

Fall 9-9-2019

## Black Women's Journey to Executive Leadership

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Fall 9-9-2019

## **Black Women's Journey to Executive Leadership**

Belinda Higgs Hyppolite  
*Concordia University - Portland*

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Concordia University–Portland

College of Education

Doctor of Education Program

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Black Women's Journey to Executive Leadership

Belinda Higgs Hyppolite

Concordia University–Portland

College of Education

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the College of Education

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in

Professional Leadership, Inquiry, and Transformation

Heather Miller, Ph.D., Faculty Chair Dissertation Committee

Tom Cavanagh, Ph.D., Content Specialist

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Concordia University–Portland

2019

## **Abstract**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to gain an understanding of the journey of Black women into executive leadership positions at predominately White institutions of higher education within the United States. One research question guided this study: What are the experiences of Black women at predominately White institutions (PWIs) of higher education serving in executive leadership positions? Participants were a purposeful sample of 10 Black women executives who currently serve in executive leadership at various institutions across the country. The data collection instruments were structured interviews, member checking interviews, and a personal reflective narrative. The typological analysis approach as described by Hatch (2002) was used to analyze the data collected. The key findings were that participants affirmed five major themes that impacted their journey to executive leadership: (a) glass ceilings and sticky floors which were inclusive of marginalization, barriers, stereotypes and mentoring relationships; (b) characteristic of Black women leaders; (c) resiliency of women leaders; (d) social networking; and (e) the role of faith and family, which help with the journey to executive leadership and sustaining the role once in the leadership position. The Black women executives' ability to achieve and survive issues related to the above themes aided in the successful obtainment and current sustainability of the roles. Participants viewed strong support systems from family and friends, key mentoring relationships, and university support as critical in their journey to executive leadership.

*Keywords:* Black women executives, glass ceilings, sticky floors, women, leadership, journey, resiliency, social networking, mentoring, faith, family

## **Dedication**

My dissertation is dedicated to the ancestors who walked the hall of the academy before me and craved the path and built the foundation that granted me access to education. I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my family and friends who never stopped believing in me. Specifically, to my mother who did not live to see this day but laid the foundation to educational excellence. To my father, Harley L. Higgs, who taught me if you aim at nothing you will hit it every time. To my grandmother, Ida Lee Higgs, who never had the opportunity to pursue higher education but knew her grandchildren and great-grandchildren would and should. To my husband, James Williams Hyppolite, and the children we have chosen to love and raise together, Sarah, Brandon, and Zahara; thank you all for your unwavering love, support, and sacrifices. To my sisters; Teresa Daily, Shelia Higgs Burkhalter, Mary Higgs, and Amanda Higgs (the baby); thank you. To a host of strong black women and men who reside in my spiritual circle and academic circle; thank you. Finally, to the name that is above all names, to the giver and sustainer of life, to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ-I say **THANK YOU!**

### **Jeremiah 29:11–14**

**11** “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD,

“plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

**12** Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.

**13** You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

**14** I will be found by you,” declares the Lord, “and will bring you back from captivity. [a]

I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you,”  
declares the Lord, “and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile.”

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Introduction to the Problem**

Although Black women working in higher education is not a new career choice, Black women remain significantly underrepresented in executive leadership positions at predominately White institutions (PWIs) of higher education (Auster & Prasad, 2016). In fact, gaps still exist in the percentage of Black women serving in executive leadership positions at institutions of Higher Education (Auster & Prasad, 2016; Cook & Glass, 2014). Despite educational attainment, skills preparation, and mentorship, the promotion level for Black women leaders lags behind that of White female counterparts and even further behind male counterparts (Auster & Prasad, 2016).

This chapter provides a brief overview of how Black women experiences within the higher education setting can shape their ability to obtain an executive leadership position at PWIs of higher education across the United States.

Throughout the literature and based upon the research I conducted, Black women face many professional challenges while seeking to gain access to executive leadership positions within higher education. It is still a rarity to see other Black women in executive leadership positions. The 2013 American Council on Education (ACE) report highlighted the number of administrators in Higher Education Institutions (Council on Higher Education, 2016). This report also showed that White senior management members constitute 53% of the total number of management staff (Mayer, 2017). A more extensive review of women, and specifically Black women, in executive leadership positions in higher education, provides greater insight into the barriers and skills needed for upward mobility. According to Silver (2018), “Women leaders are expected to be both personable and authoritative, both analytic and affable, both warm (including being open to any question, no matter how off-putting), and clearly commanding” (p. 1). The



spoken and unspoken expectations are reserved for all women, but the challenges for Black women and women of color become even more degrading. Specifically, when examining how Black women choose to present their personal selves within the academy. According to Kakaki (2018), “Some people still hold fixed ideas about leaders and how they should look and sound” (p. 3). Women of color in higher education continue to face implicit and explicit biases not only during the journey to executive or senior leadership, but upon achieving the role.

Private and public scrutiny is a part of the journey to executive leadership. According to Artis (2018), the former President of Benedict College, “Women often have to prove themselves in multiple ways before the scrutiny subsides” (p. 5). For Black women, any perceived deficits are amplified and used as examples of our inability to lead effectively (Artis, 2018). Indeed, “Women of color make up 11.9% of managerial and professional positions, but African American women make up a mere 5.3%” (Beckwith, Carter, & Peters, 2016, p. 115). The lack of Black female executive leaders has negatively impacted Black women's self-esteem, self-worth, and self-efficacy (Crites, Dickerson, & Lorenz, 2015). Black women voices have been silenced, stereotyped, and marginalized in the academy (Candia-Bailey, 2016; Jones, 2014). The spoken and unspoken expectations, the ongoing scrutiny, and constant questioning of leadership abilities make the journey to executive leadership even more daunting for Black women. Michelle Obama (2017) stated, “There is no magic to achievement. It is really about hard work, choices, and persistence” (para. 3).

The literature has indicated that hard work and persistence are not always enough to ensure Black women can achieve their dreams of executive leadership within the halls of the academy (Crenshaw, 2011). According to Hughes (2014), institutional racism is a real and present-day fact at many institutions of higher education. In fact, it seems that racism is a part of

the very cultural fabric in which we live in today within the United States and can easily go unnoticed, ignored, or denied. Institutional racism is a powerful system of privilege and power based on race (Crenshaw, 2011). Persistence and resiliency are mindsets. How can Black women truly overcome institutional racism that spans the entire existence of higher education? The power structures begin and are perpetuated by seemingly innocent normal events and daily occurrences and interaction. As the demographic makeup of the world continues to grow more diverse, so should the forward-facing leaders of higher education institutions also become more diverse. Many higher education institutions state they are a diverse and welcoming campus community; but what does it mean to embrace, celebrate, and hire racially diverse pools of applicants. There seem to be invisible barriers that still prevent Black women from ascending to the highest levels of leadership, even with the appropriate experience and desired credentials. Racism is structural and institutionalized therefore unless systems of oppression and racism are challenged and dismantled the journey to executive leadership will continue to be difficult but not impossible to overcome.

### **Background, Context, History, and Conceptual Framework for the Problem**

#### **Background, Context, and History**

The *Sweatt v. Painter* Supreme Court case helped change the landscape of education, and specifically higher education. Separate but equal was the law of the land in the late 1800s, and this law did not change until the Supreme Court ruled unanimously in 1950 to uphold the equal protection clause granted by the 14th Amendment. Discrimination was legal in the United States, and it took great persistence and the courts to overturn laws that legally denied access to education based on race and other identifiers. According to Collegeview (n.d.), “Before the Civil War, higher education for African American students was virtually nonexistent” (para. 1).

Institutions of higher education are becoming more diverse, but many are underprepared to meet the demands of a changing demographic. The case of *Sweatt v. Painter* (1950) is an example of segregation and racial discrimination impacting admittance into higher education. Access to education is a new realization for many special populations. According to Bastedo, Altbach, and Gumport (2016), “The breadth of concerns related to diversity on campuses throughout the United States include not only race, ethnicity, gender, and class, but religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, and disability, among others” (p. 373). Racial separation was the legal law of the land in the early to mid-1900s; however, because of public outcries and the challenging of the status quo, things begin to change. According to NPR (2017), the *Sweatt v. Painter* case helped lead the way for *Brown v. Board of Education* court case which ended legal segregation in America’s public schools (para. 3). However, as higher education institutions continue to defy and change discriminatory historical practices, there are still challenges that exist within the infrastructure, hiring, and promotion practices.

Black women executives have not been given many platforms within higher education research to talk about their personal experiences. The research tends to be few in number and aside from statistical reports, most research focuses on the undergraduate educational experience (Baxter-Nuamah, 2015). This research study showcases the experiences of Black women who occupy spaces of executive leadership while still holding a known marginalized identity and unpacks the many facets of intersectionality that helps to shape their perspectives as leaders.

Institutionalized racism and oppression can be presented in many forms and spaces throughout the academy (Hughes, 2014). Cultural structures are deeply embedded, and as a researcher, I cannot assume that those who benefit from a powerful system of privilege built on power and privilege will readily see inequity and institutional systems of racism. According to

Catalyst and Vinnicombe (2012), women, in general, have increasingly advanced to positions of organizational and political leaders. However, Black women and women of color remain the exception to the rule. Catalyst and Vinnicombe (2012) argued women who appear as atypical, who present as more attractive, and easier to get along with seemed to excel at quicker speeds. In addition to racism and sexism and other forms of oppressive behaviors, women of color face social and cultural pressures that others are not forced to deal with on a regular basis. Who decides the standard for beauty and attractiveness? How can it be determined if someone is easy to get along with or not? These questions continue the cycle of stereotyping and deciding who gets included versus who gets excluded.

Higher education professionals are charged with preparing students to thrive in a global and diverse society. It is hard to promote diversity and inclusion to students while feeling marginalized and excluded as a faculty or staff member. There are many declarations regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion in just about every college or university mission statement. This statement is reflective of the changing demographics of the world and on many college campuses. By embracing the rich diversity of faculty, staff, and students, the university and higher education will be better prepared to help students compete in a diverse global society. “Diversity represents one of the most dramatic societal changes in the twenty-first century” (Bastedo et al., 2016, p. 375). For colleges and universities to produce and support an effective educational environment, there must be a platform for different perspectives, points of view, and basic belief systems. Institutions must continue to recruit more diverse faculty, staff, and students; however, as the recruitment continues a shift will need to occur to ensure the university is prepared to address cross-cultural related concerns across the universities operating structure. An inclusive campus culture demonstrates an effective educational environment that enhances

the collegiate experience for all, which is inclusive of faculty, staff, and students. Institutions that do not embrace diverse perspectives and identities, help to continue the fabric of institutional racism and systems of institutional oppression.

Through the review of literature, in addition to racism and institutional oppression, Black women surveyed highlighted sociocultural factors that contributed to the underrepresentation of Black women in senior-level administrative positions in higher education. Sociocultural factors throughout higher education literature were based on gender and race, the recruitment and retention rates of underrepresented personnel, and a support system within the university. History matters, and helps to provide context to this research study. Women of color are placed in positions that seem of higher risk of personal failures that can prove harmful for upward career mobility, without the appropriate support from mentors within the context of organizational support (Fama & Jensen, 1983; Ferris, Jagannathan, & Pritchard, 2003). There are a number of challenges and discriminatory practice that may arise that can lead to the conclusion that organizational policies and practices also result in gender discrimination. Women have earned the right to ascend to senior or executive leadership position, however, obtaining the leadership position is not enough if the support structures are not in place to ensure success is achievable. Gender diversity is an important factor, but we must also ensure that all women are promoted equally and provided the tool to be successful. This research study focused on gathering knowledge from the research participants that helped to inform active learning.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The historical origin of constructivism is that the learner, through an active process, creates working systems of knowledge and frames of reference (Creswell, 2016). Quinn (2014) outlined 10 core elements of the social construction and showcased the significance of group

perceptions and experiences as reality (p. 127). Quinn further explained the importance of understanding the context of lived experiences and how experiences help to shape individual worldviews. According to the constructivism view of learning, knowledge is a process that is structured by dialogue and interaction with other learners achieved by experiencing the world together (Alt, 2014). Quinn addressed power difference and how that can affect and shape social construction and become a part of the perceptions and lived experiences of individuals. Social constructivist theory encourages the researcher to establish meaningful relationships with participants in order to collect and construct multiple points of view. Social constructivism stresses the collaborative processes in knowledge construction and thus links the social component to the cognitive component of knowledge building (Sutherland, 2017). As the researcher, I used personal reflective strategies to help in my understanding of the information the participants will share during this study.

Through the examination of the experiences of Black women in executive leadership roles, the literature helped to inform the journey and current status of Black women within PWIs of higher education. The social constructivist framework helped to guide this study and provided a guide for how the experiences of the participants and the researcher will impact what is learned and communicated regarding new learning. This study was centered on capturing the authentic experiences of the research participants.

Several factors of social constructivist schooling are indicated by theorists and practitioners and these elements have been grouped around four typologies of the constructivist learning environment (Alt, 2014; Barnes, 2017; Barrett, Gregory, & Pearson, 2015; Baxter-Nuamah, 2015; Carli & Eagly, 2016; Creswell, 2016; Davis & Maldonado, 2015; List & Sorcinelli, 2018): glass ceilings and sticky floors, Black women leaders, resiliency of women

leaders, and social networking. Social constructivism provides a framework in which individual points of view may be utilized to examine experiences and the impact of those experiences on culture, organizational structures, and practices within higher education. While research studies have been conducted on Black women leaders in higher education (Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Lloyd- Jones, 2011; Nelson, 2012), few studies have examined the experiences of Black women currently serving in an executive leadership role at predominately White institutions of higher education.

### **Statement of Problem**

Black women remain underrepresented at every level in the corporate and educational pipelines and face more significant barriers to advancement and an even steeper path to senior leadership than their White male and female counterparts (Alter, 2017; Cook & Glass, 2014; McKinsey, 2015). Within this study, the literature highlighted that Black women remain underrepresented in executive leadership positions at predominately White institutions of higher education (Auster & Prasad, 2016; Beckwith et al., 2016). The review of the literature failed to address how Black women experiences within higher education impacted their advancement into executive leadership positions. Black women have demonstrated a great deal of resiliency in coping with oppressive conditions in higher education (West, 2017a). However, the strategies used to navigate the higher education promotion process are still very elusive and virtually unknown.

Women earn more than 50% of doctoral, masters, bachelors, and associate degrees within the academy (Zahneis, 2018). Current research show there is a shortage in the percentage of Black women in executive leadership positions at PWIs of higher education (Adams & Dlamini, 2014; Cook & Glass, 2014). Despite educational attainment, skills preparation, and mentorship,

the promotion level for Black women leaders lags behind (Auster & Prasad, 2016). Experience is the greatest teacher; therefore, by examining the experiences of Black women executives, as a researcher, I am certain to gain further enlightenment into the journey Black women take while perusing executive leadership roles within the halls of higher education.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to examine the experiences of Black women at predominately White institutions of higher education who have served in an executive leadership position. According to the literature, Black women are underrepresented in executive and senior leadership positions at PWIs in higher education (Auster & Prasad, 2016; Cook & Glass, 2014). The pathway to executive leadership was explored using a descriptive qualitative case study design focusing on the experiences of the participants.

I embarked on a descriptive case study design to learn more about the experiences of Black women with the goal of better understanding what it took to achieve an executive leadership position. What abilities and skills were required for these Black women to achieve an executive leadership position at PWIs of higher education? Social constructivism provides a framework in which individual points of view may be utilized to examine experiences and the impact of those experiences on culture, organizational structures, and practices within higher education.

### **Research Question**

The study was guided by one research question: What are the experiences of Black women at predominately White institutions (PWIs) of higher education serving in executive leadership positions?



## **Rationale, Relevance, and Significance of the Study**

The results of this study may benefit future Black women striving to become executive leaders at predominately White institutions of higher education. The study was designed to gather information about the experiences of Black women executives in higher education with the anticipations of illuminating those experiences as a guide for future Black women who desire to serve in an executive leadership role. The experiences of Black women executives have not been amply examined or documented, so there is much learning that was gained and can now be shared. The experiences of Black women in executive leadership positions at predominately White institutions (PWIs) of higher education is an area of research with great opportunity and possibilities for further exploration (Auster & Prasad, 2016; Cook & Glass, 2014; Crites et al., 2015). The journey to executive leadership is a personal process, but understanding the various pathways forward was a necessary phase to help ensure the future advancement of Black women into executive leadership positions at PWIs of higher education is possible (Griffin, 2016; West, 2015). Miller and Vaughn (1997) research revealed that Black women striving for executive leadership must have a clear understanding of the past history of higher education institutions while working towards their future goals and dreams.

In addition to understanding the experiences of Black women in executive leadership at predominately White institutions of higher education, it was important to understand the paths that enhanced or prevented Black women from striving to seek executive leadership positions. The premise was to construct and understand the experiences of Black women, which facilitated learning and growth and helps to equip Black women in navigating the various paths to executive leadership in the future.

## Definition of Terms

Key terms were identified to help provide clarity to this research study and to help define the scope of the study.

*Barriers:* Barriers are systemic obstacles and challenges that exist due to internal processes and organizational policies that have historically prevented the transformation of discriminatory policies that are deeply engrained within the higher education culture (Beckwith et al., 2016; Hannum, Muhly, Shockley-Zalabak, & White, 2015; O'Bryant, 2015).

*Black/African American:* Black is utilized to denote those persons of color who identify as a member of the African diaspora, which is inclusive of Black, African American, African, Caribbean, or mixed-race persons who identify as Black and currently resides and works in the United States (Bodomo, 2013; Tinker, 2013).

*Discrimination:* Unjust or prejudicial treatment of different categories of people or things, especially surrounding concerns of race, sex, gender, and religious preference (Gardner, Barrett, & Pearson, 2014; Mohr & Purdie-Vaughns, 2015).

*Double oppression:* Unjust experiences centered around racism and sexism (Baxter-Nuamah, 2015; Grimes et al., 2003; Han & Leonard, 2017; Jackson et al., 2015; Knaus, 2014).

*Executive leadership/Senior leadership:* Administrators who are classified as Senior Academic and Administrative leaders; who are responsible for the administrative direction of separately designated divisions or departments of institutional activity commonly associated with institutions of higher education; those positions who have responsibilities in attracting external funds, marketing strategies, continuous involvement in interpreting and implementing institutional policy, and exercising substantial independence of administrative authority over staffing (American Council of Education, 2018; National Association of Student Personnel

Administrators, 2018).

*Explicit bias*: The attitudes and beliefs we have about a person or group on a conscious level. Much of the time, these biases and their expression arise as the direct result of a perceived threat. When people feel threatened, they are more likely to draw group boundaries to distinguish themselves from others (Perceptions Institute, 2019; Snowden, 2005).

*Glass ceiling*: An invisible barrier that keeps women from rising above a certain level in corporations or other professional fields (Hymowitz & Schellhardt, 1987; Morrison, White, & Van Velsor, 1986).

*Higher education institutions*: Four-year institutions that award bachelor's, master's, and terminal degrees (American Council on Education, 2018).

*Intersectionality*: The general notion that social identities serve as organizing features of social relationships (Binder, Chavez, Erwin, & Lopez, 2017; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Mohr & Purdie-Vaughns, 2015). Intersectionality has been outlined by six core ideas that are frequently referenced when researchers are analyzing data: inequality, relationality, power, social context, complexity, and social justice (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Binder et al., 2017). Highlights the experiences of individuals who occupy multiple social locations are powerfully shaped by interlocking systems of oppression and privilege (Carli & Eagly, 2015; Carter-Sowell & Zimmerman, 2015)

*Implicit bias*: Also known as *implicit social cognition*, the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner. These biases, which encompass both favorable and unfavorable assessments, are activated involuntarily and without an individual's awareness or intentional control. Residing deep in the subconscious, these biases are different from known biases that individuals may choose to conceal for the purposes of social

and/or political correctness. Rather, implicit biases are not accessible through introspection (Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, 2015).

*Leadership:* An innate trait that recognizes leadership as a social construction. Leadership is both a research area and a practical skill encompassing the ability of an individual or organization to "lead" or guide other individuals, teams, or entire organizations (Kapasi, Sang, & Sitko, 2016). *Women leaders*, in general, are expected to be high achievers, have an ability to rally individuals together, to utilize their passion and energy to bring about positive change in the community and civic organizations, to go with the flow, and have excellent networking skills (Adams & Dlamini, 2014; Kapasi et al., 2016; Marvin et al., 2012).

*Marginalization:* Social and scholarly exclusion (Berk, 2017; Lloyd-Jones, 2014; Sue, 2014). It comes in many forms of discrimination related to social, cultural, and professional identities (Davis & Maldonado, 2015).

*Mentoring relationships:* A critical connection that helps improve adjustment issues, educate around institutional factors, provides information related to career dynamics (Cook & William, 2015; Rasheem et al., 2018).

*Predominately White institutions (PWI):* Institutions of higher education in which Whites account for 50% or greater of the student enrollment. However, the majority of these institutions may also be understood as historically White institutions in recognition of the binarism and exclusion supported by the United States prior to 1964 (Kim, 2002; National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, 2018).

*Racial microaggressions:* Everyday, subtle, stunning, often automatic, and nonverbal exchanges which are put-downs of Blacks by offenders (Berk, 2017a; Sue, 2014).

*Resilient leader:* One who demonstrates the ability to recover, learn and developmentally

mature when confronted with chronic or crisis adversity (Blaine & Reed, 2015; Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Pincott, 2014).

*Social networking*: Upper-level positions that offer opportunities and access to information, knowledge, and referrals for career mobility (Harper, 2015; Hill & Wheat, 2017; Jeffries, 2015).

*Stereotyping*: Qualities or traits assigned to specific groups on the basis of their race, sex, nationality, age, religion, or other characteristics (Carli & Eagly, 2015; Crites et al., 2015; Chaves & Dickenson, 2017).

*Sticky floors*: An invisible barrier to advancement based on attitudinal or organizational biases (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Sticky Floors centers on social and cultural stereotypes, feelings of being ostracized, and isolation that make it even more difficult to ascend to executive leadership roles (Barnes, 2017; Hannum et al., 2015).

### **Assumptions, Delimitations, and Limitations**

#### **Assumptions**

Assumptions, in this case, were outside the researcher's control, however, if assumptions are not present then the research could be deemed irrelevant (Simon, 2011). In this study, an underlying assumption was that higher education institutions would have nondiscrimination policies in place and abide by those policies during the recruitment and hiring processes for all university jobs. The next assumption was that university hiring officials would work to meet the needs of diverse populations across campus by working to diversity the administrative staffing structure at all levels of the institutions. Finally, within this study, I assumed the participants would be honest and truthful during all stages of the data collection process (first-structured interviews and member-checking interviews).

## **Delimitations**

Delimitations, which are the boundaries of this study, reflect aspects of the study that I could control as the researcher (Creswell, 2016). The first delimitation was the selection of Black women participants who were currently serving in executive leadership at PWIs of higher education. I only selected participants that met the study requirements. Next, I asked each participant the same first-structured interview and member-checking interview questions to help ensure the consistency of the study. The interview questions were aligned with the review of the literature for this study and the conceptual framework. The final delimitation was I used Hatch (2002) typological analysis process and a clearly defined color-coding system, which I created to help analyze the typological data provided by each participant. The findings were documented in a consistent manner to help reduce researcher bias.

## **Limitations**

Limitations in research are those factors that are out of a researcher's control and could cause potential weaknesses in the study (Creswell, 2016). This study depended upon the availability and having ample access to the participants. I was the primary instrument in the data collection process as I conducted the first-structured interviews and the member-checking interviews, as well as providing my personal reflective narrative. It was important that I remained open to guidance and feedback from my faculty chair and committee members to help decrease researcher bias throughout this process (Sarniak, 2015).

Although the results of the study are not generalizable, the information discovered presents opportunities that contribute to understanding the experiences of Black women executives working at PWIs of higher education. I expected the participants to be honest throughout the interview process. However, and all participants were well informed that they

could withdraw from the study at any time.

With a working knowledge of the limitations and delimitations, I triangulate the data using the first-structured interviews, the member-checking interviews, and my personal reflective narrative. These three forms of data collection were used in the coding and analyses phase. This study also involved personal engagement with the participants throughout the data collection process as well as in sharing the findings of the study. Personal reflections, rich and thick typological descriptions, coding, and reflexivity were all important and considered in helping reinforce the credibility of this study.

### **Chapter 1 Summary**

Black women have been involved in the educational pipeline in meaningful ways since the 1800s. Despite the many internal and external factors that exist, Black women continue to make strides and strive for executive leadership roles at PWIs of higher education. Chapter 1 began with an introduction to the research study and provided an in-depth background section which highlighted the significance of this research study. Examining the experiences of Black women working at predominately White institutions of higher education was defined to provide clarity throughout the chapter and the dissertation. I have explained the problem and the purpose of the study and the deficiencies that were addressed during my research and presented within the findings. The research question was designed to add to the educational research centered around the experiences of Black women executives. This qualitative case study design was explained and aligned with the review of the literature and the conceptual framework, which helped to guide the study. Chapter 1 also includes the rationale, relevance, and significance of the study, definitions of terms, and assumptions, delimitations, and limitations.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **Introduction to the Literature Review**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the experiences of Black women who are serving in executive leadership positions in Higher Education at predominately White institutions (PWIs). This study is relevant to the field of education because gaps still exist in the percentage of Black women serving in executive leadership positions at institutions of Higher Education (Auster & Prasad, 2016; Cook & Glass, 2014). Black women working in the field of higher education are seeking equal access to all levels of the academy. Educational attainment is noted as one of the primary reasons women and minorities are able to achieve success (Jones, 2014; Kaba, 2017). The research of Jones (2014) highlights the descriptive qualitative multi-case study which was designed to capture the leadership experiences of multicultural administrators. The study findings showcased oppressive institutional policies and lower funding concerns for diverse leaders across campus as an area of concern and a factor requiring further exploration.

Women earn more than 50% of doctoral, masters, bachelors, and associate degrees within the academy (Zahneis, 2018). Pursuing and obtaining a college degree is a highly encouraged and achieved goal by many women. Current research shows there is a problem with the percentage of Black women in executive leadership positions at PWIs of higher education (Adams & Dlamini, 2014; Cook & Glass, 2014). Despite educational attainment, skills preparation, and mentorship, the promotion level for Black women leader's lags behind that of White female counterparts and even further behind male counterparts (Auster & Prasad, 2016). Therefore, understanding why the gap continues to exist is essential for higher education institutions to work toward sustainable solutions that translate into equal access and opportunities for Black women working in higher education.



This review of literature examines women's status in leadership roles within the academy and focused explicitly on the professional opportunities and challenges of Black women seeking paths and promotions to executive leadership positions. It is rare for Black women in the academy to see other Black women in executive leadership positions. This argument relates to the 2013 report, which records highlight staff working in Higher Education Institutions (Council on Higher Education, 2016). The report reveals that White senior management members constitute 53% of the total number of management staff, which further speaks to the transformation that is needed and required around senior management (Mayer, 2017). The lack of Black female executive leaders has negatively impacted Black women's self-esteem, self-worth, and self-efficacy (Crites et al., 2015). Believing in an individual's ability to make positive impact in the work environment and within the university culture is critical. Black women voices have been silenced, stereotyped, and marginalized in the academy (Candia-Bailey, 2016; Jones, 2014). A more extensive review of women, and specifically Black women, in executive leadership positions in higher education, provides greater insight into the barriers and skills needed for upward mobility.

Throughout the literature, researchers demonstrated that women of color have higher academic credentials than many of their male counterparts (Chin, 2011; Han & Leonard, 2016; McPhatter, Stark, & Vakalahi, 2014). However, in higher education, women of color often outnumber men of color in lower-ranking positions. Black women hold even fewer of those lower-ranking spaces (Johnson, 2014). Research across many spectrums has yielded similar results that women are still underrepresented at every level in the corporate and educational pipelines and face more significant barriers to advancement, and an even steeper path to senior leadership (Alter, 2017; Cook & Glass, 2014; McKinsey, 2015). Black women have

demonstrated a great deal of resiliency in coping with oppressive conditions in higher education (West, 2017a). The strategies used to navigate the higher education promotion process are still very elusive and virtually unknown.

The literature offers many diverse perspectives that explain why there are gaps in women leaders versus male leaders (Beckwith et al., 2016; Davis & Maldonado, 2015; McGee, 2009). Despite the gains made as a result of the women's movement and litigation to remove overt discrimination, the glass ceiling remains for women wanting to ascend to the highest levels of the organization. The research has even provided a few strategies that may be deployed to help bridge the gap between female and male leaders (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). However, when unpacking research and theories around the gaps between White women and Black women in leadership positions, the barriers become even more difficult to explain. There is little research that explicitly describes the success strategies employed by African American women working in higher education (Griffin, 2016; West, 2015). Many researchers focus on ethnicity and gender as oppressive factors that exist in the larger society that may have premeditated the halls of academia (Bower & Wolverton 2009; Burke & Carter, 2015; Howard- Hamilton, 2003). However, Black feminist theorists have stated that higher education is the perfect platform for creating counter spaces that allow African American women to confront organizational and social structures that prevent Black women from gaining equal access to the executive leadership seat (Collins, 2002; West, 2017).

A further analysis of the literature demonstrated there are common barriers that prevent women from advancing to executive leadership roles: diminished ability due to a lack of opportunity and support; discouragement and sabotage; lack of role models that negatively impacts women's ability to see themselves in executive leadership roles; and expectations and

qualification are different for women and men (Baxter-Nuamah, 2015; Curtis, Moore, & Wallace, 2014; Hannum et al., 2015). Through this study, the researchers demonstrate different viewpoints on barriers and successes; equal access and inequality in the halls of the academy, specifically for Black women. It is noted when barriers are removed and leadership qualities and skills are the primary focus, Black women can reach an executive leadership position in higher education at PWIs (Beckwith et al., 2016; Curtis et al., 2014). The literature review was sourced through the electronic database searches in ERIC, ProQuest Central, ProQuest Education Journals, Education Source, and PsycInfo via the Concordia University–Portland and the University of Central Florida Libraries.

### **Conceptual Framework: Social Constructivism**

Dewey and Vygotsky have been identified as two towering figures in educational thought (Hung, 2002; O'Brien, 2002). Dewey believed education was designed to enable individuals to look critically at previously accepted beliefs in the light of new experiences. Dewey educational philosophy centered on engagement, exploration, thinking, critical reflection, and finally on shared experiences (O'Brien, 2002). In comparison, Vygotsky believed that individual social interactions could lead to continuous changes in thoughts and behaviors and are closely associated with cultural identities (Moll, 1994). Vygotsky showcased learning around three concepts: imitative learning, structured learning, and collaborative learning. These learning modalities showcase how learning is constructed and actualized. The social constructivist framework for the purpose of this literature review comes from the theories of Alt (2014), Creswell (2016), and Guba, Lincoln, and Lynham (2011) wherein practitioners and interpretivists gain knowledge and understanding by interpreting participants' perceptions.

Creswell (2016) asserted that individuals form their own realities and that personal points

of view matter. According to the constructivism view of learning, knowledge is a process that is structured by dialogue and interaction with other learners achieved by experiencing the world together (Alt, 2014). Social constructivist theory encourages the researcher to establish meaningful relationships with participants in order to collect and construct multiple points of view. Social constructivism stresses the collaborative processes in knowledge construction and thus links the social component to the cognitive component of knowledge building (Sutherland, 2017). The social constructivist approach is rooted in the theories of eminent scholars, who stated constructivism is a composite of different views incorporating active, social, and creative aspects of learning (Hung, 2002; O'Brien, 2002). Through the examination of the experiences of Black women in executive leadership roles, the literature helped to inform the journey and current status of Black women within PWIs of higher education.

Several essential factors of the social constructivist researcher are indicated by theorists and practitioners (Barnes, 2017; Barrett et al., 2015; Baxter-Nuamah, 2015; Carli & Eagly, 2016; Davis & Maldonado, 2015; List & Sorcinelli, 2018). These elements were grouped around four tenets of the constructivist learning and the research environment for the purpose of this research study (Alt, 2014; Creswell, 2016): glass ceilings and sticky floors, Black women leaders, the resiliency of women leaders, and social networking. According to Patton (2014), "The social construction of reality, then, points us not only to what is constructed but how it is constructed" (p. 127). Social constructivism provides a platform for researchers to gather meaningful evidence and data that helps to inform and explain the subjects point of view. Social constructivism provided a framework in which individual points of view were utilized to examine experiences and the impact of those experiences on culture, organizational structures, and practices within higher education. The exploration of these concepts was validated through patterns and lived

experiences of Black women in executive leadership and informed recommendation on how to improve Black women pathways into executive leadership positions at PWIs of higher education in the future.

### **Review of Research Literature and Methodological Literature**

The literature review is a comprehensive spotlight of four typologies that help to inform the journey of Black women to executive leadership. The leadership attributes that this study focused on are glass ceiling and sticky floors, Black women leaders and their leadership characteristics, resiliency, and social network. The executive leadership role is perceived to be a distinguished leadership position. Therefore, it is important to understand the relationship between executive leaders, leadership characteristics, institutional barriers, and various pathways to achieving the executive leadership title.

#### **Glass Ceiling and Sticky Floor**

First coined by Morrison et al. (1987), the term *glass ceiling* is defined as an invisible barrier that kept women from rising above a certain level in corporations or other professional fields. The term was coined and used by the media and described the plateau, which women and other protected classes of individuals are denied the opportunity to advance to administrative positions within their organizations (Barnes, 2017; Baxter-Naumah, 2015; Carli & Eagly, 2016). For several decades, researchers have attempted to identify the barriers that are preventing women from climbing the ladder to higher executive leadership positions. These same researchers have attempted to capture the strategies that have enabled some to break through the glass ceiling (Carlie & Eagly, 2016; Barnes, 2017). There is greater difficulty in addressing how the “glass ceiling effect” impacts Black women leaders due to the complexities of historical, cultural, and social dimensions (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Empirical and theoretical research

on the glass ceiling effect reveals its multi-dimensional nature, including the interaction of cultural, situational, contextual, and individual factors. The literature continues to indicate that the historical White and male culture remains prevalent in organizational leadership, with its command and control orientated management practices and top-down communications (Barrett, Gardner, & Pearson, 2014; Hannum et al., 2015; O'Bryant, 2015).

In addition to contending with the glass ceiling barrier, Black women also deal with the *sticky floor* concept, which is defined as invisible barriers to advancement based on attitudinal or organizational biases (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Black women must work to overcome the combinations of glass ceiling, which can be experienced by any woman, with the additional pressure of the sticky floors, which centers on social and cultural stereotypes, feelings of being ostracized, and isolation which make it even more difficult to ascend to executive leadership roles (Barnes, 2017; Hannum et al., 2015). Davis and Maldonado (2015) advised that minority women have to overcome the perception of gender–ethnic role stereotypes, cultural differences, and the lack of opportunities to be mentored. All of these things can create a feeling of disillusionment and low self-worth. Whether barriers are perceived or real they can be detrimental (Barnes, 2017). There are many titles that have been assigned to the lack of access for Black women leaders. The glass ceiling is clearly the most popular general metaphor for women's lack of access to leadership (Carli & Eagly, 2016).

**Components of the glass ceiling.** The key components for the glass ceiling significant to this qualitative research study are (a) marginalization (Berk, 2017; Lloyd-Jones, 2014; Capodilupo, Sue, & Holder, 2014); (b) barriers (Beckwith et al., 2016; Hannum et al., 2015; O'Bryant, 2015); and (c) the importance of mentoring relationships (Cook & Glass, 2014; Alleman, Anderson, Mushonga, Rasheem, & Vakalahi, 2018). The chosen components help to

provide clarity to the reader around major obstacles that make the glass ceiling more difficult to penetrate for women and specifically Black women. Researchers highlight marginalization, barriers, and mentoring relationships as key factors for cracking the glass ceiling obstacle (Barnes, 2017; Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Haslam & Ryan, 2008). Women have experienced significant strides as leaders (Carli & Eagly, 2016). However, Black women are still experiencing an achievement gap when compared to their White female counterparts and men in reaching executive leadership roles (Barnes, 2017; Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Glass ceiling is a term that was invented in the 1980s and used by the media to delineate how protected classes have been denied opportunities to advance to executive administrative positions in higher education (Carlie & Eagly, 2016; Cotter, Hermsen, Ovadia, & Vanneman, 2001).

**Marginalization.** African American women and other underrepresented members of the academy often report experiences of social exclusion and scholarly marginalization in mainstream institutions of higher education (Beckwith et al., 2016; Lloyd-Jones, 2014). Marginalization comes in many forms of discrimination related to social, cultural, and professional identities (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). *Discrimination* is defined as unjust or prejudicial treatment of different categories of people or things, especially surrounding concerns of race, sex, gender, and religious preference (Gardner et al., 2014; Mohr & Purdie-Vaughns, 2015). Feeling included within the organizational culture is essential to employee success. Both social and scholarly practices of social exclusion and marginalization function as barriers to career advancement (Domingue, 2015; Lloyd-Jones, 2014). Inclusive environments help to promote team collaboration and create an atmosphere of group support. Black feminist theory (Collins, 2009; Domingue, 2015) helps to capture how Black women navigate discrimination and systemic systems of oppression in America and within the academy.

By better understanding systems of oppression, Black women then become more equipped to circumnavigate difficult situations and systems of marginalization (Collins, 2009; Curtis, Moore, and Wallace, 2014). When comparing Black and White women in full professor or other executive positions to their White male counterparts in those spaces, the data reveal that ethnicity- and gender-based discrimination continues to permeate the academy, placing Black women at a greater disadvantage than women in general (Barrett et al., 2014).

Marginalization can be subtle and the language and actions used to marginalize are often easy to dismiss or go unnoticed. The term *racial microaggression* was coined by psychiatrist and Harvard University professor C. M. Pierce (Sue, 2010) to refer to everyday, subtle, stunning, often automatic, and nonverbal exchanges which are put-downs of Blacks by offenders (Berk, 2017a; Sue, 2014). Marginalization and microaggressions are personal insults that occur in the workplace creating uncomfortable and sometimes hostile work environments for Black women or other underrepresented groups. Berk (2017b) and Sue (2014) concluded that attacks had been directed at the marginalized, historically underrepresented, and most vulnerable persons in our society in specific ethnic, gender, religious, and sexual orientation groups.

In summary, marginalization is a subtle action that has far-reaching impacts on underrepresented communities. Individuals who experience racial discrimination often suffer in silence or blame themselves for their predicament (Lloyd-Jones, 2014). In PWIs issues of marginality, along with discrimination, and hurdles maintaining personal and professional identity are prevalent (Chavez & Dickens, 2018). African American women experience incidences of exclusion and marginalization several times every day, regardless of their role or status in the institution (Barrett et al., 2014), however the complexity and consequences of marginality in the academy increase when race, ethnicity, and gender intersect (Loya, 2015;



Mohr & Vaughns, 2015; Strayhorn, 2017).

**Barriers.** Although there are many positive and potentially empowering attributes in what it means to be a Black woman, there are also many myths and stereotypes deeply rooted in ethnic and gendered beliefs that make being a Black woman in higher education emotionally, professionally, and socially challenging (O'Bryant, 2015). Historically, barriers and challenges have been emotional and deeply rooted in the organizational culture (Denis, Langely, & Sergi, 2012; Hannum et al., 2015). There are systemic obstacles that prevent Black women from ascending to executive leadership within higher education institutions at PWIs (Beckwith et al., 2016; Dilworth & Wolf, 2015; Lakshmi & Peter, 2015). The majority of African American administrators in executive leadership roles were employed at historically Black colleges and universities (Barrett et al., 2014). This review of literature synthesized over two decades of research and literature to discuss the barriers that exist at PWIs in higher education (Dilworth & Wolf, 2015). The barriers include lower pay compensation, highly scrutinized performance evaluations, the absence of a clear path to higher leadership opportunities, and continuously being overlooked for organizational promotions (Haslam et al., 2015).

Systemic barriers and oppression must first be acknowledged and then removed (Dilworth & Wolf, 2015; Lloyd-Jones, 2014). Changing systems of oppression and actively working to reduce or eliminate barriers requires the deployment of new strategies (Dilworth & Wolf, 2015; McNae & Vali, 2015). A practice to transform systems of oppression is a change in leadership. Since many Black female educators already assume prominent roles as scholars, mentors, and social change agents in higher education (Curtis et al., 2014), this practice is an accessible option. Higher education institutions must be willing to change to help eliminate and reduce barriers. Advancing women and specifically Black women to executive leadership roles is

not something to be done solely to benefit women; it is in the best interest of higher education institutions as well as society overall (Hannum et al., 2015) as higher education institutions are becoming more diverse.

**The importance of mentoring relationships.** Black women have ascended to executive leadership positions at PWIs of higher education but not without strife, backlash, and overcoming many barriers. However, Black women are still severely underrepresented in senior-level positions (Barrett et al., 2014). Mentoring is a critical connection that helps improve adjustment issues, educate around institutional factors, provide information related to career dynamics, and help Black women aspire to executive leadership roles (Barrett et al., 2014; Burke & Carter, 2015). Mentoring relationships are reciprocal relationships that nurture and inspires the mentor and mentee (Alleman et al., 2018). Mentoring relationships may be formal pairings as part of an organizational mentoring initiative, or simply organic based on mutual interests. In many cases, mentoring happens informally, but it thrives based on both parties' commitment to the relationship and alignment of goals. Mentoring relationships are critical for helping to prepare Black women to lead at the executive leadership level (Burke & Carter, 2015) because mentoring offers social capital, career benefits, and resources entrenched in career networks, which help to inform sponsorships, and professional access (Barrett et al., 2014; Burke & Carter, 2015; List & Sorcinelli, 2018).

Black women must make the time to be mentors and to be mentored to penetrate the glass ceiling. Mentoring at its fundamental level is a necessary tool to socialize faculty and administrators to enhance their career success in the academy (Burk & Carter, 2015; Llyod-Jones, 2014). Mentoring has been recognized as a vital component of a successful career, particularly for women administrators and faculty of color (List & Sorcinelli, 2018; Burk &

Carter, 2015; Barrett et al., 2014). The best mentoring model is one that encourages individuals to focus on initiating mentoring relationships that address their professional needs, take a proactive and empowering approach to mentoring, and create opportunities to both be mentored and mentor others (List & Sorcinelli, 2018). Mentoring relationships serve several purposes; they help to prevent social isolation, support intentional professional development, provide confidential spaces to discuss difficult situations, serve as problem-solving forums, and they help cultivate leadership development (Alleman et al., 2018; Barrett et al., 2014; List & Sorcinelli, 2018).

In summary, mentoring relationships are important to help penetrate the glass ceiling of higher education. Black women working in higher education are encouraged to find a mentor to help create a more welcoming work environment. Several researchers emphasized the need for institutions to take a vested interest in helping find suitable mentors to assist women and underrepresented populations find needed resources to be successful. Specifically, institutions must provide access into positions of leadership by doing what good mentors do: helping them find their voice, helping them understand obstacles in the career path, encouraging them by helping them to identify their strengths and skills, and helping them access resources for career development (Alleman et al., 2018; Ballenger, Searby, & Tripses, 2015) The right mentoring groups can help to provide a sense of camaraderie among women who are all looking out for each other's best interest as well as the interest of the institution (List & Sorcinelli, 2018). Additionally, women can learn from other females' voices and experiences. It is beneficial to find multiple and diverse mentors along the career path and to be intentional about mentoring relationships. Climb the ladder, then be willing to hold the ladder steady for others to climb (Ballenger et al., 2015; List & Sorcinelli, 2018).

In closing, the glass ceiling is still a reality at many PWIs of higher education (Barnes, 2017; Carli & Early, 2015; Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Black women administrators face issues of marginalization, barriers, and should understand the importance of mentoring relationships that can all influence the glass ceiling effect. Researchers report that women of color comprise approximately one-third of their representative gender in the workforce. Yet, only 5.3% of these women are African American and hold leadership positions (Barnes, 2017; Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Through adversity and while constantly working to break the glass ceiling, Black women continue showing up, carry out their responsibilities, and continuously work to prove their value and worth. Black women have preserved and continue to demonstrate their resilience and preparedness for executive leadership roles (Barnes, 2017; Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Haslam & Ryan, 2008).

**Components of the sticky floor.** The components of the sticky floor explored for this research study are stereotyping-described by Crites et al. (2015); Chavez and Dickerson (2018), and Howard-Baptiste (2014); double oppression-highlighted by Knaus (2014), and Han and Leonard (2016); and intersectionality-expounded upon by researchers Willis (2015), Loya (2015), and Mohr and Purdie-Vaughn (2015). The sticky floor is a subsection of the glass ceiling metaphor and places greater emphasis on the experiences of Black women at PWIs of higher education. The sticky floor component focuses specifically on stereotyping behaviors or discriminatory practices that slow women advancement (Carli & Eagly, 2016). The sticky floor impacts all women at all levels but brings up attitudes towards social dominance, power, status, and virtue (Fincher-Kiefer, Meier, & Scholter, 2014); and impact women of color in a more profound way. These components will help clarify the mechanics of the sticky floor concept.

**Stereotyping.** Although the sticky floor metaphor has been invoked to refer to poor

career planning by women who create barriers to their own success or who opt out of leadership (Carli & Eagly, 2015), it is a term used by researchers to showcase the difference in the female experiences versus the Black woman experiences. The sticky floor concept lands squarely in stereotyping behaviors by those in positions of power. Black women like other women must continue to work and break through the glass ceilings that prevent access to executive leadership positions. However, the sticky floor concept adds another layer of barriers and challenges that must be addressed to achieve success. *Stereotypes* are generally defined as qualities or traits assigned to specific groups on the basis of their race, sex, nationality, age, religion or other characteristics; and often these qualities are generalizations given to the entire group even though they may not describe all the members of that specific group (Crites et al., 2015; Chavez & Dickerson, 2017).

Black female scholars at PWIs of higher education are depicted by colleagues, students, and staff in negative ways (Howard-Baptiste, 2014). The negative stereotypes include overt and covert behaviors, attitudes, preconceived notions, and perceptions of lacking skills, knowledge, and capabilities (Auster & Prasad, 2016; Crites et al., 2015). Overcoming these negative images and stereotypes is a historical battle many Black women face. The *mammy stereotype* has helped to shape how the majority culture views Black women. The characteristics include the Mammy character as unintelligent, invisible, self-sacrificing, or angry Black women (Domingue, 2015; Howard-Baptiste, 2014; Carli & Eagly, 2016). The stories of Black women are deeply rooted in American history, a history that does not accurately represent the many struggles and experiences of Black women whose own stories and voices remain silent among the voices that are represented (Howard-Baptiste, 2014; Chaves & Dickerson, 2017).

Black women must develop coping strategies to overcome negative stereotypes in the academy (Mohr & Purdie-Vaughns, 2015). The pressure to negotiate identities, particularly in the workplace, can be burdensome for Black women. Having to shift identities often produces internal conflict and contributes to distorted perceptions of self (Chaves & Dickerson, 2017; Crites et al., 2015). Higher education institutions and their leaders have a responsibility to help reduce stereotyping behaviors across campus specifically centered on hiring and promotion practices (Berk, 2017; Howard-Baptiste, 2014). Black women must continue to apply and strive to be executive leaders no matter the obstacles. Despite demographic shifts in colleges and universities and programmatic diversity efforts, Black women still face challenges with invisibility, misrepresentation, and being fully acknowledged as leaders (Domingue, 2015; Mohr & Purdie-Vaughns, 2015; Howard-Baptiste, 2014).

**Double oppression.** Conversely, the literature demonstrates how Black women struggle with racism and sexism within the higher education arena (Han & Leonard, 2016; Jackson, Osborne, & Wilder, 2015; Knaus, 2014). *Double oppression* is defined as unjust experiences centered around racism and sexism (Howard-Hamilton & Hughes, 2003; Baxter-Nuamah, 2015). Within the sticky floor construct, double oppression validates how racism and sexism are often couched together as factors that continue to serve as oppressive stereotyping behaviors that Black women encounter (Knaus, 2014; Mohr & Purdie-Vaughns, 2015). Black women are forced to develop coping strategies for survival while struggling to maintain dignity, confidence, and visibility in the academy (Han & Leonard, 2017; Knaus, 2014; Collins, 2009). Many colleges and universities have developed structured diversity plans to promote inclusivity and equity for all members of the campus community (Wilder, Osborne, & Jackson, 2015). Now, work is needed to address the double oppressive behaviors that continue to prevent Black women

from excelling at a faster pace to executive leadership positions. Black women must continue to press forward and one strategy being used to manage double oppression is Black women reinventing themselves to meet the demands of the educational marketplace (Crites et al., 2015). The reinvention strategies come in the form of Black women being more assertive, displaying a more competitive edge, demonstrating rational and logical thinking skills, and managing emotions more intentionally (Crites et al., 2015; Auster & Prasad, 2016). Sexism and racism may never go away, but colleges and universities must be prepared to confront the behaviors that prevent all members of the administrative community from excelling on a level playing field (Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Howard-Baptiste, 2014), thus the reason the glass ceiling is one obstacle and the sticky floor is an additional obstacle for Black women in higher education.

**Intersectionality.** Further analysis of the literature demonstrated how intersectionality directly impacts the sticky floors obstacle for Black women at PWIs of higher education (Carli & Eagly, 2015; Carter-Sowell & Zimmerman, 2015). Intersectionality originated as a central argument emerging from the Black feminist movement as a critique of the feminist and civil rights movements. Foundational Black feminist theorists Crenshaw (1989, 2005), Collins (1993, 2000, 2002), and Hooks (1994) pointed out the double bind that women of color have long faced in a sexist and racist society (Loya, 2015; Mohr & Purdie-Vaughns, 2015; Willis, 2015).

*Intersectionality* refers to the general notion that social identities serve as organizing features of social relationships (Binder et al., 2017; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Mohr & Purdie-Vaughns, 2015). Intersectionality has been outlined by six core ideas that are frequently referenced when researchers are analyzing data: inequality, relationality, power, social context, complexity, and social justice (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Binder et al., 2017). Systems of

oppression and hierarchical power relations help to validate that glass ceiling and sticky floors are experienced by Black women on a consistent basis in higher education.

This review of the literature focused on the intersection of race and gender identities within the context of inequality and power dominance which create oppressive conditions that are used to deny African American women access to executive leadership positions (Binder et al., 2017; Loya, 2015; Davis & Maldonado; 2015). As a theory, intersectionality posits that the experiences of individuals and groups who occupy multiple social locations are powerfully shaped by interlocking systems of oppression and privilege (Strayhorn, 2017). In many instances, Black women do not hold power or privilege when it comes to hiring and promotion practices in the academy. Therefore, oppressive systems must be navigated to gain access to executive leadership roles and to continue to close the gap (Binder et al., 2017). The sticky floor effect adds additional layers to oppressive practices and behaviors, therefore higher education institutions must strive to understand intersectionality better so they are attuned to larger concerns, dominant structures, and issues of both power and oppression that Black women endure (Loya, 2015; Strayhorn, 2017).

In summary, it is critical that colleges and universities acknowledge that racism and sexism exist within the university culture and work to remove those barriers (Barnes, 2017; Barrett et al., 2014; Knasu, 2014). By embracing the intersectionality of a Black woman identity better enables universities and colleges to create balance and common-sense approaches to policy implementation, to cultivate positive workplace environments, and provide greater access to executive leadership positions (Morh & Purdie-Vaughns, 2015; Strayhorn, 2017). It is not a crime to be black or to be a female, but oppressive conditions still exist as Black women continue trying to penetrate the glass ceilings and the sticky floors of higher education.



## **Black Women Leaders**

The literature revealed that women now hold a majority of the earned college degrees and should be afforded the opportunity to fill the leadership positions that are available at all levels of the academy (Lewis, 2016; McGlynn, 2014; Zahneis, 2018). Research shows that women hold from 1.3% to 5.1% of executive positions across the higher education world (Berry & Franks, 2010). The percentage of African American women is significantly less. Black women have entered the academy in higher numbers over the past 30 years but still remain highly invisible in executive leadership roles or the C-suites (Barnes, 2017; Davis & Maldonado, 2015). The C-suite is a term used for senior executives whom titles begin with the word chief, such as chief executive officer (CEO), the chief financial officer (CFO), or chief diversity officer (CDO) (Nixon, 2017). Black and multiracial feminist theories argue that race and gender are socially constructed categories that contain inherent power differences (Collins, 2002; Carli & Eagly, 2016). The power difference creates intentional and unintentional barriers to Black female leaders' advancement.

Higher education institutions are grounded in oppressive and supremacy mindsets (McNae & Vali, 2015). The current status of African American women enrolled and employed in higher education is a direct result of the long and arduous journey they have endured as second-class citizens in the broader societal context that continues to marginalizes them (West, 2017). Black women still remain the outsider in the higher education arena (Enke, 2014; McGlynn, 2014). Woollen, 2016). According to the American Council on Education (2013), between 2008 and 2013, the number of African Americans in senior administrative positions declined from 3.7 % to 2.3% (Lewis, 2016). Higher education settings have become more diverse; thus the leadership structure should resemble the universities demographic makeup. However, inequality and

injustice are deeply rooted in the history of higher education and societal structures (Garland & Johnson, 2015). Black women have experienced success in achieving and accessing leadership position, however, those gains are not inclusive of executive leadership or senior-level leadership positions (Enke, 2014; Inez & Scott, 2018).

There are expectations and skills that impact Black women's abilities to ascend to executive leadership roles (Inez & Scott, 2018; Barnes, 2017; Woollen 2016; West 2017a). Women, in general, are expected to be high achievers, have an ability to rally individuals together, to utilize their passion and energy to bring about positive change in the community and civic organizations, to go with the flow, and have excellent networking skills (Inez & Scott, 2018; Barnes, 2017). African American women executives must embody the fore-mentioned characteristics but are also expected to display additional behaviors: (a) creativity, (b) risk-taking, (c) boundary-spanning, (d) divergent thinking, and (e) behavioral complexity. These behaviors can and are often in opposition of behaviors displayed by the majority members of the organization (Barnes, 2017; Lewis, 2016; West, 2017).

The concept of leadership has many definitions and is a subjective construct. Leadership theories have moved from viewing leadership as an innate trait, towards models that recognize leadership as a social construction. Leadership is both a research area and a practical skill encompassing the ability of an individual or organization to "lead" or guide other individuals, teams, or entire organizations (Kapasi, Sang, & Sitko, 2016). Social constructs accompanied by societies stereotypes present more challenges and obstacles for Black women leaders to overcome. The social construct of leadership is often observed from a male-dominated perspective (Kapasi, Sang, & Sitko, 2016; Adams & Dlamini, 2014). *Authentic leadership* is the expression of the "true self," that the leader must be relatively aware of in order to express it

authentically (Henry et al., 2015). Black women leaders at PWIs are outsiders within because they are working in White or male-dominated environments (West, 2017b). Expressions of authentic self will look different depending on the lens from which one chooses to view effective leadership. Because of the erroneous and stereotypical ways Black women identities have been shaped and defined, it is absolutely critical that “self-evaluation, self-definition, and knowledge validation replace the negative images shared within higher education settings and by larger society” (West, 2017, p. 335).

Women are often overlooked for leadership promotions because of gender bias and in-group preferences (Barnes, 2017; Cook & Glass, 2014), that stigma is more penalizing for Black women in the academy (West, 2017). The ability to be recognized as one who fits into the organizational culture is still clouded by stereotypes and biases (Adams & Dlamini, 2014; Barnes, 2017; Kapasi, Sang, & Sitko, 2016). Black women must demonstrate resilience, create counter-narratives, and work to debunk myths daily to help level the playing fields of inequality and injustice within higher education. Black feminists validate the intersection of African American women collective everyday experiences as well as the distinctness of their individual unique experiences (Barnes, 2017; Collins, 2009; West, 2017b). Black women must be deliberate in understanding the university climate and remember to embrace their personal leadership journeys as an example of how to navigate systems of oppression to achieve a higher status. Higher education institutions should be equally accountable for creating professional opportunities for inclusive learning and helping to increase team members’ sense of belonging and inclusion (Lloyd-Jones, 2014).

In closing, being a part of the in-group may seem like the right thing to do; however, if Black women compromise themselves, they are compromising their identity. Once identity has

been compromised, Black women may lose self-respect (Barnes, 2017; West, 2017a). Black women having the ability to obtain an executive leadership positions is not a personal problem to be owned or internalized by Black women, but is more indicative of societal barriers and higher education institutional barriers that those in positions of power must work to correct (Barnes, 2017; Inez & Scott, 2018; West, 2017a). In light of the higher level of scrutiny, Black women must be resilient and intentional in their leadership approaches (Cook & Glass, 2014).

### **Resiliency of Women Leaders**

This section of the literature review focused on the resiliency of women leaders. A *resilient leader* is defined as one who demonstrates the ability to recover, learn from, and developmentally mature when confronted by chronic or crisis adversity (Blaine & Reed, 2015). Resiliency is another subjective term used to construct meaning for individuals and their reactions in various situations and settings. Being a female leader or a Black female leader requires a higher level of resiliency (Blaine & Reed, 2015; Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Pincott, 2014). Resiliency is a critical skill for successful leadership. Three components of resiliency highlighted by Blaine and Reed (2015) in their research study are *thinking skills*, which focus on an individual reality or optimism about the future; *capacity-building skills*, which focus on personal values; *efficacy*, that is, an individual's well-being; and *action skills*, which focus on perseverance, adaptability, and courage in decision making. Each level of skill focuses on the current state of affairs and future possibilities. Effective leaders have been characterized as being resilient in some capacity (Blaine & Reed, 2015; Grijalva, 2018; Pincott, 2014). Black women must be resilient while striving for executive leadership roles (O'Bryant, 2015).

Current standards of excellence in most universities are founded on dominant culture standards that may no longer represent the current populations given the rapidly changing

demographics (Grijalva, 2018). A resilient leader must have the capacity to acknowledge the culture as it is and make stride for future improvements. Women of color in the academy are recovering from the recognition of their oppression and thereby are taking steps to heal themselves, building a sense of self-efficacy through the listening to and telling of stories about our collective (and individual) struggles (Grijalva, 2018; Jeffries, 2015; West, 2017a). Healing work is a form of resilience for Black women. Black women at PWIs of higher education have formed support groups, mentoring relationship, and so-called Sistah circles to serve as validating and safer spaces (Beckwith et al., 2016; Grijalva, 2018). The root cause leading to the need for resilience is the inequity perpetuated through male-gendered workplace policies, norms, and practices. These policies are written by men, for men, and out of the experiences of men (Beckwith et al., 2016). As a result of this one-sided perspective, the interests and needs of women and specifically Black women continue to be underrepresented or ignored altogether because these “ways of doing business” are deeply entrenched, at higher education institutions and in many ways have become a part of societies DNA (Beckwith et al., 2016; Tahira et al., 2015).

Research reminds the reader that resilience plays an essential role in the workplace and helps to predict job satisfaction and job performance (Grijalva, 2018, Tahira et al., 2015; West 2017b). Leaders are expected to produce quality products. The absence of resiliency could be perceived as an obstacle to achieving executive-level leadership roles. Women leaders must display energy, problem-solving abilities, and expertise in order to respond to university pressures and institutional climate concerns (Blaine & Reed, 2015). Resiliency is not formed based on a single experience, but rather a collection of experiences. Resilience has been observed as a reflection of patterns of how leaders view their current reality and how they evaluate the

probability for influencing the future (Blaine & Reed, 2015).

In examining resilience in Black women, personal attributes and behaviors associated with job performance have been critical in helping Black women develop internal strategies for success (O'Bryant, 2015; West, 2017a). Black women have experienced many obstacles in their quest to reach executive leadership positions, however, they must continue the pursuit. A supportive campus environment can help improve the resilience of all employees but specifically underrepresented populations of individuals (Blaine & Reed, 2015).

### **Social Networking**

Social networking is a skill that is scalable and useful at any level of an organization (List & Sorcinelli, 2018). Career networks offer access to upper-level positions so being a part of a network can offer opportunities and access to information, knowledge, and referrals for career mobility (Burke & Carter, 2015). Understanding the rules of engagement is one proficiency that can help build momentum towards long-term goals and success. However, it can be difficult to gain access to different networks if you are perceived or feel like the outsider in an organization. For Black women, race and gender create distinct challenges to gaining access to career networks, which are deemed crucial to gain access to upper-level leadership positions (Burke & Carter, 2015; List & Sorcinelli, 2018; Mayer, 2017). In the higher education setting, professional organizations focus on the collective responsibility of its members, which helps to facilitate an environment of inclusion and diversity for all (Burke & Carter, 2015). Despite the promotion of inclusion and diversity, the social networks within higher education still struggle with diversity, equity, and inclusion. The more prestigious the network or appointment to a higher-up position the harder it is to find women and people of color (Burke & Carter, 2015). Research studies consistently demonstrate the meaningfulness of professional development and support systems.

However, this same research continues to demonstrate the lack of access for women and other minority identified groups (Harper, 2015; Hoing, 2012; Keith, 2011).

Black women must gain access to professional development opportunities, social networks, and mentoring groups; as these are examples of best practices to support professionals seeking career advancement (List & Sorcinelli, 2018). Harper (2015) proposed organizational investment in growing leaders should be demonstrated by the leadership development opportunities provided. Important components that may be easily overlooked regarding support and professional development is emotional and social support. The lack of support for administrators ranks among the ten most important factors influencing employees desire to remain in or leave the profession (Burk & Carter, 2015; Harper, 2015). When speaking about Black female administrators the support structures become more critical (Hill & Wheat, 2017). Black women report their efforts are seen as invisible, and this is confirmed through the inconsistencies between their qualifications, interest in leadership positions, history and experience, and commitment to organizations that go unrecognized when individuals are selected for succession planning programs and ultimately placed in senior positions (Jeffries, 2015). Black women must be positioned properly to achieve success and advance to executive leadership positions (List & Sorcinelli, 2018).

Professionals suffer when they choose to be passive and not actively seek higher levels of responsibility. Additionally, Black women are trapped by the stereotypes that doom them such as the angry Black women, antisocial nature, isolating personality, not being a team player, perceived as unintelligent are a few of the stereotypes (Carli & Eagly, 2016; Domingue, 2015; Jeffries, 2015; Howard- Baptiste, 2014). Black women cannot be passive, put their heads down and wait to be recognized for their hard work and critical contributions. Black women must find

the courage to advocate for themselves and to seek social networks that will give them access to key decisions makers (Hill & Wheat, 2017; Jeffries, 2015).

Several studies pointed to the critical need to prepare women to form their leadership identities, negotiate barriers to women advancement, seek mentors and role models, support one another, and combat stereotyped attitudes toward women leadership (Hill & Wheat, 2017; McEwan & Pfafman, 2014). Specific to Black women, it is important to develop a good understanding of higher education institutional culture and to become politically savvy. Being politically savvy is a specific skill that can prove to be advantageous in helping women navigate power structures, particularly in male-dominated networks (Hill & Wheat, 2017).

In closing, there are gender disparities in higher education therefore, women and particularly Black women should seek out different types of leaders, inclusive of male mentors and role models to help create social networks. Difficulties may be associated with a cross-gender relationship but having access to the social network can bring about many positive benefits (Dunbar & Kinnersley, 2011; Hill & Wheat, 2017). Developing sound social networks is extremely important in helping solidify the upward mobility of Black women. Higher education institutions have increased the hiring and retaining of Black women administrators, however, there still remains a disproportionate underrepresentation for Black women in executive leadership roles (Hill & Wheat, 2017; Lewis, 2016; Jeffries, 2015). If higher education institutions want to truly embrace diversity and inclusion, then inequitable institutional structures must be dismantled.

### **Review of Methodological Issues**

Research cited within this literature review used qualitative methods to explore the experiences of women within the realm of higher education. Multiple qualitative studies cited in



this literature review (Barnes, 2017; Beckwith et al. 2016; Jones, 2014) used a case study research design to help explain the experience of women and specifically Black women in higher education and their journey to executive leadership. One study that was highly impactful contained a leadership resilience profile (LRP), where data compared and contrasted leader resilience by gender. The results of the LPR clearly show that women are more resilient leaders and possess higher levels of LRP skills than men (Blaine & Reed, 2015). This study yielded useful information in helping to define resilience and identify detailed leadership qualities specific to women. The review of literature contributes to the research and conceptual understanding of leadership resilience, in relation to gender, with a particular focus on the implications for women professional development (Blaine & Reed, 2015).

Recent studies cited qualitative case studies throughout the review of the literature as a primary tool for data collection and analysis. (Barnes, 2017; Beckwith et al., 2016; Jones, 2014). These qualitative case studies provided an overview of women of color in leadership, examined leadership behaviors, and highlighted lessons learned when aspiring to move from status quo to leadership excellence. The qualitative research focused on experiences related to leadership styles, salary differences, and acceptance of Black women at PWIs of higher education institutions (Barnes, 2017; Beckwith et al., 2016; Jones, 2014). The case studies concluded that there are higher education institutions that recognize the value of gender and race diversity and embrace the many talents that diverse and talented women bring. The studies further validated the experiences of Black women as they try to enact diversity leadership under race-neutral policies. The significance of the research is it captured the experiences of multicultural administrators and provided meaning around the roles of diversity leaders, and showcased the challenges faced when trying to meet diversity goals under oppressive university policies

(Beckwith et al., 2016; Jones, 2014). Black women must continue to chip away at the glass ceiling and sticky floors of the academy in order to ascent to the executive leadership role. Many administrators expressed concerns about campus inclusiveness specific to groups that are traditionally marginalized. Overall, the research described the experiences with a specific awareness of the social and political environment of the university community (Jones, 2014).

The qualitative research further explored barriers, superficial or real, that prevent African American women from ascending to the C-suite within organizations (Beckwith et al., 2016). Additionally, the studies strived to provide tools that can be used to help in the ascension to executive leadership positions. The literature outlined some of the barriers Black women face as being social, economic, and interpersonal. These barriers can easily stop African American women from reaching higher levels in the organization (Barnes, 2017; Cain, 2015; Jones, 2014). In 2014, women, in general, made up less than 16% of executive leaders in Corporations; only 5.3% of executive leaders in U.S. Corporations were African American women (Beckwith et al., 2016). Clearly, for women of color, the gap is wider according to (Warner, 2014). Executive leadership gaps also exist in higher education institutions across the country (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). These studies provide concrete reasons and possible solutions for Black women seeking those higher levels of power and responsibility.

Several research studies explored the intersectionality of race and gender for African American women through their lived experiences of how they developed as leaders in the higher education setting (Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Loya, 2015; Mohr & Purdie-Vaughn, 2015). These qualitative studies used a phenomenological research methodology to capture the participants' stories and collective experiences. The studies aimed to demonstrate the implications of race and gender for Black women in higher education settings. The results confirmed that race and

gender-informed their development as leaders in academia. Most of the female participants described how the intersection of race and gender affected their leadership development and career trajectories (Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Mohr & Purdie-Vaughn, 2015). Despite the barriers encountered, these women perform skillfully in an environment where inequities, negative assumptions, and doubts were prevalent.

### **Synthesis of Research Findings**

The literature review sought to explore the experiences of Black women serving in executive leadership positions at PWIs in higher education. The review of literature is framed around the conceptual framework of social constructivism wherein practitioners and interpretivist are able to gain knowledge and understanding by interpreting participants' perceptions and experiences (Alt, 2014; Creswell, 2016; Dewey & Vygotsky, 1979; Guba et al. 2011; Hung, 2002; Lombe, & Ng'ambi, 2012). The elements constructed from the literature for the purpose of this study are the typologies of the glass ceiling and sticky floors, Black women leaders, resiliency of women leaders, and social networking. The following information explained the collective findings for each of the constructs in the research.

The glass ceiling and sticky floor concepts continue to receive increasing attention in higher education settings (Barnes, 2017; Carlie & Eagly, 2016; Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Barrett et al., 2014; Hannum et al., 2015). Researchers continue to investigate the glass ceiling and sticky floor effect within the higher education arena and its direct impact on women and Black women leaders. Within the research, there is continued support to identify barriers, marginalizing behaviors, and important mentoring relationships that help women and specifically Black women break the glass ceiling effect (Barnes, 2017; Barrett et al., 2014; Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Carlie & Eagly, 2016). The glass ceiling is still a reality at many PWIs of

higher education (Barnes, 2017; Carlie & Eagly, 2016; Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Black women administrators face many obstacles on the path to executive leadership, however, Black women continue to persevere toward executive leadership roles.

Furthermore, there is a growing interest around the sticky floor concept that specifically focuses on stereotyping behaviors, double oppression, and the construct of intersectionality (Crites et al., 2015; Chavez & Dickerson, 2018; Han & Leonard, 2016; Howard-Baptiste; 2014, Knas, 2014; Loya, 2015; Mohr & Purdie-Vaughn, 2015; Willis, 2015). The sticky floor effect focuses on stereotyping behaviors or discriminatory practices that slow women advancement while bringing up issues related to attitudes towards social dominance, power, status, and virtue (Carli & Eagly, 2016; Fincher-Kiefer et al. 2014), that impacts Black women in a more profound way. Black women endure stereotypes which creates a broad sweeping generalization that reinforces overt and covert behaviors, attitudes, preconceived notions, and perceptions around skills and qualifications (Auster & Prasad, 2016; Crites et al., 2015, Domingue, 2015; Howard-Baptiste, 2014). The stick floor effect is a construct that deeply impacts interactions and dispositions towards career advancement and qualifications. This construct is an important element of the research presented in this dissertation.

Black women have entered higher education institutions in higher numbers over the past thirty years but still remain highly invisible in executive leadership roles or the C-suites (Barnes, 2017; Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Lewis, 2016; McGlynn, 2014; Zahneis, 2018). The literature reveals that women now hold a majority of the earned college degrees and should be afforded the opportunity to fill the leadership positions that are available throughout every level within higher education (Lewis, 2016; McGlynn, 2014; Zahneis, 2018). Black women still remain the outsider within the confines of higher education, but have managed to experience some success in

reaching leadership (Enke, 2014; McGlynn, 2014; Woollen, 2016). However, those gains are not inclusive of executive leadership roles and this lack of access continues to impact Black women in higher education ability to achieve executive leadership positions (Inez & Scott, 2018; Barnes, 2017; West 2017; Woollen, 2016). Black women leaders in higher education have many barriers and obstacles to overcome. A Black women's ability to obtain an executive leadership position is a personal journey, nonetheless, a few themes did emerge within the research that the review of the literature helped to spotlight (Adams & Dlamini, 2014; Barnes, 2017; Inez & Scott; 2018; West, 2017b).

A resilient leader must demonstrate an ability to recover, learn, and develop around different obstacles that emerge (Blaine & Reed, 2015). The literature states that resiliency is a critical skill for a successful leader (Blaine & Reed, 2015; Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Pincott, 2014). Specifically, being a female leader or a Black women leader requires a higher level of resiliency (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Researchers say, resiliency plays an essential role in the workplace and helps to predict job satisfaction and job performance (Grijalva, 2018; Tahira et al., 2015; West, 2017). Black women must be resilient and display energy, problem-solving abilities, and expertise in order to respond to mounting pressure and oppressive institutional climate (Blaine & Reed, 2015; O'Bryant, 2015; West, 2017). The concept of resilience is inclusive of individual attributes as well as a supportive campus environment. To cultivate a climate of resilience individuals and the overarching higher education institutions must examine their internal practices and policies.

Finally, social networking is a saleable skill that is useful at any level within an organization (List & Sorcinelli, 2018). The literature confirms that existing higher education institutions do not properly prepare administrators on how social networks can profoundly

impact access and upward career mobility (Burke & Carter, 2015; List & Sorcinelli, 2018; Mayer, 2017). In the higher education profession, professional organizations focus on the collective responsibility of its members to help facilitate inclusive and diverse social networks (Burke & Carter, 2015). However, despite the push for inclusion and diversity, it is very difficult to gain access to more prestigious networks. In fact, the research demonstrates the meaningfulness of professional support systems, but the consistent lack of access for women and minority identified groups (Burke & Carter, 2015; Daresh, 2007; Harper, 2015; Hoing, 2012, Keith, 2011). Black women have reported being invisible at PWIs of higher education and must continue to position themselves to achieve success and advance to executive leadership positions (Burk & Carter, 2015; Hill & Wheat, 2017; List & Sorcinelli, 2018).

Based on the reviewed literature, qualitative research designs were prevalent. Case studies and phenomenological studies were used to explore the experiences of women and Black women in higher education institutions that help to provide a detailed analysis for future studies. Interviews, observations, focus groups, and written reflections were commonly used in qualitative studies. These sources of data helped to narrow down my qualitative case study approach to the research.

### **Critique of Previous Research**

The reviewed literature uncovered themes that impact women and specifically Black women experiences while striving for executive leadership positions at PWIs of higher education (Auster & Prasad, 2016; Cook & Glass, 2014; Curtis et al., 2014; Hannum et al., 2015). The literature review provides clear factors that deeply and significantly impact Black women journey while seeking to gain access to executive leadership positions. In contrast to the literature that highlights the obstacles, barriers, and stereotypes that currently exists, there is

research that informs the improvements that are occurring at PWIs of higher education (Jones, 2014; Kaba, 2017; Beckwith et al., 2016; Curtis et al., 2014).

Having diversity represented within leadership in higher education is a highly supported concept (Adams & Dlamini, 2014; Auster & Prasad, 2016; Cook & Glass, 2014). The literature analysis exhibits support for higher education institutions committed to providing inclusive, supportive, welcoming, and skilled leaders. As a result, diversity and inclusion is highlighted as a primary goal and strategy for attracting diverse student bodies in the future around the globe (Chin, 2011; Dillard, Moncrief, Richardson, Sermon, & Vakalahi, 2014; Han & Leonard, 2016). The literature supports the need for university leaders to resemble the makeup of the student body and even provides a few strategies for how some institutions have closed the gender gap at the top. However, with all the evidence that exist to show that women leaders are needed in executive leadership roles and specifically Black women leaders are woefully underrepresented, there seems to be little change pending to curtail the current state within the academy (Bower & Wolverton, 2009; Burke & Carter, 2015; Griffin, 2016; West, 2015).

Lastly, the literature states the many obstacles, barriers, and stereotypes that remain major hurdles that impact Black women journey towards executive leadership (Barnes, 2017; Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Earlie & Eagly, 2016). According to Barnes (2017), earlier studies highlighted the gaps in leadership characteristics in comparison to male counterparts. Specifically, the study focused on attitudes, temperaments, social skills that are generally associated with women professionals as a barrier to them ascending to higher ranks based on perceptions of leadership verses the realities of how women lead. Barnes (2017), further noted that women of color are burdened by perceptions of their leadership based on cultural identity (ethnic and racial) influences rather than actual skills they use daily. However, the literature is

very scarce in demonstrating success strategies that have been deployed to reduce or eliminate those known barriers and obstacles (Griffin, 2016; West, 2015). The literature explained that each woman and Black women experiences are different depending on where they are employed, alluding to the fact that inconsistencies exist in perceptions, experiences, opinions, and institutions across the globe (Beckwith et al., 2016; Collins, 2002; Curtis et al., 2014; Hannum et al., 2015; West, 2017).

### **Chapter 2 Summary**

The literature review for this qualitative case study research design used multiple journal article and fact-finding data to help explain the lived experiences of Black women in higher education and their journey to the executive leadership seat (Barnes, 2017; Beckwith et al., 2016; Jones, 2014). The journal articles reviewed across the higher education strands demonstrated that Black women experiences and ability to obtain an executive leadership position are still highly difficult (Auster & Prasad, 2016; Cook & Glass, 2014; Lloyd-Jones, 2014). The research also showed that more research is needed regarding Black women administrators' personal journeys to executive leadership in higher education spaces (Barnes, 2017; Beckwith et al.; 2016; List & Sorcinelli; 2018).

#### **Argument of Advocacy Incorporating the Conceptual Framework**

This review of literature developed a unique conceptual framework using the predetermined typologies that helped to guide this study understanding of the journey of Black women to executive leadership. It is important to note that several factors of the social constructivist research were used to help explore the experiences of Black women in higher education at PWIs (Alt 2014; Barnes, 2017; Barrett, Gregory & Pearson, 2015; Baxter-Nuamah, 2015; Carli & Eagly, 2016; Davis & Maldonado, 2015; List & Sorcinelli, 2018). These



elements were grouped around the following typologies: glass ceilings and sticky floors, Black women leaders, the resiliency of women leaders, and social networking. Further research is needed to examine the experiences of Black women in comparison to their White male and female counterparts. Black women have educational credentials but still remained trapped by the glass ceiling and sticky floor barriers, and continue to lack access to strong mentors and critical social networks which help to facilitate upward career mobility (Gamble & Turner, 2015; Hill & Wheat, 2017; List & Sorcinelli, 2018; Lloyd-Jones, 2014). Social construction inquiry from a researcher's perspective captured and honor the multiple perspectives while seeking to understand multiple realities (Patton, 2014).

Overall, it is important to examine the unique experiences of Black women in the academy to help shine a light on the stereotypes, barriers, marginalization, intersectionality, and double oppression that are faced at PWIs of higher education. This study takes a critical look at the experiences of Black women leaders who hold executive leadership positions at predominately white institutions (PWIs) of higher education. This chapter demonstrated what Black women experience and what is needed to ascend past the glass ceilings and sticky floors of the academy to achieve the executive leadership role. This chapter also shows the importance of strong mentoring relationships and sound social networking structure.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **Introduction to Methodology**

A descriptive qualitative case study was selected as the research method for exploring the experiences of Black women in executive leadership positions at predominately White institutions (PWIs) in higher education based on the review of the literature and previous research studies. The concept for a case study research design is to select a case and describe how the case showcases a problem or issue (Creswell, 2016; Stake, 1995). Once a problem or issue has been demonstrated, the researcher must conduct an in-depth analysis of the case. The study should yield detailed descriptions of the case, followed by themes that emerge from the data collection; then the researcher should provide generalizations and assertions regarding the case (Creswell, 2016; Stake, 1995). The examination of the experiences of Black women in executive leadership positions at PWIs is best supported through the use of a descriptive case study design. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) stated that qualitative implies an emphasis on processes and meanings; thus they are for times when researchers are interested in insight, discovery, and interpretation rather than hypothesis testing.

This qualitative case study focused on the experiences of Black women in executive leadership positions, and the case is the exploration of the participants' journey into executive leadership positions at PWIs of higher education. I sought to understand and explain the pathway to executive leadership by examining individual paths, leadership practices, and by scrutinizing the process, Black women navigate in their quest towards executive leadership (Anderson & Herr, 2014).

### **Research Question**

The study is guided by one research question: What are the experiences of Black women

at predominately White institutions (PWIs) of higher education serving in executive leadership positions?

### **Purpose and Design of the Study**

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of the study was to examine the experiences of Black women at predominately White institutions (PWIs) of higher education serving in executive leadership positions. According to the literature, Black women are underrepresented in executive and senior leadership positions at PWIs in higher education (Auster & Prasad, 2016; Cook & Glass, 2014). The pathway to executive leadership was explored using a descriptive case study design that focused on the experiences of the participants.

#### **Design of the Study**

A descriptive qualitative case study design was chosen that showcased the experiences of the Black women in this study (Yin, 2003). This type of case study was used to describe an intervention or phenomenon and the real-life context in which it occurred (Stake, 2005; Yin, 2003). The conceptual framework of social constructivism was enhanced by my ability as the researcher to establish meaningful relationships with participants in order to collect and construct multiple points of view. Social constructivism places emphasis on the collaborative process of knowledge construction and thus links the social component to the cognitive elements of knowledge building (Sutherland, 2017). The participants' worldview and points of view changed over time, but as the researcher, I identified social constructions and perceptions that showed commonality and helped to explain the Black women experiences as executive leaders in PWIs of higher education within this research study.

Specifically, I embarked on a descriptive case study design to learn more about the

experiences of Black women and to understand their abilities to achieve an executive leadership position at PWIs of higher education. Social constructivism provided a framework in which individual points of view were utilized to examine experiences and the impact of those experiences on culture, organizational structures, and practices within higher education.

A descriptive case study provided the opportunity to examine and understand issues, experiences, and illuminate relationships (Hatch, 2002; Stake, 2010), this study added to the existing literature center on Black women working in executive leadership positions at PWIs of higher education. Through first-structured interviews and subsequent clarifying member-checking interviews centered on the findings of emergent themes, this qualitative study produced vibrant and instructive descriptive data. Additionally, a personal reflective narrative was used to explain further, confirm, and analyze the experiences found in the primary and secondary interviews. The constructed framework ensured the collection of meaningful data (Creswell, 2013; Stake, 2010) that helped to better inform the experiences of Black women in executive leadership roles.

## **Research Population and Sampling Method**

### **Research Population**

The research population for this case study consisted of Black women who are currently serving in executive leadership positions at predominately White institutions (PWIs) of higher education across the United States. This population of executive leaders included varying levels of executive leadership experiences in higher education settings. All participants are currently working at PWIs of higher education within the United States.

### **Sampling Method**

Criterion purposeful sampling is the process of selecting participants for a qualitative

project by recruiting individuals who can help inform the central phenomenon in a study (Creswell, 2015). The sample, referred to as participants in a case study (Stake, 2010; Yin 2003), consisted of 10 Black women in executive leadership positions who are currently working at a PWIs of higher education. These participants served as the core subjects for this descriptive case study. The participants shared common criterion characteristics related to the study (Creswell, 2015; Hatch, 2002; Palinkas et al., 2015; Turner, 2010). Criterion sampling highlights all the cases that meet some standard; useful for quality assurance and fit the context of the study research question, literature, and methodological design (Creswell, 2015; Hatch, 2002).

**Recruitment.** The participants were recruited using networking within the field of higher education, from information available in the American Council of Education (ACE) database ([www.acenet.edu/news-room/Pages/ACE-Womens-Network.aspx](http://www.acenet.edu/news-room/Pages/ACE-Womens-Network.aspx)), and from information provided in the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA) database (<https://www.naspa.org/>). I am a member of both ACE and NASPA and had access through my memberships to the resources and membership databases provided by each organization. The recruitment script is provided in Appendix D.

**Instrumentation.** The instruments were effective for collecting data for later analysis, interpretation, and discussion. Three different forms of instrumentation were used: (a) the first structured interviews, (b) secondary member-checking interviews based on emergent findings and themes, and (c) the use of a personal reflective narrative (Creswell, 2016). The interviews provided a means for conducting structured, open-ended sessions in which allowed for the collection of rich and descriptive data (Creswell, 2013).

**First-structured interviews.** In qualitative research, the process of face-to-face interviews provides a rich and in-depth experience to help researchers gain an understanding of

how people construct their lives (Creswell, 2015, 2016; James, 2016). The first-structured interview is a method of structuring interview questions to ensure each contributor is asked the same structured questions across participants to help improve the validity and reliability of the research study. Interviewing is a popular and powerful form of collecting data in qualitative research (Creswell, 2016). There are several ways to conduct an interview. The methods used for this study was one-on-one Skype interviews, which allowed personal perspectives to be shared by participants with a measure of privacy and the absence of a group or audience (Creswell, 2016; James, 2016). In the one-to-one interviews, I had the ability to observe the participant's body language and hear voice inflections. The one-to-one interviews allowed for an intimate and personal connection with the interviewee (Creswell, 2016). In this study, the interview questions were created and aligned with the research in the literature review and based on the constructed conceptual framework. I collected the data using the constructed conceptual framework for data analysis typology table (see Appendix A). The table outlined the research question, the theories presented within the literature review, the typologies for analysis, the definition for each typology, indicators, and the aligned interview questions (see Appendix A).

**Member-checking interviews.** The second interviews, referred to as member-checking interviews (Koelsch, 2013), were used to highlighting the findings that emerged within the first-structured interviews and was used to check and validate information recorded or stated, and to explore new findings that emerged from those interviews. The second interview addressed the new emerging typology of faith and family that was discovered from the review of the first-structure interviews. Only eight member-checking interviews were conducted with participants who were willing to continue participation in the study. The member-checking interviews, also known as member validation, involved the initial interview answers being taken back to the

source for further review and analysis by the interviewer. The member-checking was used to verify the accuracy of the participants' words from the first interviews. All information meriting clarification was highlighted within the interview transcript (Creswell, 2016; Koelsch, 2013). The interview questions were included in the conceptual framework for data analysis typology table (see Appendix A) and listed on a separate page which also included the new member-checking interview question (see Appendix B).

**The personal reflective narrative.** The personal reflective narrative allowed me as the researcher to explain my personal experiences around the research study topic and research question. My professional experiences as an executive leader serving as an assistant vice president at a predominately White institution of higher education helped to clarify meaning and purpose. My experiences within this role contributed to the questions asked in the first-structured interviews and within the member checking interviews (see Appendix C). I found common themes regarding Black women leadership experiences and personal paths to the executive leadership position (Blaine & Diane, 2015). According to Yin (1993), case studies are concerned with how and why things happen, which allowed for the contextual realities and the difference between what was planned and what actually occurred.

## **Data Collection**

### **Interviews**

Three forms of data were collected. The first-structured interview and the member-checking interviews served as two primary sources of data collection, followed by the personal reflective narrative. The first-structured interviews were conducted with 10 Black women who are currently serving in executive leadership positions at a predominately White institution of higher education. The specific sites for the interviews were determined by the location of the

interviewees. The sites varied as the participants were all located in different parts of the United States. All interviews were conducted and recorded using a common method. Skype was the chosen interview modality; which allowed for easy and convenient connections with research participants. The review of literature demonstrated how most qualitative researchers used either structured or semi-structured interview as a primary means of data collection (Barns, 2017; Barrett et al., 2014; Beckwith et al., 2016; Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Hannum et al., 2015; & O'Bryant, 2015). Interview questions were crafted around the conceptual framework, by using relevant research documented in the literature review, and by asking interview questions that helped to address the stated research question. (see Appendix A and B.) Only questions that were approved by the IRB were used in the data collection process. Confidentiality was respected throughout the interview process and all research participants were informed that the interviews would be recorded and transcribed.

### **Member-Checking Interviews**

For the second interview, also referred to as member-checking interview, the participants received one additional question based on findings from the first-structured interview (Koelsch, 2013). The participant responses were confirmed and verified to ensure accuracy and clarification was gathered where needed. The member-checking interviews were recorded and transcribed.

### **Personal Reflective Narrative**

Finally, the personal reflective narrative was used to assist in the summary of data and to enhance the effectiveness of analyzing all data collected for this study. The personal reflective narrative was used to highlight my personal experiences as a researcher, which allowed me as a researcher, to be a collaborator and an interpreter of actions (Creswell, 2016). The personal



reflective narrative helped to clear up ambiguous understanding and add depth and understanding to information provided in the first and second interviews. The personal reflective narrative followed the qualitative research protocol (Creswell, 2016; Stake, 2010), and was aligned with the conceptual framework and research question to assist with data coding and analysis. The personal reflective narrative helped examine my experiences as a Black woman in an executive leadership position at a PWI of higher education. As the researcher, I answered every question that the participants answered. A two-hour block of time was set aside each evening for a three week period to allow the researcher time to complete her personal reflective narrative.

### **Identification of Attributes**

The experiences of Black women in executive leadership positions at predominately White institutions (PWIs) of higher education is an area of research with great opportunity and possibilities for further exploration (Auster & Prasad, 2016; Cook & Glass, 2014; Crites et al., 2015). The journey to executive leadership is a personal process, but understanding the various pathways forward was a necessary step to help ensure the future advancement of Black women into executive leadership positions at PWIs of higher education is probable (Griffin, 2016; West, 2015).

In addition to understanding the experiences of Black women in executive leadership at PWIs of higher education, it is important to understand the paths that enhanced or prevented Black women from striving to seek executive leadership positions. The premise was to construct and understand the experiences of Black women which facilitated learning and growth and helped to equipped future Black women in navigating the various paths to executive leadership. The path is not impossible but required persistence and resiliency to navigate a path to the executive leadership table.

Predominately White institutions of higher education must facilitate environments that lead to enhanced pathways to executive leadership positions. Understanding the experiences of Black women in executive leadership positions can determine future interactions, policies, and dispositions towards predominately White institutions of higher education and impact Black women seeking executive leadership at those institutions. This study attempted to understand the experience of Black women in executive leadership positions and to give credibility to the necessity of this study to further explore the paths to executive leadership within higher education.

## **Data Analysis Procedures**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of data analysis was to conduct a systemic search for meaning by processing qualitative data (Hatch, 2002). Qualitative data analysis is one of the most important steps in the qualitative research process (Hatch, 2002; Leech & Onwugbuzie, 2007) because it helps researchers in making sense of their qualitative data. In this study, the interview questions were created and aligned with the research in the literature review and based on the constructed conceptual framework. I collected all data using the constructed conceptual framework for data analysis typology table (see Appendix A). The table outlines the research question, the theories presented with the literature review, the typologies for analysis, and the definition for each typology, indicators, and the aligned interview questions (see Appendix A). The typological analysis was used to divide the overall data set into groups or categories based around the predetermined typologies (Hatch, 2002). The table was used to establish typologies or themes that emerged across all data sources; the data included the first-structured interviews, the

member-checking interviews, and the personal reflective narrative; these served as the three data sources for the study.

### **Typological Analysis**

According to Hatch (2002), identified typologies should be fairly obvious and predetermined. The four typologies that informed the data analysis are (a) glass ceilings and sticky floors, (b) Black women leaders, (c) resiliency of women leaders, and (d) social networking. Social constructivism provided the framework which allowed individual points of view to be utilized to examine experiences and the impact of those experiences on culture, organizational structures, and practices within higher education. The typological analysis was been grouped around four typologies of the constructivist learning environment (Alt, 2014; Creswell, 2016; Hatch, 2002). The typological analysis divided everything observed into groups or categories on the basis of some rule for disaggregating the whole phenomenon being studied (Hatch, 2002).

### **Coding**

Data were coded according to predetermined typologies. After a review of Hatch (2002) and Harding (2013) concerning typological framework and coding techniques, I developed a code bank directly related to the typological categories of the experience of Black women who are currently in executive leadership positions at predominately White institutions of higher education (see Appendix F). I kept records of which entries go with what elements of identified patterns by participants and I color-coded the typologies which helped keep each typology organized. I also kept a record of emerging categories that were not identified as focus areas to explore further in the member-checking interviews and for further exploration.

I used the preset typological categories that I created while writing the literature review to serve as my code bank. These codes link directly to the topics that I discussed in greater detail in chapter two literature review and also relate directly to the research questions of this study.

### **First-Structured interviews**

The first interviews were analyzed using a typological analysis. In conceptual typological studies, authors propose new or reconcile previous conceptualizations through a heuristic reading of the literature (Bohling & Hatch, 2015). The process as described by Hatch (2002) allowed for a general understanding of the participants' experiences, which leads to an organized method for constructing meaning.

The steps for typological data analysis follow.

1. The first-structured interview utilized structured interview questions that all participants were asked (see Appendix A and B). The interviews were recorded and transcribed from the recordings. The scripts were organized based on the predetermined typologies according to themes, and categories outlined in the researched review of the literature and based on the conceptual framework for data analysis typology table.
2. I read through the data, marking entries related to the predetermined typologies. I read through the data completely with one typology in mind, before moving to the next. Information that does not fit the predetermined typologies I marked and revisit later for a closer examination.
3. I read the entries by typology, recording the main ideas in each entry on a separate summary sheet by typology. This time only data within the typology of interest was read. When crafting the summary sheets, I wrote brief statements of the main ideas as

- an excerpt on the summary page.
4. I looked for patterns, relationships, themes within typologies. I summarized broad statements that helped to construct meaning and bring the data together. Specifically, I looked for pattern similarities, differences, frequencies, sequences, correspondences, and causation (Hatch, 2002). I linked relationship indicators; strict inclusion, rationale, cause-effect, and means-end. Finally, I ensured the emergent themes were integrated into key concepts. I explored broad statements that were meaningful in bringing all the data together.
  5. I read the data, coded entries according to predetermined typologies, keep a record of what entries go with what elements of identified patterns by participants, and color-coded the typologies, which helped keep each typology organized. I kept a record of emerging categories that were not identified as focus areas to explore further in the member-checking interviews (see Appendix F).
  6. I conducted further analysis to decide if patterns were supported by the data, and searched the data for non-examples of patterns. I had to decide if the evidence was strong enough to support the case or research and if the evidence was, it was utilized.
  7. I looked for relationships among the patterns identified. This step was about searching for connections across what has been discovered. I utilized color-codes to show a visual representation of the categories, and it was helpful in clarify findings.
  8. I wrote patterns as one-sentence generalizations. Generalizations were used to express a relationship between two or more concepts (Guba, 1978). Using clearly constructed sentences was a way of organizing the data and filing into a form that was easier to understand by me and others. Utilizing this process helped to provide closure to the

analysis process (Hatch, 2002; Stake, 1995).

9. I selected data excerpts that support my generalizations. The examples were pulled from the collected data (Hatch, 2002, p. 153).

### **Member Checking Interview**

For the second interviews or member-checking interviews, all responses given during the first interview were verified and confirmed and helped to inform the subsequent question. Based on findings from the first interview, I crafted one additional question that each participant was asked. I again collected new data and analyze all of the data. The findings were recorded and grouped based on similarities, emerging themes, and typologies that aligned with the research question, conceptual framework, and from the review of the literature. I followed the same nine steps that are outlined in the first-structure interview typological data analysis process.

Typological data analysis as defined by Hatch (2002), was used to capture patterns, categories, and theme organization. Eight participants participated in a second member-checking interview. I reviewed the data and identify typologies generated from the research for further analysis. The themes from the second interview were judiciously analyzed and compared to themes from the first interviews. All categories and themes were further addressed in the personal reflective narrative.

Research procedures for this descriptive case study were as follows:

1. Coordinate the dates and times for each interview.
2. Prepare an interview instrument and prepare to tape-record each interview. I used two forms of recordings to ensure there are a primary plan and a backup recording.
3. Conducted the interview and inform the participants that the interview is being recorded.

4. I transcribed the interviews (first-structured, member checking & Personal Reflective Narratives) and analyzed the data according to predetermined typologies.
5. Organized the data according to categories and prepared for the typological data analysis process.
6. Read and reviewed all the data. Provided an in-depth analysis of key themes, findings, and categories and explain the learning and meaning.
7. Developed summary sheets where the findings could be listed and defined by categories. The typological analysis allowed for a deeper exploration of the experience of Black women in executive leadership positions at PWIs of higher education.
8. Provided generalizations, interpretations and described the findings through data triangulation of the first-structured interviews, member-checking interview, and the personal reflective narrative to help explain the key concepts, learning, and meaning derived as it related to the experiences of Black women in executive leadership.

### **Personal Reflective Narrative**

The personal reflective narrative was used as an anchor in the typological data analysis process. The narrative provided firsthand accounts of experiences that have occurred within the higher education settings. The typological analysis was used to break down the data into different units of meaning by analyzing words and phrases and connecting them to the experiences of Black women in executive leadership positions at predominately White institutions (PWIs) of higher education in relation to the themes found in the interviews (Gallagher & Wallace, 2016). The personal reflective narrative served as a stage for exploring how the experiences of Black women helped to inform learning and understanding as it relates to

higher education leaders. The personal narrative was analyzed in relation to the findings, concepts, and categories defined in the first-structured interviews and member-checking interviews.

As a researcher, I honored the qualitative process as I focused on the experiences of Black women in executive leadership positions and use the data as a guide to inform learning and meaning that the participants expressed. The process of qualitative research design is evolving, as the researcher, it was important that I honor the themes and data that were collected (Creswell, 2013). The process was fluid and allowed for further learning and exploration.

The goal of the research was to learn about the experiences of the participants and to convey findings and meaning that the study yielded accurately. To eliminate bias, I developed a set of interview questions using the conceptual framework as a guide to help capture the experiences of Black women (see Appendix A and B). The conceptual framework was designed around themes and finding discovered during the literature review process. The review of literature produced multiple perspectives and data points as a guide, and the interview questions were developed based on the researched literature.

In summation, the typological data analysis focused on carefully reviewing and writing about typologies captured during the interviews and from the authentic viewpoints the participants shared. The typologies were predetermined using the conceptual framework and review of the literature as a guide. Then the responses were explored and explained in relation to the findings of major concepts and categories. I used the typological analysis approach to look deeper into the data to ensure I identified all important aspects (Hatch, 2002). The member-checking interviews served as an additional validity check. To make sense of the data produced from the interviews, I reviewed the data thoroughly (Creswell, 2013). I used typological analysis



procedures to analyze the interview responses from both the first-structured interviews and member-checking interviews, and my personal reflective narrative.

### **Limitations of the Research Design**

Qualitative studies do not generate large-scale findings as the participant groups generally only consist of a limited number of individuals (Creswell, 2016). Case studies have been criticized for lacking scientific rigor due to a “lack of representation” (Hamel et al., 1993). The case study design, sampling method, and time constraint, locality of participants all place limitations on this study outcomes. Data collection, typological analysis, and my novice research-level also presented limitations.

It is important that I acknowledge the limitations to a case study so that the credibility and dependability of this study may be preserved. I am the primary instrument in the data as I conducted the first-structured interviews the member-checking interviews, as well as providing my personal reflective narrative. It was important that I remain open to guidance and feedback from my faculty chair and committee to help decrease researcher bias throughout this process (Sarniak, 2015).

### **Validation**

With qualitative research, the researcher must be concerned with overgeneralizations and accurately representing the data as reported. To promote trustworthiness and confidence, I chose participants who represent the subject phenomenon and shared knowledge and information that was derived from their own experiences (Hatch, 2002; Shenton, 2004). Having diverse sources was one way I worked to safeguard credibility and dependability (Gagnon, 2010). The purpose of the study was to examine the experiences of Black women who are working in executive leadership positions at predominately White institutions of higher education across the United

States. I worked to ensure the study remains aligned with the social constructivist approach as outlined by Stake (1995). I reviewed the data and identify patterns, themes, and categories, and I triangulated the collected data, so the experiences of the participants were conveyed accurately (Guba, 1978; Shenton, 2004).

### **Credibility**

Internal validity helped determine if the study measured or tested what is actually intended (Shenton, 2004). The participants were selected based on study criteria and their willingness to participate. The participants were informed upfront of the subject matter for the study with the intent of providing transparency and clarity from deception (Creswell, 2013). The information provided by the study participants was collected, analyzed, and held in confidence. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym to reinforce the commitment to confidentiality. Further strategies to increase validity included (a) data triangulation, which included the examination of data from the first-structured interviews, member-checking interviews, and personal reflective narrative; (b) engagement, as the researcher I worked to make each interview private and personally engaging; and (c) consistence referencing to relevant peer-reviewed literature (Creswell, 2013).

### **Dependability**

With regards to dependability standards, there is a close relationship between credibility and dependability (Shenton, 2004). The dependability in this study was established by including (a) a descriptive report of the experiences of each participant as it related to their experiences in executive leadership positions at predominately White institutions of higher education; (b) the data will be triangulated from the first-structured interviews, the member-checking interviews, and the personal reflective narrative (Stake, 2010); and (c) finally, reflective interpretation

was used to share the implications for learning in future educational practices. The procedures for this study were clearly documented so future researchers can repeat the study (Sandelowski, 1993).

### **Expected Findings**

Findings and results of this study were expected to show that each participant had unique and valuable experiences that have shaped their pathway to executive leadership at predominantly White institutions of higher education. Each stage of the research study was expected to reveal important data that had implications for future educational leaders and higher education institutions regarding the experiences of Black women in executive leadership positions at predominately White institutions of higher education. The information may contribute to a greater sense of understanding and shared responsibility.

### **Ethical Issues**

#### **Conflict of Interest Assessment**

Potential conflicts of interest in relation to this study were related to situations and interactions that could cause or increase my personal bias or decision making authority. I did not anticipate any substantial conflicts of interest arising. Participants were informed of the research topic and issued an informed consent form to help prevent conflicts of interest. The consent form was only used after receiving Concordia University–Portland Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. The study was designed to collect data on the experiences of Black women in executive leadership positions to contribute to improving educational leaders' practices and higher education institutions knowledge and understanding regarding the experiences of Black women executives at predominately White higher education settings.

## **Researcher's Position**

My position as the researcher in this study was as an active executive leader. According to Herr and Anderson (2005), I was an insider in collaboration with other insiders. I am a Black woman serving in an executive leadership position at a predominately White higher education institution who engaged participants at other predominantly White higher education institutions in executive leadership positions. I received no personal gains by conducting this research study. I was interested in this topic as a matter of scholarly inquiry. I worked to interview each participant, and then describe and analyze the data with the highest form of integrity. As a researcher I hope this research will influence higher education organizational change; and offer opportunities for personal, professional, and institutional transformation (Herr & Anderson, 2005).

## **Ethical Issues in the Study**

I took the necessary actions to ensure this study is highly ethical. I received approval from the Concordia University–Portland IRB to ensure all participants rights were respected (Creswell, 2016). I submitted an application that describes the study in detail, and I had each participant sign an IRB approved consent form. I treated each participant with respect and operated with integrity with every step of the study. The population was comprised of 10 Black women who are currently working in an executive leadership position at predominately White institutions of higher education. Ten participants participated in a first-structured interview and 8 participants participated in a member-checking interview. I also completed a personal reflections narrative before the interview phases of the study had concluded; all participants completed an informed consent form explaining guidelines for the interview process and procedures of the study. The Belmont Report (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of

Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1978) provides the principles and guidelines to which this study will follow. Per standard reporting practice with Health and Human Services of the Belmont Report (United States, 1978) data will be kept strictly confidential for seven years upon completion of the study. Data will be kept confidential to minimize risk and maintain ethical viability. All transcribed interview materials shared with the participants were password protected and all information will be destroyed at the conclusion of the research study.

### **Chapter 3 Summary**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the experiences of Black women are currently serving in executive leadership positions at predominately White institutions of higher education. This chapter detailed the research design and methodology of a descriptive qualitative case study design. I gather data by conducting a first-structured interview, a member-checking interview, and from writing a personal reflective narrative. I reviewed patterns, themes, and categories to help with the typological data analysis. The review of literature helped determine the typologies that were explored despite available information; little evidence was found to explain in detail the experiences of Black executive leaders.

Participants were informed of the procedures for data collection and analysis. A signed consent form was obtained from all participants. Interviews were conducted using the researcher developed instruments that were aligned to the reviewed literature. With these instruments, I was able to triangulate the data and identify the consistency of the findings among the data collection methods (Denizen, 1978; Patton, 1999). I took the necessary measures to ensure this study is valid and reliable. My role as the researcher was transparent, valid, and ethical. Elements of potential bias were articulated and addressed if they arose. Issues of trustworthiness included internal validity, credibility, and dependability. The methods described in this chapter are

techniques explained in the literature review and prior research practices (Creswell, 2013; Hatch, 2010; Stake, 1995).

## **Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results**

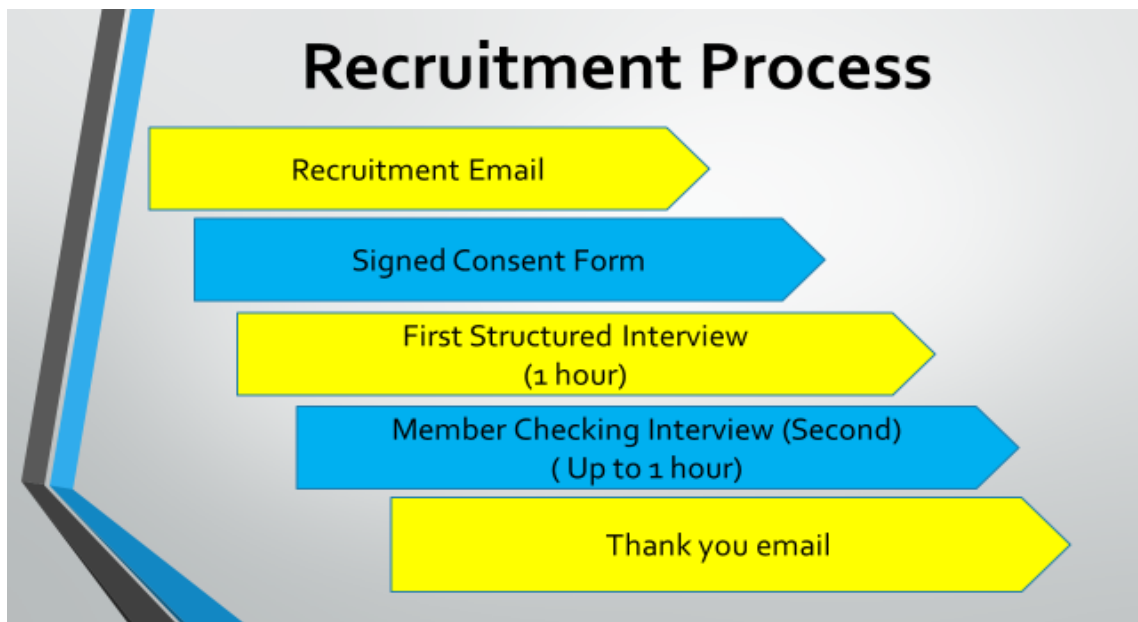
### **Introduction**

This descriptive qualitative case study was designed to explore the experiences of Black women in executive leadership positions at predominately White institutions (PWIs) in higher education in the United States. A case study research design can be used to showcase a study and recognize issues, experiences, and illuminate meaningful relationships (Creswell, 2016; Hatch, 2002; Patton, 2014; Stake, 2010). Creswell (2013) noted that interviews provide a means to conduct structured, open-ended sessions in which researchers can collect rich and descriptive data. I interviewed 10 Black women participants, conducted a second member-check interview based on emergent findings and themes, and wrote a personal reflective narrative to answer a single research question: What are the experiences of Black women at PWIs of higher education serving in executive leadership positions?

Throughout my professional career, I have contemplated the path to executive leadership for Black women. I currently serve in an executive leadership role at a PWI of higher education and aspire to go even higher. The review of literature offered many perspectives on women in leadership and provided detailed accounts of women and the obstacles they have overcome to succeed and penetrate the glass ceilings. Yet the pathway to executive leadership for Black women has remained relatively unexamined and presented an opportunity for further research. Through the interview process, I discovered a difference in the leadership journeys for Black women compared to non-Black women. The findings can help others understand the importance of Black women's perspectives and journeys. The interview process and data collection led to the data analysis and results, as presented in this chapter.

## Description of the Sample

Criterion purposeful sampling is the process of selecting participants for a qualitative project by recruiting individuals who can help inform the central phenomenon in a study (Creswell, 2015). The criterion purposeful sampling for this study consisted of 10 Black women serving in executive leadership positions at PWIs of U.S. higher education institutions. The participants were identified via personal professional connections and snowball sampling. The recruitment process is outlined in Figure 1.



*Figure 1.* Participant recruitment process.

Twenty recruitment emails were sent to potential participants inviting them to take part in this study. Ten individuals chose to participate in the structured interview process, and eight participated in a member-checking (second) interview.

The 10 Black women executives in this study worked in various roles at higher education institutions across the United States and brought to the study varying years of executive leadership experiences. These 10 women served as the core participants in this descriptive



qualitative case study and were currently serving in executive leadership positions at PWIs. The common criterion shared by all participants confirms that each executive met the standards; which is useful for quality assurance and supports the context of the study's research question, the content of the literature review, and the methodological design (Creswell, 2015; Hatch, 2002; Turner, 2010).

### **Descriptions of Participants**

Table 1 provides the pseudonym of the research participants, their executive leadership titles, and the interview dates and times. All interviews were conducted via Zoom video conferencing.

**Participant VP Shay.** The vice president and had served in her current position for 1 year but been in executive leadership for 9 years at two institutions. VP Shay had two B.S. degrees, an M.S. degree, and an M.B.A. She had more than 25 years of higher education experience and has worked at small private and public institutions that are classified as PWIs. VP Shay grew up in the Midwest in a lower socioeconomic household and was a first-generation college student. Both parents were present in the home, and both parents expected VP Shay to pursue higher education.

**Professional journey.** VP Shay said that her professional journey began when she was an undergraduate student when she obtained her first resident assistant position. She believed that through the guidance of her parents and key family members, through mentorship, and from gaining exposure to the inter-workings of higher education institutions, this access allowed her to gain knowledge and grow in her personal understanding, which helped her to become the successful leader she now was.

Table 1

*Participants Pseudonym, Position, and Interview Dates and Times (As per outlined IRB*

*Protocol)*

Participant's pseudonym	Position	Interview date & time
VP Shay	Vice President	April 1, 2019 2:00 PM EST
Dr. Cassy	Dean of Students	March 13, 2019 12:00 Noon MST
Dr. Andrea	Vice Provost & Dean of Students	March 25, 2019 3:00 PM CST
Dr. Nay	Associate Dean	March 25, 2019 10:30 AM CST
DR. ELICIA	Executive Vice-Chancellor	April 24, 2019 10:00 AM EST
DR. TANYA	Dean of Students	March 18, 2019 4:00 PM CST
Dr. Laine	Associate Vice President	March 18, 2019 11:00 AM EST
Dr. Ash	Vice President	April 4, 2019 4:00 PM PST
Dr. Rita	Vice Provost & Asst. Vice President	April 16, 2019 1:00 PM EST
Dr. Alisa	Senior Vice President	April 15, 2019 2:00 PM EST

**Participant Dr. Cassy.** Dr. Cassy was a dean of students and had served in her current position for 3 years but had more than 7 years of executive leadership experience. Dr. Cassy had a B.S degree, an M.S. degree, and an Ed.D. She had 23 years of higher education experience and had worked at small and large public institutions of higher education. Dr. Cassy grew up on the

east coast and considered herself a New Yorker in her heart. She came from a lower socioeconomic household and was a first-generation college student and first-generation Haitian American immigrant. Dr. Cassy was encouraged to pursue higher education by both her parents and was the only sibling in her family to have gone to college and graduate.

***Professional journey.*** Dr. Cassy indicated that her professional journey began as an undergraduate student while advocating for an increase in the number of faculty and staff of color at her undergraduate institution. She learned from a mentor that her passion could lead to a career in higher education. Dr. Cassy believed her strong connections to her family and community, along with her personal relationship with God, helped to shape her professional career choices and success. She credited God and strong mentors for helping to guide her professional journey, and she strived to serve with passion and dignity daily.

**Participant Dr. Andrea.** Vice Provost and Dean of Students Dr. Andrea had served in her current position for 11 months, and in an executive leadership position for 3 years. Dr. Andrea had 7 years of higher education experience and served at mid-sized and large public universities in the South and Midwest. She had a B.S. degree, an M.S. degree, and a Ph.D. Dr. Andrea hailed from a single-parent lower socioeconomic income family and was a first generation college student. She decided to pursue higher education as a way of changing her life circumstances. She was the only person in her immediate family to obtain a higher education.

***Professional journey.*** Dr. Andrea expressed having an accelerated journey to executive leadership and moved into an assistant director role right after completing her master's degree. She began applying for director positions very early in her career and landed a director's position in the Midwest after a short job search and accepted that position. She had many mentors along the way and the support of her family. Dr. Andrea stated, "My family does not understand what I

do,” but were still very supportive. She credited her faith, belief in herself, and hard work for her success. Dr. Andrea loved serving students and watching them succeed and reach their goals.

**Participant Dr. Nay.** Associate Dean and Associate Professor Dr. Nay had 8 years of experience in her current role and more than 33 years of higher education experience. Throughout her professional career, she had worked at private and public institutions, midsized and large; all were PWIs. After high school, Dr. Nay went to college and obtained her B.S degree and her M.S. degree back to back. She then worked and started her family. There was a significant gap between the time she pursued her Ph.D. from when she obtained her M.S. degree. Upon deciding to go back and pursue a Ph.D., she was a wife and mother and decided to quit her job and be a full-time student. Dr. Nay’s choices were strategic to advancing her career and were not motivated by getting another job or title.

**Professional journey.** Dr. Nay professional journey included spending time in corporate America, working in the business industry, and eventually making the transition into higher education while working on her Ph.D. She credits her business and human resource training in helping her achieve success in the higher education arena. Dr. Nay was immediately exposed to senior leaders within the higher education setting, which saw and valued her outside higher education experiences as an asset to the academy. She had worked hard and strategically to achieve success and credits mentors and her sisterhood of friends for guiding and pushing her to take the necessary risk to achieve success.

**Participant Dr. Elicia.** Executive Vice Chancellor Dr. Elicia had served in her current role for 18 months. She had been in executive leadership for 10 years. Dr. Elicia had 31 years of higher education experience and had worked at a variety of higher education institutions across the United States during her tenure. Dr. Elicia held a B.S. degree, an M.S. degree, and an Ed.D.

She was a first first-generation college student and the only one of five siblings to obtain a higher education. She grew up in a low-income home, and neither of her parents graduated from high school. Dr. Elicia never married and was now the primary caregiver to her mother and served her with pride daily.

***Professional journey.*** Dr. Elicia's professional journey started when she ended up on a college campus. She took a traditional path through the academy by obtaining her degrees, being an involved student, and building relationships with the right people; however, through mentorship and guidance, she found her path to executive leadership. Dr. Elicia originally aspired to be an attorney and then a dean of students, of which neither career choice was realized. She said that with the help of God and guidance from a key mentor, she landed a position as an assistant vice president, which began her executive leadership role. Dr. Elicia stated, "I am a servant leader who is ordained and ordered by God to fulfill my purpose of serving and guiding others."

**Participant Dr. Tanya.** Dr. Tanya was a dean of students, with three years of experience in her current role and 5 years of experience as an executive leader. Dr. Tanya had 11 years of higher education experience working only at PWIs of higher education in the Midwest. She held a B.S degree, an M.S. degree, and a Ph.D. She worked full-time while pursuing her Ph.D. Dr. Tanya was a mother within a blended family. She credited her parents and grandparents for her success as an executive leader. Her family encouraged her to go to college. She grew up in a low-income household full of love, support, and encouragement and identified as a first generation and low-income college student. Dr. Tanya's biggest supporter and challenger was her husband. Great mentors had provided guidance and help to create opportunities for her to succeed.

**Professional journey.** Dr. Tanya's professional journey in higher education began when she became a resident director. This position provided direct access to the vice-chancellor, and he took her under his wings and began to groom her for higher leadership roles. She received critical exposure, supervision, and access to key stakeholders. Dr. Tanya accepted a leadership position with the state university system, which allowed her to form critical relationships and meet the decision-makers throughout the state system. She was challenged by mentors to learn quickly and to find her voice. Dr. Tanya loved advocating for first-generation and low-income college students because she related to their academic challenges.

**Participant Dr. Laine.** An associate vice president, Dr. Laine had 10 years of experience in her current executive leadership position and more than 29 years of higher education experience. She had worked at two higher education institutions both in the south and both PWIs. Dr. Laine is a first generation college student and came from a middle-class family in the South with both parents being in the household. She was encouraged by teachers and her family to attend college. She had a B.S. degree, an M.S. degree, and within the past 2 years completed her Ed.D. She started working after earning her M.S. degree and raised two children who both went to college. Dr. Laine believed she was successful because she was always willing to serve and volunteer for tasks. Dr. Laine stated, "Most people are not interested in performing the small tasks." Dr. Laine was willing to do so and had capitalized on those experiences and used the skills she acquired while working within the business industry to grow and excel.

**Professional journey.** Dr. Laine's career in higher education began by working on a grant from the Department of Education. She has held eight leadership positions at two different institutions. She strived to be a positive influence and supporter of the people she had worked with and supervised throughout her career. Dr. Laine was hardworking and believed African

American women need to do a better job of advocating for themselves and finding their voice so that they were not passed over for positions they had earned or deserve. Dr. Laine was a positive leader and believed she was a success because of the support of other Black faculty and staff and superb mentors.

**Participant Dr. Ash.** A vice president with 3 years of experience in her current position, Dr. Ash had 9 years of experience in executive leadership positions and 25 years of higher education experience. All her jobs were on the west coast at 2-year and 4-year PWIs. She became an executive leader at a young age and eventually had the opportunity to serve at the institution from which she graduated. She has a B.S. degree, an M.S. degree, and an Ed.D. She was currently married and the mother of two children. Dr. Ash grew up in a low socioeconomic home, and violence was very prevalent within her neighborhood. She was a first-generation college student and stated, “Having access to education changed the course of my life and my children's lives.”

**Professional journey.** Dr. Ash took a traditional path to executive leadership. She worked in many areas of the higher education arena to learn how colleges and universities function. She credited her success to being in the right place at the right time, her mentors, God’s grace, and the love and support of her family and close circle of friends. Dr. Ash learned that bringing all of her and her life experiences to the table was what allowed her to be the most successful in her executive leadership role.

**Participant Dr. Rita.** Dr. Rita was a vice provost and assistant vice president for 2 years and had served in executive leadership for 4 years. She had 15 years of experience in higher education and started her journey as a faculty member. Dr. Rita had a B.S., an M.S., and a Ph.D. Her area of focus within the academy was within the STEM field before transitioning to the

administrative arm of higher education. Dr. Rita grew up in the South in a low-income home and was raised by her grandmother. She had a child at a young age but was encouraged to graduate and pursue higher education. She was a successful executive leader because she could pull from different life experiences to support students and to help others see the challenges students face to obtain a college degree.

***Professional journey.*** Dr. Rita's path started as an assistant professor, teaching in the sciences and math fields. She then began to explore and pursue her research agenda and looked for ways to find funding to help support students and aid in their ability to stay in school and have their basic needs met in the process. Dr. Rita began to do faculty management work and soon moved into an interim dean's positions. In this role, she learned more about the workings of the university and wanted to find more intentional ways of connecting with students and helping to support them through the undergraduate experience. Dr. Rita was successful because she had had to overcome many challenges and was able to support and encourage students as they push toward their collegiate goals.

**Participant Dr. Alisa.** Senior Vice President Alisa had served in her current role for about 18 months but been in executive leadership for the past 9 years. She had more than 27 years of higher education experience and had worked at small and large universities in Midwest and east coast PWIs. Dr. Alisa began her career as a faculty member but had an opportunity to work in different administrative roles while teaching. She had a B.S. degree, an M.S. degree, and a Ph.D. She worked at the university while pursuing her Ph.D. She cared about students and was willing to do the hard work to ensure students and the university were successful. Dr. Alisa stated, "The work is not sexy but necessary." She was single and grew up in a supportive home.



*Professional journey.* As a faculty member, Dr. Alisa provided support to students and other faculty members in her many roles. Her administrative journey centered on providing access to higher education for all populations at the university. She worked in areas focused on diversity, inclusion, equity, and access for all. Dr. Alisa stated, “I am successful because I am surrounded by my posse of strong women from all walks of life.” Dr. Alisa was committed to serving and had learned not to make the work her life but to have a life outside of work while serving with excellence.

### **Research Method and Analysis**

The case study methodology included collecting data via an initial structured interview with 10 Black women serving in executive leadership positions at PWIs of higher education, a subsequent second interview (member-checking interview) with eight participants. The final data source was my personal reflective narrative to triangulate the data for analysis. According to Creswell (2013) with triangulation, “researchers make use of multiple and different sources, methods, investigators, and theories to provide corroborating evidence” (p. 251). The focus of this case study was the journey of Black women to executive leadership who are currently serving at predominately White institutions of higher education across the United States. In the following section, I explain the data collection process and how it was supported by the conceptual framework, the four predetermined typologies and the new emerging typology that developed from finding and was explored during the member-checking interviews.

### **Coding**

After reviewing Hatch (2002) and Harding’s (2013) typological framework and coding techniques, I developed a code bank (see Appendix F) directly related to the typological categories determined for this study. I then color-coded each typology to help organize the data

collected for the data analysis process. A code was also designated for new typologies that might emerge during data collection.

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected in three ways. First, I conducted a structured interview with 10 executive leaders. Second, I conducted a member checking or second interview with eight participants based on the finding from the first interview. Third, I wrote a personal reflective narrative from the researcher's point of view to highlight my professional experiences as an executive leader.

#### **First Interview**

I conducted the first structured interviews with each of the 10 participants over an 8-week time period. I recorded interview data from each participant during prearranged, 60-minute video conferenced interview sessions. I conducted each interview at a time that was convenient for the participant. I also took notes in my researcher's journal as I listened to each participant's interview responses. I then used an online program to transcribe all recordings.

#### **Member-Checking (Second Interview) and Follow-Up Question**

I conducted member-checking interviews with eight participants over a period of 1 month. I provided a copy of the transcription from the first structured interview for review. In member checking, I confirmed that all information was accurate, and asked each participant one additional question. The format for five of the member checking sessions was an interview via video conference. Each video conversation was recorded. I used an online program to transcribe and prepare member-checking interviews for coding. Three participants provided email responses to the member-checking interview question, and I analyzed the response to gather further findings.

### **Member-Checking Question**

During the first structured interview, the subject of spirituality and the role of faith and family emerged. Consequently, in consultation with my faculty chair, one additional question was formulated. Participants were asked the following question: Can you provide more insight into the role of spirituality, faith, and family within your journey to executive leadership? This single research question helped to guide the member-checking interviews.

### **Personal Reflective Narrative**

At the time of the study, I was serving as an assistant vice president at a large Research I institution located in the southern United States. This institution is a predominately White institution of higher education and has and continues to struggle with recruiting and retaining women and minorities in critical leadership roles throughout the institution. My journey to executive leadership aligned closely with experiences shared by the research participants. This research study helped to affirm and validate my own experiences as a Black woman in executive leadership. The study results showcased many similarities between the research participants. Those findings are discussed in the summary of findings. According to Yin (1993), case studies concern how and why things happen, which reveals the contextual realities and the difference between what was planned and what actually occurred. Through the transcriptions of 10 women's voices, the four typologies were validated, and new themes emerged. This case study analysis highlights the salient realities of the 10 women showcased within this research study. The personal reflective narrative was written over a three-week time period as the research was occurring.

### **Data Analysis**

According to Hatch (2002), *typological analysis* is “dividing everything observed into

groups or categories on the basis of some canon for disaggregating the whole phenomenon under study” (p. 152). Typologies are derived from theory, common sense, and research objectives. For the purpose of this study, I used typological analysis steps (see Appendix E) to analyze the data collected (Hatch, 2002). While following the typological analysis steps, I identified patterns within the first structured interview and the member-checking interview. As the researcher, I took specific notice of patterns that appeared to happen the same way, I noted the frequency of patterns, and I also observed the order of patterns (Harding, 2013; Hatch, 2002).

The predetermined typologies identified for this research study were (a) glass ceilings and sticky floors, (b) Black women leaders, (c) resiliency of women leaders, and (d) social networking. While examining the typology of the glass ceiling, I specifically examined the components of marginalization, barriers, and mentoring relationships. Within the sticky floor typology, I examined stereotyping, double oppression, and intersectionality. The typologies and components are defined in Appendix E. Social constructivism provided the framework in which individual points of view were utilized to examine experiences and the impact of those experiences on culture, organizational structures, and the journey to executive leadership for the research participants. The new emerging typology based on findings from the first structured interview focused on the role of faith and family. The role of faith and family was explored during the member-checking interviews where one additional research question was asked.

The table outlining the research question, the literature used to inform the typologies, the typologies for analysis, the definition for each typology, indicators, and the aligned interview questions can be found in Appendix A. The typological analysis steps are outlined in Table 2.

Table 2

*Typological Analysis (9-Step Process)*

---

1. Identify Typologies

Glass Ceiling

- Marginalization
- Barriers
- Mentoring Relationships

Sticky Floors

- Stereotyping
- Double Oppression
- Intersectionality

Black Women Leaders

Resiliency of Women Leaders

Social Networking

New Emerging Typology: Faith and Family

2. Read entries according to the typology
  3. Record the main ideas on the summary sheet from each interview
  4. Code entries according to typological patterns identified
  5. Keep a record of what entries go with which typology and participant
  6. Decide if patterns are supported by the data sets. Also, search the data for non-examples of these patterns (new emerging data).
  7. Look for relationships among patterns that have been identified
  8. Write patterns as one-sentence generalizations
  9. Select data excerpts that support generalizations and the conceptual framework
- 

*Note.* Based on text material in Hatch (2002).

**First Structured Interview Data**

Four typologies helped inform the data analysis from the first structured interview were (a) glass ceilings and sticky floors, (b) Black women leaders, (c) resiliency of women leaders, and (4) social networking. After conducting a few initial interviews, I realized I missed one category that seemed highly important to the research participants: faith and family. This subject

did emerge throughout the literature review process, and I later decided to explore this typology further as a new emerging typology.

Throughout the data analysis, I highlighted only information in the transcripts that fit within the predetermined typologies and helped to explore my research question further. To analyze the interview data I collected, I first used Rev.com to transcribe each participant's interview. Then, I created a summary sheet for each participant to keep the data organized and captured each participant's point of view. During my review of the transcript process, I wrote clarifying statements to help summarize participant responses and process the meaning of the interviews. For example, I documented when participants readily addressed the predetermined typologies during the interview; specifically, Drs. Cassy, Andrea, Elicia, Tanya, and Rita all addressed every predetermined typology, and all discussed family and their faith as an important part of resiliency and their leadership styles. I also made notes of new data presented I had not anticipated. For example, many of the participants self-identified as being first-generation college students and spoke about growing up as children in low socioeconomic homes. This information helped to shape the participants' journeys to executive leadership and deeply impacted their leadership characteristics today.

During the first review of the data, I read each transcription and made notes and highlighted in red statements that fit into the studies definition of the glass ceiling and sticky floors typology. I took all the components of this typology into consideration while analyzing the participants' responses. The predetermined typology, the definition obtained from the research, and the conceptual framework provided an operational lens to analyze the participants' responses. Each time I reviewed a transcription, I examined the responses through a different frame using a different predetermined typology and color to help identify the typology. I only

used the predetermined typologies, as defined for this research study, as the guide. Focusing on the predetermined typologies provided additional clarity to the participants' responses and further contributed to the data. Using the color-coding method also shined a light on omitted data that contributed to the participants' journey and the data collection process.

After completing the review of predetermined typologies, I started a review process and searched for new emerging data. I noted the findings and discussed with my faculty chair a possible question for the member-checking interview. I followed the same steps of data analysis for each research participant to better understand each participant's interview data and maintain the validity of the study.

In the first structured interviews, I asked 11 questions that aligned with current literature regarding the experiences of Black women in executive positions at PWIs. Table 3 provides a breakdown of each typology and the interview questions for this study.

Table 3

*First Structured Interview Typologies and Interview Questions*

<b>Typology</b>	<b>Interview Questions</b>
Glass Ceilings and Sticky Floors	1. Describe your journey to executive leadership? 2. Where their difficulties in your journey? 3. Based on what you have accomplished, what do you consider your most important accomplishment?
Black Women Leaders	4. What leadership skills do you think are essential for executive leadership? 5. Can you share any experiences (share based on your comfort), that involved cultural, racial, or gender issues?
Resilience of Women Leaders	6. As a Black female define resilience in the context of your work life? 7. What did you do to keep pushing forward? 8. What was your journey from interest to promotion into the executive leadership position?
<b>Social Networking</b>	9. Who are those you consider the most important in helping you become who you are today? 10. What are you doing now to sustain your momentum? 11. Anything additional you'd like to share?

**Member-Checking Interview (Second Interview) Data**

Eight participants participated in the member-checking interview. Each participant was provided a copy of the transcription from the first structured interview for review. During each member-checking session, I took the time to discuss the information gathered from the first interview. In member checking, I confirmed that all information was accurate, and asked each participant one additional question based on the new emerging typology. The member-checking sessions were used to triangulate the set of data and findings and to provide greater validity to



the study. Again, I looked for patterns within the data set of the interview transcript or the written explanations provided via email. I highlighted patterns and commonalities to help provide meaning and clarity. One member checking question focused on the role of faith and family within each participant's journey to executive leadership: "Can you provide more insight into the role of spirituality, faith, and family within your journey to executive leadership?"

### **Personal Reflective Narrative**

The personal reflective narrative presented an anchor in the data analysis process. This narrative provided firsthand experiences in the higher education setting at a predominately White institution. As the researcher, I analyzed the personal reflective narrative in relation to the interview questions I asked each participant during the first structured interview and the additional question asked during the member-checking interviews. To mitigate bias, I modeled the first structured interview process and answered the member-checking question. The process of this qualitative design was emergent. While writing the reflective narrative, I specifically focused on personal experiences encounter while holding my executive leadership role. I noted experiences that brought back specific memories, feelings, and actions that helped to provide meaning for this research study. To honor the qualitative process, I kept the focus of the data on understanding the meaning as I reflected on my personal journey.

### **Summary of Findings**

Four predetermined typologies were important indicators and factors that influenced the participants' journey to executive leadership: (a) glass ceilings with the components of marginalization, barriers, and mentoring relationship; (b) sticky floors with components of stereotyping, double oppression, and intersectionality; (c) leadership qualities of Black women leaders, the role of resiliency; and (d) social networking. The participants confirmed that the

journey for Black women to executive leadership is often filled with unwritten and unspoken expectations and riddled with many types of oppressive behaviors. The executive leaders expressed similarities in their executive leadership journeys, although each participant excelled at a different higher education institution. Each participant shared personal stories of success and failures, happiness and pain, triumphs and defeats, and being understood and validated to experiencing moments of being silenced and ignored. Although these leaders voiced the various leadership characteristics that helped them to succeed and move forward in their journey, each expressed the need for persistence and resilience. Relationships matter and building a coalition of support helped the participants to maintain and persistence to the executive leadership role.

Participants discussed the importance of having mentors and the role strong mentoring relationships played in their journey to leadership while occupying the executive leadership position. Specifically, the research participants highlighted their personal self-worth and sense of self. Leadership oppression and institutional racism and sexism are real phenomena. Therefore, participants emphasized knowing their purpose for doing the work and serving and the need to have their perspectives present at the decision-making tables. These women expressed their current roles as executive leaders were not just about them but about the ancestors who came before them and the sacrifices those ancestors made so these women leaders could pursue a higher education. The participants also reflected on their services to others—and specifically, the students—and the need to have their legacy centered around their God-given purpose. The goal was to become educated and give back, and now these Black women were serving as executive leaders at institutions of higher education, that historically did not serve Black people.

The Black women executives in this study were insightful and transformational leaders. Each participant had persisted in overcoming unique obstacles, such as enduring defaming

labels, having work ideas stolen, being excluded from critical decision-making meetings, being called antisocial, having ideas and concepts publicly scrutinized, and the list continues. The Black woman executives embraced their cultural identities and upbringings, found their voice within the leadership role, and operate with a spirit of excellence no matter the narrative about them around campus. They each recognized the need for their presence within the executive leadership role, and each embraced all the dynamics that help them to achieve success or served as a deterrent to help further develop and build their leadership character.

Overall, five typologies were supported by the data collected and the findings, the research question, and the social constructivism conceptual framework. Those typologies were glass ceilings and sticky floors; Black women leaders; resiliency of women leaders, social networking, and faith and family.

### **Presentation of the Data and Results**

I analyzed the data collected from the first-structured interview and the member-checking interviews, plus my personal reflective narrative, by applying typological analysis steps (Hatch, 2002). My analysis information is organized by the predetermined typologies and new emerging typologies discovered during the data analysis process from the first structured interviews. The results are also grouped around the research definitions for each typology obtained during the literature review for this study. I explain how each research participants experiences help to support the typology and the researched definitions. The typologies presented in the data and results help to support the journey of Black women in executive leadership positions at predominately White institutions of higher education. Specifically, the data showed that Black woman in executive leadership positions at PWIs still confront institutional racism, sexism, ageism, colorism, and institutional structural barriers. The participants ascended to executive

leadership positions; however, many obstacles and barriers made the journey difficult and emotionally and physically exhausting. Within the findings, I made the decision to reference the participants by their earned title. The prefix “Dr.” was inserted in front of the participants’ names as a sign of respect. This decision was made due to the findings around marginalization expressed by the participants. Many participants expressed frustration and dismay regarding individuals, within their current work environments, refusal to call the participants by their preferred professional titles and names.

### **Typologies**

The typologies presented in the data and results included glass ceilings and sticky floors. Glass ceilings have three components: marginalization, barriers, and mentoring relationships. The sticky floors components included stereotyping, double oppression, and intersectionality. The next typology focused on Black women in positions of leadership. Next was the resiliency of women leaders. The final predetermined typology concentrated on the role of social networking. The new emerging typology placed emphasis on the role of faith and family in the participants’ journeys to executive leadership. I present the results of my analysis in this section. These findings represent common themes that emerged from analysis of the data obtained from the participants. These themes are not intended to be construed to represent common themes for Black women in leadership positions in higher education in general.

**Glass ceilings and sticky floors.** A *glass ceiling* is an invisible barrier that keeps women from rising above a certain level in corporations or other professional fields (Hymowitz & Schellhardt, 1987; Morrison et al., 1986). *Sticky floors* are invisible barriers that prevent individuals from advancement based on attitudinal or organizational biases (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Sticky floors center on social and cultural stereotypes, feelings of being ostracized, and

isolation, which make it more difficult to ascend to executive leadership roles. The women in this study provided descriptive details of their journey to executive leadership. The participants discussed numerous conditions from which marginalizing behaviors, institutional barriers, and stereotyping attitudes were displayed by peers, supervisors, and subordinates. Many participants noted that working at predominately White institutions of higher education as a Black woman in an executive leadership position is an anomaly. Institutions advertise that they are diverse and inclusive, but often, the advertised community of inclusion and equity are not actualized upon arrival to the campus. Four participants said it seemed like new ideas they brought ideas to the table went through additional scrutiny rather than being validated from the beginning. Dr. Elicia noted, “There are times where I felt like I was being treated like the help.” VP Shay noted,

As a woman who has a ton of experiences, who is an achiever by nature, I have been used for my knowledge, skills, abilities, and talents, but I have had White men and women ride my coat tale and deliberately not take ownership for not doing their part, but try to pretend they did the work, when in fact, they did not. I recently experienced a White male who has done no work, and yet, he was comfortable standing up in front of a group of people referring to me as if I was his property. Even though he thought he was complimenting me, in this search process, let’s be clear he had done no work but was standing in front of our peers and colleagues making it seem like I assisted him versus him assisting me. And the reality is, he didn't even really assist me in this process. And so, I've had some very tough conversations with this person, because, I have zero time in my life for this kind of dismissing behavior.

Other participants identified moments and instances that reinforced feelings of marginalization or emphasized the institutional barriers that still existed. Several reported they

felt like every day they were being re-interviewed for a position they already received. Dr. Andrea stated,

I'm relatively young to be in an executive leadership position. So, I am frequently interviewed, What do you do? How did you do that? Who did you know? As if to say, you could not have gotten here on your own and based on your own merit. The constant barrage of questions, being talked over, being publicly humiliated, and leaving work mentally and physically exhausted, is a lot. There are days I wonder if it is worth it all, but then I remember that I am needed in this place.

Institutional barriers are a real phenomenon, and as an executive leader, I, too, have experienced many of the situations described by the participants, as noted within my personal reflective narrative. The personal struggles and feelings of exhaustion and isolation are real and often painful. Hearing other executives identify their struggles and hardships as crippling conditions helped to bring clarity and perspectives to my lived experiences. Dr. Tanya said,

Being in a position to hold individuals accountable is tough, especially when folks are not taking you seriously, or not respecting you or your position. I have dealt with that more times than I care to share. I have been completely disregarded in my position as a leader and not supported by peers and colleagues. It is hard when your title or position is not recognized or respected.

While exploring if there were difficulties in these participants' journey to executive leadership, the participants' exposed several instances of systemic institutional barriers and discussed how their intersecting identities were not always perceived as a strength. The institutional barriers and obstacles were described as systems and processes that have existed with a long-standing history at the institution, even though individuals within the university

could not clearly articulate why or how the process came about and why they still exist. Dr.

Elicia said,

Every day is a challenge. There are difficulties in processes, just being in the space, and holding a position of power, and don't forget the scrutiny that comes with that. People are comfortable challenging you and pushing back against your leadership. I've learned to choose wisely the types of organizations I associate myself with because when it not a fit, is become a problem. I am comfortable asking why we have this process or require folks to jump through so many loops. By asking those types of questions I have been met with open hostility, disrespectful comments, and folks saying, just go with the flow because we are not going to change how we do things, and they really mean it and are comfortable articulating how they feel.

Drs. Nay, Elicia, and Laine each expressed openly their perceptions that they were omitted from strategy meetings or informed of decisions after-the-fact because others across the institution believed they would ask too many questions. Several of the participants said colleagues stole their ideas or took credit for work they did not perform. Dr. Tanya stated,

I have dealt with coming up with ideas in a room or group setting, and when I would share those ideas or provide my ideas or strategies, it seemed to fall on deaf ears.

However, if my White female or male colleague would say something similar, it was received as a brilliant idea. That is a hard pill to swallow, to be at the table and still not be heard.

Dr. Laine further noted,

There were times I should have been at the table, but the opportunity was never given. I am not saying it is because I'm African American or female, but I did watch my White

colleagues with less experience get a seat at the table at a faster pace. I witnessed them opening taking my words from private meeting and presenting them publicly without ever giving me credit or acknowledging that it was, in fact, my idea that the group had decided to go with.

All of the participants listed the achievement of obtaining the executive leadership position as a major accomplishment. However, the achievement was often overshadowed because of negative actions, remarks, and behaviors they had to endure from others. The participants mentioned their institutions' poor preparedness for a Black woman to occupy the position of an executive leader. For example, various participants wished there were support structures to help with their transition to executive leadership. Many shared how they deliberately and strategically worked to achieve their leadership roles. They spoke of going back to school to achieve the higher degrees, they attended professional conferences and sought out the advice of others who had achieved the role they desired. The participants' remembered and discussed sacrificing time away from loved ones, only to achieve the role and not be appropriately celebrated. Being a high performer, having a wealth of knowledge, and occupying the seat are not enough to help with the transition to executive leadership. The institutions should be more intentional and deliberate in preparing the rest of the campus to receive and support a Black woman hired into the executive leadership role. Dr. Ash shared,

I had to apply for the same job three times even though I was performing the duties as described in the job description. The institution thought they would do better by bringing in an outside voice, and it turns out every person they hired quit. I eventually got the job I should have had all along, but folks still acted as though I was not the authority, and some refused to call me a doctor or respect the promotion.



The institution publicly announced these women as the chosen candidates but did very little to address the institutional racism, sexism, or gendering that existed across the campus. Drs. Alisa, Nay, Tanya, and Ash specifically noted instances of racism, sexism, or belittling that had occurred across campus in various settings with no public rebuke or confronting of the oppressive behaviors that allowed oppression or stereotyping activities to continue. Dr. Rita noted,

I'm always the only person of color, and often the only female person of color. It can be exhausting to maintain the course. But as a faculty, my specialization was chemistry and biology. It's just what it is. When I was promoted to my managerial role, that is when the microaggressions started to be more apparent. Some days I wondered if it was my own perception, and other days I thought, no this is actually people attacking and challenging me.

Dr. Cassy further explained:

I am Caribbean, Black, a female, first-generation Haitian American, and grew up in a low socioeconomic home. I am the diaspora. I have been stereotyped, talked about, talked down to, and labeled "angry Black girl," because I am now in a position that gives me permission to use my voice in a different way. I am able to call colleagues on the carpet for implicit biases or microaggressions or really engage them in thinking crucially. That is a part of my responsibility. So, I need people to recognize [that] I do lead differently because of who I am.

Dr. Tanya shared,

I did not have anyone that looked like me to show me how this higher education thing worked, so I had to learn to overcome the whisper and water cooler conversations which always seemed focused on me. What I was wearing, how I styled my hair, what type of

jewelry I was wearing. I felt like my culture was constantly on display but not in a good way. I learn to walk the halls with pride and be okay with being different.

Although participants shared the excitement around achieving the role, hardships quickly followed because of their personal identities. There are many challenges that must be endured or overcome to achieve success at the executive leadership level. The support systems do not seem to exist in higher education for Black women, so having a mentor or a close circle of friends is a must.

Each participant stressed the importance of having strong mentoring relationships and the support of key university stakeholders. *Mentoring relationships* are critical connections that help improve adjustment issues, educate around institutional factors, and provides critical information related to career dynamics (Cook & William, 2015; Rasheem et al., 2018). Dr. Alisa stated,

It was challenging moving from faculty to administration. The skill sets are not exactly the same. I had established myself in the academy, but the administration didn't know me and didn't care. I was challenged around every corner to prove I should be in the seat. As a Black woman, I felt conflated sometimes in that space. The president said to me, "I believe in you and you can do this job." He took the time to build me up because he could see I was scared and exhausted. That's what a good mentor should do.

The participants recounted times when strong mentors and solid support systems was a sustaining force in helped to ground them in the work and the purpose around them doing the work. Several subjects identified their inner circles of friends as the individuals who provided the mentorship or safety that allowed the leaders to persist. Dr. Nay noted, "My sister circle gives me life. These women provided support, encouragement, and a listening ear." Furthermore, mentors encouraged the participants to have an executive presence and to bring their authentic

selves to the table. Dr. Ash shared,

I'm from Inglewood [a metropolitan area outside Los Angeles with a reputation for increased gang violence and high crime], California, so my worldview is a bit different than most in the academy. I asked a mentor how much of Inglewood should I let show up today. He said, "We need all of Inglewood at the table," which helped me understand that the Inglewood voice brought a different perspective that was much needed.

All of the research participants mentioned that mentors and strong support systems are a must. Mentors help a person find her purpose and develop meaning behind why she does the work, which, helps to put into perspective the hardships, disappointments, and challenges.

As a researcher, I, too, often have wondered if my presence makes a difference. It was affirming to hear others have grappled with the same thoughts and struggled to find meaning in the midst of the adversity. Dr. Elicia said,

I always have a squad somewhere that's holding me down. I have girlfriends, supporters, and mentors who give me the gentle pushes or who are holding me accountable. I recognize I cannot make this journey on my own, so I stay connected, so I can stay focused.

Additionally, Dr. Alisa shared, "You've got to get a posse. You've got to get your female posse and figure it out. The power of the inner circle and mentoring relationship has kept me from giving up so many times."

**Black women leaders.** The research is scarce on Black women leaders and their leadership journey. The participants provided essential information about leadership characteristics. *Leadership* is as an innate trait that recognizes leadership as a social construction, it is both a research area and a practical skill encompassing the ability of an individual or

organization to “lead” or guide other individuals, teams, or entire organizations (Kapasi, Sang, & Sitko, 2016). The leadership attributes the participants discussed centered around executive presence and voice, collaboration, setting the agenda, and being mission-driven. VP Shay said,

As I mentor people, I often talk to them about executive presence. It is not enough to have tools in your toolbox. You have to project confidence show you have the capacity and the critical thinking skills to do the work.

Dr. Alisa shared,

People learn across different learning styles, so visual, verbal, etc. So as a leader I have to be willing to lead and teach in a way that is accommodating to as many styles a possible. Leadership involves many different types of skills. Knowing which skill to use at the appropriate time makes you a good leader.

Dr. Nay further noted,

I brought from the business world to higher education with me was a sense of myself and that my voice was important at the table. Leadership is getting others to be willing to collaborate with me to address oppression because, at the end of the day, anything I do has to be about moving people towards the vision.

Each participant expressed the value of displaying strong leadership characteristics and ensuring that your personal values aligned with those of the universities. Dr. Andrea said, “Make sure the people that you work with and those that you supervise are clear on your values and be sure to lead in a way that you can be proud of.” Dr. Ash shared,

Leadership is creating the conditions that matter for students to be able to succeed. It is also recognizing that I can’t work at just any institution, or with just anyone. I worked in a place that made my soul cry out. I took many body blows. I learned that great

leadership is knowing when to stay and when to go. I had to go.

As the researcher and within my leadership position, I too have experienced leadership oppression. There were times when I questioned if the institution was a good fit or if my values were still in alignment with the direction the university was headed. Leading requires a high level of emotional intelligence and learning not to take things personally, even when they appear and feel personal. Dr. Rita said,

Leadership has to be a tolerance for what I call professional Jenga, right. There are all these stacks, and you gotta figure out where to put things and what to do. I have learned to have a high tolerance for chaos.

Women leaders are expected to be high achievers, have an ability to rally individuals together, and to use their passion and energy to bring about positive change within the organization (Adams & Dlamini, 2014; Kapasi et al., 2016; Marvin et al., 2012). Several of the Black women executives shared it was expected that they would be prepared to lead from Day 1. Dr. Tanya said,

Leadership is about learning quickly, being a mentor, and being willing to have difficult conversations. A leader must be a visionary, be approachable, and have great interpersonal skills to connect with people. Communicate clear expectations and be a role model. Be flexible and open to change and be willing to engage in the politically uncomfortable stuff while maintaining trust.

Dr. Laine further noted, “Leaders must be planned, organized, have a very strong work ethic, operate with integrity, think critically at all levels, and be willing to make tough decisions.” As the researcher, I reflected on my leadership attributes and agreed with many of the sentiments voiced by the participants. I also believe that my level of social, emotional, and

political consciousness allows me to continue to lead and inspire my team to be high achieving.

As Elicia said,

Women leaders are often labeled as emotional. For me, I have come to the point where we are going to have the tough conversations no matter the label. Sometimes it gets ugly and maybe even emotional, but we will not hide behind our titles and power structures. I am a woman who is also a leader, without apology. . . . I think the lens of Black women in higher education brings something unique and special. We bring something that is much needed at many tables and is still quite rare.

Leadership is many things to a variety of people. The participants stressed confidence with oneself and intrinsic trust in one's ability to lead is the quality that allows her to lead. VP Shay said, "I realized, not everybody can do what I do." There is no one way to lead but maintain personal identities outside of work and not allowing the work to define the leader's entire world is critically important to sustainability and resiliency. Dr. Alisa stated,

Woman leaders allow their work to define them all too much. I try to make sure the work is personal, and I have a personal investment, but it's not my personal life. I have created a cognitive distance that allows me to think about things in the greater sense, as opposed to just how it might affect me personally. I think about my work and leadership with a larger point of view.

Dr. Tanya further shared,

I must be able to step away if it's too emotionally charged. I have to find the appropriate time to circle back around after I have collected myself. I always remember I must function in a very professional manner because Black women leaders are judged differently. I am must uphold my reputation and that of my department and institutions.

In sum, leadership includes relationship building and establishing trust throughout the institution with peers, subordinates, and supervisors. Many leadership characteristics help women leader achieve success. Black women must know who they are and bring their true voices to the table without apology. More openings are needed for Black women to lead at the executive level. Institutions must be willing to address the lack of advancement opportunities for Black women into the executive leadership role. It is not because of a lack of preparation, but the small numbers are due to a lack of promotional pathways. Dr. Laine stated, “There has got to be more opportunities for women of color to move into upper-level leadership roles.” As the researcher, I believe Black women must continue seeking out executive leadership roles.

**The resilience of women leaders.** The resilience of women leaders was a personal matter for each participant. The Black women leaders in this study stressed the importance of being resilient and having a recovery plan when things go badly. *Resilient leaders* are those who demonstrated the ability to recover, learn and developmentally mature when confronted with chronic or crisis adversity (Blaine & Reed, 2015; Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Pincott, 2014). VP Shay said, “Leadership is one of the most misunderstood and abused positions within higher education.” The ability to recover quickly is a required skill for women and for Black women in executive positions. Higher education is still a White male-dominated field. Therefore, many women remain highly invisible in executive leadership roles or C-suites (Lewis, 2016; McGlynn, 2014; Zahneis, 2018). The power difference continues to create intentional and unintentional barriers to women and specifically to Black women seeking to advance to executive leadership. VP Shay said,

Even when you are tired and exhausted, you are so plugged into your life’s work and the purpose behind what you do, that you press forward and you push through, even when

you're exhausted, and you feel like you don't have much to give.

All the participants had a working definition of resilience and how resiliency manifested in the context of their work environments. Each participant provided personal testimonials of moments of resilience and persistence. Dr. Andrea reflected other participants' definition of resilience: "having a support system to help you process things. Situations are quite painful so at times it helps to have someone to process with, so you move through your personal feelings versus sitting in them." Dr. Nay further stated,

I have developed the ability to walk in a commitment, that I might get fired today. I have learned, that to be resilient. I don't hold back. If I can't use my voice, then I can't be the leader I need to be, so it enables me to keep going.

Dr. Tanya said,

Resilience is finding myself and being secure in who I am. Being a woman in leadership, and a Black woman who is confident is critical. My confidence didn't always exist. I have been through quite a bit in my life, and I don't give up very easily on things. I am very goal-oriented. You know, as I'm getting older, I just don't walk away and tuck my tail anymore. I think about the ancestors, and I think about what they went through. I'm like, okay, I can't walk away because what they went through was a lot worse. I've got to pave the way for other people, and also, my kids are gonna be coming up through these systems, so I've got to make this process a little bit better for them.

Resiliency is an internal force that allows these women to keep moving forward and to continue making a difference in the lives of students and the university. Most of the participants connected resilience to never giving up no matter the circumstances. The subjects shared many of my personal sentiments, as the researcher, toward the subject of resilience. I have a can-do



attitude. No matter how hard the project or how challenging, I will not allow myself to be defeated or stop until the goal has been achieved. I am my ancestors' legacy; therefore, I must find a way to achieve success, my family and the students are depending on me. I may cry in private, but publicly no one will ever know the private crises of confidence or the moments of despair I endure. Dr. Elicia noted,

Resilience is the ability to get up every day and get back on it, to persevere in the face of disrespect, to rise above the pettiness that happens from time to time at the cabinet-level due to politics. I don't get a cry room. I have to figure things out.

As these executive leaders continue moving forward and leading with dignity and class, resiliency is a tool they each have in their tool kits and have learned how and when to use the tool. As the participants continue serving the institutions and most importantly the students, they have managed to find fulfillment, meaning, happiness and joy in the work, which makes the journey worth taking. Dr. Laine said,

Never give up, even when you feel you can't go on, or you feel deflated, keep moving and pushing forward. You don't let racism, sexism, you don't let any of those things deter you from really moving forward with your goals and aspirations. The students need us, they need our advocacy, support, and encouragement. So find a way to be happy and continue serving.

Dr. Alisa further noted,

Resilience is about joy. The type of work I do, people often approach it from a deficit model or from a problem-based model. I see myself having an advantage because I'm a pretty happy person, and that enables me to keep going. My joy and happiness are a sign of resilience.

**Social networking.** As the participants considered and explored the individuals who helped them achieve their executive leadership positions, social networking was elevated as critically important. *Social networking* is one's ability to access upper-level positions that offer opportunities and access to information, knowledge, and referrals for career mobility (Harper, 2015; Hill & Wheat, 2017; Jeffries, 2015). Having a social network and having regular engagement and encounters with key stakeholders can make or break upward career mobility. Understanding the rules of engagement is equally important as knowing who is making the final decisions.

Each participant emphasized the importance of social networks and stressed needing someone to help grant access to the "inner circle." Dr. Nay stated,

Having a circle and access to important information has been key in moving my future forward. I've been fortunate to have presidents and CEOs see skills and abilities in me that earned me a seat at some of the most prestigious tables.

Dr. Elicia further noted,

My mentor connected me with several VPs and would-be associate VPs because these are the people he had a relationship with. Because of his relationship with other people, I went on a few interviews, but *poof*, because he vouched for me, I went from a director's position to an assistant vice president position and now I am a vice president.

Having access and establishing strong interpersonal relationships across the university is imperative. A person can choose to remain in his or her peaceful corner of the university; however, a person needs to know the decision-makers, and more importantly, decision-makers need to know the person. Dr. Ash shared,

Because of my connection to the president, he took a chance on me, and I also took a chance to say, I'll try. I have a social network of African American women, and we get together and connect on a monthly basis, and this group had been insightful and very fulfilling. I am able to share concerns that emerge during our small gathering with the president, who has the ability to influence the university climate and culture for everyone.

Dr. Laine further stated,

My vice president got me to the table. I did the work, but she was not afraid to step out there and make this happen. I have in turn had opportunities to pay it forward. Having access to the right networks can make or break your career.

Dr. Rita stated,

I took advantage of my social networks to move to a higher position. I looked for a position outside my institution. When my president learned of this, he came to ask why I was considering leaving. There was some very specific movement within my institution that explicitly provided me with upward mobility opportunities. In fact, some positions were customized just for me.

Several participants expressed how their social networks lead to upward career mobility. Each participant stressed how she worked independently to prepare herself for the move, but the social network served as the catalyst toward career advancement. Dr. Alisa shared,

My relationships with chancellors and presidents [have] provided me with an amazing platform, and particularly it has helped to place me in the right positions within several different institutions. Social networks are exclusion clubs. You have to have mentors and dare I say sponsors who will grant you access, so you can then showcase who you are and what you have to offer.

**Faith and family.** The role of faith and family was explored during the member-checking interviews as the new emerging theme. Faith and family are key to helping the participants remain focused and empowered to lead.

*Faith.* *Faith* is a strong belief in God or in the doctrine of a religion, spiritual awakening, or oneness with nature (Graham, 2008; McPhatter et al., 2014). While reviewing the data from the first structured interview, faith and family were discussed and stressed as a counternarratives to barriers, obstacles, and stereotyping behaviors that the participant experience.

The data repeatedly confirmed the importance of faith and family in helping to support personal journeys to executive leadership and to allow the women to remain committed. Faith and family also kept the participants motivated to achieve and focused on their purpose for serving and doing the tough meaningful work. The cultural grounding was specific to each participant's cultural identities and family upbringing, which was critical to their professional achievements. Spiritual awakening or oneness with nature presented differently for each participant but served as a stabilizing presence for all. VP Shay said, "God is my source. He is the center of it all, and if I lose my way, that is the part of re-centering and the rebooting process for me." Dr. Elicia further noted,

The truth is, it's a lot of praying. I stay connected to my sense of faith, knowing that there is a purpose to all of this and that wherever I am placed, I'm there for a reason and I need to be about the work. I've been anointed and appointed. If you got a problem, take it up with Jesus.

Dr. Ash stated,

My ability to do this work comes from a spiritual place. God put me in a place where I can understand my role, know who I serve, how I serve and just keeps opening up doors

for me to succeed. I have an actual spiritual partner, we are friends, and we make it a point to pray for each other, check in on each other, and have devotion time together twice a week.

Several of the participants talked about their belief in God but not a commitment to a religious denomination. Dr. Alisa shared,

I'm spiritual but not in a religious way. I love nature and having fun. I dance, do yoga, and whatever it takes to alleviate the stress of the day. I have my posse who help to keep me grounded and provide a release when I need it.

The role of faith is important and helps to provide clarity and meaning to a difficult leadership role. Faith provides a process for securing and maintaining a healthy outlook toward the work, and in many ways serves as a protective factor for persistence and resiliency. Dr. Andrea said, "I feel like God has placed angels around me, because random people whose names and faces I can't remember but remember what they said, helped me to keep pushing." Dr. Tanya said, "I do believe in God. I am a very spiritual person. I pray all the time, even throughout the day because sometimes I have to pray for extra patience." These participants' faith has served as a transformational leadership trait because it empowers each participant to show up and continue leading even in the most difficult situations. Dr. Laine noted,

My faith is what keeps me pushing forward without hesitation. When things begin to get difficult, even before things get difficult, I always shoot back to my faith, always. That is the one thing that keeps me moving forward. I bring my faith into my job, I share it with my team, students, and colleagues. It leads and guides me as a leader.

Dr. Rita shared,

It's a divine right. Sometimes you will have these dreams that are bigger than you can

even see, and when the steps just start to fall in place, you're like, okay clearly this is not something I can design for myself. This is something God had designed for me. I call those things divine interventions.

As the participants spoke of their faith and spiritual journeys, I reflected on how faith and spirituality have been a sustaining force for me. Throughout my leadership journey and within my current role, I often have looked to my spiritual upbringing and use those teachings or past spiritual experiences as a grounding and centering piece. I have called myself a faith walker and expect through pray and meditation to come out of tough situations with a clearer head and a pathway forward. Faith does help to provide a counter-narrative to the pressures and oppressions that often emerge because of the role and nature of the work.

***Family.*** Family comprises the individuals who take on the role of providing practical, social, and emotional support. They are not required to be blood relatives or birth ancestors (Barrett et al., 2014; Hill, 2017). Each participant discussed the high level of encouragement and support that only family can provide. They discussed the wisdom of the ancestors and how it served as a driving force to never give up and to continue to show up and led. VP Shay said, "My parents were really key. They encouraged my dreams." Dr. Cassy shared, "At this stage in my life, my family has to take my priorities. If I don't have people in my circle and in my space who understand, then it is not a healthy space for me." Dr. Rita further noted,

I was raised by my grandmother, who passed away, and then my aunt took me in. She was a strong Black woman. She was in law enforcement and was the first and maybe highest-ranking African American women in the highway patrol. She really taught me how to be classy and tactful but direct. She instilled in me self-respect and pushed me to succeed.

Dr. Elicia noted,

I often think about who I am and where I come from, and my ancestors, my grandmother. She birthed 21 children. My mother had 10 children. They were poor, had nothing, and they figured it out. Yes, I got this because I have their DNA. I come from a lineage of survivors. Quitting can never be an option. They didn't quite so neither can I.

Dr. Andrea, Dr. Tanya, and Dr. Ash also spoke about the honesty family brings, and how they hold you accountable, while still loving and supporting you. They spoke about the encouragement the family provided along with the grounding and humility checks. Dr. Ash said, "My family is honest and real. They keep me in check and grounded."

The family structure and ties are cherished and respected. Each participant expressed how they could not have succeeded without the love and support of their families. Family is not just those with whom you share a blood tie but those with whom you have a soul tie and commitment to love because you chose to call them family. Dr. Andrea stated,

One of my sisters randomly has decided that she's going to call me "Sparkle Shine," which is so ridiculous to me, but she texts me Bible verses and little prayers, and tell me how my job is to sparkle and shine in the world. So as silly as that seems, those text messages have gotten me through some tough days.

Dr. Tanya said,

My major support system in my family, and they are amazing. If it wasn't [sic] for my loved ones, my friends, the people who pour into me, and build me up when I'm down, I don't know what I would do.

In sum, faith and family help to provide healthy perspectives that are critical in helping the participants find meaning and purpose within the work. Faith and family affirm the purpose

and meaning for leading and enduring the often difficult academic environments. Faith and family empower the participants to cope with stress, disrespect, overcome oppressive comments and behaviors, and enabled the participants to work more intentionally. Each participant continues to lead and serve at PWIs because they know the work is greater than one individual, and their presence is needed.

### **Chapter 4 Summary**

In Chapter 4 I restated the purpose of this study and the central research question. I included a description of the research participants' and their current executive leadership roles. The information provided helped to provide details and context of each executive. The selection of a descriptive case study as the methodology for this study was also stated and justified for the readers.

The findings revealed that glass ceilings and sticky floors were affirmed by the participants, as each was able to give personal accounts of marginalization and barriers she experienced. The participants spoke about being stereotyped or instances of racism or sexism they endured. Resiliency is an actualized leadership trait for these executives. Without resilience, they would be unable to lead. The findings also revealed that positive mentoring relationships and having access to social networks has profound implications for upward mobility and promotion opportunities. Some participants valued different typologies that were not originally a part of this research study, such as the role of faith and family within the leadership journey. They each spoke about the encouragement and support of family and how their faith provided purpose and meaning to the work and the leadership role.

A detailed descriptive presentation of data and the results were provided with comprehensive information regarding the data collection and data analysis process. The specific



predetermined typologies, the new emerging typology, and the research question were used as a guide during the data collection and presentation of the data process. In Chapter 4, I presented the research study data and the results as an overview for the readers to grasp and understand the journey Black women have taken to achieve the executive leadership role at predominately White institutions of higher education. In Chapter 5, I present the discussion and interpret the results.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion**

### **Introduction**

Although Black women have experienced success in achieving executive leadership positions, obstacles and barriers remain (Auster et al., 2016; Beckwith et al., 2016). The journey to executive leadership has many pathways to success. Strategies and a roadmap for navigation are needed to prepare future Black women striving to achieve the executive leadership position at PWIs higher education across the country. The purpose of Chapter 5 is to present a discussion of this study, the conclusions, and the implications. I present key findings related to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 and additional supporting literature through the lens of constructivism as discussed and shared in the conceptual framework. I conclude this chapter with recommendations for practice, policy, and future study.

### **Summary of the Results**

This study was guided by one central research question: What are the experiences of Black women at predominately White institutions (PWIs) of higher education serving in executive leadership positions? This question was created to address the topic of inquiry: the experiences of Black women currently serving in executive leadership positions at predominately White institutions of higher education in the United States. The first structured interviews, the member-checking interviews, and the personal narrative provided rich and descriptive information about this sample of executive leaders.

The results indicated that the sample of Black women executive leaders affirmed the four predetermined typologies of glass ceilings: (a) marginalization, barriers, and mentoring relationships, and sticky floors, which focused on stereotyping, double oppression, and intersectionality; (b) Black women leaders; (c) resiliency of women leaders; and (d) social

networking. The findings also supported a new emerging typology of faith and family. These executives described their experiences in detail and the characteristics of their experiences consistently fit into the identified typologies. Several of the executives referenced glass ceilings and shared detailed experiences around marginalizing behaviors they endure at the hands of colleagues, superiors, and subordinates. Many of the interviewees spoke explicitly about barriers they have overcome and those that continue. Specifically, all research participants spoke about the importance of mentors and the role of mentoring relationships on their ability to ascend to the executive leadership role.

The Black women executives acknowledged that sticky floors are a realized reality at predominately White institutions of higher education. Several executives indicated their behaviors had been stereotyped and labeled. Many indicated they received labels of “being angry, standoffish, antisocial, and speaking very directly or harshly.” The participants acknowledged their experiences around racism and sexism, and their personal identifying traits of being mothers, or being single, having a life outside of work, or having other interest besides work had been called into question. Those with such attitudes had no context or detailed understanding of their leadership roles and responsibilities in and outside of the higher education institution.

The findings demonstrated that these Black women leaders were resilient and needed a high level of confidence and competence because their leadership style and approaches were called into question. Furthermore, these Black women executives were highly aware of the universities’ culture and climate. The participants attested that having a high degree of knowledge, education, and understanding of the job did not eliminate or reduce the scrutiny of decisions, goals, and objectives being questioned, or leadership style criticism, budget decision

backlash, or hiring or firing choices being undermined.

Leading while being a Black woman could be perceived as an occupational hazard if the Black women leader is not adequately equipped to survive the job. Several of the women executives indicated a positive culture of respect and confidence among colleagues benefits a university because morale is improved, and trust is free-flowing. However, if trust and confidence is not shared evenly among all the members of the executive leadership team, it can create a toxic work environment, lead to high turnover, and leave individuals feeling isolated and disparaged within their work environment—even at the executive leadership level.

Furthermore, every participant stated that resilience is more than a state of mind but a required quality of an effective and efficient leader. Black women in executive positions must keep pushing ahead, know when to let things go, and keep showing up and speaking up while they have a seat at the table. Therefore, Black women executive have a demonstrated history of resilient and must work intentionally at all levels of the institutions to have their voice heard, but especially at the executive leadership table.

Next, having access to social networks is critical at the executive leadership level. The results suggest that social networks are the vehicle from which promotions and access to key institutional knowledge are granted (Burke et al., 2015). Executive leaders must understand and acknowledge certain processes and issues are bigger than one executive leadership role. Everyone needs a coalition and partnerships to help the university work toward transformational changes and to address key initiatives that can strategically move the institution forward. Therefore, social networks allow access to key decision-makers and allow access to “the meeting after the meeting, or the meeting before the meeting.” Yet few people are invited to attend these before-and-after meetings. The participants suggested social networks lead to great political

capital at the executive cabinet meetings and a better executive presence.

Finally, these Black women executives prioritized faith and family as critically important for maintaining focus and pressing forward in their executive leadership role. Faith was not centered around a specific religion or doctrine but a concept or a belief system. Some characterized faith and spirituality as being one with nature, reading or writing poetry, or being involved with group workouts. Others specifically mentioned praying, reading the Bible, or attending a church service. No matter how it was conceived, faith was central to helping the participants remain motivated and inspired to do the work.

The leaders also discussed how their families held them accountable and reminded them of their greater purpose and reasons for occupying the executive leadership role. The results indicated that family support was needed and critically important when failures or perceived failures happened. The families provided strength and fuel that helped each executive leader press forward even when they knew their presence would be criticized or their decision would be scrutinized and questioned. The family structure provided an ancestral perspective from the elders. The ancestral voice did not allow the participants to accept excuses but confirmed a history riddled with obstacles and disappointment, but the ancestors still survived, thrived, and achieved when they had nothing. This ancestral perspective served as a form of strength and motivation to never give up. When the executive leaders lost sight of why they occupied the seat, the elder's voices served as a reminder, "We shall overcome."

### **Discussion of the Results**

The initial structured interviews and the member-checking interviews revealed that participants understood with clarity the journey Black women take to obtain executive leadership positions at PWIs. The one central research question was, What are the experiences of Black

women at PWIs of higher education serving in executive leadership positions? The participants believed the experiences of Black women executive serving at predominately White institutions of higher education was a topic that needed to be explored further. Most participants indicated that being Black, a woman, and an executive leader came with a unique set of circumstances. Many specified that self-confidence, high levels of emotional intelligence, being a great decision-maker, having excellent written and verbal communication, and being a responsive leader were critically important to being successful in the executive leadership role.

Each leader stressed her role and responsibility in helping to create a positive campus culture for all students but specifically students of color. The participants expressed the importance of giving back and creating conditions that allowed other marginalized voices from within the faculty, staff, and student populations to thrive. These executive leaders emphasized the burden and responsibilities of the role. The subjects connected success to the campus climate for themselves and for other underrepresented populations. Each research participant focused on setting a clear agenda, articulating a clear vision, being strategic and transparent, and bringing their authentic voice to the executive table.

Most leaders indicated there is a need to create a mentoring model that provides support to women and specifically Black women who desire to obtain an executive leadership position at a PWi of higher education. The leaders expressed the need for having mentors inside and outside of the institutional support. The participants stressed that it is difficult to be the only Black women or the only person of color at the table. They described the unspoken pressure to represent the mass voices of other marginalized constituencies. The results support the typologies in the literature and suggest that Black women executives bring a different perspective that can help to transform the environment of the university if validated and

affirmed. Black woman executives provide a different level of support to a predominately White campus culture, and that perspective and point of view should be valued and respected. To sustain a positive campus culture, diverse leadership is critically important. Black women executives bring a wealth of knowledge, cultural understanding, resiliency, and empathy that is a driving force toward a positive campus culture.

In summary, the results indicated that Black woman executives' journey to executive leadership can be a difficult but not impossible journey. This research showed the importance of Black women occupying the executive leadership role and having an active seat at the executive table. The leaders have directly impacted the university environments in a positive way and helped to create a diverse and inclusive campus culture for many marginalized populations. Black women executives are still a rarity within the higher education arena but those who have excelled to the executive position still stress the need for more support, research, and collaboration to help impact change across the broader higher education field. Sustainability cannot be a mere word but must be a demonstrated action. The result indicated that more Black women executives are needed and pathways to the executive leadership role must be created through mentoring programs and access to key social networks, and by removing institutional barriers and institutional racism and sexism. The creation of a diverse and inclusive campus culture must be supported by research and the institution must align its policies and practices with a university's mission and vision.

### **Discussion of the Results in Relation to the Literature**

The focus of this study was Black women's journey to executive leadership at PWIs of higher education in the United States. There was one central research question: What are the experiences of Black women at PWIs of higher education serving in executive leadership

positions?

According to a report from the Council on Higher Education (2016), White senior managers hold 53% of the total management positions in higher education. The report further exposed that women of color only hold 11.9% of managerial positions, and Black women hold a mere 5.3%. Despite the academic achievements of women, they still lag substantially behind their male counterparts and even further behind their White female counterparts (Auster et al., 2016). Therefore, it was important to explore the journey Black women took to obtain executive leadership roles.

This study helped to fill a gap in the literature regarding the experiences of Black women executives working at PWIs of higher education. The results can help scholars, educational administrators, faculty members, and community members understand the perspectives of Black women working in executive leadership positions at PWIs of higher education and serve as a guide around institutional policies and practices, recruitment, retention, and promotion practices, and aid in the creation of a more diverse and inclusive campus culture. This study supported other findings in the literature. For example, Crites et al. (2015) highlighted the lack of Black female executive leaders and the impact on Black women's self-esteem, self-worth, and self-efficacy. The glass ceiling was a realized obstacle for many women seeking to obtain an executive leadership position. However, Black women in this study reported experiencing hostile work environments. According to Berk (2017b) and Sue (2014), marginalization and microaggressions are personal insults that occur in the workplace, and these behaviors create uncomfortable and hostile work environments specifically for Black women or other underrepresented groups. Most of the participants affirmed the marginalization and numerous barriers which the participants directly linked to their confidence issues, specifically, around



questioning the value they added to the team or even questioning their knowledge. The participants discussed the concept of “finding their voice” to ensure the Black women’s perspective was present at the executive table. Bailey (2016) and Jones (2014) discussed Black women voices being silenced, stereotyped, and marginalized in the academy. Again, each participant shared detailed examples of silencing behaviors, stereotypes that were assigned, and moments of marginalization. The participants’ perspectives and experiences aligned with the literature in numerous ways.

The Black executive leaders in my study explicitly described the sticky floors of the academy. Sticky floor is a term used to showcase social and cultural conditions that allow stereotyping behaviors by those in positions of power. The sticky floor metaphor refers to women who opt out of pursuing higher leadership roles because of social and cultural norms that might lead to bias-based around race, gender, age, religion and other characteristics (Carli et al., 2015; Chavez et al., 2017; Crites et al., 2015). The women in this study discussed their perceptions of social and cultural factors that created obstacles to their acceptance at the executive table. The participants discussed apprehensions around appropriate dress codes, hairstyles, jewelry choices, social gathering attendance, water cooler discussion, and specific cultural norms. The sticky floors created harsher barriers than the glass ceilings. Echoing Barrett et al. (2014), Knasu (2014), Barnes (2017), the women stated that universities have a responsibility to address racism, sexism, and other barriers surrounding culture.

Participants described various experiences of leadership through their lens as Black women leaders. Researchers have identified strategies to help bridge the gap between female and male leaders (Davis et al., 2015). However, many of the strategies offered did not directly address the gaps between White men and women in comparison to Black women. Leadership

barriers appear more difficult to explain. With this study, the participants spoke directly to strategies they used to help overcome barriers and obstacles. Specifically, the participants focused on executive presence, clear and concise communication in all forms, attaching expectations to the larger university mission, and consistent accountability. They spoke about how they documented their decisions and consulted often with colleagues and their superiors to ensure there were no surprises. The women in this study gave numerous examples of creating safe spaces so they could function and flourish. According to Black feminist theorists Collins (2002) and West (2017a), higher education is the perfect platform for creating counter spaces that allow African American women to confront organizational and social structures that prevent Black women from gaining equal access to the executive leadership seat. This study acknowledged the counter space narrative and documented instances of the counter spaces.

Resiliency and overcoming obstacles and barriers were linked in this study to Black women's journey to executive leadership. Black women demonstrated resiliency in coping with oppressive conditions in higher education (West, 2017a). In my study, resiliency was presented as an innate leadership quality. Each participant spoke in detail about their methods for remaining resilient and how resiliency undergirded their executive leadership role daily. Blaine et al. (2015) described resilient leaders as capable of recovering, learning, and maturing developmentally in the face of a crisis. The Black women executives repeatedly stated that quitting or giving up was not an option. They discussed how they showed up and kept going, even when they were not supported or felt like the outsider within the suit. Grijalva (2018) argued standards of excellence were founded on the dominate cultures standards. He further espoused that the dominate culture demographics had changed and might no longer be relevant. The women in this study discussed a part of resiliency was a support system or having a positive

mentor relationship.

Women of color in the academy are recovering from oppression and have taken steps to heal themselves and build a sense of self-efficacy. Listening circles had provided a space where stories about collective (and individual) struggles are shared and these spaces are very valuable (Grijalva, 2018; Jeffries, 2015; West, 2017a). My results suggest formal and informal mentoring relationships help to support Black women's journey to executive leadership. Past researchers have found that resiliency played an essential role in the workplace and helped to predict job satisfaction and job performance (Grijalva, 2018; Tahira et al., 2015; West, 2017b). In this study, participants stated universities could have provided a mentor or a support structure to help them be more successful. The research suggests universities should take a lead role in creating mentoring structures to help women, particularly Black women, ascend to executive leadership roles so they feel valued and supported.

Burke et al. (2015) examined reasons career networks offered access to upper-level positions and linked career opportunity and access to information, knowledge, and referrals for career mobility. The participants in my study discussed how their access to a social network led to a higher-level career opportunity. The women detailed how they became excellent leaders, not solely based on their credentials, but because of the social networks they accessed. They spoke about mentors connecting them to resources that opened doors the participants did not know existed. The participants discussed how difficult it was to gain access. Each referred to a mentor or sponsor as the source of the introduction or access point to the elite social network. For Black women, race and gender create a distinct challenge to gaining access to career networks, which are deemed crucial to gain access to upper-level leadership positions (Burke et al., 2015; List et al., 2018; Mayer, 2017). Each participant discussed how she missed out on critical positions

early in her career as a result of a lack of access to the “right” social network. These participants also pointed out how they could not gain access on their own but were dependent upon a mentor or supervisor to make the critical connection.

The women in this study described the role of faith and family as grounding forces in their career advancement. Several researchers have pointed to the need to prepare women to lead and form their leadership identity, specifically to help combat stereotyped attitudes and institutional barriers (Hill et al., 2017; McEwan et al., 2014). One way these women combated all the stress of the job was through their faith walks and family ties. Faith and family enabled these participants to face their challenges head-on. Faith helped to center the women, and family provided a source of strength and context around the purpose and meaning of the journey and the calling to do the work. Participants discussed that work as meaningful and purposeful. Each woman discussed a historical context of standing on the shoulders of the ancestors and the duty and responsibility that embodied the role. The participants discussed faith through the lens of being connected to nature, to other strong Black women, or to a spiritual awakening via reading and studying the Bible or by attending a worship service. They discussed how faith in God helped them to continue examining the dream of executive leadership.

The participants expressed that family was, “the most important thing in their lives.” While most of the women had biological family connections, a few referenced posse or other social gatherings and referred to those to whom they were connected as family. Each woman discussed her faith and family as a concrete source of strength and path that contributed to her executive leadership success.

The results suggested the experiences of the Black women participants were laced with obstacles, stereotypes, oppressive behaviors, and institutional barriers. However, none of the

participants allowed those perceived barriers to deter or stop their achievement of the executive leadership role. All participants expressed commitment to helping nurture a positive institutional environment for others, specifically for other marginalized communities within the faculty, staff, and student ranks. Black women have achieved executive leadership status, but the road to the position is riddled with painful emotional baggage. This study revealed that university leaders have a responsibility to help create conditions where all employees, especially women and Black women, can receive the institutional support needed to excel in executive leadership roles.

### **Limitations**

This study was limited because of the qualitative case study design (Simon, 2011). Only the perceptions and experiences of a sample of 10 Black women serving at PWIs of higher education across the United States were analyzed. This sample did not represent all Black women who work at PWIs of higher education; therefore, it is bound to only the information and experiences that the participants provided within this study sample.

The reliability of the first structured interviews and member-checking interviews made the study weaker because of the inability to generate identical interview techniques for each interview with all participants. Although I tried to conduct each interview in a consistent manner, I might have led on participants unknowingly, misinterpreted their responses, or failed to eliminate researcher bias. The third data source was my personal reflective narrative. Some of my reflections were written after I had conducted a participant interview. Therefore, it would be easy to transpose the participants' experiences into my experiences as a researcher. Although I answered the same interview questions as the participants, the interviews might have prompted how I wrote my own narratives. Finally, the accuracy of the participants' contributions depended on their overall willingness to respond honestly and fully.

## **Implication of the Results for Practice, Policy, and Theory**

The results of this qualitative case study are available to scholarly and educational communities. The results are not generalizable, so the members of these communities should decide if the findings are relevant to them and their research agendas. The results of this study supported social constructivism.

### **Practice**

The gap in practice explored in this study is the need to understand the journey of Black women working at PWIs of higher education and their aspiration to achieve executive leadership roles. The participants had strong university knowledge, higher education degrees, and critical skill sets, and an extensive understanding of culture and climate, and yet the journey to executive leadership was allusive and difficult to navigate. The participants discussed concerns about the lack of professional mentors or having access to key social networks. The further acknowledged that institutional racism and sexism are real phenomena. College and university presidents should take ownership of the campus climate and work to fix institutional structures that create visible and invisible barriers to success. Key university employees should be empowered and encouraged to create structured mentoring programs that provide coaching, mentoring, and access to critical social networks. Mentors for every professional staff member across campus is not a realistic goal. However, the institution should review professional development practices and infuse strategic pipelines and support groups that generate educational opportunities for growth and development in vital areas of skill development.

The institution must publicly and privately address oppressive conditions and behaviors. Leaders' behaviors create the culture and affect morale. Therefore, opportunities should be created to identify and discuss the systems of oppression that are perceived or real; then,

strategies must be created at every level of the institution to infuse accountability and corrective behavior. The president and other executive leaders are responsible for creating equitable practices and ensuring that those who are employed throughout the university are adhering to the rules of engagement. This accountability should be applied individually and collectively to help form a sustained and positive impact on an inclusive campus culture.

### **Policies**

Institutional policies that encourage qualified employees to executive leadership should be implemented. Policy changes should encourage mentorship and help to cultivate and create critical relationships that focus on connecting employees who are prepared for opportunities that allow them to lead. As demonstrated in my study, individuals who are chosen for executive leadership often are not held to or hired around the same standards. Individuals interested in reaching the executive leadership table should know what the expectations are and be able to prepare themselves through formal and informal professional development to occupy those leadership spaces.

Institutional policies are needed that support advancement structures, training models, mentoring structures, and skills coaching. University policies should be examined to ensure oppressive structures or policies are eliminated if they limit or discriminate against specific populations across the institution. Policies should be transparent, simple, streamlined, and accessible to all.

### **Theory**

The findings of this study support social constructivism. The theory states that learners generate meaning through their own lived experiences and relationships (Creswell, 2018). The results suggest that education and learning experiences are centered around individuals and their

surroundings. Vygotsky (as cited in Mill, 1994) believed that individual social interactions could lead to continuous changes in thoughts and behaviors and are closely associated with cultural identities. Individuals see and examine the world through their lived experiences (Dewey, 1925). Understanding and knowledge are based on a person's needs and the circumstances surrounding those needs. Social constructivism affirmed the active learning and construction of knowledge throughout the research study.

According to the constructivism view of learning, knowledge is a process that is structured by dialogue and interaction with other learners achieved by experiencing the world together (Alt, 2014). In this study, the participants' lived experiences dictated how they perceived their experiences within their individual higher education environments. Also, the journey to executive leadership suggested the participants understood their individual interpretations and experiences were centered around their institutional circumstances and their individual journeys. The participants stated they knew the path to executive leadership would be difficult. However, they did not expect the many obstacles and microaggressions they experienced.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

A variety of research approaches should be explored when examining the journey to executive leadership for Black women working at PWIs of higher education. While I chose to explore the qualitative approach to the research, a quantitative or mixed methodological approach could yield useful data and rich information. Several past researchers employed satisfaction surveys or perception surveys for women of color (Adams & Tressa, 2014). The literature review showcased data collected from leaders across the higher education arena, but there are opportunities to further research Black women in executive leadership positions, along



with other marginalized female populations.

This qualitative research design should be replicated with additional Black women serving in executive leadership positions at PWIs of higher education, and the survey should be scaled to other countries. I engaged with women from across the United States; it would be meaningful to explore specific regions to examine if different trends or themes emerge as barriers or as opportunities to achieving the executive leadership role based around regional cultural norms.

Researchers should explore how to create more intentional pathways to the executive leadership realm for Black women in higher education. Formal and informal mentoring programs and support circles should be created that provides awareness, education, learning, and access to critical stakeholders and decision-makers. The programs should focus on decreasing barriers and obstacle that prevent upward mobility. In this study, I focused on the administrative area of higher education; however, the research showed that similar struggles exist within the faculty ranks as well as among student leaders. Strong mentoring programs and support structures are important for every person interfacing with a higher education institution at every level.

Finally, a study is needed that focuses on best practices and evidence-based programs with a proven track record of decreasing barriers and removing obstacles. Promotion and tenure in higher education for marginalized populations is not a new challenge. The need has long existed to highlight higher education institutions that have made improvements and gain momentum in bridging the gaps related to racism, sexism, and other know institutional barriers. Creating a research platform that encourages the free exchange of information is a crucial next step.

## **Conclusion**

This dissertation addressed a gap in practice in which the conceptual framework of social constructivism was embedded to examine the journey and experiences of Black women serving in executive leadership at PWIs of higher education across the United States. Participants affirmed four predetermined typologies that impacted their experiences: (a) glass ceilings and sticky floors, (b) women leadership characteristics, (c) resiliency, and (d) social networks. An additional typology was family and faith. Each participant provided a different perspective and experience that impacted her journey to executive leadership, but all confirmed the predetermined typologies to be relevant and that they had impacted the women's journeys.

In conclusion, my findings provide new insight into the perception and lived experiences of these Black women. Their experiences can lead to improved university environments, which could encourage individuals to seek opportunities to advance to the executive leadership table. Black women are needed at the executive leadership tables at higher education institutions across the United States; however, the condition must be conducive and welcoming to those striving to achieve this executive leadership role.

Institutions have mission and vision statements, and most have diversity and inclusion statement. These statements must be aligned with the practices, policies, and accountability measures present at the institution. Alignment would lead to more inclusive campus culture, improved retention and promotion of administrators' and faculty of color, and higher recruitment levels and retention of students of color. This study offers promise because recommendations and solutions have been offered that can help to improve the campus climate and ensure all contributing members not only feel valued but are valued.

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**Appendix A: Typology Table Conceptual Framework for Data Analysis**

Research Question	Theories	Typologies	Definitions	Indicators	Interview Questions
What are the experiences of Black women at predominately White institutions (PWIs) of higher education serving in executive leadership positions	Social Constructivism (1)  Resilience (2)	<b>Glass Ceiling (A)</b> (Hymowitz & Schellhardt, 1986).	<b>(A1) Marginalization-</b> social and scholarly exclusion (Berk, 2017; Lloyd-Jones, 2014; Sue, 2014).	Discrimination related to social, cultural identities, exclusion from scholarly practices and social interactions	1) Describe journey to executive leadership?
			<b>(A2) Barriers-</b> There are systemic obstacles and challenges exist due to internal processes and organizational policies (Beckwith et al., 2016; Hannum et al., 2015; O’Bryant, 2015).	Rules and patterns of promotion, success and evaluations processes	

			<p><b>(A3) Mentoring Relationships-</b>a critical connection that helps improve adjustment issues, educate around institutional factors, provides information related to career dynamics (Cook &amp; William, 2015; Rasheem et al., 2018).</p>	<p>Help to prepare mentee for greater roles and responsibilities, Offers social capital, career benefits, access to different networks</p>	
		<p><b>Sticky Floors (B)</b> (Carli &amp; Eagly, 2016; Meier et al., 2016).</p>	<p><b>(B1) Stereotyping-</b> qualities or traits assigned to specific groups on the basis of their race, sex, nationality, age, religion, or other characteristics (Carli &amp; Eagly, 2015; Crites et al., 2015; Chaves &amp; Dickenson, 2017).</p>	<p>Overt and covert behaviors, negative attitudes, preconceived notions, perceptions of lacking skills, knowledge, and capabilities</p>	<p>2) Where their difficulties in your journey? 3) Based on what you have accomplished, what do you consider your most important accomplishment?</p>
			<p><b>(B2) Double Oppression-</b> unjust experiences centered around racism and sexism (Han &amp; Leonard, 2017; Jackson et al., 2015; Knaus, 2014; Baxter-Nuamah, 2015; Grimes et al., 2003).</p>	<p>Racism and sexism are often couched and serve as oppressive stereotyping behaviors. Lack of visibility, working to maintain dignity, and confidence</p>	



		<p><b>(B3)</b>  <b>Intersectionality-</b> social identities serve as organizing features of social relationships. Highlights the experiences of individuals who occupy multiple social locations are powerfully shaped by interlocking systems of oppression and privilege (Carli &amp; Eagly, 2015; Carter-Sowell &amp; Zimmerman, 2015).</p>	<p>Inequity, relationality, power, social context, complexity, social justice  Navigating oppressive systems to gain access and close the gap</p>	
Social Constructivism	<p><b>Black Women Leaders (C)</b>  (Lewis, 2016; McGlynn, 2014; Zahneis, 2018).</p>	<p><b>Leadership-</b> is an innate trait that recognizes leadership as a social construction. Women, in general, are expected to be high achievers, have an ability to rally individuals together, to utilize their passion and energy to bring about positive change in the community and civic organizations, to go with the flow, and have excellent networking skills (Kapasi et al., 2016; Adams &amp; Dlamini, 2014; Marvin et al.,2012).</p>	<p>Social construction that has a male-dominated point of view; women remain highly invisible in executive leadership roles or the C-suites; The power difference creates intentional and unintentional barriers to leadership advancement</p>	<p>4) What leadership skills do you think are essential for executive leadership?  5) Can you share any experiences (share based on your comfort), that involved cultural, racial, or gender issues?</p>

		<p><b>Resilience of Women Leaders (D)</b> (Blaine &amp; Reed, 2015)</p>	<p><b>Resilient leader</b>-one who demonstrates the ability to recover, learn and developmentally mature when confronted with chronic or crisis adversity (Blaine &amp; Reed, 2015; Davis &amp; Maldonado, 2015; Pincott, 2014).</p>	<p>Resilience is a critical skill for successful leadership; thinking skills-optimism about the future; capacity-building focuses on person value; efficacy – an individual’s well-being; action skills-perseverance, adaptability, and courage in decision making</p>	<p>6) As a Black female define resilience in the context of your work life? 7) What did you do to keep pushing forward? 8) What was your journey from interest to promotion into the executive leadership position?</p>
		<p><b>Social Networking</b> (Burke &amp; Carter, 2015; List &amp; Sorcinelli, 2018)</p>	<p>Offer access to upper-level positions offers opportunities and access to information, knowledge, and referrals for career mobility (Harper, 2015; Hill &amp; Wheat, 2017; Jeffries, 2015).</p>	<p>Understanding the rules of engagement; gaining access to different networks; inclusive and diverse spaces; lack of access for women and other minority identified groups</p>	<p>9) Who are those you consider the most important in helping you become who you are today? 10) What are you doing now to sustain your</p>

## **Appendix B: Project Research Tool 1**

### **1: First Structured Interview Questions**

#### **Social Constructivist Conceptual Framework**

These typologies have been grouped around four tenets of the constructivist learning environment (Alt, 2014, 2017): Glass ceilings and sticky floors, Black women leaders, Resilience of women leaders, and social networking.

NAME: DATE:

TIME OF INTERVIEW:

Thank you for participating in this qualitative case study. This case study involves three data sources, but you as a participant will only be asked to participate in two data point. Today, we will complete the first structured interview that will last approximately one hour. I will ask you a series of questions that are aligned to help explore your executive leadership experiences as a Black woman working or who have worked at a predominately White higher education institution. I will record the interview for documentation and to maintain the accuracy of the interview.

Next, after careful scripting, I will arrange a second interview for us to member check information shared during the first interview. This interview will allow you to confirm the accuracy of the scripting and documentation of your responses from the first interview. I will also, use the member check interview to ask any additional questions that arise from the first interview.

I appreciate your willingness to participate in this study. If you would like a copy of your interview, I will provide it upon your request. Please remember that participation is completely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. Concordia University–Portland Office of Doctoral

Studies has approved the proposed study, and all requirements of IRB have been met.

### **First Structured Interview Questions**

#### **Glass Ceilings and Sticky Floors**

1. Describe your journey to executive leadership?
2. Where their difficulties in your journey?
3. Based on what you have accomplished, what do you consider your most important accomplishment?

#### **Black women leaders**

4. What leadership skills do you think are essential for executive leadership?
5. Can you share any experiences (share based on your comfort), that involved cultural, racial, or gender issues?

#### **Resilience of women leaders**

6. As a Black female define resilience in the context of your work life?
7. What did you do to keep pushing forward?
8. What was your journey from interest to promotion into the executive leadership position?

#### **Social networking**

9. Who are those you consider the most important in helping you become who you are today?
10. What are you doing now to sustain your momentum?
11. Anything additional you'd like to share?

## **Appendix C: Project Research Tool 2**

### **Member Checking Questions (Second Interview)**

The member check interviews will serve as a means of verifying the accuracy of the participant's words from the first interviews. The scripts from the first interviews will be shared and verified in these second interviews. All information warranting clarification will be included in the write-up and responses from these interviews. This interview will also be recorded and transcribed for accuracy purposes

NAME: DATE:

TIME OF INTERVIEW:

### **Member Check Interview Questions**

During the first-structured interviews, the subject of spirituality and the role of faith and family arose. Can you provide more insight into the role of spirituality, faith, and family within your journey to executive leadership?

## **Appendix D: Recruitment Scripts to be Used via Social Media and Email**

Dear potential participant:

Greetings, I am a doctoral candidate at Concordia University–Portland who is seeking participants to join in a research study I am conducting. I am seeking Black women participants who have or are currently serving in an executive leadership position at a predominately White institution of higher education. This research study will explore the experiences of Black women who have served or are currently navigating the experience from the executive leadership position. This email is an invitation to you to participate in the study. In order to be eligible for participation, you must identify as a Black woman who has previously or is currently serving in an executive leadership position at a predominately White institution of higher education.

Participation in this research study is completely voluntary, and you are free to withdraw from participating at any point, for any reason. Your name nor any personal identifying information will be associated with the research findings in any way. Only me as the researcher will know your identity as a participant, and I will keep all of your personal information confidential by using designated coding methods.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to engage in a first structured interview with me that will last approximately 1 hour. I will also be conducting member check interviews (second interviews) as a follow-up interview, which will last approximately 1 hour. This member check interview is a way of confirming and verifying information shared in the first interview and will allow time to address any new information or follow up questions.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please respond to this email. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Warmly,

Belinda Higgs Hyppolite

Principal Investigator, Concordia University–Portland

**Appendix E: Steps of Typological Analysis (Hatch, 2002, p. 153)**

1. Identify typologies that will be analyzed. Read the data, marking entries related to the identified typologies.
2. Read entries according to typology.
3. Record the main ideas in these entries on summary sheets.
4. Read the data and code entries according to patterns identified.
5. Keep a record of what entries go with which elements of the patterns.
6. Decide if patterns are supported by the data sets: search the data for non-examples of these patterns.
7. Look for relationships among patterns that have been identified.
8. Write patterns as one-sentence generalizations.
9. Select data excerpts that support generalizations.



## Appendix F: Typological Data Analysis/Coding Bank

Data will be coded according to predetermined typologies. After a review of Hatch (2002) and Harding (2013) concerning typological framework and coding techniques, I developed a code bank directly related to the typological categories of the experience of Black women who have served or are currently in executive leadership positions at predominately White institutions of higher education. I will keep a record of what entries go with what elements of identified patterns by participants, and I will color code the typologies which will help keep each typology organized. I will also keep a record of emerging categories that were not identified as focus areas to explore further in the member checking interview and for further exploration.

I used these preset typological categories that I created while writing the literature review to serve as my code bank. These codes link directly to the topics that I discussed in greater detail in chapter two literature review and also relate directly to the research questions of this study.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Typological Analysis (Hatch, 2002)</b> <i>(9-Step Process)</i></p>
--

<b>1. 4- Typologies</b>	<b>Codes</b>
Glass Ceiling & Sticky Floors	GC/SF
Black Women Leaders	BWL
Resiliency of Women Leaders	RWL
Social Networking	SN
New Emerging Typologies <i>(Acquired from reviewing interview transcripts)</i>	NET
<i>Coding is an analysis which is used to assign meaning and descriptions (Mile &amp; Huberman, 1994).</i>	

<p><b>2. Read entries according to typology.</b></p>
--

**3. Record the main ideas on the summary sheet from each interview**

**4. Code entries according to typological patterns identified.**

**5. Keep a record of what entries go with which typology and participant.**

**6. Decide if patterns are supported by the data sets: search the data for non-examples of these patterns.**

**7. Look for relationships among patterns that have been identified.**

**8. Write patterns as one-sentence generalizations.**

**9. Select data excerpts that support generalizations and conceptual framework.**

<b>Codes</b>	<b>Color Code</b>	<b>Typologies &amp; Sub-categories</b>	
<b>GC/SF</b>	<b>Red</b>	<b>Glass Ceiling</b>	<b>Sticky Floors</b>
		Marginalization	Stereotyping
		Barriers	Double Oppression
		Mentoring Relationships	Intersectionality
<b>BWL</b>	<b>Yellow</b>	<b>Black Women Leaders</b>	
<b>RWL</b>	<b>Pink</b>	<b>Resiliency of Women Leaders</b>	
<b>SN</b>	<b>Green</b>	<b>Social Networking</b>	
<b>NET</b>	<b>Blue</b>	<b>New Emerging Typologies</b>	

## **Appendix G: Statement of Original Work**

The Concordia University Doctorate of Education Program is a collaborative community of scholar-practitioners, who seek to transform society by pursuing ethically-informed, rigorously-researched, inquiry-based projects that benefit professional, institutional, and local educational contexts. Each member of the community affirms throughout their program of study, adherence to the principles and standards outlined in the Concordia University Academic Integrity Policy. This policy states the following:

### **Statement of academic integrity.**

As a member of the Concordia University community, I will neither engage in fraudulent or unauthorized behaviors in the presentation and completion of my work, nor will I provide unauthorized assistance to others.

### **Explanations:**

#### ***What does “fraudulent” mean?***

“Fraudulent” work is any material submitted for evaluation that is falsely or improperly presented as one’s own. This includes, but is not limited to texts, graphics and other multi-media files appropriated from any source, including another individual, that are intentionally presented as all or part of a candidate’s final work without full and complete documentation.

#### ***What is “unauthorized” assistance?***

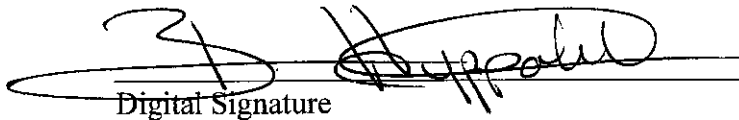
“Unauthorized assistance” refers to any support candidates solicit in the completion of their work, that has not been either explicitly specified as appropriate by the instructor, or any assistance that is understood in the class context as inappropriate. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Use of unauthorized notes or another’s work during an online test
- Use of unauthorized notes or personal assistance in an online exam setting
- Inappropriate collaboration in preparation and/or completion of a project
- Unauthorized solicitation of professional resources for the completion of the work.

### Statement of Original Work (Continued)

I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University–Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.
2. Where information and/or materials from outside sources has been used in the production of this dissertation, all information and/or materials from outside sources has been properly referenced and all permissions required for use of the information and/or materials have been obtained, in accordance with research standards outlined in the *Publication Manual of The American Psychological Association*.

  
Digital Signature

Belinda Higgs Hyppolite Name (Typed)

September 17, 2019

Date

## **Appendix H: Informed Consent Form**

**Research Study Title:** Black Women's Journey To Executive Leadership

**Principal Investigator:** Belinda Higgs Hyppolite

**Research Institution:** Concordia University–Portland

**Faculty Advisor:** Dr. Heather Miller

### **Purpose and what you will be doing:**

The purpose of this survey is to understand the experience of Black women who have or are currently serving in executive leadership positions at predominately White institutions of higher education. We expect approximately eight to ten Black women volunteers. No one will be paid to be in the study. We will begin enrollment on 3/01/2019 and end enrollment on 04/30/2019. I expect to interview eight to ten Black women executive leaders.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to engage in a first structured interview that will last for a minimum of 1 hour. Next, you will be asked to engage in a second member checking interview that will last for a minimum of 1 hour. The interviews will be voice recorded to ensure accurate data collection. Please be advised that each voice recording will be destroyed as soon as the interview has been transcribed and the data have been analyzed. If you object to being recorded, I will take notes during the interviews instead. The findings of the study will be provided to you upon request. Doing these things should take 2 hours total of your time.

### **Risks:**

There are no anticipated risks to participating in this study other than providing your information. Any personal information you provide will be coded so it cannot be linked to you. Any name or identifying information you give will be kept securely via electronic encryption. I will refer to your data with a code that only I know that links to you. I will not identify you in any publication or report. Your information will be kept private at all times. Any voice recordings will be destroyed as soon as they are accurately transcribed, and the data have been analyzed. All documents will be destroyed 3 years after I conclude this study.

### **Benefits:**

By participating in this research study, you will share information, which may be used to better understand the experiences of Black women working in executive leadership positions at predominately White institutions of higher education. The information shared may help to inform and equip future Black women as they navigate their personal journey towards executive leadership.

### **Confidentiality:**

Your personal information will not be distributed to any other agency and will be kept private and confidential. The only exception to this is if you tell me about abuse or neglect that makes me seriously concerned for your immediate health and safety.

**Right to Withdraw:**

Your participation is greatly appreciated, but I acknowledge that the questions I am asking are personal in nature. You are free at any point to choose not to engage with or stop the study. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. This study is not required and there is no penalty for not participating. If at any time you experience a negative emotion from answering the questions, I will stop asking you questions.

**Contact Information:**

You will receive a copy of this consent form. If you have questions, you may write to me at [redacted]. My doctoral studies chair is Dr. Heather Miller; she supervises me at Concordia University–Portland. You can contact her at heathmiller@cu-portland.edu. If you would like to talk with a participant advocate other than my doctoral studies chair or me, you can write to or call the director of our Institutional Review Board, Dr. OraLee Branch (email obranch@cu-portland.edu or call 503-493-6390).

**Your Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information. I asked questions if I had them, and my questions were answered. I volunteer my consent for this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Investigator Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Investigator Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date



Investigator: Belinda Higgs Hyppolite  
email: [redacted]  
c/o: Professor Dr. Heather Miller  
Concordia University–Portland  
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Portland, Oregon 97211