But I do feel valued in my current position. And that's how I see my position again, haven't been the loudest, but have been exceptional.

The imposter syndrome discussion continues as each participant had additional situations they wanted to share on the phenomenon. African American women report a high percentage of imposter syndrome, especially when they receive promotions. One of the participants mentioned working hard to get a seat at the table, but then not taking full advantage of the seat and the responsibility it entailed to hold the seat.

As imposter syndrome stories continued to be shared by the participants, it is suggested that the imposter syndrome may occur more frequently with individuals obtaining their first senior administrative position. Ginger shared her lived experience:

Everywhere I've gone and people have taken notice and other doors have opened, and I've stepped through them boldly sometimes, you know, still wearing the imposter suit, you know, sometimes feeling like that. But I'm also, gosh, I shouldn't be a PhD saying, you know, fake it till you make it, but tell my children that sometimes mm-hmm, because if you fake it through the door with the right tools, Right, right. You need the tools and everything. But, you know, no one should know that I'm taking hits to my confidence that that's important to me. I will never let you know it.

Later, in the discussion, Ginger offered some suggestions on how to overcome the imposter syndrome with the following suggestions:

You know, I kind of talked about that imposter syndrome just a little bit before. And I think one of the ways to get over that imposter syndrome is increasing your territory, pushing yourself to do the things in your career that you normally wouldn't do. That's been being a mentor to someone else. Maybe that's helping someone or even yourself, present, prepare to do workshops. You know, just, again, increasing your footprint in higher education. And I haven't always done that. I have not done a good job with that. I often think back to, you know, where else I could be if I had utilized that a little bit more. Well one, I think we all have to trust and lean on our own knowledge and understanding. You know, I think we gotta get over that hill of these self-imposed barriers.

Ginger also suggests one way to assist an individual in overcoming imposter syndrome is to have a mentor. According to Ginger, you have to push yourself, as well as offer help to others. Individuals, especially new leaders may be dealing quietly with imposter syndrome without the knowledge or the tools to overcome the barrier.

Ingrid described a self-imposed barrier as fear that keeps you from advancing. She encouraged women to break the self-imposed barriers by discarding their fear or move forward either way. She offered additional suggestions on ridding self-imposed barriers. Ingrid explains:

One of them is just to really know that you belong in the room. You have something to say and not to be afraid. If you are afraid, do it afraid, that's an introspective barrier, self-imposed barrier that sometimes women or people in general have no matter what your gender, no matter what your race. What are some of those strategies, some of those strategies to overcome any barrier would be to be prepared, to be knowledgeable, to gain the experience that is needed.

Research Question Two

The researcher documented responses by participants on the perceived barriers of African American women that have reached some level of advance leadership in higher education to share experiences while employed in those positions. Research question two (RQ2), *What challenges do African American women encounter while employed in advanced leadership roles as Deans and above in higher education?* The interview instrument included the question, Discuss in general some of the challenges/barriers you have faced as a leader with superiors, subordinates, and others in your current position. Along with some of the typical overlapping biases discussed in the previous question, the researcher will review the top two new themes that emerged from the participant responses in this section.

The top two recurring themes from RQ2 are respect/valued and microaggression. Detailed participant responses are reported below to provide a more in-depth view of their perceptions.

Respected/Valued

In response to the interview question, participants suggested the level of respect and or feeling a sense of being value correlates as barriers leaders face while employed in leadership roles. One participant feels you have to command your respect by your actions. Charlene explained her thoughts:

So I think it's an interesting question. I get it. I think it all depends. I think African American and nor any other race are monolithic in their leadership style. I think once you get to the table, it's incumbent upon you about how you gain respect, how you foster collaboration, and how you engage your colleagues. Then, that is where you see the respect earned. I am very cautious to suggest that just because I'm an African American woman sitting at the table who has this position that

everybody owes me a level of respect and command right. To command the authority that I assert, I don't take that for granted. Nor do I think that's healthy for anyone else. I think it is the responsibility of anyone who is in the position of leadership to be able to demonstrate the qualities of a good leader.

Charlene's response provided several elements, she perceives, coming together to garnish the respect she commands. The discussion continued as she discussed extraordinary African American women who overcame barriers to become well respected in academia. Discussing challenges or barriers faced by African American women while employed in leadership positions in higher education, Charlene's viewpoint is that African American women can achieve not only respect, but also admiration in the field of education.

Charlene provided examples to represent her viewpoint:

Well, let me say this. I can speak only from the existence for which I currently reside. I do think in higher education and even secondary education, there is a great deal of admiration. I do think that there is a level of respect whether it be earned with a trial by fire. I'll explain what that means in a moment or just by virtue of the work. I think I'll share an example of I think a star, a shining example of that is Dr. Ruth Simmons, President of Prairie View University, African American leader, well respected, so much that she sought out. She is often sought out by donors and other industry leaders, number one for her knowledge. But for her ability to lead, it transcends higher education. She could very easily walk into, you know, a c-suite and lead an organization, because she has that skillset. She has the ability to command control. She's very, I think succinct in articulating a mission and a vision for an organization. And I think that is what makes her so profound in the work that she does. And I would say that I think that is, that's not atypical.

Charlene shared her perspective on the respect given to African American women that cross a certain threshold level of accomplishment. However, in the end, she admits that revered respect for the top tier is not passed down to others.

Another participant spoke about respect and trust being interchangeable. After reaching a certain leadership level, participants mentioned not being able to trust individuals as well as having to set boundaries due to previous relationships within the workplace that must now shift into new dynamics. Ginger voiced the following,

I think the initial expectation was, you know, I think that it's so important for me to have set some boundaries when I came in. It's very hard. This is probably something that you'll hear period, being a supervisor. But definitely, where I'm at now, it's very hard to draw a line sometimes. It's very lonely when you get to these positions. This is a very, I feel like these past few years has been a very lonely place. As a woman and in this position, I don't feel like I have necessarily a peer group on campus oftentimes, because you have to be very careful. My peer group comes outside of the institution mm-hmm. You know, even my mentors are outside of the institution just because of the things you have to deal with at this level. Unless you're at this level, that confidentiality, that trust, it's not necessarily there. So, like I operate in a very lonely place sometimes at this level.

Understandably, relationships shift or new parameters must be set as individuals progress through leadership in their careers. However, the concern at times is having peers not respect the new boundaries dictated by the new roles (Bean, 2021).

Related to the respect/valued barriers, Helen explained her view on respect and feeling valued, saying, "I think that, just because you have a seat at the table, you or your opinion or expertise does not always carry the same value as someone that does not look

like you.” Furthermore, Ginger cited the same thoughts shared by other participants.

Ginger gave more details:

I think it's, again, the perception that our experiences aren't as valued as maybe with someone a male, or a white male, or even a white female. My perception is that sometimes no matter what, it could be the same position, but those experiences that black women bring to the table sometimes just aren't valued as much as others.

Charlene equates value attached to a label of responsibility, as seen in this statement:

I will say so yes, I'll very candidly suggest that I do feel valued and the reason why is, it comes with a great deal of responsibility, and I would say to some extent, burden as an African American leader, but more so an African American female leader.

Microaggression

Several participants spoke of working in environments where they were subjected to atmospheres of microaggression that came from peers as well as superiors. Participants were so passionate about this topic that they spent additional time, sharing the perceptions during this segment of the interview. Amber recently obtained her current position at the senior management level. She is the first African American women to hold her position at her institution. She shared that she has dealt with gender bias and micro aggression in her job. Amber shared her feelings about a specific incident of microaggression. Amber explained her incident:

You know, we talk about micro aggressions and, and mansplaining, but we get man mansplain by Black males and mm-hmm or other men of color..... He told me I can do your job.... I'm gonna tell him when I calm down. I remember when you said you could do my job. I bet you can't do my job as a Black woman.

There is more to Amber's story, however, because there were several names listed in the story, the researcher did not include the full context of it in the study to protect the identities of individuals. Amber stated that this individual has made microaggressive comments previously.

Another participant recalled a circumstance which evoked a flood of remembered emotions. While speaking on the issue of microaggression in the workplace, Charlene wanted to share a personal experience that she felt strongly about. She eluded that there was an unofficial expectation that when African Americans reached a certain level of leadership, they should not have an emotional connection to certain things, events, or activities. Charlene recalls a specific incident that she felt very emotional about:

So during the George Floyd social unrest, the George Floyd situation, there was a series or group of us that were engaged in a discussion at a senior administrative level. It was very apparent that it seemed to be business as usual during a day that it was very difficult for people of color, particularly African Americans, to process, right? The expectation that because I'm in a leadership role that I wasn't impacted or I wouldn't be impacted by what I'm seeing happening around us was unrealistic. And it started to play on me and lay heavily on me because I thought, Well, wait a minute. I'm not the only African American leader who is sitting around this table. But it would be nice to have a non-African American counterpart; you know, stop, pause for a moment, reflect and say, I want to know how you're doing, right? Before we do anything else, let me check and see how you're feeling. And we went through the meeting and just as we were about to conclude, it never happened.

During the relaying of her story, Charlene paused for a moment. Her face and the tone of her voice demonstrated the appearance of an emotional trigger for her. Charlene disclosed additional information:

Well, wait you know, we'd like to raise this as a concern, not as a concern for controversy, but a concern for what we felt the college community may be feeling at the time. And the seeming disregard for what was transpiring and how we are supposed to be immune to that. Unacceptable, right? So in that instance, we had to, we just, you know, this is an opportunity for us, number one, to learn how to respect and acknowledge some of the trauma that society places on us, regardless of what your cultural backgrounds are. But here's another opportunity for the leadership group. African Americans and African American women in particular, shouldn't always be our own advocates. So the fact that this issue was raised and it had to be raised by the group that was seemingly the most impacted is a concern.

The researcher provided the definition of microaggression within the study. Amber recalled a specific microaggression incident involving a white male peer, and she recounted the incident as part of her discussion on barriers faced while employed in her leadership role. Through her voice, Amber shared:

I've often received pushback because of my gender. Mm-hmm, Actually, he was a department head and we were working on a project together. I told him he couldn't do something. It was outside of the policy of the university to do it. He looked at me and he said, little girl. I'm a grown woman. He was like, you stay on your side of the street and I will stay on mine.

Amber elaborated more on her story as she continued her anecdote spoken in her words. Amber revealed more on her thoughts, emotions, and strategy on handling the situation. Amber continued sharing:

I could have, I could have gone off, I could have went to HR, I could have done a lot of things and that probably could have halted me, I think, for moving forward. But, instead, I handled it differently. And at the end of it, I think I garnered his respect. Then when it was time for me to move up to the next step. I had a support, I had his support. But all of that's very calculated, you know, to have, to think about not just how you respond, but you know, what your next five steps will be. I'm just not sure if men think like that. Men have to think like that in these situations. So, has it impacted me? Yes. But I don't think it's stopped me from moving forward. I don't think it's been a barrier per se, for me in what I've wanted to do and the goals that I've set for myself.

A study utilizing intersectionality as a framework exploring African American women's experiences with microaggression, defines it as intentional or unintentional, brief behavior or other indignities that communicate negative, derogatory, racial or gender based insults toward nonwhite individuals (Yearwood, 2013).

Ginger stated that she has experienced microaggressive behavior toward her imposed by coworkers. Ginger responded:

I think the perception is, again, that somehow or another, we've made it here by default, or by favor. I've heard that from some. Not because we've worked hard for it, or because we've earned it, or because we have the requisite knowledge for the job.

Ingrid shared her perspective on microaggressive attitudes:

I believe there are those that assume we are given positions, without knowing our qualifications, so you spend most of your time over compensating trying to prove yourself.

Research Question Three

Research question three (RQ3), *What strategies are suggested by African American females to overcome barriers to obtain leadership positions in higher education?*, sought to provide recommended strategies to overcome barriers to upcoming African American women seeking leadership roles in higher education. To provide feedback that would correlate back to the research question, the interview guide contained questions that would allow participants the opportunity to discuss different strategies they used to elevate their careers in higher education. Strategies to overcome barriers yielded the two themes which are mentors and opportunities.

Two participants shared their strategies to overcome barriers to leadership earlier in the discussion under the barriers section. For example, Ingrid suggested strategies included being prepared, being knowledgeable and to continue to seek experience where needed. Ginger discussed having a safe space that you could vent or release things you might be feeling on the job.

Subsequently, Jasmine offered her advice to assist along career paths, while navigating barriers: “We won't wake up and be like, I'm here, you know. Learn to advocate for yourself.” To enhance the importance of selecting the right mentor. Jasmine further explicated:

It's important to do your homework when selecting a mentor. Seek out someone who understands your career goals. It could be within the college or outside of the college, but one who understands your career goals. One who you think who, who

you see who's demonstrated some success in their own career. Be close to that mentor.

Mentors

A major strategy mentioned by all of the participants to overcome barriers to success is to seek out mentors. Participants were also asked to describe their ideal mentor in regards to race, gender, age, range, and expectations, and to explain their responses. Below are some additional comments provided by participants on mentors.

Continuing from her earlier comments on strategies to overcome barriers to leadership, Charlene provided input on her choice of mentors. Charlene stated,

Well, my ideal mentor, and I rather have two, if I can be very candid. One is older Hispanic, believe it or not and similar personalities. ... Therefore, you know, an ideal mentor could also be African American or another woman of color that is a preference though.

In a contrasting difference in the characteristics of her ideal mentor, Ginger described her mentor:

My best mentor was a supervisor who was an old white Republican male. ...you know, wearing dusters, the cowboy hats and cowboy boots. What I appreciated about him was his honesty and his realness. Some of it some kind, sometimes probably came off a little insensitive and racist on some occasions. Just like telling me, you're Black, as a Black woman, you can't cry, you can't come up in here and cry. They can, but you can't. But I was tough enough to take that. And that, I think, the kind of mentorship I needed. In response to her views on mentors, Amber made the following suggestions:

I would say get a mentor or like you hear people say, get on a board of directors, so you don't have to have just one mentor. They don't have to look like you. You know, partnering with someone, learning what others experience is, sharing, what

you want to do. And doing the research, serving the time, getting the education would be, um, you know, a great strategy and even ask them, how has their experience been? How have they navigated, maybe, it's something you can grow and learn from and would be a strategy.

Agreeing with Ginger on their selective type of mentor, Ingrid stated, "My ideal mentor is probably a 70- to 75-year-old male. If I have to pick a race, oh, he would be white." Six out of ten African American women stated that their ideal mentors were middle-aged white males, compared to only two African American women saying their choice of a mentor would be other African American women. One candidate listed Hispanic women as their first choice for a mentor. Amber says traditionally, her original mentor was a Hispanic female, but she does believe there are periods that she needs an African American woman. Amber provides further explanation:

It would be a white male, but there are times when only a Black female can pull my coattail. It was a Hispanic female that reached out to me to pull me into this position. ... now I can say a white male, because traditionally white males have been gatekeepers of two of my executive positions, but that's changing and that's shifting. And I do currently have a white male that mentors me.

Taking the opposite approach to mentorship, Evelyn presented her preference,

I probably would say age range would probably 50 to 60. Race? I definitely would say a minority. It doesn't necessarily have to be an African American, gender, we all get treated the same. It would definitely be a female.

Providing additional views on her mentor choices, a participant warns others to be careful selecting your mentors. Ginger explains why:

You know, mentorship is hard. I'll just tell you that because, you know, I have found myself looking for a mentor and being disappointed because I've always

look for mentors who look like me who are older, you know, who have some experience. You get very excited when you meet that person and you put yourself out there and it just kind of fizzles and falls short, you know? So I think that I've had to adjust my expectation of what mentorship looks like and again, who I can get it from. And also understand, even at a place I'm at now, I would love to do more. But there's, there's so many different things pulling me, including, you know, managing this career with young children and those just, it's, it's difficult. It's difficult to sometimes give, have the energy in the bandwidth at the end of the day to be something for someone else.

Gathering from the information presented in the discussions by the participant, mentors are not a one size fits all. Therefore, adequate research is needed to be paired with the most compatible mentor.

One of the participants is working on the creation of a group, where women, more specifically, African American, will have an opportunity to have open dialogue. She hopes it will be something as she stated, "I'm hopeful that it will pick up and spread like wildfire." Having a different view from the other nine women in the study, Charlene provided some reasoning behind her choice as well as providing a description of her ideal mentor:

Well, my ideal mentor and I kind of have two, if I can be very candid. One is an older Hispanic, believe it or not and similar personalities. So, you know, an ideal mentor, whether she's African American or another woman of color, that is a preference though.

A woman of color, I think is one who is older, you know, one because I need to understand the legacy and the history behind certain things. I don't want to devalue all that's been done before me. Even though we are changing, there's still

some value in respecting the history. Then I need a, a young African American leader who is dynamic, who is a risk taker and owns, acknowledges, and accepts when she makes mistakes. Because that person you learn from will say, you know, don't make the mistake I made. Here's what I learned from this and here's what I think you can take from this being a young person. I need somebody who's relatable. Now as I get older, young will have a different category for me, right. Continuing the discussion on mentors, Charlene summed up her thoughts by saying:

So my ideal mentor, one that's older so that I can understand the value in their history, and, and there's, because academics are still very rooted, even though we are changing, There's still some things that are rooted in tradition, but also a young mentor. Because I need relatability and I need someone who looks like me who's going to pull me back, pull my coattail, and be very courageous and kind of level settings at times. Right?

Opportunities

Toward the end of the interview session, each participant was asked, if they could provide some final words of advice to aspiring African American women working in higher education pursuing leadership opportunities, what would they be?

Helen shared her opinion on taking advantage of opportunities as you earn them. Helen provided insight through her words: “And so we're not giving the opportunity. Opportunity is earned. Go to back to school, if needed and get your doctorate. Get on committees, be visible and know your craft.” Jasmine added the following words of encouragement to women:

I would say, really understand your job, all aspects of it. Even if you're a leader, learn about the different teams that you're over, not in a micromanaging way, but be hands on, engage your staff. Find out what motivates them. And hopefully you

could give that to them as well, find out their goals. Because when people know you invest in them, they will also support you.

The participants shared various levels of information on potential strategies to evoke for overcoming barriers. Charlene elaborated and extended her opportunity share:

I think you have to be open to feedback and often seek it from your supervisor around personal growth and development. Don't be afraid to ask for more by way of opportunities to create. Sometimes you just have to create a space, a path for yourself. Additionally, is there an opportunity for me to shadow maybe once a week? Is there some chance that there's a committee or some other opportunity where I can learn and get engaged?...Seek opportunities where you can get engaged and involved.

Evelyn responded to the interview question by recommending strategies to overcome barriers. Evelyn engaged:

Definitely align yourself with a mentor, someone that you feel comfortable with. They're gonna give you some feedback. That's really tough to swallow sometimes and make you kind of wanna go a different direction. ...Shadow someone, you know, that'll help you with understanding what challenges come with that role. Cause a lot of people want the title, but they don't want the responsibility. So seeing someone and how they manage that dealing with the community, dealing with students, dealing with faculty, dealing with staff, dealing with budgets, you know, there's a lot that comes with board members. So I would recommend that.

The next voice in the discussion is given to Charlene to extend strategies to African American women interested in pursuing advanced leadership opportunities. Charlene was inspired to share:

Lastly, you got to be courageous and be able to take risks and understand that the most important job that you will do is building connections with people. And if you, if you are not a people person, you should not aspire to leadership. If you are an extreme introvert, don't do it. You don't have to be an extrovert, but you have to be flexible. ...And then lastly, I think you, you put yourself in a position where you are constantly evolving, investing in yourself, your professional growth. So, you know, take advantage of any professional development leadership opportunities that are available. And then don't be afraid to take on some of the grunt work. It puts you in a position, where people can acknowledge it. It's the job that some people don't want to do now, but do it well and be committed to it. I think that's the advice that I would give. It is the path that I chose. It may not be consistently applied for everyone, but certainly it's what worked for me.

Ingrid encouraged and empowered African American women with her final words for this discussion:

Know who you are, know that you are more than enough. There's nothing inadequate about you. Be confident, be compassionate, remember that we're working for and with people and always keep your sights on. What is truly important? Let your ego be humble. It's important to be humble, not false humility, not I don't belong here, but to really know that it's the grace of God that provided you with that opportunity and that there are people whose lives are in the balance. They are waiting for you. You are the key to their future. So you need to conduct yourself accordingly. Remember, what's important and keep first things first, have integrity, have character, because if you get in a position that you don't have the character for, it's not going to be too long before you fall. Do not compromise your standards for anything or anyone.

Summary of Findings

This chapter presented a summary of the qualitative data analysis of the study, providing the opportunity for the thematic emergence resulting from the in-depth, qualitative analysis of the data. Overall, the data provided comprehensive support in the existence of barriers still present throughout the career paths of African American women working in higher education. The participants were able to provide detailed personal recollections, engage in story telling sharing their lived experiences navigating through challenges and successes.

The primary findings of this study are consistent with previous studies in that barriers continue to affect African American women as they navigate their career pathways to leadership. Top perceived barriers from this study that were consistent with previous studies are gender and racial bias. Consistent with previous studies, the current findings reveal a limited number of women that self-identify as African American/Black holding presidency or higher positions in academia. The study revealed a number of self-imposed barriers that originated from internal and external forces. A consistent network and support system nonprofessional and professional is instrumental in career success.

Mentoring should begin early in the career path and should continue for longevity for effectiveness. Mentoring should be set up officially and unofficially. The disparity of women in advanced leadership roles may limit the number mentors available at that level. Consideration should be given to mentors of different genders and or ethnicities. Participants suggested clear career paths for aspiring leaders to follow. Institutions should have a defined professional path that will assist in providing information and tools for individuals to follow for career ascension. Career paths should correlate with the development of quality leadership development programs. Organizations with multiple

campuses should ensure the professional development and leadership development programs are duplicated and available on all campuses for easier access.

There were three emergent themes identified by the researcher from the discussion of the perception of barriers African American women face while pursuing career pathways to higher education's advanced leadership positions. Through the responses from the participants, the following themes emerged for RQ1: self-imposed, gender bias, racial bias, angry Black woman, and imposter syndrome. Of the five barriers, the top three barriers as suggested by this study are gender bias, racial bias, and the angry Black woman syndrome.

For RQ2, *What challenges do African American women encounter while employed in advanced leadership roles as Deans and above in higher education?*, the top two emergent themes yielded from the narratives provided by the participants are respect/valued, and microaggression. Most of the participants relayed their thoughts on respect and value as being interchangeable. The premise to this statement was if you are respected in your position, then you are valued and the same in reverse order with being value equal to being respected.

For RQ3, *What strategies were suggested by African American females to overcome barriers to obtain leadership positions in higher education?* The emerging top two themes from participant responses in this section were mentors and opportunities. Each interview question was designed to yield responses that would correlate back to each of the research questions. The researcher provided an opportunity for the participants to share their stories from their own voices. The researcher did not interject too often in order to ensure the lived experiences and short stories were those of the participants.

Conclusion

This chapter presented a qualitative analysis of the participants' perceptions of challenges and barriers affecting career progression to leadership in higher education. Overall, all educators had the opportunity to share their lived experiences and strategies through their own voice. Chapter V continues to explore the significance of the results through summaries, implications, and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER V: SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Over the past ten years, there has been an increase interest and research on the disparity of women executive leadership in academia (Bean, 2021; Clark, 2019; Hannum et al., 2015). Forbes Magazine reported that women in the United States earned over half of the professional degrees; however, men continue to achieve advanced career placement at a much faster rate (Moody, 2018). Previous research acknowledges the increased hardships faced by African American women seeking advanced roles of responsibility in higher education (Carroll, 1982; Mainah & Perkins, 2015; Whitehead, 2017). Oikelome (2017) reported, “The college presidency is a benchmark of status and achievement in the academy” (p. 23). This statement sets the foundation for the current study exploring the perception of barriers that affect the career pathways of African American women pursuing leadership roles in higher education and the challenges they face achieving that first level of what some consider a pivotal point of advancement. Despite hundreds of documented cases, involving race and gender discrimination reported annually to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and Fair Employment Practices Agencies, the Mainah and Perkins (2015) study stated that institutions of higher education have not implemented adequate strategies to eliminate the problem.

This research provided additional information taken from the lived experiences of ten African American women currently working in the academy. It will also serve to provide additional insight into the limited research on strategies to overcome barriers affecting the advancement of Black women in higher education. The phenomenology approach was used to explore perceived barriers that affect the professional growth of African American women seeking to achieve executive leadership roles in higher

education and suggested strategies used to overcome those challenges. This chapter presents a detailed discussion of the findings, implications of the findings, and recommendations for future research.

Significance of the Study

Findings from studies conducted within the past 10 years suggest that barriers still exist for African-American women affecting their ascension to executive-level positions despite advanced degree attainments (Beckwith et al., 2016; Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Gargliardi et al., 2017). The societal impact on the lack of diversity in the U.S. educational system has been researched and documented. However, these studies are lacking in areas specifically focused on the plight of African American women in higher education (Beckwith et al., 2016; Bilen-Green et al., 2008; Chenoweth, 2007; Howard-Vital, 1989; Jackson & Harris, 2007; Jo, 2008; Madera, 2017; Whitehead, 2017).

The significance of this study was to increase available research emphasizing the need for deeper examination, understanding, and implementation of solutions to the internal as well as systemic barriers hindering the achievement of African American women as part of the solution to begin the transition to successfully eliminate the disparities in senior education leadership.

The small percentage of African American women that are successful in navigating the pathways to the presidency position, which has been dubbed the “benchmark of status and achievement in the academy” frequently, have their celebratory period short-lived due to barriers and challenges faced in their leadership roles. (Oikelome, 2017, p. 23). Additionally, the need for this study was to increase the knowledge and scholarly research in a limited field of work that is useful in providing in-depth insight into the relationship between barriers and the disparity of African American women holding advanced roles or responsibility in institutions of higher education.

Summary

Prior research has listed the primary barriers leading to the disparity of African American women holding advanced leadership positions as related to race and gender (Bean, 2021; Beckwith et al., 2016; Clarke, 2019; Garibaldi, 2014; Smith-Ligon, 2011). Additionally, these studies examined the correlation between barriers and the perceived glass ceiling phenomenon on the selection process and promotion of African American women (Polk-Johnson, 2019; Reeves, 2018; Tanner, 2019; Saleem et al., 2017). Researchers have expanded studies to look beyond previously reported barriers such as gender, race, and the glass ceiling as the primary barriers affecting the progression of African Americans in the workplace (Bean, 2021; Jackson, 2018; Simms, 2018; Townsend, 2019).

Through selection criteria, ten African American women were selected and agreed to participate in the study. The primary findings of this study are consistent with previous studies in that barriers continue to affect African American women as they navigate their career pathways to leadership. Consistent with previous studies is the limited number of women that identify as African American/Black holding presidency or higher positions in academia. Data collected through narrated responses from participants was used to explore the potential barriers encountered by African American women along their career paths pursuing advanced leadership positions in higher education institutions. The participant narratives were organized and correlated back to each research question and emerging themes were documented.

- What barriers do African American women face while pursuing their career pathways to higher education's advanced leadership positions?
 - Gender biases,
 - Racial biases,

- Self-imposed
- Angry Black woman syndrome, and
- Imposter syndrome
- What challenges do African American women encounter while employed in advanced leadership roles as Deans and above in higher education?
 - Respect
 - Microaggression
- What strategies are suggested by African American females to overcome barriers to obtain leadership positions in higher education?
 - Mentors
 - Representation matters
 - Opportunities

Implications

As this study has found, the underrepresentation of African American women holding executive leadership positions in institutions of higher education mirrors the lack of representation across the U.S. in many major corporations (Whitehead, 2017). Institutions of post-secondary education may want to consider the findings of established research stating that minority students in higher education tend to have a high level of satisfaction with increased diversity of faculty and administration, therefore producing qualified individuals to serve in higher positions (Braxton, 2018).

This study concurs that the lack of diversity among women in higher educational institutions should intensify research in turn leading to possible solutions that produce positive impact on retention, career growth, student success, and institution success (Allen et al., 2019). Based on the personal account of lived experiences or perceptions narrated from the study participants, recommendations of strategies to decrease the

disparity of senior level leadership of higher education. Implications for current and future practice are outlined below:

Mentoring should begin early in the career path and should continue for longevity for effectiveness. Mentoring should be set up officially and unofficially. The disparity of women in advanced leadership roles may limit the number mentors available at that level. Therefore, it is important to be open to mentors of different genders and or ethnicities. An individual can also have more than one mentor. As noted in this study, there are periods that someone may need a mentor with certain skillsets, knowledge, and or strengths.

Clear career paths should be established for aspiring leaders to follow. If it is too difficult to set direct career paths, institutions should have a defined professional path that will assist in providing information and tools to follow for career ascension. Career paths should correlate with the development of quality leadership development programs. Organizations with multiple campuses should ensure the professional development and leadership development programs are duplicated and available on all campuses for easier access.

Formal mentor and leadership development should be designed and offered to all levels, including those not desiring to follow a specifically presidency or leadership path. The formal programs should be periodically monitored and evaluated for effectiveness. Aspiring and current leaders should continuously seek opportunities outside of the organization to develop character, community involvement, and confidence building enhances the probability of success in current or future positions.

Organizations should adopt an implemented Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion program with its own oversight department designed to create a safe space to break down

barriers by increasing knowledge in areas affected the underserved or disadvantage groups.

Female leaders, more specifically African American or interchangeably those that identify as Black, should continue to participate in research studies aimed at providing information and or strategies to improve the disparity in senior leadership career progression. This continued response to the call for lived experiences will continue to bring attention the disparities within the systems and the supply aspiring leaders with tools to navigate such systems. Research has further stated that minority students in higher education institutions tend to have a high level of satisfaction with increased diversity of faculty and administration (Braxton, 2018).

Recommendation for Future Research

The aim of this phenomenological study was to examine the perceived barriers through the lived experiences faced by African American women seeking executive leadership roles in higher education as well as explore strategies applied by those that were able to ascend advanced areas of responsibility. In an effort to further expand strategies to overcome barriers to leadership attainment among African American women in higher education the researcher proposes the following future studies below.

Conducting a longitudinal study exploring the career ascension of self-identified African American or Black women from the level of middle management to advanced leadership to provide clear career pathways to improve disparity at the senior advanced level.

A qualitative study including Texas private, community colleges, state colleges, and technical schools. Participants' perspectives may differ depending on the type of institution. Utilize the findings of this study to conduct a mixed methods research study to survey women of color female college and university senior leadership throughout the

United States. Conduct a study aimed at surveying higher education female leaders to create a database aimed at having a resource for future research.

Conduct a qualitative study including mid-level positions aspiring to achieve dean or higher positions in higher education. The perspectives may differ from those below the benchmark of achievement from those that have already broken through the barriers. Conduct a qualitative study to explore the factors that make some women more susceptible to self-imposed barriers compared to others. Conduct a qualitative study comparing the perceptions of white women and Black women's career progression toward executive leadership positions in higher education.

Research Limitations

Small sample size due to limited number of available African American women with the targeted regions holding senior advanced leadership positions. Potential bias in responses from personal individual experiences navigating through career pathways could vary. Differences between two- and four-year college structure career pathways. Limited availability of data from scholarly works supplying numbers for African American women separately from the grouping of women of color. Conducting a study after a major world pandemic. Ongoing CDC changes on a weekly basis could affect how interviews are conducted limiting the full view of body language.

Conclusion

The disparity of women in top leadership positions in the workplace has been well researched. The need for expanded research is suggested from various different perspectives.

This study should not be used for generalization due to the number of participants and the geographic location. Nonetheless, the findings of the ACE (2017) study revealed that from 2006 to 2017, women were awarded more than half of all advanced degrees.

According to the 2017 data, women account for 30% of college and university presidents, further revealing that women of color made up eight percent of all presidents (ACE, 2017; Gargliardi et al., 2017). Though African American women have worked hard to look good on paper, acquiring the professional degrees and leadership competencies to achieve success navigating the higher education career pathways, the disparity is persistent as women continue to face perceived challenges such as gender biases, racial biases, self-imposed barriers, angry Black woman syndrome, and imposter syndrome.

Due to the limited number of women serving in executive level positions, finding women meeting the preset criteria was intensified. The researcher reports that once women were identified through purposeful sampling that met the criteria, it was difficult to gain consent for the actual study interviews. Institutions should consider creating separate Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion departments to assist with leadership training and programs to improve biases in the workplace. The researcher suggests that women seek out mentors early in their career within and outside of their institutions.

Additionally, women should consider the steps and strategies suggested within to ascend to greater leadership roles. Finally, the researcher hopes to inspire others to continue to expand studies in this area, until such time adequate results have been achieved to decrease the inequities in women leadership in higher education. The researcher did not find a significant amount of concern referencing the “glass ceiling effect” regarding pay as in previous studies. Finally, the researcher hopes to inspire others to continue to expand studies in this area, until such time as adequate results have been achieved to decrease the inequities in women leadership in higher education.

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APPENDIX A:
COVER EMAIL

Dear Administrator,

My name is Barbara Ramirez, and I am a doctoral student at the University of Houston-Clear Lake. I am conducting a study as part of a doctoral dissertation, examining the effect of barriers on the career progression of African American women in higher education leadership.

As African American women are underrepresented in leadership positions within organizations, those who have ascended into leadership may share meaningful information. I am inviting you to become a potential participant in the study. In sharing your experience, knowledge of your pathway to leadership that may be integral in aiding other African American women in their pursuits for advancement into leadership positions.

The benefits of this research include expanding the research field on African American women in higher education leadership barriers and career pathways. Your participation is entirely voluntary. There are no foreseeable risks in your participation, and you may stop your participation at any time. Information collected as part of this study will be kept entirely confidential and will be reported only in summary form so that the individuals cannot be identified. Pseudonyms will be assigned to subjects to ensure that responses are anonymous.

If you have any further questions about this research, please feel free to contact me at [REDACTED] or email me at Ramirez6198@uhcl.edu.

The interview will be an audio recorded, semi-structured interview and will last up to sixty minutes in written and oral reports. Data collected will only be used for educational purposes and publication. If you consent to participate, precautionary procedures will be taken to ensure confidentiality, so you will not be identified by name. If you are interested in being a part of this research study as a participant, please identify your desire to set up a time to learn more about this study, and consent to an interview by responding yes, which provides consent to participation.

THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN REVIEWED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON-CLEAR LAKE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION COMMITTEE FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECT. Telephone: (281) 283-3618.

Sincerely,

Barbara Ramirez
Barbara Ramirez, MBA
University of Houston-Clear Lake
Ramirez6198@uhcl.edu

APPENDIX B:

INFORMED CONSENT

INFORMED CONSENT: ADULT RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

You are being asked to participate in the research project described below. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate, or you may decide to stop your participation at any time. Should you refuse to participate in the study, or should you withdraw your consent and stop participation in the study, your decision will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you may otherwise be entitled. You are being asked to read the information below carefully and ask questions about anything you do not understand before deciding whether to participate.

Title: BENDING BARRIERS: AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN IN EDUCATION LEADERSHIP

Student Investigator(s): Barbara Ramirez, MBA

Faculty Sponsor: Antonio Corrales

Purpose of the Study:

The purpose of this study is to examine the perceived barriers encountered by African American women along their career paths to obtaining leadership roles in Higher Education.

Procedures:

You will be asked to participate in a one-on-one interview with the researcher in which you will answer questions about your perception of barriers to career progression among African American women in post-secondary education.

Expected Duration:

The total anticipated time commitment will be approximately one hour.

Risks of Participation:

There are no anticipated risks associated with participation in this project.

Benefits to the Subject:

There is no direct benefit received from your participation in this study, but your participation will help the investigator to better understand the relationship, if any,

between barriers and career progression of African American women in post-secondary education leadership.

Confidentiality of Records:

Every effort will be made to maintain the confidentiality of your study records. The data collected from the study will be used for educational and publication purposes, however, you will not be identified by name. For federal audit purposes, the participant's documentation for this research project will be maintained and safeguarded by the Principal Investigator or Faculty Sponsor for a minimum of three years after completion of the study. After that time, the participant's documentation may be destroyed.

Compensation

There is no financial compensation to be offered for participation in the study

Investigator's Right to Withdraw Participant

The investigator has the right to withdraw you from this study at any time.

Contact Information for Questions or Problems

If you have additional questions during this study about the research or any related problem, you may contact the Student Researcher, Barbara Ramirez by email at barb.ramirez816@gmail.com.

Signatures

Your signature below acknowledges your voluntary participation in this research project. Such participation does not release the investigator(s), institution(s), sponsor(s) or granting agency(ies) from their professional and ethical responsibility to you. By signing the form, you are not waiving any of your legal rights.

The purpose of this study, procedures to be followed, and explanation of risks or benefits have been explained to you. You have been allowed to ask questions and your questions have been answered to your satisfaction. You have been told who to contact if you have additional questions. You have read this consent form and voluntarily agree to participate as a subject in this study. You are free to withdraw your consent at any time by contacting the Principal Investigator or Student Researcher/Faculty Sponsor. You will be given a copy of the consent form you have signed.

Subject's printed name: _____

Signature of Participant: _____

Date: _____

Using language that is understandable and appropriate, I have discussed this project and the items listed above with the subject.

Printed name and title: _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent: _____

Date: _____

THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON-CLEAR LAKE (UHCL) COMMITTEE FOR PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS HAS REVIEWED AND APPROVED THIS PROJECT. ANY QUESTIONS REGARDING YOUR RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH SUBJECT MAY BE ADDRESSED TO THE UHCL COMMITTEE FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS (281.283.3015). ALL RESEARCH PROJECTS THAT ARE CARRIED OUT BY INVESTIGATORS AT UHCL ARE GOVERNED BY REQUIREMENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY AND THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT.

(FEDERALWIDE ASSURANCE #FWA00004068

APPENDIX C:
INTERVIEW GUIDE

Demographic Information Interview Guide

1. Thank you again for agreeing to take part in this study. I will begin with some demographic background information.
2. In what age group do you identify?
 - a. 31-40 b. 41-50 c. 51-60 d. 61-70
3. Which term do you prefer or identify with regarding race or ethnicity?
4. Geographic location of current job? Urban, suburban, inner city, etc.
5. Please state the total number of years of experience you have in Higher Education?
6. What is your highest level of educational degree attainment?
7. What level is your current leadership role in Higher Education?
8. What are your ultimate career aspirations in Higher Education? If not in Higher Education, what industry and explain your decision not to stay in Higher Education?
9. Briefly tell me about your career path journey. What led you to Higher Education? Include past professional leadership positions up to your current position, even those outside of Higher Education.

10. What do you think are the perceptions of others in regard to African American female college leaders and their abilities to lead in executive college/university roles?

Interview Guide Continue	Proposed Interview Questions
<p>RQ1.</p> <p>What barriers do African American women face while pursuing career pathways to Higher Education's advance leadership positions?</p>	<p>a) What is your perception are the greatest challenges/barriers faced by African American women in their effort to obtain college leadership positions at the dean or higher level?</p> <p>b) Do you feel race has helped or hurt you in your career path to your current leadership role and future leadership aspirations? Could you explain how?</p> <p>c) Do you feel gender helped or hurt you in your career path to your current leadership role and future leadership aspirations? Could you explain how?</p> <p>e. Do you feel Higher Education is doing</p> <p>enough to ensure gender and race equality among those holding advanced leadership positions?</p> <p>Explain why or why not?</p>

<p>RQ2.</p> <p>What challenges do African American women encounter while employed in advanced leadership roles as Deans and above in Higher Education?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Describe in general some of the challenges/barriers you have faced as a leader with superiors, subordinates and others in your current position? b) What do you think is the perception of others in your ability to lead in your current position? c) Has your leadership style changed since attaining an advanced leadership role? Why or why not?
<p>RQ3.</p> <p>What strategies were suggested by African American females to overcome barriers to obtain leadership positions in Higher Education?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) What are some strategies you would suggest to African American women seeking advance leadership roles to overcome barriers that may hinder or slow down their career progression in Higher Education? b) Describe your ideal mentor in regards to race, gender, age range and expectations? Explain why (Explain, at what point in your career you have you had mentors) c) If you could provide an aspiring African American female working in Higher Education with some final words of advice, what would they be?
	<p>Is there anything that you wish to add that I have not covered in this interview?</p>