ABSTRACT

TERRY, DION. At the Intersection of Race and Gender: A Narrative Analysis of the Career Experiences of Black Women Senior Leaders in Community and Technical Colleges. (Under the direction of Alyssa Rockenbach and Paul Umbach).

The purpose of this study was to examine the intersection of race and gender in the experiences of Black women senior leaders in community colleges. Specifically, my study sought to answer the following research questions: (a) What have been the experiences of Black women senior leaders in community and technical colleges? (b) How do Black women senior leaders in community and technical colleges perceive the intersection of race and gender in the workplace?

A qualitative study using a narrative analysis research strategy was conducted among Black women senior leaders at community and technical colleges in a certain southeastern state. Interviewing was the primary data collection method. Each interview was tape recorded and transcribed. Field notes and journaling were additional data collection methods employed in the study. Multilevel coding was the specific data analysis tool used to uncover the emergent common themes among the research participants' responses.

Data analysis revealed that there were six common themes that emerged as a part of the participant's experiences. These were the importance of immediate and extended family units, the angry Black woman stereotype, the lack of formal mentoring, the perceived role of Black women senior leaders within their respective institutions, spirituality as a coping method and salary negotiation experiences.

Several conclusions were drawn from the study. First, the participants' desire to avoid being perceived as an angry Black woman was pervasive in many areas within their career experiences and interactions, including the experiences of managing staff and negotiating

salary. Additionally, intersectionality proved a useful tool as an interpretive framework for understanding their experiences in the context of race and gender. The unique social location created by membership in two historically oppressed groups provided a backdrop to all the experiences Black women have within their respective institutions.

At the Intersection of Race and Gender: A Narrative Analysis of the Career Experiences of Black Women Senior Leaders in Community and Technical Colleges

by
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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Maggie, who has always been my biggest fan. She believed I could do this and that was enough. A mother's confidence is always enough. It is also dedicated to my aunts, Ann, Lucille and Patricia, who love, support and inspire me. Finally, this dissertation is dedicated to the memories of Aunt Ann and Aunt Bernice, both of whom I lost during the doctoral journey. They didn't make it with me to the finish line, but I brought them with me in my mind and in my heart.

Each of these six women nobly, honorably and splendidly added a chapter to the story of my life. It is because of their legacies that this dissertation was completed.

BIOGRAPHY

Dion Terry is a North Carolina native who currently resides in Burlington and serves as the Executive Director of the Women's Resource Center in Alamance County. She is the only child of Lawrence McLean and Maggie McLean and the mother of Sara Terry.

Dion matriculated through the Cabarrus County and Robeson County school systems and graduated from South Robeson High School (Go Mustangs!). She earned her B.A. in Political Science from the University of North Carolina (Heel Pride!) and her Master of Public Administration from North Carolina Central University (E-Funk!). She earned her Ed.D. in Higher Education Administration from North Carolina State University, the alma mater of such notable alumni as Bill Friday, Hugh Shelton, Philip Rivers, J.J. Hickson and now Dr. Dion Terry.

Dion has worked in various non-profit and governmental agencies throughout the state. She is a licensed minister in the United Church of Christ. Dion is a sought after speaker and presenter, having conducted leadership and women's seminars throughout the Southeast.

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To God be the Glory; Great Things He has Done!

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Since the founding of Harvard College in 1636, higher education in the United States has changed significantly. Although postsecondary education was, initially, an undertaking for White, upper-class males, education has since come to be regarded as an equalizer for members of less advantaged groups, including women and ethnic minorities. Currently, women outnumber or equal men at the undergraduate and graduate levels of student participation (National Science Foundation, 2004). African Americans too have made great strides in college participation rates. Over 2.9 million Blacks were enrolled in college and technical schools in 2010, more than double the number from twenty-five years ago (United States Census Bureau, 2012). The landscape of higher education has indeed become more diverse as opportunities have opened up for people of different backgrounds and cultures.

Nearly 400 years into American higher education, though, the senior leadership has not changed nearly as much. Senior positions in two- and four-year institutions are still largely dominated by White males. The percentage of minority college presidents in 2011 was 13%, which actually represents a decrease of 1% from its 2006 high mark (Association of American Colleges & Universities, 2012). Black women held only 1.88% of all college and university presidencies nationwide (American Council on Education, 2007).

At the community college level, the numbers are stark. The presidents are mostly men (70%) and mostly White (79%). Nearly 84% of all community college presidents are over the age of 50; one-quarter over the age of 60. The next fifteen years will see this current cohort

leave the profession in droves (Boggs, 2011). Highly skilled, experienced leaders will be needed to navigate community colleges well into the future and a more diverse senior leadership will more closely mirror the constituents they will represent. Nearly half of all undergraduate students in the United States attend community colleges (AACC, 2011; Cohen & Brawer, 2008). Further, more women matriculate at and graduate from community colleges than men (Boggs, 2011). Student enrollment hovers at roughly 61% women to 39% men (AACC, 2011). The need for community college senior leadership to be more representative of the student population has never been more immediate. This study was conducted to give us a better understanding of Black women's experiences in community college senior leadership and develop a framework on which we can begin to build stepping stones for the next generation of diverse leaders to follow. In this way we can begin to ask and understand what has inhibited members of minority groups from attaining senior level leadership positions.

Currently, there are numerous theories as to what hinders Black women from attaining senior leadership positions (Amey & Van DerLinden, 2002; Gregory, 2001). One such theory is that they lack access to the institutions of power (e.g., mentoring relationships, leadership trainings, key mid-level positions) that facilitate such ascension. In short, Black women may be marginalized in programs or disciplines in higher education that lead to senior administrative positions. The organizational structure at many colleges and universities is often resistant to the inclusion of the non-archetypal leader (Thomas & Holland, 2001). Higher education, like most social institutions in America, is deeply rooted

in patriarchal traditions that deem men, especially White men, to be best suited for positions of headship (Collins, 1994; Collins, 2000; Rich, 1979). This predisposition may be a factor in the low representation of Black women in senior leadership.

In an effort to better understand what limits Black women's access to senior leadership positions in higher education, numerous research studies have been conducted on Black women at various stages within their higher education experience. There have been studies conducted on the participation rates of Black women students and professionals (Lewis & Middleton, 2003), the presence of Black women in the sciences (Hanson, 2004), the experiences of Black women leaders (Jean-Marie, Williams, & Sherman, 2009) and others' perceptions of Black women (Singh, Robinson, & Williams-Green, 1995). The bulk of this research, however, has attempted to depict Black women in terms of either "Blackness" or "womanhood," without considering how both social categories combine to affect the lived experiences of the target group (Collins, 2000; Dressel, Minkler, & Yen, 1997; Hulko, 2009; Mullings & Schulz, 2006). More specifically, higher education research has largely ignored the intersection of race and gender as it relates to the experiences of Black women. Studies and reports of membership within the academy generally present the rates of students, faculty, staff and senior administrators or presidents by ethnicity or gender. However, data on the number of Black women in the various positions within the academy are not readily available. Studies conducted on diversity within academia often fail to evaluate Black women as a unique social group, instead relegating them to a part of a larger group, namely Blacks or women. In copious reports on the composition of higher education

institutions (e.g., Boggs & Irwin, 2007; NCES Digest, 2008; Weisman & Vaughan, 2006) rarely is there definitive information about the presence or rates of participation specifically for Black women. As Black women continue to strive for greater representation at the senior levels of leadership within higher education, a failure to examine their experiences as a unique social group may inhibit their short- and long-term progress toward that end.

Existing studies cite two main reasons for the failure to consider the experiences of Black women. The first major reason social sciences and applied disciplines have not considered the influence of the intersection of race and gender on Black women is that, for a long time, there was not a consensus that this research endeavor was a necessity (Goff et. al., 2008). Indeed, a study of Blacks would certainly include Black women, just as a study of women would. However, studying Blacks or women as monolithic groups is now viewed as insufficient due to the difference in social standing between Black men and women and among women of various ethnicities. Goff, Steele and Davies (2008) showed empirically that the social category "Black" largely reflects representations of Black men, not of Black women. Additionally, the research shows that, within a social category, the features of the dominant subgroup (e.g., White women within women, Latino men within Latino/as) are often overrepresented within the category (Goff et al., 2008; Schneider, 2005).

Though earnest attempts have been made to understand Black women's experiences, they are often lost within the larger, dominant groups with which they are coupled. This can be especially dangerous for Black women who already hold a tenuous social position within the larger social context of many institutions, including colleges and universities. As an

example, women are generally stereotyped as emotional or expressing too much emotion for a given situation. However, empirical data on women broken down by ethnic group reveal that White participants view White women as emotional, Black women as hostile and Asian women as reserved (Hess, Beupre & Cheun, 2002; Landrine, 1985). Similarly, researchers have noted that stereotypes associated with Blackness are created largely based on perceptions of Black men (Eberhardt, Dasgupta, & Banaszynski, 2003), again consigning Black women to a position of collateral interest within a social category.

Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach (2008) coined the term *intersectional invisibility* to describe the experience whereby individuals with subordinate identities within a social group are made invisible. The rationale behind this is that within a social category (e.g., race, gender, sexual orientation), those members who have more social power or status within the group tend to be perceived as the prototype for that social category (e.g., White women are seen as more prototypically woman than Black women). When individuals are non-prototypical in multiple social groups (e.g., Black women; gay men of color), they become intersectionally invisible. This invisibility can lead to misrepresentation and marginalization of the group as well as feelings of isolation and powerlessness. Black women run the risk of being stereotyped by the perceived characteristics of the dominant subgroup within a social category, thereby explaining the need to examine and understand Black women as a distinct group.

The second rationale for a failure to examine the intersection of race and gender on the lived experiences of Black women is that intersectionality, by its very nature, lends itself

to the qualitative research paradigm and many disciplines have been reluctant to embrace qualitative research as a credible coequal to quantitative analysis (McCall, 2005; Riger, 2000; Stoppard & McMullen, 2003; Walker, 2003). Quantitative research as the dominant research approach in the social sciences relegates social categories such as race, class and gender to independent variables and is, therefore, limited in its ability to consider how the many social categories in which each person holds membership contribute to the overall experiences of the individual (Grills & Prus, 2008). Grills and Prus go further in this analysis: "Regrettably, such an understanding of the human sciences rests upon the false premise that scientific inquiry is restricted to data that is amenable to quantitative analysis and that the social sciences are to be advanced only by adopting the methods and approach to knowledge verification and construction found within the physical sciences" (p. 21). A reluctance to embrace qualitative research approaches as tools for understanding intersectionality restricts our ability to appreciate the unique experiences of members of oppressed groups.

Not all higher education research, however, is insensitive to the unique social location of Black women. In recent years, researchers in various disciplines have become aware of the need to consider the influence of the intersection of race and gender on the lived experiences of Black women (Cole, 2008; Collins, 2000; Grills & Prus, 2008). Moreover, the need for a research approach that is amenable to an examination of the influence of interlocking oppressions on a social group is not lost on feminists who have previously relied on quantitative methods to demonstrate the positionality of women. As Risman (2004) notes, "there is now considerable consensus growing that one must always take into consideration

multiple axes of oppression; to do otherwise presumes the Whiteness of women, the maleness of people of color and the heterosexuality of everyone" (p. 442). This is a particularly salient observation as it relates to higher education. Within academia, studies of race and gender often consider each as a variable independent of the influence of the other, rendering Black women students, faculty, staff and administrators—at times—intersectionally invisible. This is particularly problematic because the limited research available (Cole, 2008; Collins, 2000) on Black women senior leaders indicates that Black women often report experiences inconsistent with those of Black men or White women.

Statement of the Problem

The convergence of race and gender shapes all relationships that Black women have within families, communities and workplaces (Collins, 2000). Further, Black women currently hold a relatively small number of senior-level leadership positions in colleges and universities. Despite these realities, scant research has been conducted on Black women senior leaders within the academy to facilitate an understanding of how their workplace experiences are shaped by their social location (Grills & Prus, 2008; Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Patitu & Hinton, 2003). The existing empirical research on Black women in higher education largely approaches the social categories of race and gender as independent variables with little regard for how they amalgamate to create a unique social location (Cole, 2008; Grills & Prus, 2008; Warner, 2008). Existing research examining the effects of both race and gender on leadership has largely been conducted in consideration of performance results—i.e., how and how effectively women and/or minorities lead—rather than the

interaction of these oppressions with the lived experiences of the participants (Richardson & Loubier, 2008). Without attention to the ways in which individuals as members of historically disadvantaged groups are affected by their social location within a larger societal context, any understanding of their positionality is incomplete at best. This inattention to the intersection of race and gender creates a vacuum wherein the experiences of Black women are eclipsed by those of the dominant members within the group. This "all the Blacks are men and all the women are White" (Hull, Bell Scott, & Smith, 1982) phenomenon serves to silence the voices of Black women and thereby relegate them to second-class status within the groups appointed to represent them.

My study sought to facilitate a better understanding of the ways in which Black women perceived the intersection of race and gender in their experiences as senior leaders in higher education institutions, specifically community colleges. This study was aimed at achieving a better understanding of the workplace experiences of Black women senior leaders in community colleges and their perceptions of their roles in the workplace. I chose community colleges for their organizational mission and structure. The findings from this study will help further the growing body of research on Black women senior leaders in the academy.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of my study was to examine the intersection of race and gender in the experiences of Black women senior leaders in community colleges. Specifically, my study sought to answer the following research questions: (a) What have been the experiences of

Black women senior leaders in community and technical colleges? (b) How do Black women senior leaders in community and technical colleges perceive the intersection of race and gender in the workplace? Scant research has been conducted on this demographic with the intent of understanding how the intersection of race and gender creates a unique social location for Black women senior leaders in the academy. Every experience a Black woman has as a senior leader in a community college—every meeting she chairs, every employee she hires or fires, every budget request she approves—may be informed by her membership in multiple oppressed groups. A study of this nature allowed the participants to reflect on and report these experiences in their own words. This study was bounded by community college senior leadership and did not include Black women senior leaders at four-year institutions because of differences such as the hiring, promotion, retention and compensation policies in these two educational settings. Utilizing Black Feminist Theory as a theoretical framework for this study provides a sound analytical tool for a critical examination of the ways in which the intersection of race and gender created a unique social location for the women in this study (Collins, 2000). In addition, the research questions suggested the use of a qualitative research design to obtain thick, rich descriptions of the workplace experiences and perceptions of the women in this study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Denzin & Lincoln, 2007; Warner, 2008).

Theoretical Framework

Black Feminist Theory was used in this study to conduct a critical analysis of the intersection of race and gender in the lives and careers of the women in this study. Black

Feminist Theory is a critical social theory that is rooted in four core elements: thematic content, epistemological approaches, significance for empowerment and interpretive frameworks. Collins (2000) notes that while many of the core themes of the Black feminist experience (e.g., oppression, exploitation and susceptibility to assault in public and in the workplace) can be experienced by members of other marginalized groups, the totality of a Black woman's experience cannot be replicated by those of another group. Black Feminist Theory, however, provides a tool for others to understand the experiences of Black women. One of the major interpretive frameworks provided by Black Feminist Theory—intersectionality—was especially salient to this study as a mechanism for illuminating the experiences of Black women senior leaders in community colleges. As Collins notes, "intersectional paradigms remind us that oppression cannot be reduced to one fundamental type and that oppressions work together in producing injustice" (2000). Here Collins provides further evidence for the necessity of a qualitative research approach when considering the experiences of an oppressed group.

Intersectionality is "the idea that social identities such as race and gender interact to form qualitatively different meanings and experiences" (Warner, 2008, p.454). Intersectionality, as described by Crenshaw (1995) is manifest in two ways, categorical and political intersectionality. Categorical intersectionality attends to the ways in which the experience of membership in a category varies qualitatively as a function of other group memberships one holds. In other words, race shapes the experience of gender for Black women differently than for their White counterparts.

Second, intersectionality takes on a political manifestation. Political intersectionality reflects the ways in which those who occupy multiple subordinate identities may find themselves conflicted by the dueling political agendas of each constituency to which they belong. As an example, Black women may find themselves pulled at once between the civil rights agenda and the feminist agenda. Using intersectionality as an interpretive framework will allow for an understanding of the unique experiences of Black women and how these experiences shape the way they perceive themselves within a larger social context.

Method

Narrative analysis within a qualitative research paradigm was used for this research study. Narrative analysis was useful as a tool for me to gather and interpret the stories my participants used to describe their experiences. Additionally, it serves to mitigate the inherent power discrepancy between observer and object of study in that it affords the participant the opportunity to co-construct the narrative alongside the research (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). This works in concert with Black Feminist Theory's effort to both empower and emancipate (Johnson-Bailey, 2003). My participants were recruited from a single community college system in a southeastern state. Using interviews, observations and journaling I collected the data necessary to complete this research study.

Significance

This study is significant in that it examined the influence of the intersection of race and gender on the lives and careers of Black women senior leaders in community colleges. This study aimed to further the research and contribute to theory on Black women senior

leaders in the academy and be useful in understanding how their unique social location informs their daily interactions with superiors, peers and subordinates, as well as their paths to power. This study is an important contribution to the compendium of Black Feminist Theory, as we know and understand that Black women in academia wield the most power—and freedom from consequence—to grow the existing body of knowledge. It is important for those concerned with and committed to social equality because it provides an insight into the perceptions of unique members of multiple oppressed groups. A lack of existing research on this phenomenon demonstrates the need for this study to fill gaps in the higher education literature. Existing research has been limited in scope and a study of this nature will add much to the existing body of work.

This study also has methodological significance for the field of qualitative research. Using a qualitative research design allowed thick, rich descriptions of the participants' experiences to emerge from the data. Qualitative research provides an optimal approach for examining the convergence of race and gender oppressions on Black women (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Denzin & Lincoln, 2007; Goff, Steele & Davies, 2008; Grills & Prus, 2008; Warner, 2008). The collaborative nature of the research paradigm empowers the participant in a way that mitigates the subordinate positionality consistent with membership in multiple oppressed groups. This study aims to demonstrate how the use of narrative analysis within the qualitative research paradigm is useful in examining the intersection of multiple social categories.

Finally this study is beneficial both to practitioners in the field of higher education as well as programs that train community college leaders. Findings presented herein can provide a framework for practitioners to review and revise the existing hiring, retention and promotion policies for senior leaders in community colleges and other degree-granting institutions and enable higher education programs to target areas wherein a more diverse swath of students are ready to assume community college leadership. Currently, community college senior leadership is dominated by older, White men. Findings from this study may provide strategies to broaden the pool of senior leaders beyond that of the archetypal leader. Black women are largely underrepresented in the senior levels of higher education administration (Jackson & Phelps, 2004; Lewis & Middleton, 2003; Patitu & Hinton, 2003). This study provides qualitative data on the experiences of Black women currently situated in senior leadership positions from the participants' own perspectives.

Definition of Terms

Black

Black is a term that reflects a self-identified social category of race (Collins, 2000). For the purposes of this study Black people includes those of American and non-American heritage. At times, African American was used interchangeably due to inconsistency in the use of terminology in previous research.

Black Feminist Theory

Black Feminist Theory is a critical social theory that interprets Black women's location within a larger social, historical and political context (Collins, 2000). Black Feminist

Theory is widely accepted as an analytical tool for developing an interpretive framework for understanding the experiences of Black women.

Community Colleges

Community colleges are defined as "any institution regionally accredited to award the associate of arts or the associate of science as its highest degree" (Cohen & Brawer, 2008, p. 5). This definition includes all technical, vocational and junior colleges, whether public or private.

Gender

Gender is a socially constructed category that reflects learned behaviors and roles associated with being male and female (Rosenblum & Travis, 2003).

Historically Black College and University (HBCU)

An HBCU is an institution of higher education in the United States established before 1964 with the intention of serving the Black community (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). This is a designation recognized officially by the federal government for certain purposes.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a social theory that asserts that people live multiple, layered identities derived from social relations, history and the operation of structured power. In other words, people are members of more than one category or social group and can simultaneously experience advantages and disadvantages related to those different social groups (Richardson & Loubier, 2008).

Senior Leadership

Senior leadership of a community college consists of the president and all administrative employees who report directly to the president. These may include vice presidents (associate and assistant), deans, directors and other titles (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). Senior leadership and senior administration were used interchangeably throughout this study.

Chapter Summary

This research study is divided into five chapters. Chapter Two provides the review of the existing literature on the American community college as well as on the experiences of Black women in higher education. Additionally, it provides a comprehensive review of the theoretical framework that underpins this study, Black Feminist Theory. Chapter Three considers the methodology undertaken during this research study. It details the methods of data collection, analysis and organization. Further, it provides an understanding of the ways in which the study was limited.

Chapter Four presents the findings. In it I provide participant profiles and a consideration of the emergent common themes. Here I use a simulated conversation among the eight participants to demonstrate for the reader both the commonalities and disparate experiences of the participants. Finally, Chapter Five provides the conclusions drawn from the study. Here I outline the implications for future theory, research and practice.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

The purpose of my study was to examine the intersection of race and gender in the experiences of Black women senior leaders in community colleges. Specifically, my study sought to answer the following research questions: (a) What have been the experiences of Black women senior leaders in community and technical colleges? (b) How do Black women senior leaders in community and technical colleges perceive the intersection of race and gender in the workplace? This chapter provides a review of the relevant literature pertaining to community colleges and the experiences of Black women senior leaders therein. Also, this chapter provides a discussion of Black Feminist Theory in detail, which forms the basis of the theoretical framework wherein the study was located. Last, I have provided a chapter summary.

This review of the literature is divided into three sections. The first section will discuss the history and mission of community and technical colleges and their role both in higher education and in society over time. The second section evaluates the existing literature on the experiences of Black women leaders, primarily in higher education institutions. A comprehensive review of the higher education literature found few studies devoted solely to the experiences of Black women leaders in community colleges. As a matter of course, research on Black women leaders in two-year institutions is conducted in one of three ways: in conjunction with their counterparts at four-year institutions (Brown, 2005; Gregory, 2001), in tandem with Black women senior faculty members (Bonner & Thomas, 2001; Constantine

& Greer, 2003; Holmes, 2001), or in connection with other community college leaders (Amey, VanDerLinden, & Brown, 2002; Stephenson, 2001; VanDerLinden, 2004). Although studies like these help to illuminate the experiences of Black women senior leaders in community colleges, they often leave this researcher with more questions than answers regarding the accurate representation of the subgroup. The final section provides a discussion of the four core elements of Black Feminist Theory—thematic content, epistemological approaches, significance for empowerment and interpretive frameworks— as classified by Collins (2000) as a critical social theory and its relation to the study. These elements of Black Feminist Theory provide the theoretical framework wherein this study was situated.

Community Colleges

American community colleges have filled a void in higher education for more than 100 years. Community colleges arose from numerous social forces, namely the need for trained workers to operate the nation's expanding industries, a lengthened period of adolescence that requires more custodial-type care for young people and the desire for increased social equality and upward mobility, which would—in theory—be driven by greater access to higher education. In 1916, there were 74 public and private community colleges in the United States. By 1965, that number had ballooned to 719 and by 2005 to 1,173 (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). Community colleges enroll more than seven million students annually, which constitute nearly 44% of all undergraduates in the United States (AACC, 2011).

As a catalyst for social equality, community colleges have contributed much in the way of providing access for women and other minority groups. Nationally, the percentage of minority students—primarily Black and Latino students—who matriculate at community colleges closely mirrors the overall minority population of the various states. As an example, in Mississippi 35.9% of the population is Black, the highest of any state. The percent of students in Mississippi community colleges who are Black is a representative 36.4%. The Latino population of Mississippi is 0.8%. Its Latino community college student population is 0.6% (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). A similar occurrence can be found in New Mexico where the largest aggregate of Latinos can be found. The Black population is 1.8%. The Black community college student population is 2.3%. Latinos comprise 39.6% of the population and 37.2% of the community college student population (Cohen & Brawer, 2008 p. 54).

Since 1978, women have outpaced men in community college attendance (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). By 2003 women were ahead 58% to 42%. Further, in each year since 1978, more women than men have earned associate degrees. In 2006, 62.7% of all associate degrees were awarded to women (NCES Digest, 2006). These statistics demonstrate the great success community colleges have in providing higher education access and training opportunities to women and minority groups.

The senior leadership ranks of community colleges have traditionally been less welcoming to women and minority groups overall. They have been especially chilly to women *of* minority groups, particularly Black women (Boggs, 2011). Despite the historic mission of community colleges to provide increased social equality, there would seem to be a

contradiction between the recruitment of a diverse student body and the recruitment of a diverse administration. Nationally, the statistics present a grim picture of the access women and minorities have had to the highest levels of community college leadership. At the level of CEO, in 2011 males held these positions in 70% of community colleges nationally. The numbers are even more disheartening for ethnic minorities. White individuals hold 79% of the 957 CEO positions at American community colleges (AACC, 2011).

The employment trends of community colleges indicate that women and minorities are finding positions in mid-level management. Women currently hold 53% of the executive, managerial and administrative positions at community colleges. Individuals of color hold 20% (AACC, 2004). Traditionally, statistics presented on the demographics of community college leadership, like other areas in academe, are framed in terms of ethnicity *or* gender, rather than ethnicity *and* gender, making it difficult for researchers to fully ascertain the number of women within a given racial category who occupy senior-level positions. However, it is clear from the reported data that Black women are faring better in middle management than at the senior levels of community college leadership (AACC, 2004).

The future landscape of the American community college presidency presents a mixed picture of endings and new beginnings, shortage and opportunity. Indeed, the old guard of community college leadership is rapidly leaving the ranks, making room for a new generation of leaders. The open positions created by the change in community college leadership have produced mixed opportunities for women and ethnic minorities. In the ten years between 1991 and 2001 the number of women community college presidents increased

by 28%. Eighty-five (45%) of the 189 first-time presidential appointments during this time period were women (Boggs, 2003). Despite this encouraging news, only 17% of the women presidents were women of color. This statistic does not reflect the otherwise diverse nature of community colleges, which caters to students and faculty members of historically disadvantaged groups. On the other hand, the number of women community college presidents (33%) far outpaces that of women presidents at doctoral degree–granting institutions (22.3%) (ACE, 2012). There is, however, still much work to be done in this area, especially because, since 2001, the number of women in the community college presidency has ceased to increase and has subsequently leveled off (Weisman & Vaughan, 2006).

Experiences of Black Women Leaders in Higher Education Institutions

An examination of the research pertaining to African American women and leadership reveals a startling dearth of evidence. Studies about race and leadership compare White men to Black men. Studies about gender and leadership compare White men to White women. Black women are marginalized out of the modern dialogue about their place in managerial, supervisory or executive positions. This puts researchers in the position of making broad assumptions about Black women and leadership, assigning findings from studies conducted with Black men or White women to Black women as well (Northouse, 2007).

With respect to the research undertaken to make determinations about the effect of gender differences on effective leadership, little consideration has been given to the dissimilarities between White and Black women. The two groups are not homogeneous,

despite many commonalities and any study of gender roles in an American leadership context is incomplete without an acknowledgement of their differences. Several of the situational determinants outlined in Stewart's Model of Situational Determinants (Chemers, 1997) can be related to the differences between White and Black women. Stewart's Model of Situational Determinants asserts that there are many variables that impact the effectiveness of leaders, even within the same context. Broadly, their work patterns, relationships, constraints, exposure and choices are different, stemming from their different places in society. As an example, Chemers asserts that when controlling for numerous variables, the leadership styles of both Black and White women are not significantly different from those of men, however women are more susceptible to the impediments of the constraints put on them—for example, the presupposition that women (and minorities) are not equipped to lead as well as men (and Whites). If we accept this premise that Black women lead in a style similar to members of other social groups, we are obligated to consider the situational determinants that surround them, namely the unique social location created by the intersection of their race and gender.

The research that is available provides a window into the experiences of Black women in higher education leadership. A synthesis of the studies that have been conducted reveals several overarching themes. These themes motivated and influenced my own study as I was interested to hear if my participants articulated these same or similar issues and how they addressed them. These themes are the importance of Black women leaders as mentors, a conundrum between racism and sexism, marginalization of Black women leaders in the

workplace, a perceived lack of support from their superiors and spirituality as a coping method.

The Importance of Black Women Leaders as Mentors

The lack of Black women in leadership positions in academia has a negative impact on both Black faculty and students. Black women students seeking mentoring relationships often find it difficult to make connections with White faculty and administrators due to cultural differences (Patitu & Hinton, 2003). This can create a feeling of isolation for Black students, thereby prohibiting them from being as effective as they could be if given opportunities for mentoring. Also, the presence of Black faculty members correlates directly with the persistence rate of Black students. Black faculty numbers influence the enrollment, retention rate and graduation rate of Black students (Simpson, 2001).

Similarly, women seek out other women in leadership roles as mentors more quickly than they do men. Women mentors are thought to be more proficient in helping expedite plans for career advancement (Jones & DeWalt, 2006). Most female presidents of two- and four-year colleges report having a female mentor who impacted their career advancement (Brown, 2005). Of those mentors, more than half were college presidents and 43% were senior administrators. Brown further highlights in her findings the significance of having Black women senior leaders in position to mentor future senior leaders: "Obstacles and inequities continue to affect Women of Color and prevent them from breaking the glass ceiling. There are few Women of Color to serve as mentors and there is limited mentoring outreach to those who demonstrate the potential to serve as college presidents" (2005, p.

664). Despite the obvious benefits of mentoring relationships for women, they confront greater barriers to forming informal mentoring relationships than men largely because there are few women in the executive leadership positions for other women to engage (Ragins & Cotton, 1999).

A Conundrum Between Racism and Sexism

The major difference between Black women and their White contemporaries is social standing. Indeed, Black women have a lower social standing than White males, Black males and White women (Grils & Prus, 2008; Parker, 1996). This places Black women at a distinct disadvantage in the workplace, especially in the executive suite.

At the societal level, the distinct social status of African American women is painfully clear. As an example, African American women's average weekly income is 87%, 69% and 93% of the average weekly income of Anglo females, Anglo males and African American males, respectively (DOL, 2010). Further, the number of African American households headed by single women in 2010 was 52% compared to 16% for Anglo women (U.S.C.B., 2012). Thus, relative to other groups, African American women earn less and are more likely to manage alone the dual responsibilities of work and family.

Parker (1996) asserts that this combination of racial and gender disparity creates a distinct social location. Rather than being a double disadvantage for Black women, the coupling of the two creates a distinct social impediment for Black women. Essed (1991) calls this phenomenon "gendered racism" and asserts that the combination of being both Black and female creates a kind of double jeopardy. A study of managers' ratings of employees'

leadership potential reveals that here Black women have also a "double liability" (Landau, 1995). The study tracked managers' performance assessments of their employees. Landau (1995) found that Black women were penalized in managers' assessments for being Black and for being female. This is problematic because in many organizations, leadership potential scores are used to make decisions about promotions. If Black women are consistently rated lower than White males, Black males and White females, they will be systematically denied access to leadership positions, widening the already existing gap in leadership opportunities.

Racism and sexism have similar and differing effects on their target though they often work in tandem. For most Black women, the two are largely indistinguishable, causing the conundrum (Patitu & Hinton, 2003). This challenge is especially difficult for Black women to overcome when vying for senior-level positions because the processes for selecting elite leaders are largely unstructured, allowing for bias without accountability (Northouse, 2007). Unfortunately for Black women aspiring to top leadership roles, it is impossible to be assessed outside of their race and gender. They are observed first, leading to an activation of previously held stereotypes that can be difficult to overcome.

Marginalization of Black Women in the Workplace

One of the most consistent themes of the research on African American women in leadership positions is marginalization (Henry & Glenn, 2009; Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Patitu & Hinton, 2003). Patitu and Hinton (2003) define marginalization as any issue, situation or circumstance that places women outside the flow of power and influence within their organization. Patitu and Hinton indicate that Black women in their study reported

experiencing marginalization and lack of support from both their peers and managers, "for example, some of these women reported being sexually harassed by an immediate supervisor, being denied budgetary resources and being ignored and/or alienated altogether" (p. 87). Additionally, these researchers noted that racism, as opposed to sexism, presented greater challenges for Black women seeking promotion and tenure. Glazer-Ramo (2001) goes further, "as more women earn professional degrees for entry into traditionally male professions, women experience isolation, exclusion from informal networks and systemic discrimination" (p. 145).

Numerous studies (Catalyst, 2004; Parker, 1996; Patitu & Hinton, 2003) reveal that marginalization is one of the most difficult challenges Black women in leadership face. In the Catalyst (2004) study, one of the emergent themes was that of "double outsider" status. This phenomenon was experienced by Black women but not Black men or White women. As White males still retain most seats of power in higher education, Black men have gender in common with them, though not race. White women have race in common with them, though not gender. Black women have neither race nor gender in common with those who make up the established power structure. As a result, they struggle to find a common ground on which to begin building professional relationships (Hinton, 2009; Patitu & Hinton, 2003; Seidel, Polzer, & Stewart, 2000). Herein lays the root of the problem of marginalization, which takes many forms in organizations. Black women report being deliberately left out of the organizational decision making process, having information disseminated from their own

boss directly to their subordinates and hearing of important organizational changes from their employees. One account of this is particularly telling:

> There was a period when the vice-president that I reported to would only speak to me through my assistant because he is a man and he didn't want to talk to me. So if there was something major that happened, I was the last to know. He would meet with my assistant and tell him things until I went off! I went off several times and told him "I've had enough of it; I'm the director, this is what you pay me to do; this is the position you have given me and I want to be respected as that" (Patitu & Hinton, 2003, pg. 81).

Marginalization is even more caustic because Black women are invited into the setting where dominant groups assemble in organizations, however they must remain on the outside in terms of visibility. Collins (2000) describes this paradox as the "outsider within status." Black women leaders hear the dialogue from others in leadership but have no voice of their own. The lack of a personal or cultural fit to the larger group creates a marked sense of not belonging. This concept of being in the "out" group, rather than within the sphere of influence of the leader, often causes Black women leaders to escape the environment rather than stay and continue to languish in the never-ending cycle of being seen but not heard (Howard-Hamilton, 2003).

A Perceived Lack of Support from Supervisors

Black women often cite a lack of support as one of the challenges to effective leadership. Often there is only one Black person or Black woman in an organizational setting. Subsequently, the Black woman perceives that she has very little organizational support because she already considers herself to be in the organizational "out" group. When Black women do not find support in the work place, Howard-Hamilton (2003) asserts, they seek out

other Black women in organizations to counteract the effects of marginalization. When there are few or no other Black women, feelings of isolation can become overwhelming. Black women's very survival is often contingent on feeling commonalities with their peers. Black women also cited a lack of support as having other negative impacts on their professional experiences (Hall, Everett, & Hamilton-Mason, 2011; Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Lack of support, for these women, comes in the form of sexual harassment, unreasonable budget constraints, denial of programming to increase diverse student enrollment, verbal abuse from African American men and being ignored, isolated or alienated (Henry & Glenn, 2009; Jean-Marie, Williams, & Sherman, 2009; Patitu & Hinton, 2003). Black women often report being given fewer financial resources than male counterparts but being expected to do as much or more with them (Jean-Marie, Williams, & Sherman, 2009). Black women often feel as though there is no remedy for the lack of support issues they face or worse, that there are reprisals for bringing these issues to light. As a result, Black women are usually willing to allow instances of blatant sexual harassment, racial discrimination and sexism to go unchallenged (Catalyst, 2004; Jean-Marie, Williams, & Sherman, 2009). The fact that Black women feel they have little recourse in dealing with these issues in the workplace creates a disturbing atmosphere that is prohibitive to Black women's ability to rise into leadership roles and lead effectively (Parker, 1996).

Spirituality as a Coping Method

The many challenges that Black women face in leadership roles can leave them feeling isolated and overwhelmed. Black women often perceive themselves as having to lead

from a position of overcoming stereotypes that they are or may be aggressive, rude, or highly sexualized, among other characteristics (Walker, 2009). Many of these challenges are often unique to Black women in that they do not perceive members of other groups to be confronted with the same struggles. This perception can be further exacerbated by the fact that Black women are often the only Black person or Black woman in a senior leadership position within an organization (Mattis, 2002; Walker, 2009). Consequently, Black women have to seek out coping methods to effectively withstand the pressures.

The research shows that invariably Black women turn to spirituality. Black women often turn to their faith in God and use prayer and spiritual development when they feel stresses at work (Patitu & Hinton, 2003). Black women also cite their religious upbringing, indicating that the idea of turning to spirituality during troubled times is ingrained in them from childhood (Simpson, 2001). Mattis (2002) asserts the Black women connect spirituality not just to their ability to cope with workplace challenges but also to their sense of purpose and destiny in the workplace. Black women, more than any other group, hold fast to the idea that God is the one who put them in a particular place, therefore it only makes sense to turn to Him when challenges arise (Mattis, 2002; Simpson, 2001). Shirley Walker, a professor of social work at a predominantly White institution in Belton, TX, discusses at length her career choices and how she sees God's hand at work leading her with each new assignment (Walker, 2009). This melding of spirituality and career is not uncommon for Black women at all levels of career. According to Simpson (2001), though women of other groups also experience workplace challenges, the idea of using spirituality as a mechanism for coping

with a God-ordained assignment is more often noted by Black women than members of any other group.

The aforementioned themes – the importance of Black women leaders as mentors, a conundrum between racism and sexism, marginalization of Black women leaders in the workplace, a perceived lack of support from their superiors and spirituality as a coping method – are not intended to be an exhaustive list of the workplace challenges encountered by Black women in higher educational settings. Rather, they represent the most persistent themes as reported through numerous research studies of Black women in the academy. These themes are consistent with broader research using Black Feminist Theory as a critical social theory committed to the emancipation and empowerment of Black women as an oppressed group in the United States. Black women outside of academia also struggle with many of these same challenges and seek out support and coping mechanisms to navigate a society that socially locates them at the intersection of membership in two historically oppressed groups.

Black Feminist Theory

Black Feminist Theory is a critical social theory that reflects an ongoing attempt to emancipate and empower Black women who have been victimized by a tradition of political, social and historical oppression that dates back to government-sanctioned slavery in the United States. The impetus for critical social theory that considers the position of Black women as a monolithic group grew out of an understanding of two main precepts. First, that Black women in the United States are members of an oppressed group (Collins, 2000). Black

women maintain subordinate positions within race, gender and nation, creating and sustaining the need for an activist response. Second, Black women as a group are often relegated to second-class status within the larger groups wherein they hold membership. To the extent that critical social theory exists to emancipate and empower, critical race theory serves to be more useful for male members of oppressed racial groups and critical feminist theory proves useful to serve the interests of female members of majority groups. Black Feminist Theory emerged as an important tool for Black women to make visible the inherent differences in their unique position and struggle.

The body of work that comprises Black Feminist Theory has been contributed to by degreed intellectuals, middle-class working professionals, domestics and field hands alike (Collins, 2000). It is more than a compendium of the scholarly works of researchers concerned with the relocation of Black women in society. Rather, every Black woman contributes to the body of thought through lived experiences, written and oral discourses and large and small acts of resistance. Black Feminist Theory is predicated on four core elements – thematic content, epistemological approaches, significance for empowerment and interpretive frameworks (Collins 2000). These core elements position Black Feminist Theory as a functional tool for understanding how the intersection of race, class and gender inform the lived experiences of Black women.

Thematic Content

Black Feminist Theory provides several overarching themes that are germane to the unique experiences of Black women as a social group. It is from these themes that an

understanding of the experiences of Black women is fashioned. Black Feminist Theory regards as themes the legacy of struggle in response to targeted violence, the construction of cultural narratives regarding Black women and the curse of strong womanhood. From these themes emerges a framework through which an understanding of Black women's unique experiences can be created.

One core theme involves the legacy of struggle in response to the violence directed at Black women as members of multiple oppressed groups. The interrelation of White supremacy and male dominance creates a twofold struggle for Black women wherein they are constantly at risk of being the target of violence (Cannon, 1985). This violence can be both of the physical nature as well as mental and emotional violence as Black women are vulnerable to assault in the streets, the workplaces, in media representations, even within the confines of their own homes and relationships (Collins, 1998; Hurston, 1937; Richardson & Taylor, 2009). Collins (2000) asserts that the legacy of struggle among Black women is a thread binding them together irrespective of changes in era, social class, education or other factors. Indeed, Sojourner Truth in 1853 (Painter, 1993) and Anna Julia Cooper (1892) lamented the susceptibility of Black women to numerous forms of assault. Black women's vulnerability in the face of external threats may lead them to maintain a constant vigilance in their social interactions with others. As Black women senior leaders in community colleges, this apprehension may affect their daily workplace experiences, including interactions with superiors, colleagues, subordinates and even students. Black women's vulnerability to numerous forms of assault in public coupled with Parker's (1996) assertion that such acts of

harassment are often ignored or underreported may create an environment whereby their ability to lead or manage others is impeded by the historic legacy of struggle.

In addition to the legacy of struggle, a persistent theme experienced by Black women is the pervasive nature of cultural narratives. Black women constantly confront scenarios wherein the nature of their reality is constructed by someone other than themselves—generally the larger societal culture (e.g., media and entertainment, educational system, government). Despite the uniqueness of Black women as individuals, they are often viewed stereotypically as being similar in demeanor, temperament and actions (Collins, 2000; Grills & Prus, 2008). These stereotypes usually take on one of three manifestations—that of mammy, jezebel or welfare queen (Collins, 2000). Each of these representations serves to marginalize Black women by giving members of the dominant groups, (i.e. Whites, men), the power to create and control the conceptualization of Black women's varied experiences.

The representation of Black women as mammies has a long and storied history in the United States. Mammies historically have done domestic service work within the homes of White families including cooking, cleaning and caring for their children (Collins, 2000; West, 1993). Although Black women rarely perform domestic service work in homes today, mammy work has simply taken on new forms (Omolade, 1994). Rather than working in one home with one family, now Black women disproportionately hold domestic service employment in fast-food restaurants, day-care centers, nursing homes and dry cleaners. These positions generally offer little to no job security, benefits or scheduling flexibility, perpetually leaving Black women to rely on the largess of the members of the dominant

groups that overwhelmingly manage their work places (Weigt & Solomon, 2008). The women in this study do not work in these types of service-oriented professions and, as senior leaders in higher education institutions, enjoy some measure of autonomy in their daily work, scheduling, etc. Membership in senior level administration, however, does not render them immune from the implications of the representation of Black women as domestic servants to Whites. As Collins (200) notes, these cultural narratives are pervasive and believed to be stereotypically indicative of Black women as a whole. This leaves Black women in senior administration in a position of conflict between what is their professional role (leadership, authority, power) and what may be *perceived* to be their professional role (subservience, subordination, powerlessness) by members of the dominant group.

In addition to the representation of Black women as mammies, their frequent depiction as jezebels is also a conceptualization that challenges their ability to self-define. Collins (2000) asserts that efforts to control Black women's sexuality are at the heart of their oppression. By characterizing them as jezebels or whores or hoochies, members of the dominant group are provided with a ready rationalization for sexually aggressive behavior targeted toward Black women. This behavior can include anything from sexual harassment to rape and can further create an apprehension in Black women who are especially vulnerable to various forms of sexual assault. Bartky (1990) contends that Black women are stereotyped as "lustful" and "hot blooded" (p. 23) and therefore lacking in the instinctive controls that separate people from animals. As such, these women with animalistic instincts must depend on members of the dominant group to govern or control their daily experiences. These

controls are put into practice in workplaces, schools, courts, even in Congress as managers, judges and legislators make decisions about Black women's dress, child custody, reproductive rights and so forth. The message is clear; Black women need Whites and males to decide what is best for them as sexual beings because they are not capable of doing so for themselves.

Perhaps the most insidious stereotype of Black women is that of the welfare queen. State entitlement programs developed to support poor working-class families were, for many years after their creation, inaccessible to Black women. As Black women gained more political power and demanded access to social welfare benefits, a cultural narrative emerged of Black women as "breeders" who had several children for the sole purpose of earning a check and living off of the government, i.e., the hardworking, socially responsible, White taxpayers (Collins, 2000). This cultural narrative has proven extremely difficult for Black women to surmount in the face of government policies and media portrayals that imprint firmly into the consciousness of American society the image of Black woman as the single mother of many children who depends on welfare for her very existence. Many of these entitlement programs, including Social Security, unemployment compensation, college grants, child welfare programs and free and reduced lunch programs were never created for nor intended to serve Black women; yet after the shrinkage of the inner-city job market of the United States during the 1980s, many started to receive these benefits (Amott, 1990; Quadagno, 1994; Squires, 1994). It was at this same time that the need for state entitlement assistance became widely stigmatized in the media and other contexts, leading numerous

politicians to convert the war on poverty into a war on the poor. As senior-level leaders in community colleges, the women in this study will likely not be current benefactors of state entitlement programs. However, their current socioeconomic status is no protection against the cultural narrative of the Black woman as welfare queen.

Each of these cultural narratives is similar in that it requires Black women to be dependent on the dominant group. Whether for employment, entitlement or existence, Black women are represented as needing Whites and men to help them navigate their daily lives. As these stereotypes are perpetuated, they begin to assume a hegemonic nature of sorts, lending themselves to the idea that it is natural for members of the dominant group to be in control of Black women's reality construction. As these cultural narratives are considered in the context of this research study, one must consider the ways in which Black women senior leaders' reality is constructed through such narratives of hyper-sexualized, welfare queen and mammy. Despite holding traditionally powerful positions in higher education institutions, is these women's power mitigated—even neutralized—by possibly more powerful narratives of stereotypically negative behavior on the part of Black women?

In addition to the legacy of struggle and the impact of cultural narratives on the lived experiences of Black women, the curse of "strong womanhood" is a theme that persists to define what it means to be a Black woman. Strong womanhood conceptualizes many subthemes—those of Black woman as matriarch of a "male-less" family, Black woman as full-time worker and full-time mother simultaneously, Black woman as independent – needing a man for nothing and Black woman as the foundation of Black social institutions,

including families, churches and civic groups (Bartky, 1990; Collins, 1998; Collins, 2000; Hancock, 2008; Weigt & Solomon, 2008). The Black woman as strong and independent in this country has its root in the history of slavery. During slavery, Black couples and families were intentionally torn apart to keep them from unifying and building strength to rise against their oppressors (Collins, 2000). As a result, Black women became the matriarchs or heads of families, families often not even related to them by blood or marriage. This was done simply to survive. Though Black women are no longer enslaved, they still find themselves often holding together "families" that, without their intervention, would not survive.

This representation is problematic for two reasons. First, it is a highly masculinized image of Black women. The prevailing image of "true womanhood" in this country is represented by a White, middle-class, heterosexual female who serves in a subordinate capacity to her husband. This woman administers the home and children with ease, working outside the home as needed while seamlessly managing the family's affairs (Collins, 1998). The image of Black woman as matriarch runs counter to this image as she becomes the head of her household with no patriarch to which she may subordinate. Accordingly, she cannot model the proper image of womanhood to her children, thereby perpetuating a condition wherein Black girls never learn how to become true women nor do Black boys learn how to grow up and assume their rightful positions of dominance over their households. As this cycle continues, Black women are seen as more independent and as taking on the more masculine gender attributes of competence, adeptness and physical and emotional strength (Bartky, 1990).

The representation of strong womanhood is also problematic for Black women because it can be threatening to members of the dominant group. As Black women break through glass ceilings in corporate America, higher education, government agencies and the military, their presence can affront members of the dominant group who see them as trying to seize positions that do not rightfully belong to them (Hancock, 2008). This condition can also be burdensome for Black marriages if the woman holds employment that wields more managerial authority than that of her husband. As Hancock (2008) notes, "[even] in the nicest of conversations, we've received the message, 'No Black man will ever marry you if you are too angry, too stringent, too feminist, too much. Better to have someone minimally in our lives or … achieve less economically or academically so as to not "intimidate" a Black male emasculated by racism'" (p. 22). Likewise, the stereotype of Black women who are strong and independent can create a threat to members of the dominant group. Black women senior leaders in higher education institutions have already demonstrated above average achievement—they represent a small minority of all senior leaders—and as such are atypical to the more 'marriageable' Black woman Hancock (2008) describes.

Epistemological Approaches

In addition to the thematic content Black Feminist Theory provides as a tool for interpreting the diverse experiences of Black women, it also offers various epistemological approaches that are useful for comprehending how Black women understand their positionality within a larger societal context. Epistemology addresses "how we know what we know" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Collins, 2000; Harding, 1987). Therefore, Black

Feminist Theory helps us to understand how Black women engage in the process of knowing. Three epistemological approaches present themselves for consideration within the Black Feminist Theory framework: Black women intellectuals as situated knowers, Black women as builders on an existing story and Black women as tellers of their own stories (Collins, 2000; Waring, 2003).

Quite possibly the most visible, outspoken members of the community of Black feminism are those with an outlet for their expression—writers, scholars and members of the academy. While the collective is comprised of Black elites, executives, scholars, middle-class professionals and the working class alike, it is those in the academy who have the requisite combination of intellectual skill and academic freedom to pierce the social consciousness and remain largely unscathed. Black women intellectuals built Black Feminist Theory as a critical social theory based on their membership within multiple oppressed groups. From their positionality as both women and Blacks, they became aware of the failure of both the feminist movement and the civil rights movement to attend to the most salient needs of Black women. This awareness prompted the development of a critical theory that would address these needs.

Black women intellectuals, like all Black women, are situated at the intersection of race and gender. This intersectionality informs all of their experiences within academia, including scholarship, research and writing and educational leadership, thereby placing Black women in the position of situated knowers. Collins (2000) posits that Black women intellectuals' greatest contribution to Black Feminist Theory is the use of their access and

acceptance to observe and report the experiences of Black women. Black women intellectuals enjoy insider status of a sort and as a result can present empirical data confidently from that perspective. Collins (2000) herself, as a Black woman exploring Black Feminist Theory as a critical social theory, describes how she wrestles with the decision to use "I", "my," and "our" rather than "she," "her," and "their" in her own writing. Collins opts for first-person in her narratives, believing that her membership in the social categories of Black and woman supersedes her membership in the academy wherein distance and neutrality are highly valued tenets of scholarship.

This knowing that Black women intellectuals engage in comes from two sources, internal and external (Etter-Lewis, 1991). Neither source is intuitive, according to Etter-Lewis; rather the knowing is a by-product of interactions with others. The external source of knowing comes from things heard or learned from others' experiences (i.e., "I knew it could happen to me if it happened to another Black woman"). These are the experiences Black women internalize if they happen to other Black women that they know or know of. The internal source of knowing comes from a Black woman's own experiences, (i.e., "I knew if it happened to me in the past, it could happen to me again"). As Black women process their lived experiences and those of other Black women, a situated knowledge begins to develop over time. This knowledge is fluid, evolving over time as layers of experiences and social interactions are added to the foundation of a Black woman's life (Grills & Prus, 2008). This point was particularly salient to my own study, as the women are a part of the intellectual community but have taken various paths to get to their current positions and had unique and

individual stories to share. Though Black women have in common membership in a unique social location (Collins, 2000), my participants demonstrated clearly how that membership, combined with further common membership in higher education senior administration, does little to mitigate the uniqueness of each one's lived experiences and subsequent reality construction. Each woman, as Grills & Prus (2008) predicted, presented a socially constructed reality consistent with her unique experiences, relationships and interactions.

Black Feminist Theory as a critical social theory relies not only on Black women intellectuals as situated knowers, but on all Black women as builders on an existing story. Perhaps this epistemological vision is best articulated by Alice Walker (Washington, 1982), "I believe that the truth about any subject only comes when all sides of the story are put together and all their different meanings make one new one. Each writer writes the missing parts to the other writer's story. And the whole story is what I'm after" (p. 49).

Contemporary Black feminists are charged, not to alter or ignore the existing body of literature that is Black Feminist Theory, but rather to build on it. This epistemological approach is essential for two reasons. First, the struggle itself has evolved. Black women are no longer enslaved on Southern plantations, relegated to in-home domestic service, denied access to higher education, government services or public or private sector employment. These were the challenges faced by an earlier generation. As the struggle evolves, the story also must also evolve lest the entire movement become irrelevant. Second, this approach builds validity for Black Feminist Theory as a critical social theory by proving its

sustainability as new contributors take up the mantle. The contemporary contributions to Black Feminist Theory must build on the historical contributions or risk fracturing the foundation laid by the Sojourner Truths, Anna Julia Coopers and countless others. To do so would endanger the Eurocentric knowledge validation process of Black Feminist Theory. As Collins (2000) notes, in the United States there are social institutions such as colleges and universities that legitimate knowledge. Knowledge validation processes are controlled by members of the dominant group—generally elite, White males—and Black Feminist Theory is subject to such processes. The knowledge claims of Black Feminist Theory must satisfy the epistemological criteria wherein it resides or risk being demoted to second-class status. In short, it is vital that contemporary contributors to the compendium of Black Feminist Theory make claims that are consistent with established epistemological understandings as promulgated by those with the power to determine what is, in fact, accepted as sound epistemology.

To say that Black feminists must build on an existing story is not to deny the presence of one's own story and the uniqueness it possesses. In fact, Black Feminist Theory challenges Black women to tell their own stories as an epistemological approach to detach from the cultural narratives produced by members of the dominant group to represent Black women. Collins (2000) posits that the ability to define a group is a privilege enjoyed by the dominant group. This means that elite, White men are empowered through numerous venues to tell not only their stories but Black women's stories as well. This power comes from a prevailing wisdom that believes oppressed groups are not as capable of interpreting their own

experiences and must rely on the dominant group to analyze the "Other." This "Other-ing" serves to objectify Black women, which is a central requirement for sustaining existing power relationships. The telling of one's own story then becomes an exercise in subjectivity for Black women and is vital in their self-definition process. Herein lies an essential component of Black Feminist Theory's importance as a critical social theory; it provides a framework for Black women to tell their own story in a manner that can be validated as sound epistemology. Without Black Feminist Theory as a tool for knowledge construction, the participant narratives in this study would be reduced to a mere collection of stories with no mechanism by which to extract similar and disparate themes in an effort to emancipate and empower.

Significance for Empowerment

Inasmuch as Black Feminist Theory provides a framework for the telling of one's own story, it also offers significant opportunity for the empowerment of Black women as well as members of other oppressed groups. As a critical social theory, Black Feminist Theory by definition sought to empower and emancipate. If the objective of Black Feminist Theory is only to emancipate and empower Black women then, as a movement, it fails to truly achieve either of these goals. Since the nineteenth century Black women have recognized that their struggle is rooted in the larger struggle for human dignity. Anna Julia Cooper said it cogently,

> [The] colored woman feels that woman's cause is one and universal; and that …not till race, color, sex and condition are seen as accidents and not the substance of life; not till the universal title of humanity to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness is conceded to be

> inalienable to all; not till then is woman's lesson taught and woman's cause won—not the White woman's nor the Black woman's, nor the red woman's but the cause of every man and of every woman who has writhed silently under a mighty wrong (Loewenberg & Bogin, 1976, p. 330–331).

Black Feminist Theory by its very nature must concern itself with the plight of other historically oppressed groups or it is nothing more than a movement to replace one hegemonic social structure with another. As Shirley Chisholm writes, "in working toward our own freedom, we can help others work free from the traps of their stereotypes. In the end, anti-Black, anti-female and all forms of discrimination are equivalent to the same thing—anti-humanism. We must reject not only the stereotypes that others have of us but also those we have of ourselves and others" (1970, p. 181). Rooted in the Black Feminist Theory conceptualization is the ability to engage and empower other groups. As an example, many of the domestic service positions largely occupied by Black women during the pre–Civil Rights era are now held by Latinas. Often these women or members of their immediate family are undocumented workers and, as a result, occupy a tenuous social location in American society. As Black women have transitioned out of these low-wage, low-security, low-privilege positions, Black Feminist Theory has challenged them to secure tacit human freedoms alongside members of other oppressed groups rather than at the expense of those persons. Collins (2000) declares that Black feminists should never stop questioning social injustices, whether they are perpetrated on Black women or on any oppressed group. It is important to note that though Collins asserts that all Black women contribute to Black Feminist Theory through their lived experiences, members of the academy have both more

freedom and more power to use its knowledge validation processes to liberate members of oppressed groups. As senior leaders in higher education institutions, the women in this study may be the most able to use their epistemologies to help others construct and embrace their own unique socially constructed realities.

Interpretive Frameworks

The final core element of Black Feminist Theory is interpretive frameworks, which present a tool by which social phenomena are explained (Collins, 2000). Interpretive frameworks help solidify Black Feminist Theory as a critical social theory by providing instruments through which the experiences of Black women can be both explained and understood. Intersectionality serves as an interpretive framework of Black Feminist Theory. Intersectionality addresses the social identities that serve as organizing features of social relations, mutually constituting, reinforcing and naturalizing one another (Shields, 2008). This definition represents a change from previous attempts to operationalize intersectionality. Gamson and Moon (2004) assert that researchers have been attending to the intersections of multiple oppressions but have failed to ask the question of how these oppressions impact each other. Increasingly, the growing body of literature on intersectionality sought to ask and answer these questions (Cole, 2008; Shields, 2008; Warner, 2008). An examination of the existing literature on intersectionality as an interpretive framework reveals several themes. These themes are the relationship between the individual and the institution, stereotyping and other people's perceptions and the fluidity of intersectionality.

Relationship Between Individual and Institution

Intersectionality considers the ways in which multiple oppressions constitute and impact one another. For Black women, minimally, it considers the ways in which being Black and being a woman work in concert to inform each of their lived experiences and social interactions. Within families, workplaces, churches or civic organizations, Black women are individuals in relationships with various institutions. These relationships are predicated on numerous expectations that are socialized in individuals at an early age. Hierarchies of gender and age are socialized and reproduced in Black women through their initial relationships within families (Collins, 1998). Men are the head of women; husbands have authority over wives, due singularly to their gender. Women—mothers—have authority over their children due to their age and child status. This hierarchy is socially constructed, and as it is reproduced over generations, it becomes hegemonic and seen as natural (Collins, 1998; Lorde, 1984/2007). These hierarchical expectations are not limited to families; social institutions mirror family dynamics in that, traditionally, there is an expectation of men holding positions of authority over women and of older workers—i.e., those with more seniority—holding positions of authority over those with less seniority. Bartky (1990) argues that in addition to the hierarchy of gender and age is the hierarchy of race wherein members of the dominant group hold positions of authority over others based on their increased competence and more highly developed intellect. Indeed, White men and White women enjoy shared racial privileges associated with being White. However it is understood that White women should defer to White men. Among people of color, this expectation is the

same; women also must subordinate to their men, often to support them in the struggle for racial equality (Collins, 1998).

Black women, in relationships with numerous social institutions, receive the message that, based on their membership in various social categories, they are on the lower end of the respective hierarchies. These social expectations can become problematic as Black women seek senior-level leadership positions in organizations where they will hold authority over persons whom, traditionally, would be in authority over them. This was an interesting avenue to explore in my own research as I studied Black women in senior leadership in academia, where older, White males have historically been the authority. If the women in the study received messages that they did not belong at the pinnacle of community college leadership, they rejected them in favor of more emancipatory messages.

In addition to hierarchical expectations, the existing hegemonic structure of institutions is such that White men—and White women as a result of familiar relationships with White men—have an expectation of an inheritance as a means of social mobility (Collins, 1998). This inheritance may take the form of financial resources if the family is wealthy, however the most common form of inheritance for working-class White males is opportunity. For blue-collar workers, inheritance may constitute an apprenticeship in a family-owned business with the tacit understanding that the son will take over the reins from the father at some point. For white-collar families the inheritance of opportunity generally takes the form of college attendance, entry- to mid-level jobs and networking. Both blue- and white-collar White males may receive property as a portion of inheritance. As Black women

move into senior-level leadership positions, they often meet resistance from members of the dominant group who perceive high-wage, high-status jobs as a part of their "natural" inheritance and consider Black women to be, metaphorically, trespassing on private property (Collins, 1998). Within social institutions led by Black males, such as Black families, Black churches and HBCUs, the phenomena of Black women as trespassers is not an alien one. Black women consistently report disillusionment with Black men who persistently maintain sexist attitudes while disparaging Whites for similar racist attitudes (Collins, 1998; Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1995; Hancock, 2008; Hurston, 1937). Membership in multiple oppressed groups can be extremely frustrating for Black women as they perceive resistance to their advancement, seemingly on every hand. This frustration creates the catalyst for the advancement of Black Feminist Theory, as Black women recognize the inadequacy of White-dominated feminist and male-dominated civil rights movements to attend to their unique needs (Warner, 2008).

Stereotyping and Other People's Perceptions

In addition to the relationship between the individual and the institution, a salient theme of intersectionality is stereotyping and other people's perceptions. Lorde (1984/2007) presciently described the mythical norm—White, male, young, thin, heterosexual, Christian and financially secure. Membership in any social group that differs from this norm brings with it the attachment of a negative perception or stereotype (Hulko, 2009). Membership in multiple subordinate groups forces Black women to contend with numerous, sometimes conflicting, stereotypes. As individuals engage in social interactions within institutions, they

assign certain characteristics to members of other social groups based on their perceptions of and previous experiences with members of those groups (Grills & Prus, 2008). These assignments inform their engagements and create suppositions about individuals who represent certain groups. Black women as a group are often initially perceived as intellectually underdeveloped, uncivilized children who must rely on the intellectual maturity of White adults for survival (Bartky, 1990; Collins, 1998). For Black women senior leaders, these suppositions would be especially dangerous because they work in positions of authority over people who may, in effect, perceive them to be subordinate. It is a reasonable assertion that Black women will bring suppositions and stereotypes of Whites and males into their social interactions as well. However, negative cultural narratives differentially affect Black women as they find themselves situated at the intersection of multiple oppressions (Hancock, 2008). Black women experience life in social institutions within the social constructs of race and gender (Richardson & Taylor, 2009). Indeed, Black women cannot work, act, interact, engage others or even live outside the place that is informed by their membership in a minority race and subordinate gender.

Fluidity of Intersectionality

The final theme of intersectionality as an interpretive framework is that of its fluidity. A Black woman's identity is at once stable and dynamic (Shields, 2008). In most social settings, Black women represent the "Other"—something other than Lorde's norm. However, the salience of the various oppressed groups within which Black women hold membership fluctuates. Social location is not a static category; it is contextual. Although an individual's

life experiences are shaped by social location, this can vary based on the context of the experience. As an example, Black women in predominately White organizations may feel the burden of the dual axes of oppression of race and gender. However, Black women in predominately Black institutions may feel comfortable in their "Blackness" and find only their gender oppressive. Similarly, Black women intellectuals may not have the same struggles with class issues that inform the experiences of Black women domestic service workers. Even for the same Black woman, identity is a moving target, changing and being negotiated throughout her social life (Diamond & Butterworth, 2008). Her identity shifts over time and place as her social location changes.

Chapter Summary

Seeking a greater understanding of the workplace experiences of Black women senior leaders in community colleges is an important research topic for many reasons. The existing research on community colleges and Black women in higher education reveals several dilemmas that they currently face. These range from a lack of Black women senior leaders as mentors to marginalization to a lack of support. To increase the participation rates and improve the workplace satisfaction of Black women senior leaders in the academy, it is important to attend to these issues. The existing literature presents a social location for Black women outside that of the dominant group. Further, it demonstrates a lack of commonality of experience among Black women and members of other social groups. Despite these differences, the women in this study have been able to ascend to the highest levels of community college leadership, assuming positions of authority historically denied them.

This demonstrates the importance of Black Feminist Theory as a critical social theory to illuminate the career experiences of the women in this study. The four core elements of Black Feminist Theory provide a lens through which the experiences of Black women can be viewed effectively. For this research study the four core elements assist in situating the participant narratives within the larger compendium of knowledge construction that Black Feminist Theory provides. Each participant narrative was analyzed through the critical social lens of Black Feminist Theory in an effort to make meaning of the stories and to understand the participants' perceptions of the intersection of race and gender in relation to their career experiences.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

The purpose of my study was to examine the intersection of race and gender in the experiences of Black women senior leaders in community colleges. Specifically, my study sought to answer the following research questions: (a) What have been the experiences of Black women senior leaders in community and technical colleges? (b) How do Black women senior leaders in community and technical colleges perceive the intersection of race and gender in the workplace? Although the participants in this study had race and gender in common, the existing research indicates that the experiences of these Black women will vary widely in relation to contextual factors (Collins, 2000; Grills & Prus, 2008).

This chapter offers a justification for the use of a qualitative research approach. Descriptions of the research design and methods used to collect and analyze the relevant study data are also included. This chapter contains the following sections: overview of qualitative research, narrative analysis, research design, data collection, data analysis**,** trustworthiness, positionality, ethical issues, limitations and chapter summary.

Overview of Qualitative Research

The research study employed a qualitative research strategy. Qualitative research refers to any type of research that produces findings not derived from statistical procedures or other means of quantification (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) describe qualitative research as a situated activity that locates the observer in the participant's world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make that world visible to those

outside it. Qualitative research is a naturalistic approach concerned with the meaning people attach to experiences within their social world (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Qualitative research assumes that one's reality is socially constructed; the reality is neither fixed, measurable nor agreed upon. Rather, there are multiple constructions and interpretations of reality that are dynamic and changing over time (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Merriam & Associates, 2002; McMillan & Wergin, 2006). Qualitative research seeks to understand the multiplicity of realities that individuals construct from their interactions with social institutions within their world.

Qualitative research has two major approaches, interpretive and critical (Merriam & Associates, 2002). An interpretive approach to qualitative research examines how people interact with the larger world around them and the meaning they derive from these interactions. The critical approach is also concerned with the ways in which individuals make meaning of their interactions within larger societal institutions, but it emphasizes an understanding of the roles these institutions play in the meaning-making process for the individuals. The critical qualitative approach asks how the social and political aspects of an institution shape the reality construction for the individual. As an example, an interpretive qualitative study of first-year college students might examine how they interact with professors and other students, or how they learned the campus, registration processes and so forth and what meaning they construct from these experiences. A critical qualitative study of the same individuals might examine how the established processes and procedures of the school influence the meaning-making process for the first-year students. Both are concerned

with the social construction of reality, but the critical approach considers the influence of societal institutions on the reality construction process.

I chose qualitative research for this study based on a desire to obtain a deeper understanding of the meaning the participants attach to their workplace experiences and interactions. This study is critical rather than interpretive though these approaches are not mutually exclusive. Though the focus of this study is the ways in which the social and political institutions in which these Black women senior leaders hold membership (e.g., families, community colleges, society) influence their construction of reality, I am also concerned with the meaning they derive from these experiences. This critical approach is complementary to the use of intersectionality as one of Black Feminist Theory's interpretive frameworks for knowledge construction. The intersection of race and gender creates a unique social location for Black women that influences their reality construction in numerous ways. A critical qualitative study coupled with the tenets of Black Feminist Theory provides powerful analytical tools for the participants' narratives.

Qualitative research has a goal of describing the forms and processes of relationships between categories of phenomena and the themes and meanings relevant to these categories (Creswell, 1998; Patton, 1990). This stance makes the qualitative researcher more open to emergent phenomena than the quantitative researcher whose work is driven by hypotheses determined a priori. Qualitative research is highly iterative in nature in that theories emerge during the data collection and analysis processes. Qualitative research relies on an inductive approach to theory building; it identifies themes and categories and the relationships between

them (Creswell, 1998; Merriam & Associates, 2002). Qualitative researchers generally approach topics of study without fully formed hypotheses rather relying on Yin's (2002) approach wherein the researcher follows three steps: make observations, study the observations and search for a pattern (making a statement of what is occurring) and make a tentative conclusion or generalization about how some aspect of the world operates.

Narrative Analysis

Within the qualitative paradigm, there are various distinctions that guide the research process. These distinctions have been defined by qualitative researchers as "orientations" (Patton, 1990), "designs" (Tesch, 1990), "traditions" (Creswell, 1998), or "strategies" (Denzin & Lincon, 2000). Within academia, researchers use many different strategies to glean useful study data. Among these, narrative analysis serves as a powerful tool by which the researcher can gather and interpret the stories individuals use to describe their experiences (Hatch, 2002). A core element of narrative analysis is that the accounts are told first person in story form (Merriam & Associates, 2002). Narrative analysis is a way of understanding experience that forms a collaborative between researcher and participant, over time and place in social interactions (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). These stories can be presented in various ways, including oral histories, family stories, research interviews, journals, autobiographies, letters, conversations and field notes. What makes these diverse texts narratives is the sequential and consequential nature of the text (Riessman, 2005). Narratives can be long, such as in the case of one's life story, or they can be more brief, as in the recounting of a particular experience. They can be uninterrupted or fragmented, but the

more fragmented the narrative becomes, the greater the chance for crucial meanings to be lost (Riessman, 1997). The stories are usually spatially (e.g., "at my mother's house") and temporally (e.g., "before I was married") located (Riessman, 1997). Narratives serve numerous purposes both for the storyteller and the listener. They can be, at once, persuasive, liberating, convicting and inspiring.

Narrative analysis embraces the story as both the method and phenomenon of study (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Within narrative analysis, there are three common strategies (psychological, biographical, discourse) used to perform the actual analysis of the narratives (Merriam & Associates, 2002). The psychological strategy looks at the relevant study data to determine the internal thoughts and motivations of the individual. In contrast, the biographical strategy views the individual in relation to society, considering such factors as class, family structure and hierarchy and gender in the analysis of the narratives. Rather than attend to the internal or external motivations within the narrative, discourse analysis examines the written text or recorded words, searching out changes in pitch, intonation or pace as clues to the meaning behind the experience. Of these strategies, I completed a biographical narrative analysis. This strategy for narrative analysis is consistent both with the critical qualitative research approach and the critical social framework that Black Feminist Theory provides in that narrative analysis is beneficial for knowledge construction both to participant and researcher. Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) assert that both participant and researcher learn from the narrative analysis process as they develop and navigate an interactive research relationship. The storyteller seeks the aid of the listener in

collaboratively constructing the narrative (Riessman, 1997). Further, qualitative studies of Black women frequently use narrative analysis because its interactive and collaborative nature helps to attenuate much of the natural power disparities between researcher and participant (Johnson-Bailey, 2003). Such empowerment of Black women is consistent with the core elements of Black Feminist Theory.

Narrative analysis as a qualitative research approach complements Black Feminist Theory as a critical social theory in numerous additional ways. First, it affords the participant an opportunity to tell her own story and to build on an existing one. Storytelling is a fundamental epistemological approach of Black Feminist Theory (Collins, 2000). Dillard (2000) addresses the use of narratives to articulate epistemologies, "Narratives provide spaces where African American women 'can know who we are when we are most us'" (p. 664). Narratives provide meaning for marginalized people by critically examining sociocultural issues such as race, gender and social class that occur in relation to a phenomenon such as leadership (Taylor, 2004; Walker, 2009). Narrative analysis was a natural fit for this study because of its ability to enlighten and empower both researcher and participant. Narrative analysis also has the capacity to consider the relationship between each of the oppressed groups in which Black women hold membership simultaneously rather than reducing any one of them to an independent variable. In this way, narrative analysis is well suited for a qualitative examination of the intersection of race and gender.

Narrative analysis is also consistent with Black Feminist Theory's epistemological approaches in that it allows for the fluidity of a Black woman's knowledge construction.

Because Black women's knowledge construction is at once static and dynamic (Shields, 2008), providing a mechanism wherein the participants can share large portions of their stories intact captures the fluidity of the knowledge construction process. Rather than capturing a snapshot of a certain time and space, narrative analysis allows for the construction of reality to evolve over the course of the story.

Research Design

This study sought to understand the workplace experiences of Black women senior-level leaders in community colleges. Purposeful (non-probability) sampling is the sampling method of choice for this research. Merriam (1998) explains that purposeful sampling is based on the premise that the researcher chooses a sample from which the most can be learned to understand the phenomenon of interest. Thus, to learn the most about the phenomenon of study, the researcher must select samples that will provide the richest information. Patton (2002) describes information-rich samples as those that will allow the researcher to gain substantial knowledge about the primary purpose of inquiry. Merriam (1998) identifies an important purposeful sampling prerequisite: determination of the selection criteria required to choose the people or sites that were studied. The selection criteria for this study required that the sample population meet all of the following:

1) must be a woman of Black/African American descent;
2) must be a senior leader at a community college (senior leader is defined as anyone in an administrative position who is or who reports directly to the president or CEO);
3) must be currently employed by a certain public community college system of a southeastern state.

This study is bounded by employment in a public community college system rather than any other type of higher education institution to ensure a measure of consistency with regards to hiring, promotion and compensation policies. This type of sampling is homogeneous sampling, wherein the participant group is narrowed by a single common variable (Patton, 2002). This is not to say that the experiences of each participant were homogeneous, rather that the participants have in common participation in the same community college system.

I chose "senior leaders" as my sample rather than "leaders" for two reasons. First, a review of the literature of Black women in leadership positions in academia told me that Black women are making great strides at the middle-management levels. Women currently hold a majority of the mid-level leadership positions in community colleges and ethnic minorities hold a representative 20% of these jobs (AACC, 2004). In short, Black women are finding success as department directors, program coordinators and so forth. However, there seems to be a metaphorical ceiling above which Black women find it difficult to ascend. The women in the study have ascended beyond the middle management level and, as such, are in a position to discuss the nature of their experiences and how they perceive their roles in the workplace.

Second, the increasing numbers of Black women at the middle-management level means that there are fewer Black women leaders who are the "first" or "only." This refers to the phenomenon wherein a Black woman in a leadership position encounters the resistance associated with being the first or only Black or Black woman in a leadership position within

her unit (Collins, 2000). However, at the senior level of leadership (e.g., president, vice-president, dean, etc.), the first or only phenomena is still widely experienced. This creates a different positionality for Black women senior leaders and, for me as the researcher, a different topic of study.

Initially, I ascertained from the community college Web site the number of Black women in senior leadership positions as of 2010. I then contacted the institutional research officer of the community college system via email requesting the contact information for the eligible participants. I identified myself to the institutional researcher as an individual conducting primary research in fulfillment of a doctoral degree. The institutional research officer replied via email with the names and employment sites of the eligible participants. Eighteen names were provided to me. An internet search of the participants revealed that two had subsequently retired, rendering them ineligible to participate in the research study. Additionally, I requested information regarding the community college system requirements for conducting primary research on employees. I received written permission from the Institutional Review Board of North Carolina State University and the institutional research office of the community college system to conduct the study.

Each of the sixteen eligible participants was contacted via email and asked to participate in the study. Those that consented to participate in the study were emailed a research packet to include a brief description of the study, consent form and profile information sheet to be returned to the researcher prior to the interview. The consent form explained the intent of the study and apprised the participant of her rights. The profile

information sheet asked basic questions about the participant's upbringing, families and careers. Of the sixteen eligible women I emailed, eight agreed to participate in the research study.

Data Collection

According to Patton (2002), qualitative results are derived from three types of data collection: 1) in-depth, open-ended interviews, 2) direct observation and 3) written documents. Moreover, Patton (2002) observes that the combined use of observations, interviews and document analysis enhances the ability of the fieldworker to verify the findings of the study. Although there are numerous data collection methods within the qualitative research paradigm, interviews provide perhaps the richest form of gathering intact narratives in narrative analysis. Polkinghorne (1995) notes that, "Interviews appear to be the most often used source of storied narratives in contemporary narrative inquiry" (p. 12). Interviews offer participants an opportunity to reflect and reveal, thereby providing the thick, rich descriptions indicative of a narrative analysis approach to qualitative research. Describing the analysis of narratives, Polkinghorne states, "researchers collect stories as data and analyze them with paradigmatic processes. The paradigmatic analysis results in descriptions of themes that hold across the stories or in taxonomies of types of stories, characters or settings" (p.12). In narrative analysis, the challenge is to examine and synthesize data that have been collected in the form of a story for themes that permeate throughout.

Interviews

For the purposes of this study, each participant was asked to sit for a semi-structured, interview, sixty to ninety minutes in length. Interviews are a necessary data collection method when researchers cannot observe how individuals interpret meaning (Merriam, 1998). Interviews can range from highly structured, where specific questions and their order are predetermined, to completely unstructured, wherein the researcher has no prescribed questions, only a topic area to be researched. Most interviews fall somewhere in between. This study was no different in that I used the flexibility of the semi-structured interview to maximize my potential for eliciting thick, rich data. Semi-structured interviews are important for qualitative research because of this flexibility. I used an interview guide (see appendix) but remained free to ask follow-up questions dependent on the participant's responses. In this way, the participants and I collaborated to determine the flow and tenor of the interview (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). For my study, the questions were flexibly worded and open-ended to allow for new ideas and themes to emerge (Newman & Benz, 1998). As with a narrative analysis approach to qualitative research, I was interested in the stories that the participants recounted of their various workplace experiences. My intention was to leave the narratives largely intact; fragmenting them increases the likelihood that the meaning would be lost (Riessman, 1997).

The interviews were conducted via telephone at prearranged times to provide sufficient confidentiality and comfort for the participant. The interview guide was segregated into three sections with questions categorized as personal, professional and cultural. I tape-

recorded each interview using both a digital and cassette recorder. The interview guide consisted of twenty-one questions that asked the participants to describe various workplace experiences and their perceptions of different situations. Questions regarding the participants' family life were included to seek a greater understanding of their experiences and perceptions. Each interview was transcribed afterward. The cassettes were secured in a locked file cabinet to be used only as a backup. The digital recordings were uploaded to my personal laptop and password protected. The original digital recordings were then deleted. The interviews, once transcribed, were stored on my personal laptop in a password protected folder. The hard copies of the interviews were secured in a locked file cabinet.

Field Notes and Reflective Journaling

Field notes and journaling can be an important supplementary data collection method to support interviewing (Merriam, 1998). After each interview I journaled about the experience, noting things of particular interest or import to the research project. I also journaled after reading each transcript to begin extracting themes from the data.

The journal entries, personal reflections and extracted themes from the data comprised my field notes. Data collected through field notes helped to inform the study and data collected through interviews. In this way, I tried to connect the experiences of the participants to the larger compendium of Black Feminist Theory research by returning to the four core elements after each interview was recorded and again after each was transcribed.

Document Analysis

As Patton (2002) notes, document analysis enhances the ability of the fieldworker to verify the findings of the study. For this research project I received the initial list of eligible participants from the community college office. I conducted internet searches of each participant to match their current work location and job title to the list provided me. Subsequently I discovered that over the course of the project two of the eighteen participants had retired. Those two women were rendered ineligible for the study, leaving sixteen who met the non-probability sampling criteria.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is the systematic process of organizing, synthesizing and interpreting the collected data, thereby increasing one's understanding of the phenomena of study (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Merriam, 1998). Qualitative research is inductive in that data analysis occurs simultaneously with data collection (Merriam & Associates, 2002). The data analysis process is dynamic; it neither begins nor ends at a fixed point in the research project. For my study, each recorded interview was transcribed verbatim immediately after the interview. This is crucial because, as Riessman (1997) notes, the analytic work of narrative analysis requires "detailed transcriptions" and attention to "narrative form" and "rhythmicity." Reading these transcripts numerous times and reviewing my field notes formed the basis of my data analysis. Additionally, I frequently reread the purpose, problem statement and research questions from the study throughout the analysis process to ensure that I stayed grounded to its conceptual framework.

Data from the interviews was coded using an open coding strategy. Polkinghorne (1995) recommends analyzing the data thematically, looking for categories and connecting threads, patterns and themes within and across each participant's experiences. I sought to come to the transcripts with an "open attitude, seeking what emerges as important and of interest from the text" (Seidman, 2006, p. 117). During this first level of coding I looked for commonalities and differences among the narratives. This level of coding was particularly powerful for me because it reflected on the participant stories. Some were so similar that the participants even used the same cliché or expression to convey their meaning. At other times the participants shared similar stories but attached differing meanings to each. This first level of coding led me to present the findings in a simulated, conversational style. As I coded the narratives and reflected on my field notes, it felt as though a conversation was emerging from the narratives. During the second level of coding I used the transcripts and field notes to look for themes consistent with the four topic areas of Black Feminist Theory to identify and develop emerging themes from the data. The final level of coding consisted of using the transcripts and field notes to determine themes consistent with the two research questions. Results from each of these coding strategies were synthesized for the final analysis.

When conducting qualitative inquiry, there can be a desire on the part of the researcher to force all the data into cleanly identified themes (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This tendency can inhibit the researcher's ability to accurately interpret experiences that contradict these themes. I took care to respect the emergent nature of the participants' narratives by using words and phrases from the participants' interviews to develop thematic

codes. I paid careful attention to what Miles and Huberman (1994) call the contradictory narratives, outliers or surprises.

Trustworthiness

Issues of trustworthiness are important considerations to ensure the believability of the study's findings. Trustworthiness, both internal and external, creates a means of ensuring the interpretive accuracy of the findings of the study (Creswell, 1998; Lincoln and Guda, 1985; Merriam, 1998; Merriam et al., 2002). Several strategies were employed in the study to achieve trustworthiness. Merriam (1998) identifies six strategies researchers can use to enhance internal trustworthiness. These include: triangulation, member checks, long-term observation, peer examination, participatory or collaborative modes of research and disclosure of researcher positionality. For this study, I worked to ensure trustworthiness by member checking and disclosing my positionality as a researcher.

Merriam (1998) and Merriam et al. (2002) describe member checking as the process of taking data and preliminary interpretations back to the participants from whom they were derived and asking them if the results are consistent. For the study, I provided the narrative profiles to the participants so that they could determine whether their words, experiences and intent had been captured accurately and contextually.

Additionally, Merriam asserts that internal reliability is achieved through a clarification of the assumptions, worldview, biases, experiences and theoretical orientation of the researcher in relation to the study. This allows the reader to come to an understanding of

how the researcher arrived at a certain interpretation of the relevant data (Merriam et al., 2002).

Positionality

Researcher positionality disclosure consists of the researcher revealing her past experiences, orientations and prejudices (Creswell, 1998). This is vitally important because, in qualitative research, the researcher becomes the research instrument. Positionality refers to the numerous ways in which people are categorized in a hierarchical society (Collins, 2000). The positionality of the researcher, specifically in terms of race and gender, impacts the research process. My positionality as a Black woman in higher education formed the basis for my decision to conduct this research study in particular. Initially, I sought to study women in leadership through a critical feminist lens. However, my professor at that time, Dr. Paul Umbach, challenged me to consider the ways in which women of different ethnic backgrounds make meaning of gender in a racial context. This was my first introduction to intersectionality—though at that time I had no word for it—and I allowed the existing literature to guide me to a point where I believed this research study would benefit from attending to women of one ethnic group only. There is, perhaps, a danger in the researcher sharing a common social location with the research subjects. As a Black woman also in academia, at times the interviews became more like conversations, like two friends casually discussing common issues of work, family, race, religion. Although this connection led to a mutual trust between researcher and participant, it could also create a situation wherein the researcher draws assumptions from her own experiences rather than listening for and being

attuned to the ways in which the participants made meaning of their unique experiences, interactions and perceptions.

An important element of positionality is the insider or outsider status of the researcher. Banks (1998) presents a four-part typology that characterizes the complex nature of the researcher's position: the indigenous-insider, the indigenous-outsider, the external-insider and the external-outsider. While indigenous and external refer to the relationship of the researcher to the group being researched, the terms insider and outsider describe the researcher's political and cultural connectedness, or lack thereof, to the researched group. Banks' four-part typology shares common views with Merton's (1972) insider-outsider concept. Though it was previously accepted that researchers were either insiders or outsiders, recent discussions point out that the boundaries between the two positions are blurred (Merriam & Associates, 2002). In fact, depending on the setting, each of us may assume the role of both insider and outsider. According to Banks' (1998) typology, I would consider myself to be, minimally, an external-insider. I had a cultural connectedness to the women in the study as I, too, am a Black woman. This status assumes, as Collins (2000) also does, that there are numerous experiences, understandings and social phenomena that are common to all Black women without regard to other factors such as education level or socioeconomic status.

This positionality created for me a guarded optimism that the common bonds of race and gender would provide a foundation on which to build trust during the interviewing process (Johnson-Bailey, 1999; Merriam et al., 2002) and I was rewarded with that trust.

However, there was no way in which I could escape this connectedness, such that I could come to the research project as a blank slate without preconceived ideas about how and where Black women are socially located within institutions. The challenge for me as the researcher was to avoid all attempts to speak for the participants based on my own positionality, interactions and perceptions and constantly evaluate how the experiences of the participants were being represented in the study.

Despite my insider status as a Black woman, I also had an external perspective due to my lack of community college leadership experience. My lack of relevant professional experience afforded me the opportunity to hear the participants speak of their experiences with fresh ears. As Pinnegar & Daynes (2007) state, the very nature of qualitative research is that it is beneficial for instruction both to the participant and the researcher.

Race and gender and even community college leadership experience, were not the only areas of congruence that could affect the collaborative nature of my relationship with the participants. As Riessman (1997) notes, collaboration between researcher and participant can be aided, or limited, by the level of congruence of race, gender, culture, class or kinship. In truth, race and gender are the easy things to determine. It was a more difficult task to determine my congruence with the participants in the various areas that are not so overtly visible. My positionality with the participants varied based on our similarities and differences.

External trustworthiness is another component in the believability of qualitative research. According to Merriam (1998), external trustworthiness addresses the

generalizability of the research findings. If one examines generalizability from a statistical view, qualitative findings will not be generalizable and this should not be an intended goal of qualitative research (Merriam, 1998; Merriam et al., 2002). Furthermore, Merriam (1998) places the impetus on the reader to determine the contextual applicability of the findings of a study. The intent of the study was to seek a greater understanding of the workplace experiences of senior-level Black women in community colleges rather than to provide findings that are generalizable to Black women senior leaders in community colleges in a statistical manner.

The absence of generalizability as an intended goal in qualitative research does not mean there are no strategies researchers can use to address external trustworthiness. Indeed, providing rich, thick descriptions allows readers to compare the similarities and differences of their situations to the ones described in the relevant research project (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998; Merriam et al., 2002). Additionally, maximum variation can be used as an additional strategy to enhance external trustworthiness (Merriam 1998; Merriam et al., 2002). The logic of this strategy is based on including diversity in site selection (e.g., community colleges located in rural and suburban areas) that allow the findings to be applied across a wider spectrum. The study was conducted with participants in the central and eastern regions of a southeastern state. There were no eligible participants in the western region of the state. Campuses in the western region of the state are consistently more rural with smaller numbers of students. The central and eastern regions serve more urban campuses with a higher concentration of students from diverse populations.

Another consideration of trustworthiness is that of reliability. Reliability refers to the potential of repeating a study and producing similar findings (Merriam, 1998; Merriam et al., 2002). Although, in quantitative research, reliability involves repeated measurements of the event being studied, human behavior is capricious and constantly evolving. As a consequence, the probability of replicating a qualitative study and achieving similar results is highly unlikely. Merriam and Simpson (2000) assert that the more important objective of qualitative researchers is to derive results that are consistent with the collected data. One way to ensure this is the use of an audit trail. An audit trail is essentially a recipe that provides descriptive details on how data were collected, themes were selected and decisions were made (Merriam, 1998; Merriam et al., 2002). An audit trail allows future researchers to duplicate the design and implementation of a study, rather than guaranteeing similar results. Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe six methods for maintaining an audit trail: raw data (field notes and digital interview recordings), data reduction and analysis (multilevel coding), data reconstruction and synthesis (participant profiles and findings presented through a simulated conversation), process notes (journaling), information about intentions and disposition (research proposal) and instrument development information (semi-structured interview protocol). In this study I have provided a detailed description of my research approach, sampling criteria, data collection and analysis as a means for future duplication of the study design.

Ethical Issues

Despite the aforementioned positionality that I brought to the study, it was conducted with a careful attention to the issue of ethics. Merriam et al. (2002) define a good qualitative study as one that strives to ensure ethical behavior is maintained throughout the research process. Merriam (1998) posits that in qualitative studies, ethical issues generally arise during the collecting of data and sharing of the findings of the study. The two dominant issues that most guidelines of ethics in research with humans must confront are informed consent and protection of subjects (Bogdan and Biklen, 1998). General guidelines have been developed to make certain that subjects are voluntary participants who understand the nature of the study and the obligations involved and subjects are not exposed to any risks that may outweigh the potential gains. Wolf (1996) outlines three considerations for ethical study—inequalities inherent in the positionality of the research, possible exploitation of the researched by the researcher and the power of writing and representing.

Inequalities may be created by positionality, typically when a researcher is "studying down" (Wolf, 1996, p. ix). Largely, this was not a concern of my study. I was "studying up" in that I was interviewing senior leaders in community colleges over whom I had no real or implied control. Also, I hold membership in the same subordinate social groups as the participants, further attenuating the impact of my positionality.

The power exerted during the research process, between the researcher and the researched, relates to exploitation, which may occur when the fieldworker uses her advantage to gain her goals at a real cost to the women she is studying (Wolf, 1996). Though I certainly

had personal goals connected to the completion of this study, primarily the completion a doctoral degree, I did not exploit the participants of my study in any way to obtain my goal. On the contrary, I was meticulously careful with all that the participants entrusted to me.

Wolf (1996) described the third power issue as relating to writing and representing. Glesne (1999) reminded the researcher that "life as told is a re-presentation; the life and the telling are not the same thing" (p. 178). This is a particularly salient point; as the researcher I was the instrument. Despite the collaborative nature of qualitative analysis, I still retained a great deal of control over the final re-presentation of the participants. My goal was to accurately and contextually re-present their experiences.

During the data collection process, I addressed relevant ethical issues by carefully reviewing the intent of the study with each research participant, including ensuring that consent forms were well understood. Additionally, participants had the option of refusing to answer any questions. Regarding ethical issues that arose during the dissemination of the study findings, I used member checks as opportunities to preempt ethical issues before they arose.

I sought to further reduce any ethical concerns regarding informed consent and protection of subjects by meticulously adhering to the spirit and letter of any and all guidelines, policies and procedures of the university's Institutional Review Board. Neither the state, the community college system nor the names of the community colleges are disclosed in the study. Further, due to the limited numbers of eligible participants, neither

their ages nor job titles were disclosed in this study. This was done to protect both the privacy and the anonymity of the participants.

Limitations

This study was undertaken to better understand the experiences of Black women senior leaders in community colleges. As with any qualitative study, there are limitations that must be addressed and attended to. Primarily, this study was limited by the available sample size. There were only sixteen potential participants who met all the criteria outlined above. These sixteen represent a small percentage of the overall senior-level management of the community college system. Further, according to information obtained from the system Web site, these individuals were concentrated in two of the three state regions. One region was not represented in senior leadership by a Black woman. This could, depending on the nature of the participants' responses, cause one or more participants to be identifiable.

Also, the location of the sample could prove to be a limitation. The research study was conducted in a southeastern state. Seven of the eight participants were raised in the same state and one moved there from the northeast as a child. This could potentially be an important distinction; perhaps the experiences of Black women senior leaders in other geographical regions of the country would be markedly different. Perhaps my participants' perceptions were influenced by nearly life-long residency in the Bible belt or in the cradle of slavery in the United States. These are also important considerations.

Finally, because the researcher is the instrument, I presented a limitation to the study. Throughout the data collection, analysis and presentation processes, I made determinations

about the questions to ask, themes to code and findings to present. These determinations were made based on my own experiences, familiarity with the relevant literature, knowledge base and understanding of qualitative research strategies. To the extent that my experiences and knowledge are finite in nature, I limited the presentation of findings accordingly.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the intersection of race and gender in the experiences of Black women senior leaders in community colleges. I conducted a narrative inquiry, qualitative study to secure the desired data. I used interviews and field notes collected through observation and journaling.

Data analysis was conducted throughout each phase of the study, beginning with data collection. The analysis consisted of open coding wherein I began to extract emerging themes from the data. These themes were then tied to both the research questions and to the theoretical framework.

Issues associated with the study's internal and external trustworthiness, ethics and limitations were addressed through member checking and disclosure of researcher positionality. Further, I provided a detailed description of my research process to serve as an audit trail. This served to ensure the integrity of the research process.

CHAPTER FOUR

Findings

The purpose of my study was to examine the intersection of race and gender in the experiences of Black women senior leaders in community colleges. Specifically, my study sought to answer the following research questions: (a) What have been the experiences of Black women senior leaders in community and technical colleges? (b) How do Black women senior leaders in community and technical colleges perceive the intersection of race and gender in the workplace?

In response to the question: what have been the experiences of Black women senior leaders in community and technical colleges, the findings indicate that women in the study experience the organizational culture of their colleges primarily through unwritten rules that the participants quickly observe and use to assimilate into the culture. These unwritten rules often take the form of an understanding of loyalty, hierarchy and interpersonal relationships within the institution. The women in this study recognize that they have reached a level of authority wherein they are able to help shape the culture of their respective institutions; however, they overwhelmingly assert that their membership in two historically disadvantaged groups influences their experiences, even at the senior level of community college leadership. The findings indicate that the women in this study have experienced working their way up through the ranks of college leadership, leveraging a combination of education and skills to ascend to the senior levels of community college leadership. Each participant reported interactions with individuals of different races and gender that shaped

their workplace experiences. Notably, none of the participants reported experiences of being mentored – formally or informally – by another Black person but many described experiences of receiving career advice, encouragement and support from White women or White men.

In response to the question: how do Black women senior leaders in community and technical colleges perceive the intersection of race and gender in the workplace, the women in the study perceived that intersectionality was at play in their lived experiences, influencing the ways in which they interacted with colleagues at all levels of authority. They were unanimous in their belief that the intersection of race and gender did not constitute the totality of their workplace experiences; they believed other things such as perception of competence, professionalism and relationship building also governed the ways in which they experienced the workplace. Although none of the participants (with perhaps one notable exception) considered the intersection of race and gender as the primary lens through which their experiences should be evaluated, each of them indicated an understanding of themselves and their experiences as different than the majority of senior leaders at their respective community colleges who are, primarily, white and male.

The participants indicated an understanding that they represented Black women at all employment levels within their institutions and acknowledged a belief that their roles minimally included providing some measure of mentorship to continue preparing Black women for senior leadership positions. In other words, the women in the study believed they had a responsibility to themselves and to members of the campus community to represent

Black women in a positive light as well as a responsibility to Black women or members of other minority groups to provide intentional leadership for that population.

The data supporting these findings were collected from eight women who were recruited from a southeastern state to participate in the research study. This number represented one half (50%) of all women eligible for the research study. The women were asked to participate in semi-structured interviews guided by the two primary research questions regarding their experiences and perceptions of the intersection of race and gender in the workplace. In addition to the semi-structured interviews, the participants also completed profile information sheets that provided information about such things as upbringing, family structure and education level. The interview data, transcribed into written form, along with my field notes and reflective journaling provided the basis for the narrative and thematic analyses.

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section will provide narrative profiles of each participant. These profiles provide the backdrop for our understanding of the participants' experiences in senior-level community college leadership. The second section will highlight the emergent common themes that arose from the data. The third section will provide a synthesis of the emergent common themes developed within the context of a simulated conversation. The final section will provide a chapter summary.

Narrative Profiles

This section provides an in-depth profile of each participant. Though many of the lived and career experiences of Black women senior leaders were common to the group,

there were numerous counter-stories within their narratives. The profiles serve to demonstrate each participant's story and provide background for her workplace experiences.

Monica

Monica is the youngest of five children. She hails from a solid, middle-class family with parents who have been married more than sixty years. Monica lives near her parents and sees them regularly. Family is very important to her though she is the only one in the study who is currently not married. Monica is divorced after twenty years of marriage. She attributes the failing of her marriage in large part to her career aspirations. As she stated, "If I had to do it again I would still aspire to community college leadership but I would have managed it better." Monica is also unique in that she, unlike the other participants in the study, began her career in K-12 educational leadership.

As a Black woman, Monica is acutely aware of her membership in two historically disadvantaged social categories, pertaining to race and gender. This conscious recognition of her social location seems to be in the forefront of her interactions with individuals in professional settings on her campus. In other words, it is never far from her mind that she is a Black woman. She feels that she must keep this in mind at all times as she goes about her daily routine. When discussing her interactions with individuals at her institution she states that "sometimes people want to intentionally offend you because you are a Black woman" and "as a Black woman, there is never any room to get angry or emotional." Monica could not identify any close friends, inside or outside her professional environment and values keeping a certain distance from all but her immediate family.

Monica shared a story of how she made a significant change to the way continuing education courses were scheduled at her college. This made many senior citizens in the local community very upset and they complained about her. This was her first major challenge in the position and she worried about the fallout, in part because she was the first Black woman in senior leadership there and because the conflict was reported at length in the local newspaper. At some point her boss called her in for a meeting and stated she had been hired to manage the program and he trusted her ability to do so. Eventually, the change proved to be a financial success for the college though few people (she felt) acknowledged it. However, having her boss's support was a watershed moment for her in her first position in senior leadership. From there, she never doubted her ability to be successful. "Preparation and proximity are the keys to success. You gotta be prepared."

Laura

Laura comes from a working-class family. She was raised with both her parents in the home until her dad, a landowner, died when she was in her teens. Laura is the youngest of ten children and one of three girls. There are seven years between Laura and her next youngest sibling and twelve years between Laura and the third youngest child. Like Monica, Laura is divorced but she has been remarried for more than twenty years. "The second time around, I married the love of my life."

Laura is the only participant who indicates always knowing what she wanted to do with her life. The other participants seem to have "landed" in community colleges and then worked up to senior leadership. Laura indicates that this was always her goal and she has

only worked at one institution. She is fiercely proud of the quality of her work product and believes this is why she has succeeded even without a doctoral degree, which many of her colleagues have. “They needed someone to do good, quality work. It wasn’t because I was a Black woman.” She treats “everyone on campus with the same respect as the president,” which has been a key to her success.

Laura vacillates between believing that race and gender play little to no role in her interactions with individuals at her institution and believing that Blacks are paid less, shown less respect and valued less at her institution. Interestingly, at times when we discuss her own salary and perception of her by others on campus, her voice goes hushed and she answers my questions in a tone barely above a whisper. She does this several times during our interview which makes me feel I am being made privy to a “secret” I should never share with “White folks.” At times both her responses and her demeanor seem to contradict her stated belief that neither race nor gender is a major factor in her experiences as a Black woman senior leader. At times Laura will answer a question with only an “I don’t know” or an “I’m not sure.” Once during the interview she declines to answer a question. In this regard our time together is so different from all the others. I think about my external-outsider status (Banks, 1998). At once I feel so close to her and so far away from her. She lets me in, but only by degrees, then she quickly closes me out again.

Christine

Christine’s parents were both first-generation college. Her father was a business owner until he died when she was in her twenties. She and her younger sister enjoyed

comfortable middle-class upbringings and she was able to attend a private boarding school to complete her high school studies. Christine married weeks after her college graduation to a man ten years her senior. She and her mother are still very close.

Christine is the youngest individual in the study. Her career trajectory has been the most linear as it appears that she moved quickly up the leadership ranks from her first community college position until her current one. She attributes this largely to being smart about every single career choice. “Don’t apply for every open position. Be strategic.” Also she notes the fact that she and her husband together are “committed to something greater.” Christine is candid about the fact that she has an appreciation for the experience of minorities but believes that a commitment to excellence defies race and gender disparities and that, in the end, it is the most important thing to most people. She shares with me her sense that race and gender do matter and that they matter a lot. But once people know you and appreciate the level of competence you bring to your work, membership in social categories becomes much less of a factor. She shares a story of when she promoted two Black women because she had identified their talent and saw great leadership potential. At the time there was no pushback but later through an employee satisfaction survey she “received a lot of flak” for what was perceived to be favoritism.

Throughout Christine’s interview she speaks to an interesting paradox for women in senior leadership positions. At one point she goes into great detail about how she and her husband navigate the personal and the professional. She states that her husband is the leader of the family and that she “can’t be the boss at home.” Christine asserts that she is

comfortable with this arrangement and views it as somewhat of a relief to be able to lean on his leadership in their personal lives. However, the statement that she "can't be" the leader at home channels Collins's (1998) premise that "true womanhood" provides for women to subordinate to their husbands as the natural leaders of the family as well as her premise that society values age (seniority) as a qualification of leadership. Christine's husband is ten years older.

Sophia

Like Monica, Sophia is the youngest of five children. Her family was working class, which she describes as "having everything we needed." Sophia is the only participant in the study to have divorced parents. Her father left the family when she was eleven; her mother remarried when she was sixteen. Sophia had a rural upbringing. She grew up on a dirt road right across from her mother's parents.

Sophia married what she describes as a "blue-collar guy" when she was a teenager. At every stage of her journey toward community college senior leadership, she had to consider whether the next move would be a fit for him as well as her. At times she wondered if her husband would fit in with each new social circle. Consideration of its impact on her marriage also made her ponder for a long time the decision to earn a doctorate. "I took a long time to decide about that. I married at 18. How would he feel in each new circle?" Eventually she decided to continue her education but she worried whether this new endeavor would strain her marriage. Sophia seems to believe her consideration for the needs of her husband (and adult daughter) caused her to move more slowly up the leadership ranks than she would

have liked. “Most of my colleagues are in their forties. I’m in my sixties.” I think I hear a mixture of resignation and resentment in her tone when she shares this, but I cannot be sure.

Sophia views solidarity with Black women as more important than either demographic considered alone. “There are snakes in both races and genders but all the professionals I trust are Black women.” This view comes across even in our interview when she seems to be trusting of me almost immediately, sharing this of her decision to move into community college administration, “I needed to move from the ‘field’ to the ‘big house.’” This expression has its roots in slavery and presumes an almost instinctive understanding and kinship among all Black women. I immediately think of Banks’ (1998) typology again. Though I am not a senior leader in a community college, membership in the same race and gender makes me an insider. Sophia reverts to this use of colloquial language with me many times throughout our interview. She refers to her ability to detect “haters,” her love of “retail therapy,” and the “good old boys” to describe White men. I have a sense that she feels comfortable with my insider status.

Sophia attributes a piece of her career success to her sense of loyalty and an understanding of the unwritten organizational culture. “I don’t always agree with the president’s decisions but I always have his back. He can trust me. And if I want something, I can get it.”

Reba

Reba too had a rural upbringing. She came from a solid, two-parent home where she watched both of her parents go to school; her mother for a GED first and then an associate’s

degree. Her father went back for his bachelor's. She and her older brother were raised in a distinctly middle-class family. Reba also had a large extended family growing up.

Reba may be the most social of all the participants in the study. She is an active member of a sorority and has a wide circle of friends within the educational community. She is also active in her church and other civic groups. She valued civic engagement and leadership, community involvement and participation on sports teams growing up and has extended these values to her children as well. Her parents used to say, "I'm raising you to be the boss," and Reba took that to heart. Reba is still an active member of the same church in which she grew up but, interestingly, was the only participant who did not list any form of religious activity (e.g., prayer, meditation, church attendance) as a coping mechanism for the challenges of her profession. Rather, she valued having someone to talk to, "I have someone both on and off the job," and the ability to rearrange the frustrating things on her work schedule as her primary means for dealing with workplace stressors. In fact, Reba shows more of a tendency to build close professional relationships both inside and outside her institution. She has a number of education professionals with whom she is comfortable confiding and sharing ideas.

Reba has no problem speaking up in a professional setting. She shared a story of being frustrated because she could not get information she needed from the Information Technology (IT) department at her institution. She escalated the situation to her president and felt comfortable doing so. "Once the president got involved, I quickly got my information!"

Her institution is the exception in that they have three Black women in senior leadership. She has a collegial working relationship with each of them.

Gina

Gina is one of two girls raised by two parents in a working-class family. Gina was the first in her family to go to college, which made her parents, especially her dad, very proud of her. "They always told me to do better than they did." Her mom is still living but her father died some time ago. When she was younger, Gina used to have a very quick temper. Once she displayed very destructive behavior with a high school friend that caused her to realize she needed to make a change in the way she behaved. Her first year out of college, she was one of two teachers who integrated a high school. Being a first-year teacher in the first year of a school's desegregation was extremely meaningful for Gina. "The janitor walked me in that day. He welcomed me. The kids called me names. You know, people teach children how to hate. I was only one year out of college. I had three Black kids in the class." Since then, she has continued in her career being the "first" Black woman to reach a number of milestones.

Gina is the only participant in the study without children. At times she questions the decision but is overall comfortable with it. In her own words, she "still feels that twinge every now and then." She believes that raising children as well as managing her career and her relationship with her spouse would have been hard to juggle. This idea is confirmed by the other participants, each of whom cites this balancing act as a difficult—though rewarding—one.

Interestingly, Gina is the only participant who indicates having had a formal mentor. A White woman at the vice presidential level mentored her for several years when Gina was employed in another state. She still nurtures this relationship and gleans a lot of wisdom from the individual. Gina states that the relationship does not feel quite so much like mentoring now because of her own years of experience. At some point the relationship evolved into more of a friendship between colleagues.

Gina was the lone participant to talk about women of a different ethnicity than Black or White. She lamented the absence of Asians and Latinas in senior positions in academia. She explained that she has an interest in global diversity and looks for opportunities to get to know people who are different than she is. "I have limited interaction with them here, but when I'm at conferences or workshops, I try to find out more about women of other ethnicities. I enjoy knowing about other women, too."

Mary

Mary was raised in a middle-class family with two parents who were both college educated. Her mother, like Mary, holds a doctoral degree and her father is the fourth generation in his family to attend college. Mary is the younger of two daughters. Her father was a military man so her family traveled a lot when she was growing up.

Mary displays a number of personality traits she believes to be inconsistent with general perceptions of women in leadership and she is summarily aware of these inconsistencies. She does not consider herself to be the nurturing, relationship-oriented type of leader many associate with women's ways of leading. Rather Mary is, by her own

admission, extremely aggressive in working toward her professional goals in that she is always thinking about the next educational or professional endeavor. Mary is not the warm and fuzzy type. As a leader she maintains a professional distance that could be perceived as coolness. As she puts it, she is not the type to "remember birthdays or anniversaries" but she has made a concerted effort to be more open with her staff. Even in this, she describes herself as calculated, "I've already decided which things about my life, my family, my children I'm going to share with my staff. Nothing more than that." She understands the importance of making these connections because she realizes that "people do not want to work for strangers." Some of these lessons have come to her through trial and error. In the past she tried to manage teams without building relationships and developing connections with her employees. She believes this leadership style made those teams less successful than they could have been if she had been more open.

Mary explains that for her home life, she had to "re-record the images in her head" that were put there by her own mother. She cannot put a hot meal on the table each night and her house is professionally cleaned. This is different than how she was raised but she seems comfortable managing a family in a different style. "I cook on Sunday. We eat off that all week. I can't do it like my mom did. But it's OK."

Grace

Grace was raised in a two-parent, middle-class family. Her mother earned a bachelor's degree and her father an associate's degree. She has two siblings, one brother and

one sister. Grace was a good student and graduated in the top ten percent of her high school class.

Grace considers herself to be fairly easy-going and one who does not "take life too seriously" but rather lets life come to her. This is evident both in her personal and professional life. In general she does not see a need to move quickly in relationship nor in career. She and her husband of nearly thirty years dated ten years before that. Professionally, she meticulously worked her way up the ranks of community college leadership but never felt pressure to make it to the next level, then the next. Her supervisor had to push her to apply for her current position, even encouraging her to work on the skills she was lacking. At his urging she did and returned to school to earn her Master's degree. "I was already at the dean's level with no Master's. I can retire in four years so no Ph.D. for me." She does not worry about how the intersection of race and gender influences people's perceptions of her at her institution. She believes she has been there long enough to earn the respect of others on campus. "I'm just me." This portends to a deeper understanding of Grace's perception of the intersection of race and gender on her workplace experiences. She indicates a sense of the importance of race and gender, but also a sense that longevity and competence also create an intersection that has earned her a great deal of respect. "I've been there so long, I know where the landmines are." She is direct and honest but has learned to apply a little finesse along the way. She manages both Black and White men and she has learned that you often have to modify your approach as a Black woman in her position. She feels comfortable with that. "Most of my peers are White males. Then there's one Black male and one White

female. Some men don't like that direct approach so I had to learn that after a time or two. I know who needs to be stroked and how. That's an advantage I have over someone just coming in. Sometimes I have to back off and come at it from a different angle."

Emergent Common Themes

The narrative profiles and an analysis of the aggregate data revealed several emergent common themes. Although each woman's story is her own, their journeys highlight many commonalities among Black women at their level of community college leadership. Among these are the importance of immediate and extended family units, the angry Black woman stereotype, the lack of formal mentoring, the perceived role of Black women senior leaders within their respective institutions, spirituality as a coping method and salary negotiation experiences.

Importance of Immediate and Extended Family Units

It is striking that each participant in this study spent the majority of their formative years in a traditional, two-parent family. Beyond that, each of them raised their own families in a similar fashion. They asserted that the values they rely on as senior leaders were instilled in them by both father and mother. They attribute their professional and personal success to the mantras of hard work, honesty and integrity, never giving up and education. Many of the participants spoke of remembering specific quotes they heard from their parents such as "always do your best" or "finish what you start" and adopting those credos for themselves. As Reba notes:

"I got to watch both of my parents go to school. First my dad went to college, then my mom went to get her G.E.D. She kept on until she had an associate's (degree). Education was important to my family. My parents were leaders in the community and they raised us the same way. They always said, 'we're raising you to be the boss.'"

Each of the participants recounts the significant impressions their parents left them with from childhood. Gina discusses her home life:

"My dad was strong and quiet. He didn't say a lot but he was so proud of me. I was so proud to be the first college graduate in the family. They always said do better than they did and treat others the way you want to be treated."

Grace's father earned an associate's degree. Her mother earned a bachelor's degree. Their work ethic was instilled in her at an early age:

"'You work hard. No excuses. Be honest. Your good name is all you have to stand on.' I always had a good support system, when I was growing up and with my husband now."

In fact, each of the participants reported having a good family support system. Beyond their immediate home life, many of the participants also talked about the importance of extended families in their upbringing and while raising their own children. Christine and Sophia shared that their grandparents were a major part of their upbringing, with Sophia's living right across the dirt road from her. Similarly, Laura and Reba spoke of relying on their parents when they were young professionals attempting to balance career and family life. The importance of strong immediate and family units ran throughout the narratives. As Sophia notes:

"We were a working class family. My dad always worked in factories. When I was 11 years old, he left the family. It was hard but we had a good support system. We lived close to both sets of grandparents. My mom's parents lived right across the road—a dirt road. When I was 16 my mom remarried."

Laura talks about the importance of having family support in her early career days:

"I couldn't have done it early on without my mom. She was the caregiver to my kids. I had a good support system. I would go in at 6:30 to be off at 3:30. My mom would help with getting the kids ready and transporting them and watching them after school—all that."

The importance of immediate and extended families proved important throughout this research study. In this area, the participants' experiences were very homogenous. Each of theme reported participation in solid, two-parent families as a part of their formative years and adult experiences which is salient in that it is inconsistent with many of the cultural narratives surrounding Black women.

Angry Black Woman Stereotype

The women in this study reported a salient theme that did not present itself in my previous review of the literature on Black women. The perception that emerged was that of the "angry Black woman" stereotype. None of the participants used this expression; none of them presented themselves as "angry" or "bitter" in our interviews. But over a period of time, as interviews turned into transcripts and transcripts to themes and themes to chapters, an underlying refrain came through in the narratives. Black women senior leaders should never put themselves in a position to be perceived or labeled as an "angry Black woman."

At first, it seemed that this wholesale rejection of the angry Black woman stereotype was a natural response to one of the interview questions that asked the participants to talk about a time they had been angry or frustrated at work (see appendix). But upon more comprehensive analysis, this theme was woven like a thread throughout a number of the interview responses ranging from perception of their roles to interactions with colleagues to solidarity with other members of oppressed groups. When Monica speaks of interactions with colleagues she says, "Black women can get the reputation for being attitudinal, uncooperative, (and) unprofessional so it's difficult being in this position. If you try to change any process, people will not take it well."

This idea that you may feel anger or frustration at work but, because you are a Black woman, there is no safe space to express those feelings was a consistent one throughout the narratives. Other participants shared Monica's viewpoint to differing degrees. Mary indicated that she did not feel that race and gender were "a big deal" in her interactions with colleagues but that she never "led" with race or gender issues. "As a conscious Black woman administrator—and I do consider myself conscious—you can't go in making race and gender be the biggest issues. You have to work on those things in small settings. You can't get the reputation for being that emotional Black woman."

Gina tells a similar story of "working hard" to not present as an angry black woman. "Sometimes I present myself in an inauthentic way, 'fronting'. At first I had a difficult subordinate but I wouldn't show any anger. I work hard not to present myself that way."

Another dynamic of the "angry Black woman" stereotype comes through in Gina's narrative. She tells a story of another Black woman senior administrator joining the leadership team at her community college. "For a while I was the only Black woman at the executive level. Then another Black woman came. She is more 'in your face' than I am. She will tell people what she's thinking right away. I think that reflects negatively on me and I worry about that." This is an important dynamic of the angry Black woman stereotype—that it is not just your behavior that might feed into others' perceptions, but the behavior of other Black women may impact how your subordinates, peers and superiors perceive you. With Black women often being the first Black or Black woman in senior leadership, they bear a real or perceived responsibility to represent all Black women to members of other social groups who already maintain certain beliefs and perceptions (Grills & Prus, 2008).

Each participant, in her own way, tackled the idea of what it means to be the first or only Black woman in executive leadership at her respective institution. A part of this experience was how to avoid being perceived or labeled as an angry Black woman and how important this was to the overall success of the experience.

Lack of Formal Mentoring

A very salient narrative emerging from the participant data was a lack of formal mentoring. None of the study participants spoke of participation in formal mentoring programs at the national or statewide level, though there are certainly networking programs available. In fact, only one participant reported having had a formal mentoring relationship during her career. Gina reports:

"When I was in another state, I had a White female vice president who mentored me. That was years ago, but she taught me everything that she did. She really showed me what she was doing. She was open minded and caring. Since then, we've reached similar career levels and the mentoring relationship has become more of a friendship at this stage."

Other participants' experiences ranged from simply having no mentor to being rebuffed in their attempts to identify mentors. Sophia asserts:

"I asked four different people to mentor me. All of them said no. One of them said they could 'kinda' mentor me. I didn't know what that meant so, no. I never really had a mentor."

Reba and Mary also indicated not having a mentor through this stage in their careers but both received offers to be mentored now that they are at the executive level of leadership. Reba noted:

"My current president has stated he will mentor me if I decide to move up to the presidency. I've been in this job two years and he's been grooming me." Mary's experience is similar: "The person who had this job before me moved up to a presidency. I did my research on the position and wanted to move to a job where the current president would groom me for a future presidency. My current president was open to that and understood my career aspirations."

Though none of the study participants indicated they had been mentored into their current positions, many of them still believed that mentoring was an important part of senior level leadership in higher education institutions. Monica and Grace tell similar stories in that

neither of them indicate ever having a mentor while moving up the community college ranks, but both stated that their bosses were "very supportive" of them applying for and receiving promotions. Monica's new job moved her to a different community college and she tells the story of asking the hiring committee what made her stand out above the other applicants, "I asked the president of the college, you know, how was it that I was projected ahead of the others. Some of them were holding Ph.D.s and he matter-of-fact told me, it was what my former president at the other college had to say about me, because there were people applying for the position who had Ph.D.s but their presidents didn't have the same kinds of commentary about them." In this case, though Monica did not identify her president as a formal or informal mentor, his support of her career aspirations helped her to move into an executive-level position.

Grace's story is similar in that, though she did not identify her executive vice president as a mentor, he was influential in her ascension to senior leadership. At times he urged her to apply for open positions within the college and to acquire the skills and credentials necessary for them. "I didn't apply for the job the first time because I didn't have a master's degree, though my VP kept on telling me to. After it was filled, I went back to school and got my degree. When it was open again, there he was urging me to apply. I applied and I got it but I can retire in a few years. No Ph.D. for me." This support was essential to Grace's career success though she did not identify her executive vice president as a mentor.

Christine offered an interesting observation on the idea of mentoring. Though she too could not identify a mentor throughout her career, she indicated that there were a number of people over the years who saw her talent and wanted to develop that. She talked about how, at times, White men in higher education would work hard to see Black women represented to the point of being "patronizing." Then she asserted, "In some situations, I have found people to be patronizing and that word has taken on an interesting meaning for me during my career. When you think of the word 'patron' it comes from fatherly and it has been a double-edge sword. I have been patronized by people talking in a condescending way and (you have to) let them know you have experience and you know what you are doing and get them to realize you know what you are doing. In some cases it has been constructive. Particularly White males who have said this is a bright star here and an opportunity for me to help and to kind of feel like they are doing a good deed and opening a space. The act of patronizing can be a good thing or a bad thing. I learn to deal with both." This idea of being patronized by White men was echoed to a lesser degree by nearly everyone in the study. While they were consistently resistant to the idea that they had received mentoring, many of them indicated receiving some level of career advice, support and encouragement from members of the majority group.

The lack of formal mentoring was consistent with most of the participants. Additionally, they each seemed hesitant to label career advice, encouragement and support as mentoring. They each spoke of times though, when they had benefitted from mentoring relationships.

Perceived Role of Black Women Senior Leaders Within Their Respective Institutions

Each participant spoke of her institutional role in a unique fashion. At some levels they seemed to perceive the intersection of race and gender as an inescapable part of their career experiences and institutional roles but at other times seemed insistent on making the case for other things being more important than either race or gender or a combination of the two. Five of the participants indicated being the first or only Black woman to reach their level of leadership within their institution. This places the extra burden of representing other Black women on them. Gina describes this in great detail when another Black woman comes to work in senior leadership after her and she perceives herself as subject to others' perceptions of her colleague. Gina worried that she would be labeled as "in your face" because other people perceived her colleague that way:

"I work hard not to present as an angry Black female. Sometimes I just present in an inauthentic way, 'fronting'. I was the only Black at the executive level for a while and then this other Black woman came. She is more in your face than I am. I worry about how other people see her and how they will see me. I wonder if people think I am like her."

Monica also speaks to people's perceptions of her role within the institution:

"Black women can get the reputation for being attitudinal, uncooperative, unprofessional so it's difficult being in this position. If you try to change any process, people will not take it well. Once a man was 'feeling himself' and he just for a half a second felt a compulsion to say something totally outrageous that could have cost him his job. He was shocked that I even dealt with it. I was swift and very concise—very to the point. Sometimes

people want to intentionally offend because you are a Black woman but I wasn't (offended) because it was professional. It wasn't personal. It's never personal and I can separate the two."

The participants in this study perceived their roles as advocates for others within their institutions. As Black women senior leaders, they had reached a level of authority wherein they had power to positively affect the organizational culture and they seemed to take this role very seriously. As Grace noted:

"My primary role is that of student advocate. I represent the student needs because they are not at the table to represent themselves. I am able to explain things on the students' behalves and get policies changed when necessary."

Reba perceived herself as an advocate for the institution:

"I'm used to having to speak up and take the initiative when I have to. My president looks to me to represent the school and his vision—to do what's best for the school. I'm tasked with being supportive of others. I find money. I identify partners. That's what I do."

Interestingly, each of the participants felt that they were respected by colleagues at all levels of institution. Most spoke of feeling respected by their subordinates, even though the intersection of race and gender was a reality in their interactions. Monica believed she had the respect of her direct reports even though she perceived some of them to, at times, behave in a way that would be intentionally offensive to a woman of color. She also sensed that some of their resentment toward changes she made had more to do with her social location than the merit of her decisions. When she overhauled many continued education policies,

she perceived that people challenged her authority to do so, more than the changes themselves. Still, she believed that her track record and commitment to building relationships afforded her the respect both of her subordinates and superiors. Laura presents a similar paradox:

"There is a difference in the level of respect. It's not an even playing field. African Americans are paid less. But I do make the final decisions and my staff respects me. They don't try to go over my head or anything."

The idea of representing all Black women (and to a lesser degree all Blacks) because of their level of career success and visibility of their roles was an important one in the dialogue. Many of the participants described what it meant to be the first or only Black woman in senior leadership for others at the institution. As Sophia describes it:

"There haven't been any Blacks—male or female—at this level before. The Blacks on campus were pretty excited about it. My subordinates respect me and my position. I connect with Black women on campus through hair or style of dress. Things we have in common. Black women (on campus) usually love my haircut and pattern their dress after me. I love shoes and I bond with some through that. I have my 'hater-dar' up, though. I watch to see whose words are consistent with their behavior."

She uses commonalities such as hairstyles and clothes to connect with Black women at different levels of career and this is meaningful for her. Grace also describes her relationship with Black women on campus as a representative one. She is the only one in

senior leadership at her institution as well so Black women at lower levels seek her out for mentoring. She feels comfortable with this relationship and perceives it as a responsibility:

"I feel a commonality with Blacks and women but I have a bond, a commitment even, with Blacks. I'm the first Black woman at this level and the Blacks on campus want me to succeed and then help them succeed. When we retire, we need to make sure there are others (Blacks) who can move into these positions."

Many of the participants echo this sense that a part of their role as a Black woman senior leader is to be responsible to bring others along on their career journey. Christine speaks of identifying and promoting talent among Black woman as important. Mary shares that it is important for her to model appropriate behavior for other Black women to follow:

"Women in general hold on to grudges and get involved in workplace pettiness. I try to model for Black women how to disagree and move forward. I have a theory that boys more so than girls play sports and in sports boys learn how to win, lose, have conflict and get over it. Some girls never do. So I try to model that behavior, if I disagree with someone on an issue or in a meeting, soon I am reaching out to them about another topic to show that we can get past it."

The women in this study perceived their roles as much more than senior level administrators. They saw themselves as advocates, mentors and role models. They felt the pressures of being, in most cases, the first or only Black or Black woman in senior-level administration but they used the pressures and let those expectations motivate them to be great in their roles.

Spirituality as a Coping Method

Spirituality also emerged as a salient theme to a number of the participants. Each framed her own experiences with spirituality differently, but described them as essential for coping with workplace stressors. Many of the participants indicated that they had long commutes that afforded them time to meditate, pray and relax. As Monica notes:

"I have an hour long commute, which is hard. But I use that time for prayerful meditation. I envision my day before I start it and just meditate on my whole day. Then when I get to work, first I lock up my purse, greet everyone, speak to the students. I don't jump right into work. I start my day from a place of meditation and that keeps me relaxed and purposeful. On the way home I use prayerful meditation to release the day."

Others, such as Mary and Sophia, cited their weekly church attendance as being and important piece of their coping strategies. Mary describes her routine:

"I'm not afraid to take a day off. Sometimes I need a mental health day. But spirituality is really an important source for me. I go to church weekly and pray regularly. That's a really important source for me."

While each of the participants demonstrating some level of commitment to faith or spirituality, Laura was the only participant to reference God as an important source for her as she coped with workplace stressors. As she stated, "I know who God is. Where He will bring you and where He will take you." For her, this formed the basis of her sense of spirituality as a coping mechanism.

Spirituality as a coping mechanism took on a significant meaning for each of the participants in this study. From meditation to prayer to church attendance, they identified some form of spirituality as an important source.

Salary Negotiation Experiences

The final theme that emerged salient throughout the participant narratives was of their most recent experiences negotiating salaries. Surprisingly, seven of the eight participants indicated that they had not negotiated and had accepted the first offer extended them. This is particularly striking because each of the participants has reached the most senior level of community college leadership by working up through the ranks. Rather than moving laterally from another industry, each of them had served at lower levels and combined education (each holds a graduate degree) and institutional experience to form the basis of their qualifications. Still, none of them asked for more money—or fringe benefits—than was originally offered. Their stories are strikingly similar. Monica describes:

"Negotiation? What negotiation? There was no negotiation. I attempted to negotiate but was told 'this is where we're going to take you.' I'm really not sure if it was because I am a Black woman or not because I was chomping at the bit for the opportunity. I don't like to sit and reflect on whether I got less because I'm a Black woman, but the person who was here before me had been here twenty-four years. Obviously, I wasn't going to get his money."

Many participants indicated, like Monica, that they would have negotiated or were prepared to try but were told the salary was set and there was no room for negotiation. Still

others reported that though they did not negotiate, they had a minimum offer in mind that their employer did meet. As Mary describes:

"My husband and I had already discussed a minimum salary. The offer came in well above that, close to the top of the range. I really wanted the job and I jumped. I heard from my mom later that I should never do that. My mom is an HR professional and she was very upset that I took the first offer. I learned my lesson. It will not happen again."

The lack of salary negotiations was a striking and unexpected theme that emerged from the participant narratives. The reasons for not negotiating were as varied as the participants themselves. It is surprising though in light of their current levels of career success.

A Conversation

From the aggregate data derived through the use of profile information sheets, semi-structured interviews, field notes and journaling, I have developed a simulated conversation of the emergent common themes presented by the study participants. The participants in this research study were not together in the same place for this conversation as depicted here; however, this dialogue is important because, for me, it is a representation of how the narratives came together. Each individual interview built on the one before it; each participant either affirmed or countered the experiences of the participants before her. Or, in some cases, affirmed and expanded on the experiences of Black women senior leaders in community colleges. The conversation depicted here sounds like—even feels like—the ongoing conversation in my head during this process. At times it felt like the participants had

studied the same playbook, even to the use of similar phrases and colloquialisms. Still at other times one or two participants provided counter narratives that were quite different from the larger group. There were many commonalities here; from the similarity of their upbringings to the homogeneousness of their experiences with salary negotiations, many overlapping themes became apparent. At the same time there are notable differences here; for example the social category with whom they feel most solidarity varied from woman to woman. Similarly, when asked why they believed the participation rates of Black women senior leaders were at their current levels, the responses were as diverse as the participants themselves.

Consequently, a conversation began to emerge from the narratives. The simulated dialogue presents a compendium of the participants' responses to the various questions posed. This simulation of ideas and dialogue is not a new one; other researchers have used this technique to further demonstrate the power of a story to provide analysis and understanding (Tullos, 2011). This conversation represents for me an attempt to go further in that effort – to exploit each facet of a story's power and resonance. To that end I have compiled each participant's singular narrative into a collective one. Through this assemblage of experiences, both the commonalities and the differences become more stark. Notations of participants' facial expressions or body language as well as the representation of tenor and tone are my own interpretation but I gave special attention to keeping the dialogue close to the participants' actual responses. Excerpts from the participants' interview transcripts are denoted with quotation marks.

Simulated Conversation

Dion: First I would like to thank all of you for your participation in this conversation regarding the experiences of Black women senior leaders in community and technical colleges. I'd like to begin by asking you a little about your upbringing. In compiling the demographic information that you provided, I marveled at how similar your childhood experiences were. Each of you reported growing up in a working- or middle-class family with at least one sibling. With only one exception each of you grew up with both your parents in the home. Unfortunately, that's all too rare in Black society. (Some of the participants nod or murmur in agreement.)

Sophia: I guess I'm the one exception to the rule?

Dion: (With a slight smile.) You are. Would you talk a bit about your upbringing?

Sophia: Sure, well my dad was there for a while. Until I was eleven I did have both my parents in the home and then one day he just left. It was hard because there were five of us. We had our grandparents on the same street though. That helped a lot. My mother remarried when I was about sixteen years old.

Dion: Each of you seems to come from such a strong family network—two-parent homes, grandparents close by. Can you talk about the values your family placed in you growing up? (There's a moment of thoughtful silence before someone speaks up.)

Gina: My parents always said to do better than they did and treat people the way you want to be treated. I've never forgotten that.

Reba: Definitely. My parents believed in us being polite and respectful. At the same time, my mom would always say, “I’m raising you to be the boss,” so you just understood that you were supposed to excel, to be a leader.

Monica: I think for me it was the work ethic. (Many participants nod in agreement.) My parents stressed hard work. I mean, if we wanted a car at sixteen or something like that, we had to get out and work and earn it. It was never given to us.

Christine: Absolutely.

Grace: My folks would say work hard, no excuses. Oh, and (She mimics her mother’s voice.) “Your good name is all you have to stand on!”

Mary: (Chuckling.) You’ve got it! All my life Daddy said, “If a task has once begun, never leave it till it’s done. Be the labor great or small, do it well or not at all.” I can still hear it ringing in my ear and it challenges me to be someone who honors my word, who finishes what I start. And my parents taught us to value money. They believed money should be used for education – schooling, tutors, lessons, things like that. Never for name brand clothes. “I never had name brand clothes growing up.” That wasn’t something they valued.

Laura: Your word is your bond.

Group: Oh yeah, um hum.

Dion: So I think I hear you saying your parents stressed working hard and keeping your word.

Christine: Yes, and treating people with respect and making sure people treated you the same way.

Laura: Oh yeah, they would always say, “you’re as good as anybody else.” (The group nods in affirmation here.)

Dion: So let me ask you this: thinking about the strong network that you all come from, how does that influence your current social networks? What do your personal communities look like?

Sophia: Well, I guess I’m somewhat of a lone wolf. I’m married and I have one daughter. My sister—I guess you would call her my best friend—but I don’t have a lot of friends. I have a lot of acquaintances.

Laura: Yeah, I draw a lot of strength from my immediate family, too. I’ve been married twenty-two years—this is my second marriage—to the love of my life. We have two girls and no grandkids yet. (The group chuckles.) I do sit on a few civic and higher ed boards, but I really draw strength from my family. Oh, and my church. I’m active there.

Sophia: Church is a big one for me too.

Mary: Definitely church is a big one for me as well. I also volunteer on a number of boards. I guess I’m like Sophia; I don’t have a lot of friends who know and see the real me. Just a handful of those folks. Plus I’m married with three boys in school! There’s really not a lot of time for anything else.

Dion: Gina, what about you?

Gina: (Chuckles a bit.) Well I’m naturally a quiet person. I have limited friends. I can probably count the true ones on one hand. I’m not currently active in church now and I don’t

even know why. My sister is actually my best friend. I'll tell you I've been hurt before and I just put a wall up.

Mary: Right. Sometimes you just have to because you just don't know. You never know who you are friends with today that you will not be friends with tomorrow. You don't know.

Reba: "There are two women here in administration. We have a close bond, you know? I see them outside of work." I trust them.

Dion: Monica, what about you? What does your social network look like?

Monica: Well, I see my parents every weekend. They are getting up in age and it's important for me to do so. I have one son off at college so that's about it. Honestly, I have few friends. I am a part of a community of professionals in K-12 and higher ed.

Dion: Is that community all Black women?

Monica: Um, it's all but one. There is one Black man in the group. It's all people in their forties or so, networking and supporting each other.

Dion: Grace?

Grace: Hmmm. . . I do have a few friends I spend time with. And I'm active in church as well. I'm on a couple boards through work and I volunteer at my local precinct. Honestly though, I work sixty hours a week. It's hard to have much of a social network.

Christine: That's one thing about this level of career. Between the work and the commute there are just so few free hours in the day. I covet that time and try to give as much as possible of it to my husband and kids. I have a few close friends and some not-as-close community college friends, but my free time is reserved for my family.

Dion: You all have talked at length about how stretched your time is. I'm just honored that you consented to do an interview with me! (A collegial chuckle goes around the room.) So let me ask then, about this question of managing time. You've all reached the senior level of community college leadership. Each of you is or was married with children. How do you manage it? How do you balance career and family at this level?

Sophia: Well, I think at every step you consider how the work will affect your family. (The group is all nodding here and they seem pretty thoughtful.) It took a long time for me to decide about the doctorate. In the end I went ahead and did it, but I had to consider how it would affect the hubby. How would he feel in different circles if I moved up the ladder? He is a blue-collar guy. I married at eighteen.

Dion: Wow.

Christine: I'd say my situation is somewhat similar. I married right out of college. And when I say that I mean *right out*—like two weeks out—and my husband is considerably older than I am. But he and I share a commitment. "We're committed to something greater and he's very supportive of my career. One thing I've learned is that I can't be the boss at home. I'm the boss at work but he is the leader of the family. It's comforting for me to get in my car and make that long commute home. During that time I take off my boss's hat. I don't have to be the boss at home too."

Gina: It is, at times, hard to manage. I have a long commute as well—an hour and a half one way. My husband is also very supportive of my career but we married later in life and

decided to have no kids. Every now and then, I feel that twinge. (An easy silence falls onto the room. I sense each of the participants thinking about her own sacrifices.)

Dion: Laura, what about you? How do you manage it all?

Laura: Well my husband is retired now but I'll be honest, I couldn't have done it without my mom. She was an extra caregiver to my kids during those early years. I thank God for her.

Reba: Same here. Both my parents helped because back then my work had a lot of travel. My husband did some shift work when the kids were small so that he could be there in the times that I couldn't. But still we had to rely a lot on the grandparents.

Grace: One thing that helped me a lot when my kids were smaller is that I could stretch my day. If kids had events after school, I would go in at six to be home in time to make it to games and recitals. I had the flexibility, too, to work evenings and weekends. But my husband is very supportive. We've been together almost forty years. We do it together.

Mary: One thing that's been important for me—I just had to re-record the messages in my head from my own childhood. My mother taught me that good wives have hot meals on the table every night and helped with homework. There's just no way I can meet that standard. "My kids do go to private school, though." That was a message I got from my mom. I don't really talk about that a lot but I was raised to spend money on education. I just can't do everything like my mom did. We have our house professionally cleaned and I try to cook a nice meal on Sunday, which we generally eat off of all week. (The group nods and laughs here, indicating they understand.) My husband is a great partner and support. Before I made this last career move I told him he would have to step up. He's done so.

Dion: Monica, what about you? How did you manage when your son was at home?

Monica: I'm not sure I did. After twenty years of marriage we were divorced so I'd say my career aspirations cost me a lot. I guess I neglected some home obligations; at that time I was unaware of the consequences. I didn't notice the lack of communication between my spouse and me until . . . (Her voice trails off. I sense that the group understands.) "So, if I had to do it again I would still aspire to community college leadership but I would have managed it better."

Dion: Let's switch gears here. I want to find out from each of you what influenced your decision to enter community college leadership. Gina, will you start?

Gina: Sure, that's easy. It was a fluke. I started with a part-time evening position four days a week. From there I was promoted to a day job and just moved up the ranks.

Grace: I'm like Gina. I was a temporary office assistant. I'm guessing I did a good job (She laughs here.) because that was over twenty years ago and I'm still here. I just worked my way up. Though I did make some lateral moves just to get exposure.

Christine: And here I thought I was the only one. (She laughs.) I was definitely not thinking about community college leadership. After college I thought I'd go another way. There was a part-time opening in the paper right after graduation. I thought I could do that and raise a family. I just took off from there. One thing I did find out along the way though was that I really could make a difference in leadership positions.

Sophia: Right. I've always believed in the community college mission. I became an administrator because that's where you could help the most. I needed to move from the field

to the big house! (The group erupts with laughter.) I worked in a four-year institution but didn't like it. Too much politics.

Monica: Hmm, I guess you could say the same with me—only I was in K-12. But the politics were crazy. I seldom felt like I was making the best decision for the student. For the most part in community college you have adult learners who want to be there. It makes a lot of difference.

Dion: Reba, how about you? How'd you get here?

Reba: Actually, my journey is a lot like what you heard. I began teaching adult ed on a temporary basis. Then I began helping displaced workers learn soft skills. From there I just kept getting promoted.

Laura: Well, I had to make a change. I was traveling a lot for work in private industry. I saw the job opening in the paper, applied and got it. This is better.

Mary: For me too. I was in private industry for several years even after my Master's degree. Actually, I got laid off and that caused me to reevaluate everything. The money was good in private industry, but I wanted to help people. Wanted to be able to manage a team. "When I was successful in private industry, I only made the company successful. When I'm successful here, I make other people successful. That matters to me."

Dion: So what about your current position? How'd you end up here and were you mentored in?

Monica: No mentor but I will say that my former president really supported me when I was interviewing for my new position. In fact, after I was hired I was told that it was my

president's recommendation that really put me over the top, even over people with higher education levels.

Laura: No mentor for me either. I just kept working my way up the ranks.

Christine: (laughingly) I'll join the group. No mentor here either. But—I was very observant. I watched what others in leadership were doing. I tried to listen and learn from them. I've worked for four different presidents and I've learned something from each of them.

Dion: Well, is anyone willing to say they've had a mentor?

Sophia: No. (The group laughs.) I asked four different people along my career to mentor me. Three of them said no.

Dion: Wow.

Sophia: It's true. One of them said "I can kinda mentor you I guess," so no, I've never had a mentor like that. I saw the job in the *Chronicle* and I was hoping for an opportunity to get back closer to home. I had no mentorship whatsoever.

Reba: OK, I'll jump in. I was not mentored in to my current position, but my president always encourages me that she will show me the ropes if I desire to move up into a presidency. How's that? (The group laughs, familiarity among the group is growing.)

Dion: Well, that's pretty good. But I'll admit I'm surprised to hear about the lack of mentorship for women in your positions.

Mary: Well, my story is similar to other ones you've heard. I've had no formal mentoring to this point. However, I paid close attention to what other leaders were doing and how they were acting. I learned by observing. I know that I want to be a president one day and when I

took this position, a part of the reason was that the president understood that and was available to teach me. So I'm getting that mentoring now, for the next move.

Grace: You're going to love this. I was mentored into this position! (The group is all smiles, very comfortable now.) The first time it came open I didn't apply because I didn't have that Master's degree. I went back to school after twenty years. The next time, my executive VP made me apply and was influential in telling me which skill sets I needed to work on to be prepared for it.

Dion: Gina, you're the last hold out? How did you come into this position?

Gina: Well, I actually had a mentor years ago. She was a White VP from another college and she was a mentor for many years. As to this position, I didn't apply. The president promoted me.

Dion: So each of you took different paths into your current positions. I wonder, how do your career paths compare with those of your colleagues?

Laura: I'd say my career path is pretty common except most people at my level have Ed.D.'s.

Sophia: Same here. I followed a fairly traditional path, except most of my colleagues are in their forties. I'm in my sixties. I moved more slowly than I would have liked.

Christine: I guess I'm the opposite of Sophia then. I'm fairly young, much younger than most of my colleagues and peers.

Gina: I'd say mine was pretty similar to my peers. I started off in the library. For some reason, librarians tend to move up easily in the community college system.

Dion: I think I hear you all saying that with a few notable exceptions, you've taken a pretty fluid path.

Grace: I think that's right. No two careers look exactly the same but you get that education and experience and you just work your way up.

Dion: OK, so let me ask you this. And this pertains to your current position. What was your most recent experience like negotiating your salary? How comfortable did you feel during the negotiations?

Monica: What negotiations? I attempted to negotiate but was told "this is where we are going to take you." I wondered if it was because I was a Black woman but I was chomping at the bit for the opportunity. I try not to think about whether I got less because I'm a Black woman but the person before me had been here twenty years. Obviously, I wasn't going to get his money.

Mary: I guess that was my story too. I really wanted the job and so when they made the offer I jumped. My husband and I had discussed the minimum salary I would take and the offer came in well above that. I have since learned I made a mistake not to negotiate. Believe me I heard it! That was a lesson learned. It will not happen again.

Grace: Pretty much the same for me. I had done my research and knew what people were getting nationally and on my campus. The offer was consistent so I didn't negotiate but I would have if I'd had to.

Laura: (Her voice goes hushed.) African Americans are paid less. I asked for a bump about two months ago. I'm still waiting to hear if I got it.

Gina: Hmm. There was no room for me to negotiate either. My predecessor was receiving two salaries for the same position. Do you think I got that?

Sophia: During the application process I was asked for my salary requirement. When I got the job the salary was in that range so I accepted it.

Dion: So wait. I'm here with eight of the most powerful community college leaders in this region and I think I'm hearing you say that NONE of you negotiated your salary. Is that correct?

Christine: I did. We met over three separate meetings and worked out the terms of the salary and benefits.

Dion: Anyone else? (A chorus of no's.)

Mary: My mother was an HR professional for many years. She was really upset when she found out I didn't negotiate at all. It's pretty common for Black women. You're just so happy to get the job.

Gina: So happy to be there. (This realization blankets the room with an emotion I struggle to reduce to one word—perhaps it is defeat.)

Dion: Let's talk about your working relationships. How do think you are perceived by your colleagues? This could be subordinates, superiors or peers. In general, how do you believe you are perceived at your institution?

Monica: I think people view me positively because I make a point to speak to everyone. I make a personal connection with people in strategic positions. I know my executive vice president views me positively. He trusts my judgment and decisions.

Christine: I think people view me as a good decision maker as well. People tell me I'm humble and a strong team player. I think I give people a good feeling. I want my direct reports to have a voice and to challenge me. When I came here, I didn't bring in any new staff. I'm comfortable with the current folks.

Sophia: Honestly, I don't know. I hope they perceive me a certain way but their insecurities might get in the way. There haven't been any Blacks at this level before and I am learning on the job. The Blacks on campus were very excited about that. I do think my subordinates respect me and my position.

Laura: I'm the only Black woman at this level too. There was a Black woman VP before but she is gone. My staff respects me; they don't go over my head. (Here her voice goes hushed again. I'm intrigued by this phenomenon.) But there is a difference in the level of respect. It's not an even playing field.

Gina: Well, I was the only Black woman at this level for a while too. Then another Black woman came. She is more "in your face" than I am and honestly, I worry that her style reflects on me too. I work very hard not to present myself as an "angry black female." Sometimes I find myself "fronting" and being somewhat inauthentic if you know what I mean.

Dion: I do. (This idea of "fronting" is a common term in the Black community, referring to presenting yourself in a deliberately fake or disingenuous way. Again, I think of Banks (1998) and the ways my participants use vernacular they feel confident that I am familiar with and understand.)

Grace: I'm the first Black woman at this level too, but honestly my experience has been very positive. People see me as direct and honest. I question everything and they know I'm going to question it. I have the reputation where if you want something done quickly and accurately, ask Grace.

Mary: Let me share this because I think it's important. People perceive me as professional but not necessarily friendly. I'm not the one to remember birthdays or anniversaries. I've had to work on making those personal connections over the years because one thing I've learned is people don't want to work for strangers. But that's not necessarily my nature.

Dion: So would you say you are, at times, "fronting?"

Mary: No because that is a skill set I'm genuinely working to develop.

Dion: OK, let's talk then about the organizational culture of your institutions. What is it like and how is that culture established? Is it mostly by written or unwritten rules?

Grace: Well for me us it's pretty much unwritten. At this point I know where trouble is. I know who needs to be handled how. I've been here a long time.

Monica: Well, I'd say a little of both. We try to follow written rules to stay out of the gray areas. That keeps you out of trouble. But loyalty to leadership and loyalty to the institution are unwritten rules. It's expected. (The group nods at this.)

Sophia: Honestly, it depends on the president. My president now was VP before. Back then, that president ran the school like the Wild, Wild West. (More nodding, the group can empathize.) This current president is more likely to follow written rules.

Laura: That's true. I've been under four different presidents. The current president is more written; last one was more unwritten. I prefer written rules. It makes things easier.

Mary: Not always. My previous institution was largely run by written rules and it stifled innovation and creativity. It was bureaucracy heavy. My campus now is much more entrepreneurial. The culture is completely driven by unwritten rules. Before, if a business came to you and wanted to fund a program that didn't exist, you would get so weighed down in the bureaucracy, you couldn't get it done. This school, I have the freedom to turn things around in a short period of time. It's a better fit for my personality.

Christine: That's right. Community colleges answer to so many constituencies. You have to have flexibility between helping communities and working with business. That's why our culture is mostly driven by unwritten rules.

Gina: I'd say mostly unwritten but our president is trying to eliminate a lot of that. We are a "majority minority" institution. That affects the culture. A lot of people operate in silos or are territorial.

Reba: Like Gina said, our campus has a mixture of both but mostly unwritten rules. Accreditation pointed out areas where we needed to write things down. Everybody knew the policy but it wasn't written down—especially disciplinary rules for employees and students.

Dion: Within that culture, let's talk about your interactions with individuals of different races and genders. Can you talk about those?

Sophia: I can tell you this. I'm the same all the time. Same with everybody. I just am who I am.

Christine: Yeah, it's just about the work. Though people do treat you differently when they find out who you are. My authority and control over situations temper the interactions. It can be challenging in the community though. It can be very isolating.

Reba: I would agree. Once we share the same vision, race and gender become less important. I really don't feel like race and gender influence my interactions but I know it matters to some people.

Monica: Yeah, it does. Black women can get the reputation for being attitudinal, uncooperative or unprofessional. It's difficult being in this position. If you try to change any process, some people will not take it well coming from you. I remember one time a man was just feeling himself and he said something incredibly inappropriate to me. It was so outrageous it could have cost him his job. He was surprised though because I dealt with it immediately. I was swift and to the point without even getting angry. I remembered that it's professional; it's not personal and I can separate the two. Sometimes people want to intentionally offend and get you angry. (Monica's passion is so poignant here I almost forget to note her reference to the man "feeling himself." Again, this is a common phrase in the Black community that loosely means he was feeling enough self-confidence to speak to her in a blatantly disrespectful manner.)

Mary: There's definitely some truth to that. You can't lead with race and gender issues. If you are a "conscious" Black woman administrator, and I believe that I am, you can't lead with that. You have to work to make small changes in that area. Overall I haven't seen race

or gender as a big deal. People mostly want to know that you're going to be helpful. Competence and keeping your word are more important, I think.

Laura: I agree. No real problems for me with race and gender. I'm pretty skilled at determining if problems are about race and gender, though I know at my institution—salaries are different according to race and gender.

Grace: I'd say that I don't have any real problems. Most of my subordinates were at the college when I was working my way up, so before I was in this position, I was just me. They knew me before I got here. Though I will say this, most of my peers are White males and I did have to learn how to talk to them. I'm pretty direct and the direct approach doesn't always work with men. I have to back off that sometime and learn how others want to be treated.

Dion: OK, let me ask you this—can you talk about a time you were angry or frustrated at work? How comfortable are you expressing those feelings?

Sophia: Yesterday! (Laughter erupts.) A situation happened just yesterday to make me angry. But I'm least likely to speak on anything when I'm angry. You can't take it back.

Gina: There've been times I've been really angry. I try not to react. I just walk across campus and walk back and handle it. One time I had a situation with my direct supervisor. My supervisor wouldn't even meet with me. Completely stopped communicating. It was unfair. I had to escalate it to the president and I was angry!

Dion: Christine, what about you?

Christine: Disappointed, yes. Angry, no. I've been disappointed in both superiors and subordinates. I shake it off and keep on moving.

Mary: Hmm. Shake it off and keep on moving. I'm thinking about that. Over the course of my professional life—not just in community colleges—at times I've received feedback that I'm too emotional. That's something I've really worked on. I've come to realize it's not personal.

Monica: Exactly.

Mary: It's not personal and I try to separate it and take time to think about it.

Monica: Never express anger. Never. You have to be completely non-emotional. I have no problem expressing frustration but you don't allow yourself to get angry. As a Black woman in this position there's no room for that.

Dion: Laura, what do you think?

Laura: (There's a long space before she answers.) I can't share those issues right now.

(Another brief pause. I am utterly fascinated by many of Laura's responses—and non-responses. There seems to be something much deeper under the surface but I am respectful of her unwillingness to disclose.)

Dion: OK, let me ask this of the group. How do you perceive your role in the institution?

(This question prompts a long pause before anyone answers.)

Grace: I'm a student advocate. I represent their needs because they are not at the table to represent themselves. My department counts on me to do that.

Mary: I'd say that too. My primary role is to represent and serve the people.

Gina: I'm valuable to the institution and my role is to convince them of that. (This remark prompts chuckles from the group.) No, I mean it. My job affects a lot of people. A part of my role is to give feedback. I've been through four presidents and they count on what I have to say.

Reba: Oh yeah, for sure. I'm used to having to speak up—to take the initiative when I need to. My president looks to me to represent the school and his vision. My role is to be supportive of others, identify partners and find money! (All around the room, nods and murmurs of agreement.)

Sophia: I don't agree with all the president's decisions but I have his back. And if I want something—I get it.

Dion: OK, for a few moments I just want to focus on Black women. Can you talk about your working relationships with Black women at all levels of your institution?

Christine: I'm sensitive to what Black women go through as double minorities. When I identify talent, I try to promote them. We should always be developing talent, no matter the race or gender.

Laura: Most Black women at my campus are secretaries or below. I treat them just like I treat the president. No different.

Monica: Yeah, I'm the only Black woman in senior leadership so all the black women are below me on the chart. I have great relationships with most of them and make it a point to collaborate with them on different initiatives when I can.

Sophia: It's funny; sometimes I connect with Black women about clothes, shoes or hairstyles—things like that. But I watch carefully and have my "hater-dar" up. I'm still not trusting of people—I keep my eyes open. Many Black women on campus have been supportive of me and ask me for mentorship. I do that.

Grace: Yes, that's for Black men and women. They were happy to see me get to this level and they ask for mentorship. They want to move up as well.

Mary: I have a theory about women in general. We are more likely to hold onto grudges and pettiness in the workplace. My theory is that boys—especially those that play sports—learn how to compete and mess up and get over it and move on. I'm not sure that women ever do. My goal is to have peace among the women in the office and I try to model for Black women what it looks like to disagree and move forward. Sometimes that's hard for us to do.

Dion: In light of these responses, would you say you feel more solidarity with Blacks or women, and why?

Christine: I think race is more meaningful. You can't really say you're closer to a white woman.

Mary: Definitely blacks—it's the biggest part of who I am. Then women.

Gina: Hmm, I don't know about that. I'd say women first. White women go through a lot, too. Women have it tough all over without regard to race. Always trying to prove themselves worthy, too. It's definitely harder for Black women, but it's hard for all women.

Monica: I'd say Black because you are perceived as Black first and then as a woman.

Grace: Yeah. There are commonalities with both groups but there is a bond and a commitment to Blacks. Blacks here want me to succeed and want me to help *them* succeed. When we retire, we need to make sure others can move into these positions.

Dion: When you say others, you mean Blacks?

Grace: Yes.

Dion: Hmm, Sophia what about you?

Sophia: Oh, for me I'd say Black women. All the professionals I really trust are Black women. I feel solidarity with them. (The intensity of her response is very moving for me.)

Dion: Reba?

Reba: Honestly, I can't say. It's hard because I fit in both categories at all times.

Laura: That's where I am. I'm not sure there's a difference.

Dion: OK, so why do you think Black women's participation rates in senior leadership in community colleges are at their current levels?

Christine: It's just like at all workplaces. It's the systemic effect of racism and slavery.

Mary: Right. We're not expected to be ambitious or aggressive. It's not viewed positively for us like it is for them.

Dion: Who is "us?"

Mary: Black women. It's not the same for us as for everybody else. (The participants, in their own way, are using their intersectionality as an interpretive framework for their lived experiences. It is extremely moving to watch them attempt to make meaning of their unique social location.)

Grace: It's the boards. Do they want Black women in senior leadership? If they don't want that, you won't get it.

Gina: Right! It's the boards. They don't even have any Black women on them. So why would they value Black women in key positions? They don't even realize they are missing anything.

Reba: But we have been able to overcome some of the issues. We're represented at higher levels than Black men because we're perceived as less threatening.

Sophia: I don't know. I think it's because we don't apply. I don't know if we're ambitious enough to get to the top.

Mary: I agree. We haven't been strategic in managing our careers. We wait for things to come to us and take whatever. But I still believe it has a lot to do with how we are viewed when we try to be aggressive.

Mary: Do Black women even make it known they want to be at the top?

Sophia: Right. If you start with three hundred Black women, maybe two of them get to the top.

Dion: But you all are here. You are at the top. So what strategies did you employ to get here?

Monica: Preparation and proximity. You gotta be prepared.

Christine: And strategic. Don't apply for every position. Be strategic.

Mary: That's it. You need a plan with a timeline. When I took this position, I was already thinking about the next one. And I'm seeking out skills I don't have that I will need to get it.

Grace: Right. You've got to look for opportunities outside your area. Partner with other departments.

Sophia: And take on projects that highlight your skill set.

Monica: Yes and only apply for jobs that will fit your strengths and your skill set.

Gina: One other thing I would say that's more formal is leadership programs.

Sophia: Yes.

Christine: Yes.

Mary: Yes.

Dion: OK, you've talked to me about a number of the challenges you face. What are your coping mechanisms for these challenges?

Christine: Prayer, massage, family.

Monica: (Nodding.) Prayerful meditation. I use my two-hour round trip commute for that.

Laura: Knowing who God is—where He brought you and where He will take you.

Grace: I work out and I have a strong faith. I don't take life too seriously.

Gina: I pray and call my sister.

Reba: Definitely. You have to have someone to talk to—on and off the job.

Sophia: Well, I have high blood pressure so I'm not sure I'm coping all that well. I pray and read trashy novels. It takes my mind off of things. (The group erupts with laughter.)

Mary: I treat myself well. I walk, workout and eat healthy. I pray regularly and go to church weekly. That's an important source for me.

Dion: Ladies, that was my final question. Thank you so much for this dialogue.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of my study was to examine the intersection of race and gender in the experiences of Black women senior leaders in community colleges. A combination of the interviews in conjunction with the field notes and reflective journaling provide a foundation for our understanding of these experiences. In this chapter the data were presented both individually through the narrative profiles and in the aggregate through the simulated conversation. Six common themes emerged from the data, namely the importance of immediate and extended family units, the angry Black woman stereotype, the lack of formal mentoring, the perceived role of Black women senior leaders within their respective institutions, spirituality as a coping method and salary negotiation experiences. Each of the participant's stories was unique; these themes do not indicate a homogeneousness among their lived experiences. However, analysis of the data collected from the women in this study indicates many commonalities of experience.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion of Findings

The purpose of my study was to examine the intersection of race and gender in the experiences of Black women senior leaders in community colleges. Specifically, my study sought to answer the following research questions: (a) What have been the experiences of Black women senior leaders in community and technical colleges? (b) How do Black women senior leaders in community and technical colleges perceive the intersection of race and gender in the workplace? This chapter will provide a discussion of the emergent common themes derived from the findings presented in Chapter Four. These themes were the importance of immediate and extended family units, the angry Black woman stereotype, the lack of formal mentoring, the perceived role of Black women senior leaders within their respective institutions, spirituality as a coping method and salary negotiation experiences. Each of these themes is explored through the critical lens of Black Feminist Theory and examined in relation to the literature. In addition, this chapter will consider the participant narratives through the critical interpretive lens of intersectionality as an interpretive framework. Next the chapter will attend to the study's implications for theory, research and practice. Finally, I have provided conclusions for the research study.

Importance of Immediate and Extended Family Units

Although each of the study participants reported unique experiences relating to their families of upbringing and their current immediate families, there were a number of similarities that ran through their narratives. Each study participant was raised in a home with

married parents at least through the age of eleven. One participant, Sophia, reported her parents divorced at that time and her mother remarried when she was sixteen. Another participant, Laura, reported that her dad died when she was sixteen. Aside from these two instances where participants found themselves in single-parent homes after a number of years in two-parent families, the findings indicate that, largely, the study participants had a familial foundation built on the traditional, patriarchal two-parent family structure inconsistent with the cultural narrative created by the dominant group to define black women (Collins, 2000; Hancock, 2008; Weigt & Solomon, 2008). These women's experiences are not those of the socially constructed mammy (performing service work in the homes or businesses of Whites), jezebel (sexually aggressive, lustful, animalistic), or welfare queen (breeding several children for the purpose of living off of the government). Further, these women represent a categorical rejection of the "curse of strong womanhood"—the Black woman who is, at once, a full-time worker and full-time mother, the head of a "male-less" family because she has no need of him. Each of these participants was raised in traditional two-parent families and raised their own families in similar fashion. It is salient that none of these women grew up in homes dominated by a single mother wherein they perceived the mother as both father and mother, disciplinarian and nurturer; rather, they attained a more traditional understanding of the roles men and women play within families and, consequently, society. Collins (1998) asserts that the institution of family reconciles the contradictory relationship between equality and hierarchy. As a part of a traditional family, the participants in this study have received, internalized and socially constructed a reality that accepts the seemingly

inherent presupposition that men are natural leaders of families, institutions and society. That they have reached the senior level of leadership is not a contradiction of this reality; rather it is a testament to their ability to assimilate within the existing culture. In other words, the participants in this study leveraged their experiences as daughters, sisters, wives and mothers within traditional families to successfully navigate the organizational culture of higher education institutions as they ascended to senior level leadership.

The women in this study speak at length of the importance of their husbands as partners in building successful families and careers. Christine states: "I don't have to be the boss at home. On my long commute home, I mentally take that hat off. I run things at the office; he runs things at home." Christine indicates she is comfortable with this; as we talk she seems even relieved that she does not have to lead at home as well. Mary talks about a conversation she and her husband had before she accepted her latest position, "I told him he would have to step up with this new job and he has. He is a great partner and support." Reba also shares, "My husband worked shift work when the kids were small to be there in the mornings and evenings when I couldn't be there. At that time I traveled a lot for work. He understood that and supported that." Each participant with the exception of Monica, who is divorced, spoke of the support of their spouse as a major factor in their ability to reach this level of career success. These ideas seem to reinforce Collins's (1998) assertions that families form natural hierarchies wherein women subjugate under the leadership of men and serve to manage the home and family. Christine "can't be" the boss at home. Though she is the boss at work, she cannot be the boss at home (because that is her husband's role). Mary

needs her husband to "step up" to support her efforts to manage the home (because managing the home is "naturally" her responsibility) before she can accept a job offer. Reba's husband had to work shift work to fill in for her (because child care is "naturally" her responsibility) when she "couldn't be there." The findings indicate that though the women in this study have achieved the most senior levels of leadership in higher education institutions, their experiences consist of reconciling their workplace realities with the socially constructed realities of family life imposed on them by others.

Within the dynamic of marriage, another trend emerged from the participant narratives. Each of the seven women who were married at the time of the study had attained both a higher level of education and a higher measure of career success than her spouse. The highest education level attained by any spouse was a bachelor's degree. At least one had an associate's degree and two were, according to the participants, "blue-collar" workers. This trend toward Black women having a higher level of education and career status than their spouses is not new. Black women have long played a larger role than Black men in the family economy due to overt racial discrimination in the labor market and the perception of the Black man as a threatening figure in society (Furstenberg, 2007; Golden, 1977). This reality creates an interesting paradox for the Black women in this study. At the same time that they willingly subjugate the leadership of their homes and families to their husbands, they assume a greater level of leadership at their respective workplaces and contribute, in general, a larger portion of the household income.

In addition to the presence of strong spousal support for the women in this study, many of them alluded to the presence of extended family, both in their upbringings and in rearing their own children, as important factors in their familial success and their ability to find work-life balance. Sophia's grandparents lived across the street from her while she was growing up and were an important support for her mother during her separation and divorce. Christine also reported that her grandmother was an active participant in her upbringing. Strmic-Pawl and Leffler (2011) studied the upbringings of thirty-nine famous Black leaders since the Civil Rights era and noted that each of the participants who reported having extended family actively engaged in their childhoods attributed much of their career success to this phenomenon. This included extended family members of children who grew up in two-parent homes and those wherein the extended family members assisted in the place of one or both biological parents.

In terms of their adult families, many of the participants reported relying on their parents to help them with child care and other household responsibilities early in their careers. Laura states, "My mother was the primary caregiver to my kids early in my career." This theme that extended family played a large role in the family structures of the participants was evident throughout the narratives. Grandparents provided child care, transportation, nurturing, even financial assistance as the Black women senior leaders in this study worked to build careers and families and manage the competing interests of the two. The study participants largely noted that this support was key to their success as they wrestled with such things as long commutes—up to ninety minutes one way—long work

hours—"I would go in at 6:00 and get off at 3:30. I worked from home and on weekends. Anything to make it work."—and extensive travel. For many participants, the support of extended family was essential as they navigated the dual realities of senior leader within a higher education context and manager of families, children and households.

Angry Black Woman Stereotype

Each woman in this study, to a varying degree, indicated the importance of never being perceived as an angry Black woman. They did not all use this terminology. At times they spoke of not being perceived as attitudinal, hostile, angry or uncooperative. During our interviews they did not indicate that they had been perceived or labeled this way. However, they were consistent in their assertion that Black women should work to avoid conforming to this stereotype. The near uniformity of the participants' responses led me back to the literature to document existing research on the topic. There was virtually no research in academic outlets regarding a real or perceived angry Black woman stereotype in the workplace. Broadening my search led to numerous studies about gendered expressions of anger in the workplace (Davis, Capobianco, & Kraus, 2010; Sloan, 2012), that is, the ways in which women and men express anger. However these studies largely considered the differences between White men and women, shedding little light on how the intersection of race and gender socially locates Black women's ability to express anger in the workplace and how this expression affects others' perceptions of them. Sloan (2012) describes a phenomenon called the "emotion culture" (p. 371) which provides guidelines for the ways in which individuals learn to express emotions in given situations. These guidelines are socially

constructed and are predicated on one's social location. As an example, people learn to demonstrate grief at the funeral of a relative or express gratitude for a gift received. As individuals, we work to learn and operate within these guidelines because a failure to do so could cause us to be marginalized, or worse, ostracized. While Sloan's (2012) study of emotion culture was undertaken to consider gender differences in expressions of workplace emotions without consideration to the intersection of race and gender, it is useful for our understanding of the experiences of the women in this study. If all members of society receive messages about how and when emotion should be demonstrated, it is reasonable to assert that these messages attach themselves to our social locations. In other words, the more (or less) power you have due to your membership in various social categories, the more (or less) freedom you have to express emotion.

Overwhelmingly, the women in this study reported having no safe space to demonstrate anger in the workplace. They did not say they felt no anger; in fact they reported at times experiencing anger, frustration and disappointment in the workplace. Whether the anger was directed at superiors or subordinates, the women in this study reported retreating to a private space, on or off campus, to experience and process feelings of workplace anger or frustration in order to avoid being perceived as an angry Black woman. This is particularly salient because Sloan (2012) goes on to assert that, without regard to gender, individuals who have higher status positions within organizations have more freedom to express emotion in the workplace than those who are on the lower end of the organizational chart. The women in this study seem to contradict this. Most of the feelings

of anger or frustrated they reported experiencing at work were directed toward subordinates or direct reports. Rarely did they demonstrate anger or frustration with superiors. However, even when they find themselves in higher status positions than the individual at whom their anger or frustration is directed, they demonstrated no feeling of safety in expressing those emotions. This point is salient; the literature would lead us to an understanding that the more professional authority you possess, the more freedom you have to safely express emotion in the workplace. However, the Black women senior leaders in this study – to a woman – refute that assertion. They consistently assert that, despite the power that comes from a high status, professional position, there is a stronger power at work which socially locates Black women subordinate to members of other majority groups (Whites, men) making it unsafe to express anger in the workplace. One of the core elements of Black Feminist Theory is its significance for emancipation and empowerment. Numerous factors – among those education, experience, talent, intentional hiring decisions – work together to help Black women obtain senior leadership positions. The attainment of a high status job alone, though, is not sufficient to emancipate or empower women who have received certain cultural messages for a lifetime.

A closer examination of the participant narratives revealed that the fear of being perceived as angry or hostile may have permeated all of the participants' experiences as Black women senior leaders. Among the emergent common themes, it would seem that avoidance of the angry Black woman stereotype may work to interfere with or inhibit a Black woman's personal and professional opportunities. If a Black woman feels bound to never be

perceived as angry, confrontational or uncooperative, she may feel the need to acquiesce to members of other groups at numerous junctures throughout her professional career. Indeed, how could a Black woman who is striving to avoid the perception of being angry feel comfortable demonstrating the requisite assertiveness and self-advocacy needed to negotiate a higher salary or added fringe benefits? How could she feel comfortable enough being authentic with members of the majority group to engage in, and take advantage of, a mentoring relationship? Avoidance of the perception of "angry-ness" is both a seminal finding of this study and a defining element of the Black woman's experience.

Lack of Formal Mentoring

A review of the existing higher education literature on the role of mentoring on the career success of Black women indicates the importance of Black women as mentors. In fact, the persistence rates of Black women students are correlated to the participation rates of Black women in leadership within colleges and universities (Patitu & Hinton, 2003; Simpson, 2001). However the women in this study, with one notable exception, rejected the notion that any type of formal or informal mentorship was key in their career success in higher education. None of the study participants reported being formally mentored into their current positions. One participant reported having asked different people to mentor her over the course of her career and being rejected each time. When asked about even informal mentoring, the participants indicated that over the years they had watched individuals—men and women—who were in the jobs they pursued. They attempted to observe and emulate these leadership behaviors but never considered the relationship as a mentoring one. These

findings were surprising in light of the research, which often indicates that both formal and informal mentoring are key for the career trajectories of Black women leaders in higher education settings (Brown, 2005; Jones & Dewalt, 2006). While analyzing the narratives to identify the emergent themes, though, it became clear that most if not all of these women had enjoyed and benefited from mentoring relationships at different points in their careers. Though seven of the eight said no when asked if they had mentors, they proceeded to describe mentoring relationships they had with current and former supervisors within their institutions. Many of them received career coaching, at times having supervisors tell them which jobs to apply for, which degrees to pursue, which committees to lead to prepare them for career advancement.

Without articulating it in this way, most of my study participants indicated some level of "patronage" from White men, mostly, and White women secondarily along their career journey. Existing research on mentoring in higher education indicates that Black women often struggle to connect with would-be mentors who are not women of color and that they actively seek out mentors among their own race and gender (Patitu & Hinton, 2003). Because there are so few Black women in senior leadership within higher education institutions, this may explain the participants' reticence to consider these individuals—who have influenced their careers so profoundly but are not Black women—"mentors". However, this idea of having someone who is not a Black woman patronizing or investing in your career success permeated the narratives. Patitu and Hinton (2003) and Brown (2005) indicate that the absence of Black women senior leaders in higher education creates feelings of isolation and

produces obstacles to other Black women's ability to break through the glass ceiling. While I do not disagree with this assertion, my study leads me to believe that Black women at times may not capitalize on mentoring opportunities that are available because of the immediate and obvious race and/or gender differences between themselves and the potential mentors. Or they may not view relationships that have a clear mentoring dynamic as being mentoring arrangements because the differences in social location between themselves and the mentors obscure the underlying nature of the relationships.

By its very essence, a mentoring relationship requires a measure of trust in both the motive and the method of the mentor. Perhaps the legacy of struggle experienced by Black women creates a distrust that inhibits their ability to accept and acknowledge mentoring support from individuals with whom they do not share a social location. They have already indicated a certain level of trust in the method, in that they observe individuals who are in the positions that they seek and attempt to emulate those behaviors. Perhaps it is the motive that Black women struggle to embrace. Christine indicated that she had to learn that someone "patronizing" her could be a good thing and it took her some time to see the benefit of this. The women in this study have already demonstrated a reticence to express strong emotion in the workplace, perceiving that there is no safe space to do so. This same reluctance may prohibit women from letting themselves be vulnerable enough to seek out and accept the benefits of mentoring relationships from those outside their social groups. From my positionality as researcher, I would consider these relationships, wherein the mentee received career advice, encouragement, support, training and even recommendations, as obvious

mentoring ones. That these women didn't is very salient. Perhaps this is the one of the challenges to overcoming a history of oppression and struggle; members' of historically oppressed groups inability or unwillingness to identify and exploit mentoring opportunities with members of traditionally advantaged groups.

Perceived Role of Black Women Senior Leaders Within Their Respective Institutions

The findings indicate that the participants in this study perceived their roles as advocates, role models and standard bearers. Many participants indicated that a part of their role was to represent members of various groups (e.g., students, Blacks, women, their president). Participants in the study largely believed they had a responsibility to mentor Black women and men, but did not indicate a sense of the same responsibility to help women of other ethnicities. This is at once congruent and contradictory to our understanding of Black Feminist Theory. Collins (2000) asserts that each Black woman adds to the body of knowledge. Each is engaged in the struggle. As the struggle changes, the ways in which we fight change. However, as a critical social theory Black Feminist Theory seeks emancipation and empowerment for members of *all* oppressed groups, not just Black women.

The participants' acceptance of the responsibility to represent, model behavior and pave the way for others is consistent with Collins's (2000) premise that Black Feminist Theory provides numerous epistemological approaches to understand Black Women's positionality within a larger societal context. None of the participants reported being told that they were responsible to model "proper" behavior for other Blacks or Black women. None reported being instructed to mentor Blacks under their authority to develop future senior

leaders. But, instinctively, they understood these responsibilities to be a part of their roles within their respective institutions. As Etter-Lewis (1991) notes, "knowing" can be internal—stemming from one's own experiences—and external—learned from the experiences of others. As an example Grace noted that while she felt a commonality with Blacks and with women, she only felt a commitment to Blacks in terms of helping them succeed and be prepared for leadership positions. Both internal and external knowing coalesce to create a tool for the women in this study to make meaning of their perceived roles within their institutions.

Spirituality As a Coping Method

The existing research on Black women senior leaders in higher education indicated a predisposition toward spirituality as a method of dealing with the pressures of career and family (Bacchus, 2008; Hall, Everette & Hamilton-Mason, 2012; Patitu & Hinton, 2003). More specifically, spirituality took the forms of having faith in and praying to God. Bacchus (2008) asserts that when a Black woman says the stressful situation is in the hands of God, she may be engaged in behaviors she believes will bring about positive results. For the participants in my study, this was a consistent theme. All but one participant cited some form of spirituality as a coping method for workplace stressors. Many participants cited their lengthy commutes to and from work as opportunities for prayer and meditation.

Though all but one participant specifically used the term "pray" or "prayer" during their interview, only one participant referred specifically to God. Each of the participants referenced praying, meditating or church attendance, but only one participant (Laura)

referred to belief in God as a coping mechanism for workplace stress. This was striking because the existing literature (Mattis, 2002; Simpson, 2001) indicated that Black women were more likely than any other group to indicate a belief that God had placed them in their current position and would sustain them through the challenges they faced. As one Black woman educator described it, "(The role of) spirituality is major. Major. If it wasn't for my belief in God I wouldn't be able to breathe…Every day I wake up I ask God to let my words make a difference. Guide me wherever you (God) want" (Agosto & Karanxha, 2012). My review of the literature coupled with my own positionality as an insider to this group (Banks, 1998) predisposed me to expect my study participants to recount similar narratives. Overwhelmingly, they did not do so. While they did not refute the presence of God as the director, sustainer and appropriator of their career experiences, they stopped short of affirming this in any direct way. This is not to suggest that the women in this study were rejecting God; rather that, as Black women's positionality and the legacy of struggle change, their demonstrations of faith and spirituality will change concordantly. This is consistent with Collins' (2000) assertion that Black Feminist Theory must evolve as the struggle evolves in order to maintain its effectiveness as a critical social theory.

It remains important to note this change in expression of spirituality because existing research on spirituality as a coping method for Black women consistently indicates that the spirituality generally takes the form of praying to God. Black women, more than any other social category, are noted as believing that they are in the position God wants them and therefore should seek Him in stressful times (Mattis, 2002; Simpson, 2001). The women in

this study at times seemed to infer this but did not state that specifically. Rather, they used terms such as "meditation," "relying on my faith," and "spirituality." At times participants talked about the importance of church attendance as a coping mechanism, but still made no mention of God. Collins (2002) asserts that the body of literature that composes Black Feminist Theory is constantly evolving as the struggle evolves. The challenges that Black women face today are much different than those of previous generations; consequently their responses evolve accordingly. Spirituality as a coping mechanism is still a large part of Black women's response to the legacy of struggle, though the manifestation of that spirituality may have taken on a different form. Spirituality permeates all aspects of life for many African Americans, and African American women in particular are connected to one another, their culture, their past and their future through a broad understanding of spirituality (Frame et al., 1999). If Black women are connected through an understanding of spirituality, as their expressions evolve so will their level of connectivity to one another.

The Salary Negotiation Experience

The intersection of race and gender creates a unique social location for Black women who hold membership in two traditionally oppressed groups (Shields, 2008). That social location affords them less power than members of some other groups (e.g., Black men, White women) with whom they interact. This was particularly salient in my discussion of salary negotiations with the participants in this research study. Of the eight participants, only one had negotiated her current salary at the time of hiring or promotion. The other seven each accepted the first salary that was offered. This is a powerful phenomenon given the

considerable status and professional power of these women. Each of them is a senior level leader in an institution of higher education. Each of them has a graduate degree; many hold terminal degrees. Each of them has worked her way up through the ranks of community college leadership. Yet seven of them made no attempt to leverage their education, experience and skills into a higher salary. When asked why they had not negotiated, the responses were varied. Many participants stated that they were told there was no room to negotiate; the salary was fixed. Others indicated that they had a number in mind when they accepted the position. The offer was in an acceptable range so they accepted without negotiation.

The lack of negotiations does not indicate that the women were ignorant of the process. A number of participants indicated having done research prior to accepting the position to determine what others in similar positions earned, both at their respective institutions and nationally. However two participants who had done the research reported that they were offered considerably less than what their predecessors (both White men) were earning for the same job. One of them said, "I was chomping at the bit to get the position. I took what was offered." In fact, some variation of this was reported by many participants. Despite their considerable education and experience, the strong desire to break through to senior leadership led them to just be grateful to have the opportunity. This mindset is likely not shared by members of the majority group. Collins (1998) asserts that members of the dominant group often perceive high-wage, high-status jobs as a part of their natural

inheritance. Consequently, they would not feel so grateful just to have the chance that they accept the first offer without negotiation.

This behavior is consistent with some research on gender differences in salary negotiation but not all. Women are less likely to negotiate their salaries than men (Babcock, Gelfand, Small, & Stayn, 2006; Marks & Harold, 2011; O'Shea & Bush, 2002). Worse, many organizations penalize women who do advocate for themselves by labeling them as pushy or marginalizing them outside of important decision making opportunities (Babcock, Gelfand, Small, & Stayn, 2006). Coupling this idea with my study participants' assertion that it is important to avoid the angry Black woman label, it is easy to see how a culture of asking for and accepting less is developed, even for Black women at the senior level of higher education administration.

Though women are less likely to negotiate their salaries than men, they become more likely to negotiate as their careers progress (O'Shea & Bush, 2002). To find senior-level women failing to negotiate salaries at this stage of career is startling. Seidel, Polzer and Stewart (2000) would attribute Black women's failure to negotiate not solely to their gender or race but to the social location found at the intersection of the two. Their assertion is that Black women often lack what they describe as "friends in high places" (p. 1). In other words, Black women rarely have connections within the hiring institutions or the social capital to build necessary relationships that lead to confidence in salary negotiations. Further, Black women often lack the insider relationships to help them determine such things as the organization's predetermined maximum salary offer and comparable salaries within the

hiring or similar institutions. This lack of information places Black women in a less powerful position than the negotiator, which often leads them to make no attempt at negotiation (Seidel, Polzer, & Stewart, 2000). This challenge is especially salient if the negotiator is a White man. At the point that a White man is seated across from the negotiating table making an offer to a Black woman, the power dynamic has already been established. He brings to the table his history of dominance; she brings her legacy of oppressive submission and desire to not be perceived as angry. This point is salient. When I asked each of the seven women why they had not negotiated their salaries, none of them said, "because I am a Black woman whose lived experiences are rooted in a history of oppression." The existing literature and participant narratives point to that very phenomenon, though, as the reason that Black women oftentimes leave money and benefits on the table. At a minimum, Black men would have gender in common with a White, male negotiator. White women would have race in common. Black women lack the common foundation needed to begin building capital during the negotiation process. This is why any examination of the lived and career experiences of Black women must be undertaken through an intersectional lens. The absence of a common race or gender with White men is essential to an understanding of why Black women – even those at the height of higher education careers – struggle to accept and embrace the professional power that comes with education, experience and skill. Without access to the formulaic power structures within organizations, even those who reach senior levels of leadership are at a disadvantage to overcome systemic obstacles to gender and racial equality. Moving up the organizational chart might attenuate the consequences of oppression but it can

never eliminate them. Black Feminist Theory provides tools for empowerment as one of its four core elements. Though the women in this study possessed so much professional power – they were experienced, well educated and often sought after to fill these positions due to a lack of women of color in senior level leadership – a history of oppression and struggle inhibited their ability to operate from their relative positions of power during the salary negotiation process.

Implications for Theory

This study was guided by Black Feminist Theory, a critical feminist theory predicated on four core elements: thematic content, epistemological approaches, significance for empowerment and interpretive frameworks. Thematic content considers several overarching themes that are germane to the unique experiences of Black women as a social group and helps us to understand those experiences. Epistemological approaches attend to the ways in which Black women "know." Significance for empowerment considers the way Black women's struggle for emancipation empowers them and members of other oppressed groups. Interpretive frameworks provide a tool whereby Black women can make meaning of their lived experiences. One framework in particular, intersectionality, has been integral to this research study. Black Feminist Theory goes far in helping us understand and conceptualize the experiences of the women in this study.

Within the thematic content of Black Feminist Theory, Collins (2000) describes a legacy of struggle as a common thread that connects Black women without regard to class or educational attainment. This phenomenon was prevalent with the women in this study who

reported feeling a responsibility to nurture future leaders and avoid negative perceptions in response to this struggle. One way to counteract the legacy of struggle is to assist others in their endeavors to achieve senior levels of leadership. In so doing, there are fewer Black women who have to experience the pressures and responsibilities consistent with being the first or only Black or Black woman in a leadership position. In addition, the participants' concerns with being perceived as an angry Black woman were consistent with Collins' assertion that the legacy of struggle inhibits a Black woman's ability to self-define and forces her to always be defined by the dominant group. In essence, the members of the dominant group who largely control the education, government and media define the role of Black women in society. Though the women in this study did not fit any of the cultural narratives generally used to define them, (e.g., mammy, jezebel, welfare queen) they, like all Black women, are burdened by an inability to create their own narratives.

To the extent that the epistemological approaches of Black Feminist Theory considers ways in which Black women "know," an important facet of this knowing is the ability to own and tell one's own story. Collins (2000) asserts that though Black women at all levels contribute to the compendium of knowledge that constitutes Black Feminist thought, Black women in the academy have the most freedom and power of expression. This proved true throughout my study. The participants exercised freedom to tell their own stories, but the telling of these stories was tinged with the seeds of oppression rooted in membership in two historically disadvantaged groups. This was demonstrated through Laura's hushed tone, Sophia's reference of moving from the field to the big house, Christine's assertion that she

cannot be the boss at home. Among Black women, Collins asserts that members of the academy have the most freedom of expression to contribute to Black Feminist Theory. My participants demonstrate this freedom but also demonstrate why the struggle is ongoing. Namely, because any freedom that a Black woman has to self-define was given to her by the majority group. If they have the power to give freedom, they also retain the power to reclaim it. As Collins notes, the legacy of struggle is constantly evolving as cultural narratives take on different forms and Black women encounter new areas of resistance. The women in this study felt the freedom to tell their own story but demonstrated an understanding that the Black women and Black men well beneath them on the organizational chart possessed no such freedom.

Black Feminist Theory's third core element, significance for empowerment, posits that as a critical social theory it is useful not only for understanding Black women's experiences but for emancipating and empowering members of all oppressed groups. The women in this study may not have perceived women of other ethnic groups to be oppressed in the way that they perceived Blacks to be oppressed, thereby signifying a commonality of experience with Black men more so than with other women. This perception would seem rooted in the history of oppression germane to African Americans in the United States, which is unlike that of any other social group. Additionally, there were many instances throughout this research project where the theory seemed disconnected from the reality of a Black woman's lived experiences. If one of the core tenets of Black Feminist Theory is its significance for emancipation and empowerment, why did the women in this study seem so

un-emancipated and un-empowered at times? Black women still struggle to self-define, safely express strong emotion in the workplace and negotiate salaries and benefits, even as they ascend to some of the most powerful positions in higher education in the country.

As an interpretive framework, intersectionality proved to be valuable for understanding and making meaning of the experiences of Black women in this study. As members of a historically oppressed race and gender, their experiences cannot be considered outside of their membership in these groups. The participant narratives painted a picture of women who were well educated, professional, accomplished and focused. There were as many differences among the data as similarities. From the overarching themes that emerged, I was challenged to demonstrate the various ways in which the participants perceived the intersection of race and gender in the workplace.

Though the participants in this study were socially located at the intersection of a traditionally oppressed race and gender, they seemed more sensitive to the historical oppressions associated with race than those of gender. The participants reported such ideas as Blacks being paid less than Whites, their positions making them responsible to help other Blacks achieve leadership positions and a more common bond with men of their own race than with women of any other race. The research purports that Black women are invisible at the intersection of race and gender as their unique location must subordinate to the position of White women as well as Black men due to a lack of power and status (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach 2008). However the women in this study seemed to acknowledge less power and status than White men and women, but not necessarily that same subordinate positionality to

Black men. In fact, they seemed to harbor some empathy for perceived struggles experienced by Black men. When asked about the participation rates of Black women in senior leadership, one participant observed that though Black women struggled to reach senior leadership, Black men experienced even more challenges because they are perceived as "threatening" figures. In fact, many participants indicated a perceived responsibility to help Black men ascend to senior leadership as succinctly as their responsibility to Black women. There was absolutely no consideration that women of other ethnic groups – dominant or minority – should be afforded the same assistance or support. The desire to support Black men is somewhat inconsistent with the narrative about Black women that posits them as having no need for Black men, content to lead alone (Collins, 2000). However the fact that the women in this study did not perceive a need to support women of other ethnic groups is inconsistent with one of Black Feminist Theory's tenets, that it provides as a critical social theory a mechanism to emancipate and empower members of all oppressed groups. Perhaps this portion of the theory collapses around Black women because they do not perceive the struggle of women of other ethnicities to be as valid or rooted in a history of oppression as that of African American women and men in the United States. While there can be no debate about the negative consequences of the legacy of struggle on African Americans, Collins (2000) herself asserts that Latinas are quickly becoming the victims of an oppressive system wherein they are relegated to low-wage, low-skill, domestic service positions once held largely by Black women. As a matter of course, Black Feminist Theory posits that Black women should both understand and rail against that. For the participants in my study though,

this was overwhelmingly not the case. This may be attributable to the fact that there are even fewer Latina women in senior leadership in higher education. As one participant said of the absence of Black women on community college boards, "they don't even realize they're missing anything." It is possible that, as a socially located group so enmeshed in our own struggle, we do not even realize that we are missing something by not bringing women of other ethnicities along.

Implications for Research

In terms of implications for research, the emergent common themes helped further an understanding of the experiences of Black women, but many areas revealed a need for further research. Each of the participants in this study spent the majority of their lives until age eighteen in a two-parent family. At times this dynamic changed due to death or divorce, but overwhelmingly, the participants had the experience of growing up in a two-parent home. Moreover, seven of the eight were currently in stable, long-term marriages. What is not clear from this study is the impact of this dynamic on their career trajectory or success. Would a woman raised by a single mother have different experiences? Does the upbringing predict the ability to reach senior-level leadership in a higher education institution? Would a Black woman raised by a single mother (or father) who reached senior leadership lead differently? These are questions for consideration in future research endeavors. Half of the women eligible to participate in this research study declined to do so. Perhaps among the eight who declined there was a woman raised by a single mother or one who had never married. Among the women that participated in this study, however, each of them had similar exposure to a

traditional family that reinforced the socially constructed realities of the roles of women in families, institutions and societies. Future research could consider the lived and career experiences of Black women from different upbringings and how these might have influenced their leadership styles.

In addition, the women in this study overwhelmingly rejected the idea that mentoring played a significant impact in their career success. However, their interview responses contradicted this assertion. It appeared that the participants in this study did receive, minimally, informal mentoring at numerous stages of their career. This mentorship primarily came from White men and secondarily from White women, leading me to wonder if Black women senior leaders are less likely to consider the relationship a mentoring one if the guidance and tutelage is not extended by other Black women. Questions to consider are what is the nature of mentoring relationships for Black women with members of other groups? Do Black women struggle to qualify relationships as mentoring if there is no formal, predetermined relationship? Does a legacy of mistrust toward members of the dominant group prohibit Black woman from taking advantage of mentoring relationships? This appeared to be the dynamic at work with my own research study. The participants clearly benefitted from some form of mentoring but did not perceive it thusly. Bartky (1990) asserts that among the cultural narratives regarding Black women, one is that they need members of the dominant group to govern or control their daily lives. Perhaps it is a subconscious rejection of this narrative that caused the women in this study to decline to identify the support and patronage of Whites as mentoring, crucial to their career success.

It was disheartening to find such scant research on a real or perceived angry Black woman stereotype, despite the fact that each participant made mention of it at some point during her interview. Collins (2000) asserts that self-definition is a key tenet of Black Feminist Theory; however, the women in this study lacked the ability to safely express anger or frustration in the workplace for fear of being labeled negatively by members of the dominant group. It is important to note that no participant ever stated they had been called or labeled as "angry." Nevertheless, the perception that they could be was very powerful and had a chilling effect on their behavior in the workplace. The limited research on this topic indicated that members of the majority group felt no such pressure to self-restrain expressions of anger or frustration, especially those in high status positions. Is this perception of Black women by members of other groups real or perceived? Is there a safe space for Black women to express anger or frustration in the workplace without earning the angry Black woman label? Are Black women in the workplace judged by the actions of other Black women? This phenomenon provides great opportunity for future research.

The existing research on experiences of Black women in higher education institutions paid little attention to salary negotiation. As the interviews progressed it became apparent that well-educated, professional Black women were consistently leaving money on the table by a reluctance to negotiate their salaries. The discrepancy of power between Black women seeking career advancement and hiring managers would appear to be pervasive, even for those who have reached the height of career success. The lack of a common social location with salary negotiators, often White men, establishes a systemic power dynamic from the

onset of salary negotiations. What can Black women do to overcome the power imbalance of the negotiating process? What can organizations do to level the playing field for Black women in this situation? Collins (2000) asserts that as the legacy of struggle changes, the objectives of Black Feminist Theory must also evolve. As Black women move from the more vulnerable positions in the workplace to senior leadership positions, their ability to articulate expectations of salary and benefits have not evolved alongside them.

Implications for Practice

This study offers much in the way of implications for future practice. The prevailing research on community college leadership contends that leaders are developed primarily through formal mentorship and leadership training programs for individuals whose talent is identified at the mid-level of their careers (Boggs, 2003). However, the participants in this study attributed little of their career success to either of these long-held predictors of success. If the women in this study reached senior-level leadership without formal mentoring or training programs, what are the key predictors of Black women achieving this level of success? It would seem that, in practice, organizations should work to better understand the dynamics around perceived stereotypes of Black women and to level the inequity of power during the hiring and promotion processes. Higher education institutions should be intentional in their recruitment of Black women senior leaders. At the point of salary negotiations, they should create a diverse team of individuals to negotiate with new hires. As possible, this team should be representative of their employees and stakeholders. This could help to reduce the power imbalance for Black women in salary negotiations.

The women in this study moved up through the ranks of community college administration. This would indicate that there are, within institutions, Black women at the mid-level management of community colleges who would excel in senior leadership positions if provided with exposure and mentoring opportunities. Institutions could leverage existing programs to develop Black women leaders in community and technical colleges. The National Council on Black American Affairs hosts an annual conference for Black women at the mid-level of community college leadership. Professional development funds allocated for these types of opportunities for Black women would serve both to provide leadership training and exposure, but also to help them develop formal and informal mentoring relationships. If the mid-level Black women in these nationwide programs were assigned a senior level administrator as a mentor, the mentoring relationship would become much more formalized one, thereby helping more Black women ascend to the senior levels of higher education administration. We know that Black women senior administrators struggle to develop mentoring relationships, in part because there are few Black women already in senior leadership and partly because differences in social location may prohibit Black women from identifying potential relationships with members of other groups. Still, Black women senior leaders, or those that aspire to senior leadership, could benefit from programs that work to attenuate the unconscious bias on both sides of the mentoring relationship. At times, Black women do not perceive the career advice and support as mentoring; similarly, those that provide the mentoring informally may not appreciate the importance of such relationships. Supporting programs that formalize mentoring relationships may create a

valuable career building tool for Black women senior leaders. A number of my participants reported having bosses that had agreed to groom them for higher-level positions. Black women at all levels of administration with a desire to move into senior leadership should be afforded opportunities to cross-train and learn different skills to prepare for senior leadership positions.

This study also indicates that hiring multiple Black women in senior leadership positions within the same institution could alleviate the perception that the one Black woman in senior leadership has to represent all other Black women, thereby relieving her of responsibility for other members of her social location. Only one participant in this study indicated having three or more Black women in senior leadership at her institution. Institutions should work to make senior administration more diverse to represent the student populations they serve and eliminate the pressures Black women experience as the first or only in senior leadership within their institutions. This can be accomplished by identifying senior leadership potential at all levels of community college administration. In this way, institutions would become more welcoming to members of oppressed groups and reduce the feelings of isolation and loneliness that Black women senior leaders often report. Additionally, in the absence of other Black women senior leaders at their respective institutions, employers should sponsor inter-institutional networks for Black women to build relationships with their peers at other institutions. This could become a valuable resource for Black women who may often feel isolated at their institution. In North Carolina, the BRIDGES program provides cross cultural training and networking for women in four-year

higher education institutions that desire increased responsibility or leadership roles. Opening up programs of this nature to community college administrators, or creating similar programs that serve community college leaders would be useful to provide exposure, training and mentoring for Black women at the mid and senior levels of community college leadership. Further, a number of Black women senior leaders in community colleges receive their training through education leadership programs at four-year universities. In North Carolina, four state universities within 100 miles of each other offer doctoral degrees in education leadership. These programs could actively work to connect their Black women students and alumni, creating a large network for Black women who are or aspire to be senior level administrators. Building these relationships would help to attenuate the feelings of isolation often created by having so few Black women in senior level leadership within institutions.

The women in this study managed personal and professional responsibilities by using immediate and extended family networks, working flexible schedules, employing professional domestic help and setting reasonable expectations for themselves. From a practitioner standpoint, institutions should consider work-life balance in their staffing decisions, e.g., providing telecommuting and flexible schedule as ways to ensure that top talent is attracted and retained. Senior leaders should be able to use the latest technology to communicate, transmit documents, attend meetings and manage programs without a constant presence in an office. Most of the women in this study reported commutes of an hour or more and sixty-hour work weeks. Reducing the number of days each week that senior leaders must

be present in the office would create more attractive opportunities for Black women. As more Black women enter senior leadership, the need to balance work and family will only increase.

Conclusion

The research study provided me an opportunity to contribute to the body of research on the experiences of Black women senior leaders in community colleges and, as Collins stated, to contribute to the compendium of literature that comprises Black Feminist Theory. The trust that the participants placed in me was humbling and motivating. I sought to tell their stories accurately and completely. Still, the conclusion of this study leaves me with more questions about the experiences of Black women in higher education, hence the need for future research. I was struck by the fact that whenever themes would emerge from the data, it was difficult, if not impossible, to return to the literature for further illumination of a topic. It is not satisfactory to use studies on leadership, gender, mentorship or anger that compare White men to White women to explain the ways in which Black women experience the workplace. Such efforts are incomplete and relegate Black women to a new place of powerlessness, a position that Black Feminist Theory wars against. I am encouraged that this study will provide an additional source of literature to help future scholars build on existing narratives.

The emerging themes that arose from the data, those of the importance of family, mentoring, Black women's perceived roles, spirituality as a coping method and salary negotiations amalgamated to form a basis for our understanding of the experiences of Black women senior leaders in community and technical colleges. Many of the nuances of these

themes were consistent with the existing literature while others created new literature with the potential for new research endeavors. The research revealed the qualities and characteristics the women in this story brought to their senior leadership positions, the values instilled in them as children and the opportunities afforded them earlier in their careers. It also illuminated their unique experiences, consistent with their membership in two traditionally oppressed groups.

This research study was undertaken to consider the influence of intersectionality on the lived and career experiences of Black women senior leaders. The participants were candid, thoughtful and expressive about what it means to be a Black woman in their respective positions. The challenge, though, is to consider only the intersection of race and gender when all individuals hold membership in other social categories. This research study did not consider at length issues of class, gender orientation or religious affiliation. But surely each of these—and myriad other social categories—coalesces to form every individual's unique social location. How to consider the intersection of the countless number of social groups in which we hold membership is a task for the next researcher. My task is complete.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

IRB Approval Letter

NC STATE UNIVERSITY

North Carolina State University is a land grant university and a constituent institution of The University of North Carolina

Administration

Office of Research and Graduate Studies
Division of Research

Sponsored Programs and
Regulatory Compliance
Campus Box 7514
2701 Sullivan Drive
Raleigh, NC 27695-7514

919.515.2444
919.515.7721 (fax)

From: Debra Paxton, IRB Administrator
North Carolina State University
Institutional Review Board

Date: March 1, 2010

Project Title: A Narrative of Senior Level Black Women Working in Community and Technical Colleges

IRB#: 1335-10-2

Dear Ms. Terry,

The project listed above has been reviewed by the NC State Institutional Review Board for the Use of Human Subjects in Research, and is approved for one year. **This protocol will expire on February 15, 2011, and will need continuing review before that date.**

NOTE:

1. You must use the attached consent forms which have the approval and expiration dates of your study.

2. This board complies with requirements found in Title 45 part 46 of The Code of Federal Regulations. For NCSU the Assurance Number is: FWA00003429.

3. Any changes to the protocol and supporting documents must be submitted and approved by the IRB prior to implementation.

4. If any unanticipated problems occur, they must be reported to the IRB office within 5 business days by completing and submitting the unanticipated problem form on the IRB website.

5. Your approval for this study lasts for one year from the review date. If your study extends beyond that time, including data analysis, you must obtain continuing review from the IRB.

Sincerely,

Debra Paxton
NC State IRB

Appendix B

Interview Protocol

Research Questions

(a) What have been the experiences of Black women senior leaders in community and technical colleges?

(b) How do Black women senior leaders in community and technical colleges perceive the intersection of race and gender in the workplace?

Personal

Tell me about your upbringing. Family Structure. Social Class.

What are some of the important values instilled in you growing up that shape your life today?

Tell me about your current participation in social networks – friends, extended family, community organizations.

Can you talk about how you manage the challenges of career and family life?

Professional

What influenced your decision to enter community college leadership?

How did you get your current position?

Were you mentored in?

How does your career path compare to those of your colleagues?

Tell me about your most recent experience negotiating your salary.

Cultural

How do you believe you are perceived by your colleagues? Superiors? Subordinates?

What is the organizational culture of your institution like? Can you give an example of written or unwritten rules of organizational culture?

Can you tell me about your regular interactions with colleagues of different races or gender than you? Superiors? Subordinates?

Can you tell me about a time when you've been angry or frustrated at work? How comfortable were you expressing your feelings?

How do you form professional networks within and outside your organization?

How do you perceive your role in the institution? With colleagues? Superiors? Subordinates?

Tell me about your working relationships with black women at all levels within your institution.

With which social category do you most feel solidarity– blacks or women – and why?

Why do you think black women are represented at their current levels in senior leadership in community colleges?

What strategies have you employed to reach this level of career success?

What coping mechanisms do you employ for workplace challenges?

Is there anything else missing from your story that I might have neglected in this interview?

Appendix C

Informed Consent Form

North Carolina State University
INFORMED CONSENT FORM for RESEARCH

Title of Study

A Narrative of The Experiences of Black Women Senior Leaders in Community Colleges

Principal Investigator	Faculty Sponsor
Dion Terry	Alyssa Rockenbach

What are some general things you should know about research studies?
You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to be a part of this study, to choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty. The purpose of research studies is to gain a better understanding of a certain topic or issue. You are not guaranteed any personal benefits from being in a study. Research studies also may pose risks to those that participate. In this consent form you will find specific details about the research in which you are being asked to participate. If you do not understand something in this form it is your right to ask the researcher for clarification or more information. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you. If at any time you have questions about your participation, do not hesitate to contact the researcher(s) named above.

What is the purpose of this study?
The primary purpose of this research is to explore the experiences of black women senior leaders in community colleges in NC. This research is important due to the low levels of black women currently represented in community college senior leadership (≤ 5% of total leadership). This research is in partial fulfillment of a doctoral degree.

What will happen if you take part in the study?
If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to meet at a location that is convenient for you to be interviewed for approximately 90 minutes. This interview will be audio recorded, digitally and will be transcribed confidentially. The information collected in this study will be used produce a dissertation. All participant information will remain confidential but anonymous direct quotes (with no link to your identity) will be used in the dissertation summary. You will be provided a copy of the dissertation upon request.

Risks

You will be asked to share personal information from your own experiences and those of your families. If at any time you feel uncomfortable you will be able to discontinue the interview. You may also skip any question you do not want to answer.

Benefits

You will receive no direct benefit for participation in this study; however your contribution will contribute greatly to the body of knowledge in the area of black women in higher education.

Confidentiality

The information in the study records will be kept confidential. You will be assigned a pseudonym to replace your name on all study data. A master list will be made to link your pseudonym to your name. Data and this master list will be stored securely in digital files on secure computers. This master list will be destroyed after completion of the study. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link you to the study. You will NOT be asked to write your name on any study materials so that no one can match your identity to the answers that you provide. This consent form containing your signature will be stored separate from other study data. If you are quoted in reports about the research results, your identity will be kept confidential.
Your identity as a potential participant was provided to the researcher by the NCCSM. This means that, while your identity will be protected, your colleagues may be able to identify you from quotes used in the research.

Compensation
You will not receive any form of compensation for participating.

What if you are a NCSU student?
Participation in this study is not a course requirement and your participation or lack thereof, will not affect your class standing or grades at NC State.

What if you have questions about this study?

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Dion Terry at dterry@ncsu.edu or 336-270-0949.

What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?
If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Deb Paxton, Regulatory Compliance Administrator, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (919/515-4514).

Consent To Participate

"I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study with the understanding that I may choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. I confirm that I am at least 18 years of age."

Subject's signature_____ **Date** _____
Investigator's signature_____ **Date** _____