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Graduate School of Education and Psychology

KEYS TO SUCCESS FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN LEADERS IN  
COMMUNITY COLLEGES

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## DEDICATION

Giving praise to the almighty heavenly father through him all my Blessing flow. To whom much is given much is required (Luke 12:48). Only by God's grace, protecting me, sustaining me, and encouraging me, have I entered this moment in my life. For every task, every roadblock, for every challenge, test, and tribulation encountered, believe there is a reward. Regardless of the direction you take, every journey is special.

My tribe of family and dear friends have poured into me as I embarked upon this journey. This dissertation is dedicated to them:

- My Husband for being selfless. I Love You! Thank- you for listening and understanding, those late nights, early mornings, and missed family events.
- My son, you are the engine that propels me forward, giving me the power and stamina to be who I am today. I have been blessed to be your mom and this accomplishment I share with you.
- My family, who showered me with overwhelming support. My mom (██████████) for her dedication to education. Always leading, guiding, and encouraging my footsteps.
- My sister (██████████) for gifting me the gift of education, a Pepperdine scholarship and always willing to give a listening ear.
- My cousin ██████████, for passing the torch and reminding me of my strength.
- My dear friends, my sisters Thank You for wiping my tears, keeping me laughing, non-stop.
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To my African American women/Black women, the inspiration for my research study, thank you from the bottom of my heart for your willingness to share your stories with me; your courage and strength is inspiring.



## ABSTRACT

This qualitative study investigated the lived experiences of past and present African American women leaders in community colleges in the United States. The purpose of this research study is to understand common barriers and challenges faced, and strategies used for achieving and sustaining leadership as “Black” and a “woman”. The participants were chosen purposefully because their ethnicity, gender, and current professional position qualified them to provide useful insights into the phenomenon of interest. A total of 15 past and present African American women leaders with at least five years of experience in community colleges and three or more years with the titles of director or higher participated. The research study found parallels in challenges previously established in the literature, as well as advice for the future generation of African American women leaders, using a phenomenological approach with semi-structured interview questions. Learning from past and present African American women community college leaders will encourage other African American women to not only strive to be a leader in a community college, but also to achieve and excel in a leadership role.

*Keywords:* African American female; community college, leaders, leadership

## Chapter 1: Introduction

### Background/Historical Context

Over many decades, the composition of university and college faculty has been the focus of controversy, discourse, and concern. Since the 1960s when equality in higher education became a national priority as a result of the Civil Rights Movement (Taylor et al., 2010). According to Taylor et al. (2010), more than 50% of the U.S. population will be minorities by 2050. Despite increasing awareness of diversity issues on college campuses, African American women in leadership positions continue to be scarce across higher education institutions in America (Howard-Vital, 1989; Wolfe & Dilworth, 2015). According to Valverde (2003), African American women have been disproportionately underrepresented in university and college comparison to their White counterparts.

Community colleges enroll the bulk of higher education students, complemented with changing faculty, staff, and student demographics (Shults, 2001). However, the average representation of the faculty and staff, is not indicative of the student body (Eagan, 2007). According to the American Association of Community Colleges (2018a), in 2016 12.1 million students were enrolled in over 1,100 community and technical colleges across America. Smith (2015) explained, community colleges typically enroll a broad range of students, and they are doubling down on efforts to promote diversity and inclusion even as they face resistance sometimes from within their own ranks. Pluvoise (2006) stated that, over the years students' demographics have changed, however the administration demographics have generally stayed the same. Pluvoise continued by writing that, with the shifting composition of the student body, community college administrators are concerned with the need of a more diverse personnel, faculty, and administrative workforce to support the students. According to Fujimoto (2012),

82% of community college faculty members were white, 17% of faculty were of color and 35% of students were students of color in 2007-2008.

According to Alexander-Floyd (2010), Drake (2008a), and Ebbers et al. (2010), many college presidents and senior administrators who are White males are retiring. Ebbers et al. (2010), explained in 2010, 84% of the college presidents and 38% of community college upper-level administrators were set to retire. Cook (2012), expressed great concerns about the surge of retirements amongst college and university presidents and the possibility of loss of leadership. Cook nevertheless, believed it's a great opportunity to provide a remarkable opportunity to diversify the leadership of the United States higher education system. Green (1998) likewise suggests that high turnover rates can be perceived as an incentive to boost diversity and more accurately align African American administrators with African American students. However, several of the positions have yet to be filled by African American females. *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* (2006) pointed out that 5% of full-time faculty members at higher education institutions were African American. Hague and Okpala (2017) reported 23% of community college presidents in 2006 were females, however White women were employed in those leadership roles. In 2017, the American Council on Education reported that 30% of college presidents were women, 17% were members of racial or ethnic minorities and 9% were African American women. Logan (2006) mentioned that Black women were at the bottom of the hiring chain when trustees chose an administrator to oversee one of the nation's two-year colleges because of outdated perceptions and stereotypes.

## **History**

Education has traditionally been a key driver of success in the African American community. Littlefield (1997) indicated that in 1862, Mary Jane Patterson was the first African

American woman to receive a bachelor's degree from Oberlin College, a historically White university in Ohio. By the year 1900, approximately 225 Black women had earned baccalaureate degrees (Littlefield, 1997). Howard-Vital (1989) expressed that Black women were motivated to get an education for racial uplift, the thought was these women could then aid in the improvement of the African American race.

The beginning of educational success for African American women did not end with earning college degrees, many became administrators. In 1869 the Institute for Colored Youth in Philadelphia appointed Fanny Jackson Coppin Principal; this appointment made her the first Black woman to lead an American higher learning institution. Littlefield (1997) reported a few years later in 1881 Josephine A. Silone Yates was hired as a female assistant; five years later she became head of the Natural Sciences Department at Lincoln University, Jefferson City, Missouri. Glazer-Ramo wrote in 2001 that, more women were earning professional degrees for entry into predominantly male occupations, in doing so women were experiencing alienation, exclusion from social networks, and systemic discrimination.

Although these women rose to leadership positions, these women faced cultural and social barriers. Writing about the early African American women pioneers in education leadership, Teague (2015) wrote, the natural strength of women is creative, competitive, and effective leaders, however there are still obstacles to their advancement. Racial equality was first on the agenda for Black women, but women's rights was a close second. The 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries produced multiple women's movements. Those centuries acted as a vehicle for the advancement of equal rights for women, for example voting rights, equal pay, family rights, and women's victories. Such victories for women include, the Equal Pay Act of 1963, prohibiting sex discrimination, that men and women could not be paid less for the same work in the same

institution; access to more jobs for women; employer's responsibility for growing the female work force; the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title VI and VII, prohibiting discrimination based race, religion, sex and natural origin, opening the path for new opportunities for Black women in higher education; prohibiting discrimination against pregnant women and women with families (Noble, 1956); the Education Act of 1965, the entrance of Black students into previously segregated colleges.

The exclusion of women of color in the women advancement rights caught the attention of feminist and women's movement reformers and activist. These women proved to be instrumental in promoting the understanding of various campaigns led by women. The amalgamation of women from diverse cultures, race, and social classes collectively contributed to the progression of all women. Despite significant advances towards women's equality and equity, there is still evidence of significant disparity in senior academic positions for African American women (Noble 1956; Teague 2015).

According to Duggar (2001) and Williams (2005), few women and people of color are making strides in becoming educational pioneers in their academic careers. Ransford and Miller (1983) indicated these types of views against women tend to be profoundly influenced by historical and current social inequalities. Giscombe (2008) explained that, as women pursue leadership positions, they frequently face socio-cultural obstacles related to behavioral norms, gender congruity and stereotypes. Researchers concluded, there is a consensus that Black women in general typically face a plethora of academic challenges that hinder their professional development and restrict their ascendancy to leadership roles in higher education (Battle & Doswell, 2004). Creating a broad view of a woman's ability to serve and maintain in higher education leadership roles is a long process that requires a sense of urgency to address challenges

that contribute to the difficulty. More importantly, creating a sense of urgency could open many doors for African American women and shatter glass or concrete ceilings, that interfere with upward mobility of the African American women.

Black women in academia seek open access to the opportunities that their abilities, interests, and willingness to work entitle them. According to Meyerson and Fletcher (2000), limited advancement of Black women leaders is due to a "glass ceiling," an intangible obstacle of attitudinal or interpersonal sexism. Giscombe and Jones (2004), called it the concrete ceiling effect, highlighting the dual responsibility of being a woman of color aspiring for leadership roles. Nohria and Khurana (2010) stated that barriers to women's development hinders an organization's efficiency and challenges basic values of equity and social mobility. According to Johnson (2017) the rate of degree attainment for women is more than 50%, in which they are not close to providing half of the industry's leadership. For example, within the last three decades, more than half of all baccalaureate degrees were earned by women, and within the last ten years, more than half of all doctoral degrees were earned by women, however women account for less than 30% of colleges or universities presidents and women of color just 5%.

Although women are already the plurality of college students and provide a fair share of leadership abilities, eliminating hurdles for African American women can also decrease the number of turnovers in organizations. These statistical factors indicate slow progression, however the value that African American women have placed upon education, represents the possibility and the benefit of women advancing into leadership roles. Nohria and Khurana (2010) expressed that organizations cannot continue to squander their human capital in a growing economic and multicultural climate. Ragins and Sundstrom (1990) conclude, "Glass ceilings"



will harm an organization, not only in terms of people who feel stifled in their career and lose their competitiveness, but often in terms of recruitment/turnover costs and regular wages.

### **Context**

Historically Black women have felt defeated when met with challenges and/or barriers that prevented or stifled their advancement into leadership positions. In 1999, Dr. Shirley Ann Jackson became the 18<sup>th</sup> president of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, and in 2001, Dr. Ruth Simmons became the first Black president of Brown University, an Ivy League institution. In 2011, 6% of all college presidents were African American and African American women represented 34% of the total proportion (American Council on Education, 2012). According to Davis and Maldonado in 2014, a review of the statistical data found that few African American women in higher education have reached the highest-level positions in the administration in predominantly White institutions, colleges, and universities. Given the scarcity of leadership opportunities for African American women, studies have shown that all women exhibit sensitive, robust, and special leadership qualities that enhance the goals and results of organizations (Hill et al., 2016).

Teague in 2015 wrote that the inability of African American women to transition into higher education leadership roles will adversely affect qualified women and colleges or universities. Community colleges would greatly benefit from diverse leadership in many ways, such as,

- recruitment and retention of students, administrators, and faculty,
- the ability to align student demographics with administrations demographics which will allow students to see themselves as leaders and become more accepting, tolerant, and thoughtful members of society,

- diverse leadership will challenge predisposed stereotypes or norms that faculty, administration, and students may have developed from adolescents,
- diversity leadership will also improve communication and thought processing that affect the college community and the community the colleges serve.

Years prior Ernest and Young in 2009 wrote, leaders with a varied range of viewpoints, perceptions and identities are critical to promoting multiple perspectives, broadening cultural worldviews, and fostering creativity that is of vital significance to colleges and universities responsible for teaching and preparing future leaders, staff, and residents.

The concerns of gender equity and lack of African American women inclusion are nothing new. Women have fought for centuries for women's rights. The future of equal opportunity, fundamental freedoms for everyone rely on the acknowledgement of the nature of the problem by the social and political institutions and on corrective action. Considering that the effort of the women's movement has been ongoing for three decades, there could still be a substantial period remaining on the road towards the inclusion of more African American women in leadership positions. Drew (2010) wrote that the scenery of higher education is dynamic and requires leadership capable of handling transition. Hannum et al. (2015) explained that despite the advantages of women's engagement in higher education leadership, as they shift into high-level leadership positions, these women face different challenges. Based on the experiences and perspectives of others, offering best practices and strategies to promote African American women in leadership roles could strengthen employment opportunities and help African American women manage a leadership system that was not designed for them.

The goal of this research is to identify those best practices and strategies for African American women aspiring to leadership roles at community colleges referred to as two-year

college, technical college, or junior college. Teague (2015) suggests that university leaders provide the necessary tools to equip future leaders. Davis (2015) wrote that to build leaders, it is important to provide deliberate access to individuals on activities and practices that provide them with the skills required to be successful leaders. Understanding the challenges and experiences of African American women active in higher education leadership will allow future leaders to overcome these common difficulties. Chapter 1 introduces the background, the problem statement, purpose of the study, research questions, the significance of the study, assumptions, limitations, definitions of terms used in the study, and an overview of corresponding chapters.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The colleges and universities across the United States are facing a leadership crisis (Evelyn, 2001; Forthun et al., 2017). There is a shortage of African American women in leadership roles at community colleges. The limited data available indicate wide gaps in accomplishing a diverse leadership team and minimal steps has been taking in narrowing such gaps. Hiring, promoting, and retaining African American women, and support, available opportunities, at the collegiate level is needed. A pattern was observed across all racial and ethnic groups by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2019), during the academic year 2015-2016. The observation was more pronounced for Black students, than any other ethnic group. According to NCES (2019) women held the most graduate degrees in Academic year 15-16, Black women earning 70% of master's degrees and 66% of doctoral degrees. One would presume that, based on the number of advanced degrees earned by African American women, the colleges and universities, there should be an adequate pool for selecting qualified administrators (Turner & Quaye, 2010). Although women are earning graduate degrees in high numbers their leadership roles are not increasing within the higher education arena.

The shortage of accessible data adversely impacts the aspirations and employment choices of African American women and collegiate recruitment activities. Undoubtedly a lack of representation is prevalent in higher education leadership with a deficiency in African American women continuing to be under-represented in community college leadership roles, frequently working in less influential roles than White women (Flowers & Moore, 2008; Gasman et al., 2015). African American women represent the largest category of non-White females in 2014 within academia. Among the 236,000 Black women in this category, 6% worked in senior or managerial positions, in addition the overwhelming majority worked in clerical roles, led closely by the number of staff members (Wallace et al., 2014).

This crisis has been on the horizon for over a decade (Forthun et al., 2017) African American women administrators have demonstrated a willingness to participate in the leadership positions on college campuses, yet few have been granted the chance to work in senior leadership roles. As America's student body is quickly steadily diversifying the global demands of the world are becoming more complex (Eckel & King, 2007), diversity in the leadership of higher education is necessary. The shortage of representation in places of leadership may have a disturbing effect on the expectations of aspiring leaders who see no place for people like themselves in education.

Colleges and universities across America vary in many ways, each having its own specific and distinct mission, vision, and practices. To fulfill the primary mission of community colleges, diversity in student bodies, faculties and personnel is important to providing high-quality education. The diversity of a college's faculty, staff, and student population influences strength, productivity, and intellectual personality. Diversity also contributes to the richness of teaching, learning, personality, cognitive style, and intellectual outlook which will offer students

a breadth of ideas that constitute a dynamic intellectual community. Finkel (2019), added as the colleges enter a season of change, an imbalance in leadership roles, is recognized particularly within the categories of race and gender; community colleges must recognize that diverse leadership is needed to represent and support their student and faculty populations.

Though African American women have made marks in higher education from the 1800s to the twentieth century, they were few in numbers, but their impact was great. When looking at the overall structure of a college that serves thousands of students, the underrepresentation still exists. The best resource to understanding the career journey, advancements and experiences of an African American woman is African American women leaders themselves.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study is to understand the best practices and success strategies employed by African American women who have obtained and maintained leadership positions at two-year public institutions by exploring their career journey through experiences. The effectiveness of their performance is not in question, but rather their experiences and the meanings they give to those events that have shaped their careers. An understanding of the unique needs of African American women in leadership roles is essential to implementing meaningful strategies to support their continued success in community colleges referred to as 2-year college, technical college, or junior college. Findings from this study contribute to the African American women's strategic development in higher learning by providing practical tools for increasing their professional career.

This study also provides a deeper understanding of the challenges African American women administrators encounter and the coping mechanisms they utilize to successfully manage those challenges. This study explores the challenges of African American women administrators

in the position of director and above at community colleges. The methods produced by this research will enable African American women to effectively integrate their work experiences, education, and personal life to combat challenges.

Information from this research can support the career aspirations of African American women through realistic strategies to assist in their career advancement in higher education. More importantly, profound self-awareness and the desire to create their own personalities, the African American woman can exercise authentic leadership, in conjunction with demonstrating maturity in their ability to deftly turn challenges including self-doubt and undue scrutiny into opportunities to grow, improve and eventually meet and exceed expectations. This research can also be used as a recruitment and retention tool for community colleges as they seek diverse talent to serve their student population. This research is important for community colleges, as student populations are rising and evolving rapidly, a potential exists to close the gaps through these changes.

The purpose of this study is to understand the Challenges endured and strategies employed by African American women in leadership positions at two-year public institutions; assist aspiring African American women leaders, colleges and current leadership in their talent growth, progression, and retention processes; and enhances higher education literature. Aspiring African American women leaders will be able to explore perspectives of women who came before them and learn from their journeys into leadership positions in higher education. The results from this study will also be useful for management of the colleges talents to recognize systematic leadership gaps, to encourage and improve minority leadership satisfaction, and to foster and investment in African American women existing within their colleges. The data from

this research study contributes to the ongoing conversation and literature on African American women and the industry of higher education.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions (RQ) were addressed in this study.

RQ1: What challenges and barriers do successful African American women leaders face in advancing to leadership roles in community colleges?

RQ2: What strategies and best practices do African American women utilize in advancing to leadership roles in community colleges?

RQ3: How do successful African American women in leadership roles at community colleges measure and track their career success?

RQ4: Based on their experiences what recommendations would successful senior level African American women make for aspiring African American women leaders?

### **Significance of the Study**

The significance of this qualitative research is to examine African American women's experiences in recruiting and retention, as well as factors impacting their upward mobility at higher education institutions. The findings of this research study could benefit future African American women who aspire to become community colleges leaders. This research study will aid in psychology as African American women offer their own viewpoint on real issues that affect their ability to assert themselves and hold a leading position in a higher education institution. This research study would also offer insight into the understanding of barriers in the acquisition and preservation of leadership roles in community colleges by African American female administrators. Furthermore, this research study also will help aid in student success. Pitts (2007) explained, many stakeholders in the education community have made claims that

minority faculty positions improve the success of minority students by serving as role models, mentors, and advocates for the students.

In addition, this research study will introduce readers at universities and community college levels the resilience of African American women administrators in higher education. This study will help close gaps on the limited amount of knowledge available, which focused on how successful African American females obtained and retained administrative positions at community colleges. Hannum et al. (2015) explained that the significance of women fulfilling leadership roles has been explored, but not purely for women but for the entire higher educational system. Hall et al. (2007) wrote African American women leaders' commitments to post-secondary education have been marginalized, and researchers have found it challenging to gather simple ideas concerning their leadership role. According to Harvard (1986) women in leadership positions remain largely unexplored in higher education, specifically Black women in the positions of academic leadership. Johnson (2017) stated the American Council on Education (ACE) is pushing for further research to be undertaken on the career advancement of African American women in higher education.

Little is known about the positive actions of women in general, Black women specifically, in positions of academic leadership and responsibility. The information gained from studying African American women can be used to support others as they make the journey to community college leadership positions of director and above. Studying African American females with terminal degrees can help others to know the barriers women of color experience on their way to the top of the community college organizational hierarchy.



## **Assumptions of the Study**

Simon and Goes (2011) stated that, assumptions, were beyond the reach of the researcher, but if assumptions were not present, the study could be considered irrelevant. This research studied the best practices and strategies used by African American women in leadership positions within community colleges. Creswell (2009) explained that the researcher uses themselves as an instrument that is granted privileged access to the participants lived world. Moustakas (1994) acknowledged the impact on individual responses on human experiences, recollections and understanding of events.

This research offers an opportunity to look into the educational and emotional phenomena affecting the advancement of African American women administrators in public higher education institutions. Although the literature allows one to make several assumptions about this issue, the results really depend on the population of the sample chosen to participate in this analysis. The following section discusses the key assumptions and limitations of the research and has the potential of influencing the study result.

This study was conducted with the following assumptions:

- African American women in leadership roles are available and are willing to share strategies to overcome barriers to professional growth.
- The participants in the research are truthful and practical in delivering their responses and sharing their experiences and perceptions of the challenges they have encountered in their professional growth as they apply to African American women in higher education leadership positions.

- Women are under-represented across industries, not just higher education systems. There is also little presence of African American women in leadership in the positions of director and above at community colleges.
- Historically women have been discriminated against, therefore the barriers that exist for African American women exists for all women including White women.
- The data gathered will provide a detailed and objective review of some of the challenges that ambitious African American women interested in community college leadership may face during their career development, as well as some of the suggested solutions that could help them achieve their career goals
- The researcher will be able to gain a deeper understanding of the research questions by extrapolating information, interpretation, and analysis.
- Qualitative research reflects on individual experiences and perceptions to reflect the thoughts, behavior, and feelings of those studied (Stake, 2010).
- Based on the history of our country and existing experiences of discrimination against African American women in the higher education setting, it is believed that the same racial behaviors that exist outside the workplace also occur inside the workplace.
- Similar coping mechanisms are shared by African American women who have obtained leadership positions in community college administrations and they also have common ways of overcoming similar difficulties and hardships.
- The absence of White women in higher education leadership, it is believed that similar challenges exist for African American women, both personal and professional.

## **Limitations of the Study**

According to Creswell (2016) limitations in research are those variables that are beyond the control of a researcher and may cause potential weaknesses in the study. The approach for this qualitative research study is phenomenology. Phenomenological research was described by Creswell (2013) as a phenomenon that uses interpretations of participants' experiences. This research study examined common experiences of African American women in higher education leadership. Data was obtained from interviews at different community colleges with present and past African American women leaders. Phenomenological studies are generally limited due to the assumed consistency of interpretation, understanding and memory of the participants. Creswell and Poth (2018) stated that the compilation of self-perceptions of participant experiences inevitably limits the analysis, as participants must be able to remember and express their experience precisely and the researcher must present their interpretation of these experiences without bias. Other limitations include:

- This qualitative research used a technique of phenomenological analysis to identify the tales and common perspectives of the participants in a community college setting, the experiences shared by participants may be parallel those of individuals in university settings throughout the country.
- Only the perceptions and experiences of the sample selection of Black women serving at community colleges of higher education across the United States were analyzed.
- This sample did not represent all African American women employed in community Colleges; thus, it is bound only by the knowledge and experience given by the participants in this study sample.

- Data collected from interviews of current and former African American women leaders at community colleges may present biases based on their cultural norms, or other unknown factors.
- The researcher is an African American woman and employed at a community college.
- The study focuses only on African American women in higher education, maybe there are other strategies to be used in other industries when a leadership position is obtained or maintained.
- The semi-structured interview format may trigger biases in the conversation in the nature of the conversation between the researcher and the interviewee.

### **Definition of Terms**

- *Academia*: Higher Education institutions organized into a system or multiple systems of academic institutions, with boards of directors elected or appointed for each system or for individual systems (Ehrenberg, 2004).
- *African American/Black*: Black is used to describe all people of color who identify as members of the African diaspora, including Black, African, African, Caribbean, or mixed-race individuals who are categorized as Black who live and work in the United States (Bodomo, 2013).
- *American Association of Community Colleges*: A non-profit advocacy organization, representing associate degree granting institutions two-year college, technical college, or junior college (American Association of Community Colleges, 2018a).
- *American Council on Education*: A membership-based organization that promotes the higher education sector to develop effective public policies, promote innovation and high-quality practices (American Council on Education, 2017).

- *Attitudinal*: Expressive collective behavior or emotions (Meyerson & Fletcher (2000))
- *Barriers*: Barriers are systemic obstacles and difficulties that arise because of institutional structures and operational practices that have traditionally discouraged the reversal of discriminatory policies profoundly entrenched in the higher education community (Hannum et al. 2015)
- *Behavioral norms*: how people act in reality, their normal and/or usual actions Giscombe (2008)
- *Community colleges*: Two-year college, technical college or junior college issuing associate degrees, trades, or certifications (Shults, 2001).
- *Concrete ceiling*: A term like glass ceiling, emphasizing the expanded adversities experienced by women of color in professional progression centered on ethnicity and status (Giscombe & Jones 2004)
- *Demographics*: A population study based on factors such as age, race and gender (Pluvoise, 2006)
- *Diversity*: Every person is unique, and the distinctions are noticeable, these may include dimensions of race, nationality, gender, sexual identity, social class, size, physical ability, religious values, political views, or other ideologies (Eckel & King, 2007)
- *Gender congruity*: fit between leadership roles and gender roles; Receiving women as potential occupants of leadership roles less favorably than men and judging actions that fulfill the requirements of a leadership position is less favorably when enacted by a woman (Giscombe, 2008)
- *Gender pay gap*: The disparities in men and women earnings and discrepancies in pay between men and women in equivalent jobs (Miller, 2017).

- *Glass ceiling*: An invisible barrier that prohibits women from rising past a certain point in institutions or other organizations technical fields (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000)
- *Journal of Blacks in higher education*: A former academic journal for African Americans working in educational institutions (Journal of Blacks in higher education, 2006)
- *Leadership*: Leadership is both a study field and a functional expertise that includes the capacity of a person or institution to "lead" or direct certain individuals, teams, or whole organizations (Harvard, 1986).
- *Marginalized*: Form of discrimination in relation to social, cultural and professional identities; Academic and social exclusion (Hall et al. (2007)
- *National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)*: The main federal agency in charge of educational data collection and analysis (National Center for Education Statistics (2019)
- *Predisposed stereotypes*: Negative stereotypes; where the brain responds unfavorably to groups that are represented in a negative way. The media can fuel racial bias by negative portrayals of ethnic or religious minorities
- *Prohibiting discrimination*: It is unconstitutional for employers to discriminate against the terms, conditions and privileges of jobs in relation to recruiting, dismissal, compensation or service (Noble, 1956)
- *Racism*: A Person actions both deliberate and unconscious that trigger marginalization and inflict differing degrees of damage to minorities; and social practices that perpetuate White supremacy and enable the continued subordination of minorities.
- *Resilience*: The use of resourceful, professional values to succeed in times of adversity
- *Sexism*: Discrimination based sex or gender in particular against girls and women (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000)

- *Stereotypes*: Character traits or qualities attributed to particular classes on the basis of their ethnicity, sex, nationality, age, faith or other character trait (Giscombe, 2008)
- *Social inequalities*: Discrepancies in the allocation of economic properties and profits, as well as the general efficiency and privilege of each person's life in society (Ransford & Miller, 1983)
- *Systemic discrimination*: Instigated by organizations, institutions, through hidden policies and procedures, decision making, and education (Glazer-Ramo, 2001)

### **Chapter Summary**

Since the 1800s African American women have played a significant part in the education system. Given the many challenges African American women continue to obtain and maintain leadership roles at community colleges. This research study aims to support emerging African American women leaders and African American women leaders to help build a leadership route for future African American women. This research study can be used as a tool by community colleges, organizations, society, and policymakers to better support African American women, to influence policy making, remove systematic barriers and simply to bring awareness to racial and gender gaps. Chapter 1 began with an introduction which provided the background history, statement of problem, purpose, and research questions. This research study is designed around the experiences of African American women in leadership positions. Chapter 2 also includes significance of the study, assumptions and limitations, and the definition of terms.

That process of the research study is illustrated in corresponding chapters. Chapter 2 focusing on the existing literature, which provides the theoretical framework for this research study. Chapter 2 also discusses women leaders, historical overview, and historical accounts of African American women in higher education, the current status of African American women in

higher education and the exploration of the survival strategies and common barriers African American women utilize and experience. Chapter 3 details the research design and methodology, an explanation of the sampling and data collection methods, Interview techniques and protocols, validity and reliability testing procedures and data analysis process. Chapter 4 highlights the findings of the study from the data analysis process and Chapter 5 summarizes conclusions and key points and lists recommendations for further studies.



## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Overview of Literature Procedures

Analysis of existing literature in this Chapter; relates to past and present experiences of African American women in leadership roles. According to Jackson-Dean (2014), the foundation of a research study is found in the literature review, in which the researcher gathers evidence for the research study from scholarly and reliable sources to perform credible research. Wolfe and Dilworth (2015) explain that literature exists for African Americans in higher education has expanded. However, its focus has been primarily on qualitative studies of student retention and faculty. It has failed to explore the experiences of African American women advancing into leadership roles in higher education institutions. Diversity in leadership is beneficial to institutions, faculty, leaders, and students. It strengthens the campus environment through multicultural experiences and contributes to a universal society. Wolfe and Dilworth, (2015b), Jones, (2013), explained leadership in higher education institutions must be dedicated and committed to the development and advancement of people of color within leadership positions at all levels of the higher education system. Guillory (2001) concluded that institutions and the leadership within the higher education system have a civic obligation to meet the needs of America's changing populations.

Specific themes emerged from the literature review about how the expectations and assumptions of African American women in society impact their advancement and successes in leadership roles. This review of the literature categorizes these themes as follows; (a) leadership and gender; (b) women in leadership; (c) African American women in leadership; (d) women in higher education; (e) African American women in higher education; and (f) the identification of African American women successes/strategies/practices in leadership roles. Howard Hamilton

(2003) explained, when attempting to understand the needs of Black women, the theories chosen should be centered on their cultural, social, and personal context because it varies significantly from men and women who have not experienced racial and gender inequality. Black Feminist Thought (BFT) and Critical Race Theory (CRT) will be the two theoretical frameworks used to gain insight into social problems faced by African American women.

Understanding why African American women's experiences differ from other women and men is essential in exploring the perception of the African American women, the challenges faced, and how they successfully navigate everyday life in leadership roles within higher education. The reader should note that the terms African American and Black are used interchangeably in this literature review.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Ravitch and Riggan (2012) state, the theoretical framework is the "why" and "how" of the research study. Therefore, it is used by researchers to gain a better understanding when analyzing data, the rationale for conducting the study, and validation of the gap in knowledge. The framework of this research study will introduce and describe the theories that explain why the research problem exists. Savin-Baden and Major (2012) suggest that theories incorporate principles, mechanisms, models, conceptual frameworks, or solutions to examine facts, outcomes, behavior, methods, or conclusions. The exploration of the various theoretical frameworks used in this literature review was due to the different themes of the research topic, such as race, gender, leadership, challenges, overcoming challenges, and gaining successful careers.

In exploring the theoretical frameworks that helped to clarify the development and social challenges facing African American women, it became clear that the context had to come from

the experiences of African American women. According to Howard (2003) instead of many of the mainstream theories considered to be universal and lacking the idea of multiple identities, two frameworks were deemed to be acceptable when researching African American women: Black Feminist Thought Theory (BFT) and Critical Race Theory (CRT). The overall theoretical foci of this study are rooted in the literature which focuses on leadership, BFT, and its three themes, critical race theory and the effect on higher education institutions and individuals, as well as address obstacles and success strategies of African American women in leadership roles within higher education.

### **Black Feminist Thought Theory**

This research study requires an understanding of BFT theory to help explain the experiences of African American women. Eisenstein (2004) suggests that the feminist philosophy assumes that women are homogeneous, have similar challenges, and patriarchal experiences within institutions. Collins (2004) explains, the philosophy of Black feminism which centers around the oppression of Black women, contending that racism, sexism, and class oppression are inseparably intertwined. The fundamental insight into BFT theory is that awareness is influenced by several influences linked to a specific role of a person or community in culture and history. Ethnicity, gender, cultural context, socioeconomic standing, and experiences of those participating in this research study play a significant role. Collins (1991) stated the BFT theory starts with the most critical intellectual context for discussing African American women.

To different people, the idea of Feminism means different things. Individuals have described themselves, for example, as radical feminists, critical feminists, mainstream feminists, Black feminists, progressive feminists, and post-structural feminists. Hooks (1984) insist that the

failure to reach a consensus on what feminist is or embrace concepts that can act as a source of unity has become a vital issue in the feminist debate. Perreault (1993) determined that feminists are equally concerned about the unequal positions of women in higher education and culture but vary in their recognition of problems, goals, and their approach to reform. Although there is a lack of capacity to embrace one unified concept, feminists share one goal, and that is to better the lives of women even if the approach or strategy is different.

According to Davis and Brown (2007) the term "Black Feminist" was introduced in the 1970s during the mid-nineteenth century when Black feminists were participating in feminist rhetoric. The specific ideologies of BFT relate to social justice movements for women and African Americans. Davis and Brown pointed out later, BFT expanded the concept to include class and sexuality. During the mid-nineteenth century, feminists expressed that African American women, politically and socially, deal with "double bind," a concept meaning Black and a woman (Davis & Brown, 2007). Salzman (2006) explained that race and gender intersect at some point. Crenshaw (2005) coined the term intersectionality over 30 years ago, in 1989, arguing social identity labels lead to discrimination and places African American women in positions to fight more than one status. Crenshaw stated intersectionality is more than race and gender identity, it is class, and sexual orientation, religion, and other unique identifiers asserting people of color are oppressed in many ways.

Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010) and Collins (1999) determined intersectionality was the examination of marginalization. Collins associates the term with multiple personalities and complex attitudes. Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010) say this contributes to the various roles that African American women leaders maintain in everyday life and its core force. According to

Collins (1998), minority women view the world from an intersectional perspective emphasizing race and gender positionality.

Salzman (2006) explained, two of the leading Civil Rights Movements at the intersection of race and gender excluded the needs and the voice of the African American women. Besides, the predominately-male-led Civil Rights Movement successfully and relentlessly advocated for the ethnic minority rights of Blacks. However, the same movement ignored the rights and needs of women. Similarly, in the 1960s and 1970s, the second wave of women's movements fought against gender inequality in a unique manner, which overlooked the needs of fair justice for minority women.

Collins (1990, 1998, 2002) continued the Black feminist thought conversation and pointed out that African American women have occupied a marginalized position in Academia for a lengthy time. Howard-Hamilton (2003) explained that African American are invited into places where the majority group has gathered, and they feel like an outsider. Although they are visible, they have no voice when the dialogues start viewing this marginality as the "outsider within." Howard-Hamilton (2003) wrote that there is no fit between African American experiences culturally or personally with the majority group; therefore, a sense of belonging does not exist.

Collins (2002), details three themes in BFT: (a) other people besides Black women have shaped their identity, (b) the differences in experiences and oppression amongst African American women from other women and (c) the presence of similarities and disparities among African American women in terms of ethnicity, sexual identity, and socioeconomic status factors. Collins pointed out these three factors as the driving force in the marginalization of

African American women. Collins also described BFT as communicating the multiple oppressions of African American women.

This research study aims to analyze a group of African American women who live at the margin of the seams in higher education. African American women's expertise varies as members of any ethnic class due to their perceived unequal status in society. Sharing experiences of African American women leaders leads to increased awareness and raises consciousness within society. Building knowledge and awareness are critical to the development of strategies and best practices as a tool to support and create a pathway for African American women advancing and retaining leadership roles in higher education. Davis and Brown (2007) explained, to promote and support African American women in higher education institutions; understanding of their unique position must take place at the institution level.

### **Critical Race Theory**

Critical Race Theory (CRT) emerged during the 1970s, marking a significant phase in the history of racial politics in the legal world, widening the conversation about racism and race in America. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) and Villalpando and Bernal (2002) pointed out that CRT is a theoretical framework established in the 1970s by two legal scholars who studied law and legal policies concerning marginalized people in society. Witherspoon and Mitchell (2009) stated that the legal scholars developed this theory to help understand how influential people of power establish policies and laws that preserve racial and ethnic inequality even though systems were/are viewed as race neutral.

Decuir and Dixson (2004) explained that CRT was adopted as the first analytical framework to assess the inequalities in education. Ladson-Billings and Tate (2005) stated that the framework had been used by many scholars to analyze further and critique the research and

practices of the education system. According to Hiraldo (2010), CRT is used to examine the multiple types of socioeconomic inequity supported by higher education institutions. DeCuir & Dixson (2004) and Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) wrote that CRT explores the role of ethnicity and racism in perpetuating social inequality between privileged ethnic and marginalized groups. Jean-Marie et al. (2009) also found that Critical Race Theory recognizes the intersectionality of race, which research scholars call "double jeopardy" for African American women, in their race and gender, traditionally linked with disadvantaged communities. Hiraldo (2010), Gasman et al. (2015), DeCuir and Dixson (2004), McCoy (2006), and Ladson-Billings (1998) laid out five straightforward tenets of CRT: counter stories, the permanence of racism, whiteness as property, interest conversion, and critique of liberalism.

### ***Counter Stories***

The first tenet empowers marginalized groups, particularly people of color, to use their voice, through narratives, by telling the first-hand account of their story involving marginalized experiences. According to Ladson-Billings and Tate, (1995) CRT has created a coping approach through its narrative counter stories and helps marginalized groups to view and identify their reality. Delgado and Stefancic (2001), Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) expressed that the art of storytelling is the most successful and dominant tool.

### ***Permanence of Racism***

CRT's second tenet suggests the economic and social-political spheres of the American Society are presently and historically controlled by racism. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) found that race generally was not theorized, giving scientific legitimacy, and validating it for empirical study and research. DeCuir and Dixson (2004) and Hiraldo (2010) points out that the

permanence of racism is illustrated by normalization and perpetuation of injustice and inequality in daily life.

### ***Whiteness as Property***

The third tenet of CRT are power structures that only benefit White people over non-White people, described as White privilege. This tenet insinuates ethnicity, sexism, and the power that is extracted from sexism are represented in terms of White cultural ideology and are used as a criterion to decide what is considered appropriate, natural, or commendable. Also, DeCuir and Dixson (2004), Hiraldo (2010) and Harris (1993), paint the picture of whiteness as a property that can be illustrated by-laws, legislation, and informal networking opportunities focused on the facts and practices that are central to White culture.

### ***Interest Convergence***

Interest convergences concedes White people as the primary beneficiaries of civil rights laws in America. Hiraldo (2010) and DeCuir and Dixson (2004), argued that the advancements, liberties, and privileges made available to African Americans and people of color during the Civil Rights Movement were rights and freedoms that were already standard in White culture. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) stated, White people are unable to empathize or understand what it is to be non-White and are thus guilty of cognitive and experiential checkout.

### ***Criticism of Liberalism***

The fifth and final tenet of CRT, derived from the concepts of color blindness and historical revisionism (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). The criticism of being colorblind deprives an individual of a critical part of their social identity. The oppression of color blindness makes White Ideology eradicate the aspect of a person of color to be recognized as an individual. Also,



this tenet even criticizes the revisionist history, one in which a glamorized, less graphic form of history is revealed.

This research study aligns with CRTs five tenets. This qualitative research study focused on experiences lived by African American women in which they articulate their perspectives through the narration of stories aligned with CRT. Researching through the CRT lens offered exposure to counter stories linked to hidden, structural racial disparities that lead to a thorough understanding of those experiences. The research study includes a selection of African American women's perspectives and experiences that have overcome barriers to advance to leadership roles. The gradual advancement of African American women in leadership, the perspectives of African American women, and their career choices in the United States are part of recognizing the permanence of racism as a role in social operations. Whiteness as a property stresses preferential rights for White people and limits on exposure to leadership for persons of color.

CRT is a paradigm from which to interpret society and address the "why and how" questions about participation and opportunities in higher education for African American women. Parker and Lynn (2002) explain that the theory aims to examine the historical, political, psychological, and social conditions in which sexism and racism have been mainly proclaimed eradicated. The theory offers a framework for the implications of the long-term impact of sexism and racism on unequal recruiting, advancement, and retention of African American women. Hiraldo (2010) expresses, the central concept of CRT is that recent and historical events have deliberately and by implication generated outdated views, social inequalities, and faulty changes for people of color. The CRT framework, therefore, is a relevant tool in this research study in recognizing and understanding the challenges African American women face.

## **Transformational Leadership**

Transforming leadership was introduced by James Burns in his descriptive research on political leaders. Burns (1978) was among the first to define transforming leadership. Burns describes transforming leadership as a process where leaders create a positive change within the followers, encouraging them to a higher degree of integrity and inspiration, with the overall goal to turn followers into leaders. Burns stated that leadership could be transforming or transactional. Transforming, according to Burns, produces a significant change in individual lives and an organization's growth, while transactional is based on a give and take relationship. Transactional leaders typically do not aim for systemic reform within an organization. Still, they operate within the current culture of the organization, whereas transformational leaders seek to change or improve the culture of the organization (Burns 1978).

Bass (1985), another researcher, expanded Burns (1978) work, by discussing the psychology of transforming and transactional. Bass used the term transformational to replace transforming. Bass (1985) contributed to Burns (1978) original definition to explain how to measure transformational leadership and how it influences and affects the morale and success of the followers. According to Bass (1985), the measurement of transformational leadership is indicative of the influence on the followers.

Bass and Riggio (2006), suggest transformational leadership is a change mechanism to inspire people to accomplish a shared purpose or goal. Kouzes and Posner (2002) stated that when people are encouraged and empowered, it raises their level of integrity, and that is where transformative leadership takes place. Eagly and Carli (2007) notes that research has shown that the effectiveness of women leaders often correlates with transformational leadership, which is a leadership style widely used by women. Hill et al. (2016) explained that women are often related

to transformational leadership and are connected to success. However, often women do not ascend to leadership roles as much as their male counterparts. According to Judge et al. (2009) the typical established model of leadership has historically been dominated by the theories of Great Man, and these theories created make-believe leaders who assumed effective leadership is characteristically masculine.

Paternoster (2006) completed a research study examining the traits associated with transformational leadership and concluded that women use this type of leadership rather than men. Results of the research study showed in the areas of consideration, stimulation, motivation, and influence; women ranked higher than men in the overall performance of the organization. Martin et al. (1983) suggest that women appear to have the most personal, caring, uncompetitive, and realistic leadership qualities. Collins (2000), Delany and Rogers (2004), point out studies on women leadership did not surface until the 1970s and 1980s, and the emphasis was White women, middle and upper class, with no attention given to African American, women of color, or women of other social classes.

Therefore, Parker and Ogilvie (1996) outlined the leadership qualities of African American women as independent, loving, participatory, trustworthy, and transformative. Byrd and Stanley (2009) indicated that transformational leadership is consistent with the African American woman's leadership style. Parker (2005) emphasized that transformational leadership is a demonstration of social change and freedom. However, Combs (2003) explained a woman's style of leadership seems to face more challenges than men in gaining leadership opportunities and recognition that promote career development.

### **Community College Historical Overview.**

Drury's (2003) exploration of the roots of the United States of America (USA) community colleges referred to as 2-year college, technical college, or junior college, links to the Morrill Act of 1862 (Lands Grant Act) which effectively broadened access to public higher education. Broader access made it possible for many people who had been admitted to colleges or universities but have been disqualified or refused access to higher education for different reasons. Drury explained, the second Morrill Act of 1890 (Supplementary Act of 1890) allowed the expansion of minorities to admittance to land grant colleges. The act called for the withholdings of Federal funds from specific colleges who withheld student admissions to land grant schools based on race. The creation of these acts was after the civil war, which included a provision that allowed African American people to receive some form of higher education. Chamberlain (1991), Cowley (1961) and Lucas (1996) noted that the passage of both acts allowed employment opportunities and educational gains for African American women and gave rise to a new beginning for post-secondary education. Chamberlin (1998) highlighted that before the Civil War, all African Americans were excluded from higher education institutions.

In 1901 Joliet Junior College was established deeming them the first community college (Evelyn, 2001). Joliet Junior college was created as a postgraduate high school experiment. The community college open access model provided students who wish to pursue higher education within the community an affordable post-secondary education and the opportunity to achieve many educational and professional goals, including transferring to four-year institutions. Evelyn (2001) stated it was not until the 1960s and 1970s when most community colleges were established, and Palmer (1996) pointed out during this time, the United States of America built 2-year institutions per week. Within 10 years, more than 450 public community colleges opened.

Community colleges outnumber the colleges which exist before the start of the decade. Cohen et al. (2014a) went on to explain since the development of 2-year colleges in the early 1900s; student enrollment continued to increase.

Cohen et al. (2014) reported that community college enrollment increased from 500K in 1960 to a little over 2 million 10 years later in 1970. Community colleges changed in the 1980s. During this decade, community colleges started developing relationships with area high schools to train students for technical and two-year programs. Enrollment continued to double every ten years, with slightly more than 7 million students enrolled by 2010. American Association of Community Colleges (AACC, 2018) disclosed that more than 12 million students enrolled in community colleges in the United States fall of 2016. AACC stated that 56% of students enrolled in community colleges were women, and 13% of students were African American (American Association of Community Colleges [AACC], 2018).

Cohen et al. (2014c), Lum (2004) and Pluviose (2006) argued community college student populations are becoming increasingly diverse, and the administrators of these institutions are not a reflection of the student population. Phillippe and Sullivan (2005) explained community colleges were adapting change to fit the diverse student population. In addition, Eagan (2007) and Shults (2001), agreed that the profiles of faculty and staff of community colleges are changing.

Pluviose (2006) succinctly agreed that the student population at the community college level had changed dramatically; however, the minority faculty in leadership roles have not changed much. Finkelstein et al. (2016), reported two decades of growth within community colleges as faculty of color rose 4% from 1993-2013. According to King and Gomez (2008),

more than 50% of Community colleges full-time faculty are women, and more than 50% of women hold senior-level positions in comparison to four-year universities.

Ladson-Billings (1992) and Pitts (2007) stated that women and faculty of color in leadership roles within the higher education system serve as advocates, mentors, and role models to students of color, thereby enhancing the students' performance. Street and Kimmel (1999) agreed that women attending college look to receive support from administrators who are women. The rise of female students, and the African American women students, shows a desire for women college administrators.

### **Leadership and Gender in Higher Education**

Leadership is a strongly coveted quality. People believe leadership is a way of enhancing their life, socially and professionally. Argyris (1998) wrote that the task of a leader includes developing a clear vision, to identify and implement a strategic plan, and articulate the vision and strategy so that the employees of the organization can carry out the process effectively. Bass (1990) stated that leadership has multiple meanings. Leaders inspire others to foster an atmosphere of teamwork, inclusivity, and collaborative efforts, leaders, shape the organization's mission and approach. Vardiman (2002) postulates there are few opportunities to become leaders, and the people who are expected to take on leadership positions may not be the most suited candidate but satisfies the stereotypic image of how a leader looks, speaks, and moves. Jackson-Dean (2014) suggests that the pictures idealized by American leadership are stereotypical of White men of the upper-middle class. Lumby and Azaola (2014) contributed to this thinking by adding that women who desire to achieve leadership roles must aspire to step beyond the appropriate notion of what a woman is to be to suit the prototype of leadership.

Heilman (2001) pointed out that the traditional stereotypes of gender disparities between men and women make it impossible for women to be given a chance to fill senior leadership roles. Hannum et al. (2015) highlighted leadership roles had been explored extensively, for women and the higher education system. However, Drake (2008) stated, minority faculty and women believe that the higher education system caters to the interest of White men. Drake (2008) continued the discussion pointing out that the retaining of this belief is because women were more likely to hold titles of director or coordinator rather than chancellors, provost, President, vice president, or Dean. The American Council on Education (2017) reported that the president's study found White males between the ages of 60 and 64 as the main profile of college presidents and university presidents, 30% female presidents, and 9% African American women.

Amey et al. (2002) described the dominance of White males in leadership roles at community colleges. They argued that women aspiring to higher positions might be compelled to surrender their uniqueness and embrace those of the dominant culture in hopes of ascending the career ladder. Levitt (2010) explained that women are expected to demonstrate masculine attitudes such as frankness, strength, and competence when assuming leadership roles; however, when those behaviors are promoted, women are viewed negatively. Townsend and Twombly (2007) concluded that community college is a gendered institution whose operations and activities have not always served and represented women as well as they should despite the institution's mission and the proportion of female students, faculty, and presidents.

Both Collins (2000) and Delany and Rogers (2004) agreed that researching women in leadership in the 1970s and 1980s, focused on the experiences of the middle class and upper-class White women without consideration, and attention given to women of other social classes and women of color. In the review of leadership and gender, leadership characteristics have been

an area in which literature suggests a difference in leading between women and men. Eagly and Karau (1991) pointed out that men are task-oriented leaders and that women are social leaders. So, the superiority of men over women in task-oriented activities is one of the keys to their success as organizational leaders, implying that men have more 'education' in leadership positions than women.

The historical information explored in this section is centered on the role of women in leadership throughout various organizations. So, the focus must be directed to the relationship between senior leaders, the features of leadership, the systemic challenges, and the specific approaches to achieving a senior leadership role. The next section deals with the role women play in leadership roles.

### **Women in Leadership (Historical Overview)**

Women have dominated all over the world throughout history, leading monarchies, being voted in as presidents, rulers, and taking on leadership roles in both large and small businesses, corporations, and learning institutions. Rather than mimicking "male" approaches, women have succeeded in exercising a leadership style that turns people's needs into organizational goals and brings out their most tremendous success. Rosener (1990) explained that the road to leadership success for women is natural, and it is demonstrated through their socialization and the experiences they share. For example, there are many historical movements in which women arose as leaders' in women's right movement:

- Women's Right Movement (1848–1920)
- The Civil Rights Movement and Women (the 1950s-1960s)
- The Feminist Movement (1990–2000)
- The Times Up and Me-Too Movement (2006–present)



- Black Lives Matter Movement (2013-present)

### ***Women's Rights Movement***

Elizabeth Stanton, a women's rights activist and Lucretia Mott, a Quaker preacher, called for a women's right convention, shortly after attending the 1840 anti-slavery meeting in London with their husbands. Females were not permitted to take part in the conference and had to sit separately from men. Insulted by the treatment of women by the male reformers, July 1848 started the fight for women's suffrage. Seneca Falls Convention (2020) described that the two-day convention event was coordinated by five people, among them Elizabeth Stanton and Lucretia Mott, the founders of the convention. The women's rights activist Mary M'Clintock, the abolitionist Martha Coffin Wright, and the Quaker activist Jane Hunt. Hundreds of women gathered at the women's right convention in Seneca Falls, New York, to have a conversation on the rights of women and develop a plan to approach civil and social justice issues and religious rights of women. In addition, Seneca Falls Convention (2020) reported success from the convention, which delivered 11 resolutions recommending women equal to men. This 72-year struggle proved to be successful in 1920 with the passage of the 19th amendment, giving women the right to vote.

The landmark moment in gender equality is viewed as a success story for all women in the democratic voting process in America. Women made some progress and won a voice, but the voting privileges at the polling booth differed from that of men. According to Lawrence (2017) all White women were entitled to vote, but only selected women of color could efficiently exercise their voting rights, based on the culture of the local government. During this time, African American women of color were not seen as equal, and policies that illustrated systematic marginalization were directed at people of color who wanted to register to vote.

African American women were fighting for suffrage, such as Sojourner Truth, Ida B. Wells Barnett, the journalist, and activist. They documented issues of race and politics in the south, the owner of two newspapers, Memphis Free speech and headlight, and Free Speech. Ida B. Wells, one of the many founders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and Mary Church Terrell, President of the National Association of Colored Women (NACW), dedicated themselves to educating and supporting African Americans. All of these women spoke for the rights of African American females. These women were leaders and built a movement that would grow to half a million; however, they would never find acceptance among mainstream suffragists. Therefore, these women championed women's rights in addition to suffrage, including the right to pursue higher education.

### ***Civil Rights Movement and Women***

The American Civil Rights Movement has been one of the most significant events in the history of America. The movement was a demonstration against race and ethnicity related to prejudice, racism, oppression, and segregation in society. African American women have been at the heart of critical Civil Rights Movements. Most women who worked in the Civil Rights Movement were the actual backbone of the movement, were not known. U.S. National Park Service 2019 reported that Ella Baker, a longtime activist helped nurture and birth the student movement, Diane Nash, the lead strategist behind the sit-ins in Nashville and the freedom riders also played a critical role in organizing the Selma marches. Media attention would draw to the men of the movement, such as Dr. Martin Luther King and others, but would not necessarily focus on the women. According to Robnett and Anderson (2017), both men and women recognized and valued the movement's meaning and potential, but scholars identified a desire to investigate the disparities in the perspectives of the different groups as they relate to the Civil

Rights Movement. Visible and notable contributors like Rosa Parks, who accounts for the origins of the Montgomery Bus Boycott from 1955 to 1965, refusing to surrender her seat to a White man. Also, Coretta Scott King, the wife of minister Dr. Martin Luther King and a host of other women, served behind the scenes, orchestrated fieldwork, marches, and sit-ins (Robnett & Anderson, 2017).

Robnett (1996) pointed out that there is nothing new about overlooking African American women in leading social movements, and the discussion of leadership is generally left unanalyzed; usually, the movement participants are leaders or followers. Robnett and Anderson (2017) went on to say that African women acted as "bridge leaders" as they were able to transcend the barriers between the social movement, the community, and between prefigurative strategies aimed at individual change, consciousness, identity, and political strategy. The bridge leaders operated in "free space," a term identified by Evans and Boyte (1986). Women control the day-to-day operations and activities in this space. They also keep in touch with the interest of the community and the constituents of the movement. Robnett and Anderson (2017) explained that African American women's contributions in the Civil Rights Movement provided the requisite barriers to crossing boundaries between the personal lives of future supporters and followers and the political life of civil rights organizations.

Sacks (1998) challenged the idea of leadership and discussed the loosely defined concept of leadership. Sacks explained in a research study that many women in the Civil Rights Movement operated as leaders but rarely held such titles. For example, Dorothy Height, regarded as the godmother of the Civil Rights Movement, has made outstanding contributions to the Civil Rights Movement and women's liberation movements in the 1960s and 1970s. According to Alter (2014), Height was often on the sidelines, behind the podium, behind the scenes and was

overlooked due to race and gender; Height helped coordinate Dr. King's March in Washington but was not invited to speak with male civil rights figures. Sacks wrote that the concern was not with the leadership at the local or international level, or the titles recognized globally, what mattered was the inclusion of personal attributes and the ability to influence others and gain loyal followers (Sacks, 1998).

### ***Feminist Movement***

Feminism is a type of activism, according to Marx Ferree (2006). It is intended to question and change the subordination of women to men. Laughlin et al. (2010) suggest there are turning points in feminist activity and explains them as waves of Feminism. According to Lawrence (2017), since the women's movement began in America in the mid-1800s, White feminists have marginalized women of color. The movement's focus has been on White women's issues while ignoring the struggles and hardships of women of color.

Laughlin et al. (2010) expressed in the late 1960s through the mid-1980s the second wave in which White Feminism continued to dominate the narrative on policies, objectives, and ideologies. Lawrence (2017), it was not until the 1990s through the early 2000s in which Feminism became more inclusive, characterizing the third wave by younger men, younger women, and the incorporation of various categories of Feminism began, infiltration such as age, race, gender, and sexual orientation. Lawrence emphasized for Feminism to accomplish its objective in transcending the socio-cultural constraints, White feminist must expand their understanding beyond gender and be intersectional. Valenti (2009) stated increased inclusiveness due to technology and social media networks appeared in the fourth wave of Feminism, changing how contemporary feminists organize, engage, and communicate.

Alaa-Elassar (2020) critiqued the movements and explained that they are supposed to help African American women but expressed concern that they may be contributing to their marginalization. Alaa-Elassar continued describing the actions as intersectional invisibility. Alaa-Elassar explained that African American women are overlooked in the conversations of racism and sexism even though they face both forms of discrimination simultaneously. Lawrence (2017) pointed out that by acknowledging and supporting intersectional Feminism, women can change the current oppressive systems. Lawrence continued by describing intersectional Feminism as embracing differences through listening and learning from each other's experiences (Lawrence, 2017). Therefore, a call for society to combat oppression and injustices of women is related to this study. A single narrative is not the voice of all women in the movement and should not overshadow the varied perspectives of those in the movement. Listening and learning from other diverse experiences contribute to the campaign, the body of information, and accelerates the cycle of social reform and equality. Society working collectively as a whole for the interests of all will maximize achievements and accelerate the cycle of equality and inclusion.

### ***Me-Too Movement***

The me-too movement started by African American woman Tiana Burk, in 2006, to support victims and survivors of sexual violence, created after conversing with a teenage female about experiencing sexual abuse (Alaggia & Wang, 2020). The movement was built to empower women through empathy, who have been sexually abused, particularly women of color. The hashtag # MeToo went viral in 2017 within 24 hours on different social media platforms, as an actress took to social media sites asking women and men around the world to share their stories of abuse, by using the hashtag "MeToo" (Alaggia & Wang, 2020). The post was shared over 500,000 times on twitter and over twelve million on Facebook. According to Alagga and Wang

(2020), #MeToo has fueled online activity around sexual abuse/assault, and its use online has become an avenue for disclosing, since sexual abuse/assault survivors. Online network exposure has represented a tipping point in the way allegations of sexual harassment and misconduct are made and, theoretically, how to reply to disclosures (Alaggia & Wang, 2020).

### *Time's Up Movement*

Building off the momentum of the "Me-Too movement," the women in the entertainment industry declared that the time was up on a sexual assault, harassment, and inequality in the workplace, and now was the time to seek change. In November 2017, The Time's Up mission came into focus when more than one hundred plus women from the entertainment industry, launched the initiative to shake-up Hollywood's decades of sexual misconduct and help women everywhere who are struggling with sexual abuse in the workplace (Hillstrom, 2008). Time's Up high-profile organizers include Hollywood producer Shonda Rhimes, director Ava DuVernay, and actor Reese Witherspoon. In a public demonstration of solidarity, the women in Hollywood and attendees were encouraged to wear Black in the representation of their support for the movement at the Golden Globe Awards to speak out against sexual harassment and use the hashtag #WhyWeWearBlack on social media to raise awareness.

Although the movement is leaderless, it was launched by women and made up of a variety of organizations. Such groups have several goals, including the implementation of legislation, combating sexual abuse, and ensuring that persons of color and LGBTQ are fairly treated. Sacks (1998) explained that a leader is not defined by their role, but rather by the capacity to influence others.

### ***Black Lives Matter (BLM)***

The Black Lives Matter movement was founded by three women in 2013 when a neighborhood watch volunteer was acquitted for killing a 17-year-old African American unarmed male in 2012 (Tedeneke, 2016). According to Ruffin II (2015), the three community organizers: Alicia Garza, a domestic rights organizer, Patrisse Cullors anti-police violence organizer, and Opal Tometi immigration rights organizer, wanted to bring awareness to the devaluation of Black lives, by the hand of police officers.

The giant movement began sweeping the country when one founder posted to social media a love notes, expressing love for Black people, and their lives mattered. The hashtag #BlackLivesMatter was born, it has grown into a global organization, with 23 chapters in America, Canada, and the United Kingdom (Tedeneke, 2016). Bass (1990) states that African American movement leaders are easily identified by their frustration of shared conflicts and the ensuing injustices. They focus on social identity and the need for a sense of connectedness. Rosser-Mims (2010) explains that their leadership strategies show coping mechanisms in families, culture, religion, and civic organizations that include ingenuity and dedication to social well-being.

Historically national attention has focused on police brutality and the police killing of Black men; the focus has not been extended to Black women. African American women are frequently left out of the conversation. The names most associated with the BLM movement are men, however Black women and girls are regularly victims of police brutality. In America, African American women's experiences of police brutality tend to receive far fewer media and political attention, dealing with this double layer of discrimination. Hooks (1994) pointed out that history demonstrates that women of color have always faced a racist and sexist society,

describing the circumstances as double bind. Crenshaw (2005) explained society could not afford to have movements that are not intersectional; collectively, we must try to understand the broader movement of equality and equal rights through the intersections of ethnicity, gender, class, sexual orientation, and culture. Understanding the social structures of society and how the intersection of race, social status, and gender impacts African American women is relevant to this work as they function regularly and perform in leadership positions. Ruffin II (2015) stated that BLM puts the feminist theory "intersectionality" into motion by calling for a united focus on social issues and understanding that prioritizing of one social matter over another will contribute to the failure of the global movement for human and civil rights.

### ***African American Women in Leadership***

Jones (2014) and Kaba (2017) emphasized that educational success is a description of one of the main components of achievements for African American women; once achieved, those that are working in higher education institutions are seeking fair access at all levels. Warner and Corley (2017) explained that the Center for American Progress reported in 2017, 51% of the American population is women, over 50% have professional jobs, and 60% have earned undergraduate and graduate degrees. McGlynn (2014), Lewis (2016) and Zahneis (2018) stated that women hold the most college degrees, and they should be given a chance to become leaders at all levels of higher educational institutions. Murtadha and Watts (2005) wrote that there are some respected pioneers in leadership and education, such as Lucy Laney, an educator who founded the first school in Georgia for African American children in 1883. A few years later came Mary Mcleod Bethune, who in 1904 started her primary school in Florida for African Americans, which became Bethune-Cookman. Five years later, Nannie Helen Burroughs in 1909 helped open the National Training School for Girls in Northeast Washington, D.C. These women



acted as role models for African American children and families. Auster and Prasad (2016) continued the argument, stating despite professional achievement, skills growth, and mentorship, the advanced level of Black women leaders, falls behind White females and much more behind males.

Adams and Tressa (2014) and Cook and Glass (2014) all explained that trying to pursue and get a college degree is a dream many women have actively promoted and accomplished. However, new research studies indicate that there is a concern with the number of African American women in higher education leadership positions. Berry and Franks (2010) noted that many studies show women holding 1% to 5% of higher education leadership roles. Davis and Maldonado (2015) pointed out that the number of African American women is slightly lower, even though they joined higher education institutions in more significant amounts within the past 30 years, they continue to remain mostly unseen and relatively unnoticed in leadership roles.

Griffin (2016) and West (2015) wrote that there is little research explicitly describing the effective higher education strategies used by African American women. The methods used to handle the advancement of African American women rising to higher education leadership positions are still very elusive and generally unknown. Knowing that the gap or divide continues to exist, is crucial for higher education institutions to strive for the best solutions that result in equal access and opportunities for African American women employed in higher education.

For this research study, gender and racial diversity differences and its exploration in higher education leadership. Generalizing women's perspectives without the background of race and ethnicity is restricting does not provide a full understanding of the African American women's experience as they ascend to leadership roles, along with an understanding of why the gender divide persists. Davis and Maldonado (2015) explained that several researchers offered

varying viewpoints to understand why there are gaps between women leaders and men leaders. There have been approaches that may be placed in motion to help close the gap between women and men leaders. However, when it comes to untangling studies and hypotheses on the divide between men, women of color, White women, and African American women in leadership roles, the barriers are much more difficult to understand.

### **History of Women in Higher Education**

Chamberlain (1998) wrote that two hundred years after men became college-educated at Oberlin College, the college admitted women. Oberlin College was a private liberal arts college that allowed co-education. White women were the first to attend, and then shortly after, African American women were admitted and allowed to graduate with a college degree. In 1837, Oberlin College became the first to accept women and men of all races, and this was the beginning of women in higher education. Granting women the ability to access and pursue higher education did not guarantee equality upon enrollment. Watson (1977) explained that the roles between men and women were clearly defined, liberal arts education for women and men to study law, medicine, and religion. Watson noted that, given the increasing number of women in the field of education, restricted areas of study for women marginalized then and maintained inequality in the 20th century. Other fields of study became available to women, but they were associated with administrative assistants and nursing, not leadership all servitude positions (Watson, 1977).

In the late 1800s through the 1900s, there was a rise in opportunities for women. There were many theological schools and women-only colleges founded in which they were able to recruit, hire, and retain women faculty members. According to Parker (2015), men dominated higher education. The schools were divided between men and women, and women were excluded from faculty positions at men colleges. Although women were excluded, they were

leaders at the women's colleges. Colleges began changing the admittances policies, which allowed more women to enroll in male-dominated institutions. Parker pointed out that the college administrators recruited women to serve as professors, counselors, and advisors for college students, establishing the term Dean of women, which became the first administrative position offered to women. The role of the Dean of women oversees the women, which included the separation of men from women while at the same time directing and protecting the women (Parker, 2015). Schwartz (1997) wrote that the forefront of the Dean's concerns was academic advancement for women. Schwartz went to say the Dean of women was faculty, so their primary role was to teach. Parker (2015) talked about the first dean of women, Alice Palmer, and her role in leadership and explained she was a history professor and the Dean of women at the University of Chicago, later becoming the President of Wellesley College where she resigned, shortly after she married.

Enrollment for women began to rise in the 1920s and continued through the 1940s, surpassing the number of men enrolled and men faculty. Low enrollment for men was due to the large number of men serving in the war. Many women took advantage of these changes to be leaders of colleges and show their skills in the process. Despite most men at war, women filled positions and roles left empty by men. Schwartz states that the number of women pursuing higher education started to decrease in the 1940s to mid-1950s, calling into question the role of women in society. Schwartz (1997) indicated that the termination of women was 75% more than men, and 60% were released from their jobs within months following World War II. According to Parker (2015), college campuses developed attitudes towards women enrolled and the workforce, causing a steady decline in women's presence on college campuses.

Parker found that the push towards equality in the workforce and education in the 1960s and 1970s facilitated a change in the role of women administrators and faculty of higher education institutions. The 1964 Civil Rights Act called for equal treatment of minority communities and the ending of gender discrimination, Title IX of 1972, the educational amendments guaranteeing the protection of staff and students in educational arenas, resulting in the treatment of men and women as equals. Parker argued that men had assumed most leadership roles in higher educational institutions from the 1950s to current. These roles include presidents, vice-presidents, deans, directors and many other top leadership positions on college campuses. Schwartz (1997) reported that data found showed women progressing up the career ladder at a slower pace, have a higher teaching load, were less successful, and have lower incomes. Parker wrote that over 70% of men were full-time professors, over 85% were chancellors, provost, and presidents in 2012 (Parker 2015).

### **African American Women in Higher Education**

During slavery, African Americans were prohibited from reading and writing. Following the Civil War, African American women were instrumental in advancing their race as more slaves and ex-slaves had been allowed to learn how to read and write. According to Barnett (1978), Harley (1978) and Littlefield (1997), despite prohibition, people like Mary McLeod Bethune and W.E.B Dubois educated themselves and others. They took the lead and acted as forerunners to create learning opportunities for many African Americans. The Colored Ladies Literary Society (CLCS) was founded, along with the Boston African American Female Intelligence Society, and several literacy organizations were established in New York City in 1834 (Murtadha & Watts, 2005). Murtadha and Watts (2005) described these types of organizations as driven groups, supporting Black people, who were united in bringing about

social change, leadership, and educational services. Garner (2010) mentioned Lucy Sessions, an African American woman in 1850 who graduated from Oberlin College, completing a Ladies Literacy course equivalent to a degree program. Still, the program did not award graduates with bachelor's degrees. However, Garner explained college degrees were earned, and Mary Jane Patterson was the first African American to acquire a college degree in 1862, later becoming the first African American President at a school for Blacks in Washington DC. Davis (1982) also mentioned Sara Early, the First African American woman professor at Wilberforce University in 1865.

Perkins (1993) reported that by the year 1890, thirty African American women had earned baccalaureate degrees, and Littlefield (1997) stated the number increased to over 200 in the 1900s. Rankin (1998) continued the conversation discussing the efforts of two White women Mytilla Minor and Harriet Beecher Stowe; in the late 1850s, founded the Minor Teachers College for African American Women, committed to improving the success of Black women. During this time, Black women were set on increasing social literacy in the African American community and set out to make a social change. Black women continued to be "the first woman" and the "first African American" in many fields of higher education.

### ***Twentieth Century and African American Women in Higher Education***

The NAACP (2002) explained that in the 20th century, the presence of African Americans in higher education rose again, compliments of the Harlem Renaissance and National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) organized in 1909. Brown (1990), Hine (1997) wrote around this period that African Americans had moved to the north to obtain jobs and schooling. Muldrow (2003) highlighted that, in the 1920s, Black women started

to create traction in higher education by building up and pushing ahead with a variety of Black women's institutions and organizations.

Bennett College, the first institution for women founded in 1926, held the first annual conference of deans and advisors to girls in Black schools. According to Littlefield (1997), Lucy Diggs Slowe led the meeting, the first African American women dean at Howard University, and to serve as Dean at an American University. Littlefield (1997) also acknowledged the success of the first conference that gave birth to the establishment of the Association of Women Deans and Advisors to Girls in Black Schools. The number of African American women earning post-secondary degrees and advancing to leadership positions continued to rise. Muldrow (2003), pointed out that African American women obtaining advanced degrees from colleges, began outnumbering Black men obtaining degrees. Littlefield, (1997) mentioned Mannie Phipps Clark became the first Black woman to earn a Ph.D., from Columbia University in 1943. Progress continued throughout the twentieth century for African American women in higher education.

The 1950s and 1960s proved to be fruitful for African Americans in higher education. Muldrow (2013) discussed Willa Player, who became the first African American President in 1955 at Bennet College, hired one year after the ruling of *Brown v. Board of Education in 1954*, which contributed to the desegregation of schools. Littlefield (1997) explained the fight continued for desegregation of public colleges through American activist Autherine Lucy Foster. Muldrow (2013) talked about the passing and development of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, created to end discrimination based on color, gender, national origin, and sex, and led to the presumption of greater possibilities and opportunities for Black women in higher education. The Civil Rights Movement of the '60s and affirmative action development led to more African American Students and more African American faculty members.

Littlefield (1997) explained that ten years following the Civil rights uprising, Black women continued to spread across higher education ranks, shifting into administrative positions. Littlefield pointed out that the University of Virginia School of law graduated the first Black woman, Elaine Jones, who later became the head of the NAACP legal defense education fund in 1993. Mary Francis Berry was another African American woman mentioned by Littlefield, who became chancellor of the University of Colorado in 1976 (Littlefield 1997).

According to Muldrow (2003), in the 1980s, Black women continued to fulfill leadership roles at universities, all becoming the first Black women to serve in such capacity at their respective universities. For example, Johnetta Cole, the seventh president of Spelman University; Marian Wright Edelman of Spelman College Board of Trustees; and Niara Sudarkasa, the 11th president of Lincoln University. Although African American women continued to make gains in higher education and job markets, Vital-Howard (1989) explained the challenges and successes of the African American women ascending to leadership roles within the higher education system has yet to be directly explored. Vital-Howard (1989) further states that historically empirical studies have focused on the Black male, excluding the experiences, contributions, perspectives, and achievements of Black women.

### ***Twenty-First Century and African American Women in Higher Education***

Many colleges and universities are mainly composed of women. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, African American women continue rising through the ranks. However, according to Alexander (2010), few have been granted the ability to serve in senior leadership roles, although they have shown interest. Hinton (2012) explained that in the fall of 2009, The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported that African American women held 5.8% of executive-level positions within U.S. higher education. These women were presidents, vice presidents of

student affairs or academic affairs, provosts, chancellors, deans and directors. Lounsbury (2017) stated that in the 2015-2016 academic year, 60% of administrators at public two-year colleges were women, but only 25% of all administrators were African American or Hispanic. Muldrow (2013) pointed out that when looking at how the colleges serve thousands of students, there is still a lack of representation. Tatum (2007) wrote that educational leadership in the 21st century requires individuals with the potential to build positive working relationships with people from diverse cultures and different perspectives.

### **Systematic Obstacles for African American Women in Higher Education**

According to Cook and Glass (2014), research studies across a range of continuum has shown consistency with findings that women are still under-represented in the higher education arena at all levels and face more severe promotional hurdles and a much steeper road to senior management. Barriers and institutional processes and practices contribute to the under-representation of African American women in leadership roles. Crites et al. (2015) stated that the absence of African American women in leadership roles had a significant effect on the self-worth, self-esteem, and self-efficacy of African American women. Patitu and Hinton (2003) agreed that because of the scarcity of women role models, young women's failure to imagine themselves in leadership roles is frustrating and may discourage them from pursuing such positions. Patitu and Hinton went on to say it is crucial to believe in the individual's potential of having a positive effect on the workplace environment and the atmosphere of the institution. Candia-Bailey (2016) and Jones (2014) both explained that African American women have been stereotyped, marginalized, and their voices muted in higher education institutions. Hill et al. (2016) concurred that women of color, specifically African American women, experience discrimination differently than White women and men of color. Hill et al. (2016) continued by



saying it would be unfair to view and group the experiences of women as monolithic when, in fact, gender and race is an attribute of all women.

According to Hannum et al. (2015), challenges and barriers for African American women have been subjective and profoundly ingrained in organizational culture. Dilworth & Wolf (2015) explained that some barriers prevent Black women from ascending to senior leadership roles within higher education institutions. Haslam et al. (2015) wrote that these barriers include lower wages, slow work ladder advancements, reduced productivity, and enduring lack of organizational promotions. The literature presented in this section has concentrated on the challenges and systematic obstacles faced by African American women in the higher education system. This background literature review leads to recognizing some of the barriers significant to this study, such as sticky floors, glass ceilings, concrete walls, and obstacles that African American women face in transitioning to senior leadership roles or jobs.

### ***Sticky Floors, Glass Ceilings, Concrete Walls***

According to Hannum et al. (2015), given the gains of women's participation in higher education leadership roles, these women face several challenges as they transition into high-level leadership positions. There are many titles attributed to the lack of access for women leaders, particularly African American women. Primarily concerned with career advancement or development matters, labels are often issued, such as sticky floors, glass ceilings, and concrete walls.

The sticky floor concept was coined by Catherine White Berheide in 1992, who carried out a study on women-in low paying government jobs. According to Johnson et al. (2014), The study found that women in entry-level management positions were disproportionate to their male counterparts. The women had great difficulty in entering management positions in various

industries such as the academic world, medicine, law, sports, and that most of the women working in government positions were in lower-paid roles. Davis and Maldonado (2015) described the sticky floor as a phenomenon in which invisible barriers to advancement block qualified women from advancement opportunities based on the attitude and biases of the organization. Johnson et al. explained that historically society's perception of gender roles-built barriers for women as they seek to move forward to leadership roles. As attitudes and opinions develop about women's positions in society, those views are transferred to the work community. The beliefs form barriers for women seeking an equal opportunity to fulfill roles that they might qualify for. Johnson et al., went on by acknowledging that the hurdles can be identified as sticky floors, resulting in the absence of a diverse population throughout organizations (Johnson et al., 2014).

In addition to contending with the Sticky floor, all women deal with the glass ceiling concept. Marilyn Loden coined the term in 1978 at the Women's Exposition in New York, who determined the name was most fitting because the center of the conversation was on women, their self-image, and how it was the blame for not advancing to leadership roles Morrison et al. (1987). Morrison et al. (1987) described the term glass ceiling as an intangible obstacle that prevents women who are qualified from advancing within the organization due to sexism and racism, mainly preventing women from moving up the job ladder within an organization. Carlie and Eagly (2016) and Barnes (2017) found that researchers have tried to capture strategies that have allowed some to break through the glass ceiling. However, Davis and Maldonado (2015) pointed out that given the complexities of historical, cultural, and social dimensions, the incredible difficulty is in addressing how the "glass ceiling effect" affects African American women leaders.

Tan (2016) explained that sticky floors and glass ceilings address the challenges and difficulties facing women. Recent studies have described the hurdles encountered by African American women as they advance in their careers as being a league of their own. Pierre (2019) pointed out that the concrete wall is an impenetrable wall facing African American women, impossible to see and impossible to break through. The concrete wall's rigid construction allows too few women of color to crack into it. While the precise root of the word remains unknown to researchers, the term has been adopted within the last ten years and put on the radar for discussion through academic writing and media outlets.

America has a long history of racial strife, founded by White supremacy structures and institutional frameworks of the nation. The literature continues to demonstrate an apparent under-representation of women in leadership positions within higher education across America (Wolfe & Dilworth, 2015). According to researchers' African American women have educational qualifications but remain stuck by the glass ceiling and sticky floor barriers and continue to lack access to good mentors and vital social networks to help foster upward career mobility (List & Sorcinelli, 2018). The trend has prompted researchers to describe the intangible barriers that women experience. However, the literature presented continues to show that the tradition of White male dominance remains influential in leadership roles, with its control and command methods and top-down communication (Hannum et al., 2015; O'Bryant, 2015).

### **Sticky Floors Components**

The sticky floor components explored for this research study are intersectionality, double-bind, and stereotypes. The sticky floor is a subset of the glass ceiling concept, which puts further emphasis on African American women in experiences in higher education and other industries. Carli and Eagly (2016), highlighted that the sticky floor elements primarily focus on

stereotyping attitudes and unfair policies and practices that hinder women's advancement. Davis and Maldonado (2015) suggest that minority women overcome gender understanding, ethnic identity perceptions, cultural inequalities, and lack of mentoring opportunities. Barnes, (2017) explained all these things could produce a feeling of false hope and low self-esteem, even If the obstacles are perceived or actual, they can be detrimental.

### ***Intersectionality***

The term intersectionality coined in 1989 by social theorist and law professor Kimberle Crenshaw. Crenshaw (1989) describes intersectionality as a framework that conceptualizes individuals, groups of people, and social issues. Crenshaw stated that intersectionality recognizes overlapping experiences and identities of individuals and groups of people to understand the intricacy of inequalities and prejudices they face daily. In Critiquing of the feminist and Civil Rights Movements, intersectionality originated as a central argument emerging from the Black Feminist movement. Carli and Eagly (2016) wrote that the research has shown how intersectionality has a significant impact on sticky floor barriers in higher education for African American women advancing to leadership roles. Researchers state that the women of color are double bind as they have long encountered a racial and sexist society (Crenshaw 1989, 2005; Collins 1993, 2000, 2002).

Intersectionality points out social identities as a function of organizational characteristics of social relations (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). According to Binder et al. (2017), intersectionality highlights six key concepts that are commonly referred to by scholars while examining data: inequalities, connectedness, control, social dynamics, ambiguity, and social justice. Systems of inequality and oppressive gender structures of authority further affirm the African American women face sticky floors and glass ceilings regularly in higher education.

This literature review reflects on the importance of the intersection of ethnicity and gender norms within the framework between racism and power supremacy that create unequal structures and impede the access of African American women to leadership positions (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Strayhorn (2017) pointed out that the approach of intersectionality suggests that the experiences of people and groups representing specific social environments are deeply affected by intertwining structures of privilege and inequality. The opportunity of having the power to execute the practices of hiring and promoting has not been within the sphere of African American women in the higher education arena. Binder et al. (2017) advise that African American women maneuver through these types of unequal structures to obtain access to senior leadership positions and continue to contribute to fulfilling the divide. Strayhorn (2017) and Loya (2015) suggest that the floor becomes sticky when additional layers are applied to inequitable structures and attitudes. The higher education systems must aim to better recognize intersectionality to respond to the existing systems, broader challenges, disparities, and power problems encountered by African American women.

Strayhorn (2017) reiterated that by understanding and embracing the intersectionality of African American women's identities, colleges are better placed to create diversity and knowledge for policy growth, promote positive work environments, and expand visibility and accessibility to senior leadership roles. It is not a breach of the constitution to be an African American woman or a Black woman (Hyppolite, 2019). However, there are still unfair policies and practices as Black women continue attempting to break down glass ceilings and sticky higher education floors. Barnes (2017) and Knaus, (2014) recommends that colleges and universities identify and try to address these barriers/obstacles while acknowledging that prejudice and misogyny remain within the higher education system.

### ***Double Bind***

Double bind adopted nearly two decades ago, creates a behavioral norm in which an individual cannot succeed regardless of what they do or how hard they try. Women are facing a variety of circumstances where double bind prohibits them from scaling the organizational ladder. In the numerous organizations that perpetuate gender and cultural stereotypes, women experience what is known as "double bind." This type of bias tends to impede the resources and prestige accessible to women and has been used to justify the incredibly small number of women in senior leadership positions.

The expectations of society and patriarchal systems clash as women seek to scale the never-ending ladder. Historically, those who possess power used double bind to control those who are powerless. Sexism and implicit prejudices have been used to divide women and men into distinct roles defined by society. Oakley (2000) mentioned that the emphasis the United States and its enterprises put on dominance and qualities traditionally found in men gives them more incentives for leadership positions. In contrast, women who exhibit more traditional traits, such as being authoritarian and robust, are often considered "too domineering" or "bitchy " as they show assertiveness or aggressiveness. Clay (1998) explained that there is an "old girl's" network as a community for women; however, African American women are not an integral part. Therefore, Black women must form their support system to cope with the double bind of sexism and racism in work environments. It would serve to minimize loneliness emotions and the effects of not understanding what is going on inside the company (Clay, 1998). MSPB (1992) concluded that studies have shown that women as a community are still removed from male-dominated networks and thus have limited exposure to knowledge and resources that will increase their opportunity for advancement.

## *Stereotypes*

Crites et al. (2015) described stereotypes as characteristics attributed to certain classes of people based on their cultural background, race, gender, age, faith, or other character traits. Crites et al. (2015) went on to state that sometimes stereotypes are assumptions assigned to an entire group of individuals, even though they do not represent the whole population of that group. Carli and Eagly (2015), highlighted that it is a term used by scholar researchers to illustrate the variations in experiences amongst African American women and women. African American women, like other women, must continue to strive to shatter the glass ceilings limiting entry into senior leadership roles. The sticky floor term is deeply rooted in the stereotyping actions of those in positions of influence and authority, creating another dimension of challenges and hardships for African American women to overcome.

Howard-Baptiste (2014) mentioned that African American women in Academia are depicted negatively by faculty, peers, students, and families. Crites et al. (2015) described the negative stereotypes as stereotypical assumptions that include explicit and implicit attitudes, behaviors, preconceived ideas, and expectations of not being intellectually capable of leading, among other stereotypes. Trying to overcome these stereotypical perceptions and prejudices is a daunting challenge faced by many African American women. According to Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2003), the systematic propagation of derogatory images in the United States of African American women extends to 400 years of American culture. The angry Black women stereotype, sapphire stereotype, and jezebel stereotype have helped influence how the majority culture views African American women. Howard-Baptiste (2014) and Carli and Eagly (2015), went on to say that the impact stems from the historical mammy character which the illustration is unintelligent, unnoticed, and self-surrendering. Feagin (2014) also stated that the illustration of sapphires as

being bossy, sassy, angry, and jezebels as being sex-crazed or the target of sexual gratification. Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2003) emphasized that these poorly constructed images remain troublesome for African American women in America, and these images have been used as an excuse for mistreatment and injustice. Howard-Baptiste (2014) agreed and pointed out that the roots of African American women's stories are in American culture. A culture that does not adequately reflect the numerous challenges and perspectives of African American women whose own identities and opinions are invisible among the narratives portrayed. Lewis and Neville (2015) concluded that African American women work under scrutiny, knowing that their voice, words, speech, and actions are viewed through the prism of this stereotype, which devalues them and ultimately contributes to their marginalization.

African American women must continue to apply and strive for senior leadership roles within the Higher education system no matter the obstacles. Mohr and Purdie-Vaughns (2015) suggest that African American women develop coping strategies to overcome negative stereotypes within the college. Crites et al. (2015) explain that stress in compromising roles can be traumatic for African American women, especially in the work environment, causing psychosocial struggles, which creates social discord and leads to skewed views of self (Henry et al., 2012). Howard-Baptiste (2014) stated that despite diversity efforts and demographic shifts, African American women continue to face problems of misrepresentation, real recognition as a leader, and visibility. Berk (2017) and Howard-Baptiste (2014) all went on to say that it is the responsibility of higher education institutions and their leaders to help eliminate stereotyping trends across campuses, focused mainly on recruiting, training activities, and advancement practices.



### *Components of Glass Ceilings*

Some of the main components for the glass ceiling significant to this qualitative research study are marginalization, barriers, and the value of mentoring relationships. The selected components serve to give the reader insight into some barriers that make it difficult for women, especially African American women, to penetrate or break the glass ceilings. Davis and Maldonado (2015) highlighted that studies emphasized marginalization, barriers, and mentoring relationships as crucial factors in the breaking of the glass ceiling barrier.

**Barriers.** Dilworth and Wolf (2015) mentioned that a review of the literature summed up over two decades of study and literature to address the challenges that exist within the higher education system at community colleges. Denis et al. (2012) and Hannum et al. (2015) highlighted that politically and culturally, the systematic obstacles and difficulties have become profoundly ingrained and subjective in workplace culture. O'Bryant (2015) emphasized that there are many optimistic and profoundly empowering facets of what it entails to be an African American woman. There are also many misconceptions and assumptions firmly rooted in racial and gender-based perceptions that make it psychologically, mentally, and socially challenging to be an African American woman in higher education.

Dilworth and Wolf (2015) and Mc Nae, and Val (2015) agreed that shifting the structures of inequality and working aggressively to minimize or remove obstacles require the formulation of new strategies. Curtis et al. (2014) explained that the process of changing systems of inequality requires the shift of leadership. Curtis et al. went on to say African American women educators assume influential positions as academic professors, advisors, and agents of social change in higher education; this practice is an open access choice. Hannum et al. (2015) expressed that as higher education institutions increase in diversity, the college must be able to

adapt and help break down and reduce barriers. Advancing women, especially African American women, to leadership roles not only help women but both the higher education institutions and the entire community.

**Marginalization.** According to Beckwith et al. (2016) African American women and other under-represented scholars often disclose perceptions of social isolation and intellectual marginalization in higher education institutions. Marginalization may be implicit, and sometimes the words and behaviors used to marginalize can be quickly ignored or overlooked. For example, Barrett et al. (2014) pointed out that African American women encounter incidences of discrimination and marginalization many times a day, irrespective of their position or status. Barrett et al. went on to state where race, ethnicity, and gender converge; the scope and implications of academic marginality increase. Collins (2009) explained that with better understanding of the patriarchal system, African American women are better equipped to tackle difficult circumstances.

Sue, (2010) noted that a Psychiatrist and Harvard University psychologist created the word ethnic microaggression. Berk (2017) and Sue (2010) both state that the word applies to daily, direct, beautiful, sometimes unconscious, and non-verbal interactions between African Americans and individuals. Marginalization and microaggression are implicit insults that emerge in the workplace. They can cause unpleasant and often abusive working conditions for African American women or other underrepresented communities. Chavez and Dickens (2018) conclude that issues of marginality, inequality, and obstacles to preserving personal and professional identities are pervasive in higher education, such as community colleges.

**Value of Mentoring Relationships.** Hackney and Bock (2000) claim that mentoring is no longer as successful as it once was. Mentoring is seen as a dominant type of guidance in an

environment where people respond to horizontal guidance better than vertical leadership and conventional hierarchy. Hackney and Bock went on to state that in Academia, a compassionate staff member who works side by side with emerging leaders is more successful than a traditional mentor. Hackney and Bock (2000) also suggest partnerships instead of mentorships, as this will help to reduce the inequalities for African American women positions on campus. Quinn (2012) disagreed and argued that mentorship has been advantageous to both the mentee and the mentor in the fields of job development, improvement in salary, longevity, improved trust, and personal satisfaction. Alleman et al. (2018) added that relationships of mentoring are mutual relationships that foster and encourage both the mentor and mentee. Mentoring relationships may be organized pairings as part of an institution's program for mentoring, or purely spontaneous one focused on shared interests. Mentoring exists informally in many situations, but it thrives dependent on the engagement of all parties to the relationships and target alignment.

Barnes (2017) and Davis and Maldonado (2015) explained that African American women continue to maintain, show their strength, resilience, and preparation for senior leadership positions. However, according to Barnes (2017) and Davis and Maldonado (2015), African American women hold a little over 5% of leadership positions. Therefore, Burke and Carter (2015) suggest that mentoring relationships are crucial in helping train and prepare African American women in advancing to senior-level leadership roles. In addition, List and Sorcinelli (2018) agree that mentoring provides social support, job opportunities, and services embedded in employment networks that help educate sponsorships and professional and leadership exposure.

African American women leaders face marginalization problems, challenges, and should recognize the value of mentoring networks that will both affect the impact of glass ceilings. Studies note that women of color account for around one-third of their collective class in the

workplace. Hannum et al., 2015 stated the concern is trying to find mentors with the same backgrounds and history as African American women, and it can be rather tricky in higher education because of the low number of African American women who have attained senior leadership roles. Despite adversity, even while fighting tirelessly to crack the glass ceiling, African American women tend to turn up, fulfill their duties, and continue to work relentlessly to prove their worth and importance.

**Concrete Wall.** Glass ceiling is a challenge for women, as many research studies have shown, and their advancement to senior leadership positions and power roles within an organization. In many of the journals the glass ceiling and the constraints imposed on women, the research studies appear to concentrate on the common drawbacks of all women and lack an overview of how African American women and their impacts face such barriers. Tan (2016) pointed out that the shared history between African American women and their White peers is profoundly different, and it is illustrated by their gender gap, high business dominance, and lack of resources for them. Clay (1998) mentioned that the vast disparity is seen in African American women and women of color across the globe. These inequities for African American women are so crucial that instead of a glass ceiling, the description is that of a concrete wall. Catalyst (1999) stated that this term is sometimes called the "concrete ceiling" or "Black ceiling" (Sepand, 2015).

For African American women and White women, the intersecting race and sex carry very different perspectives. Although sexism and racism are distinct types of prejudice articulated differently, the consequences are exacerbated when a person encounters both at the same time. The American Association of University Women (2018) wrote that this kind of intersectional inequality perpetuates the disparities in ethnic and gender income, restricts the exposure of

African American women to educational opportunities, and adversely affects their career advancement.

Racism, as well as the discrimination, can contribute to unfair employment practices, and how an employee is viewed and handled at work. Combined prejudice and misogyny produce a marginalized community of people experiencing more substantial consequences from cultural prejudices, bias, and discrimination. McKinsey and Company (2018) found that the two identities of race and gender have shaped and restrained the progress and opportunity presented today to African American women. They tend to face minimal mobility in their professions and endure discrimination based not only on gender but also on race. African American women, on the other hand, feel that they face a concrete wall. It is almost impossible for a person alone to poke a hole in a concrete wall (McKinsey & Company, 2018). Furthermore, those closed in behind the wall cannot learn about the organization because they are isolated from the mainstream of organizational life, and worse they are invisible to the decision-makers on the other side.

**African American Women Strategies and Practices.** Strategies and practices aimed to address obstacles to recruiting, advancement, and challenges at the workplace are holding women in positions of power and inspiring the next generation of women leaders (Beckwith et al., 2016). The literature offered methods for women in leadership to tackle gender inequality and unequal workloads in the workplace. Many institutions have also identified environments that offer support for women who want to lead but have no opportunities. It is noted that when obstacles are eliminated and leadership qualities and skills are the focus, Black women will achieve leadership in higher education (Beckwith et al., 2016; Curtis et al., 2014).

This section discusses how women in leadership have used conformity and personal commitment approaches to attain and hold leadership roles and the identified requirements for mentoring, career growth, and social networking as practices to reach and maintain Black women in leadership. List and Sorcinelli (2018) explained that Black women must have access to career growth programs, social networks, and mentoring groups as examples of best practices to help in career advancement.

### **African American Women Strategies**

#### ***Conformity***

African American women recognize various considerations when adapting to a new role, climate, and set of expectations. The small number of African American women in leadership positions causes the African American women to be often "the only" or "one among few" at the table of decisions. Hill et al. (2016) indicated that these situations had given rise to anguish and a strong desire for African American women to blend in and be apart. Hill et al. also pointed out that women usually conform to male-dominated traits to blend in with other leaders and to be taken seriously by their immediate staff. White males have characterized these masculine characteristics as the most identifiable manifestations of leadership qualities in America. Hill et al. described the male-dominated traits of their leadership illustration as aggressive behavior, commitment, ability to participate in confrontation, and power.

To African American women, conforming is most perceived as a detrimental tool as it masks the real personality, acquired talents, and techniques that have proved to make women successful leaders. Chin (2013) identified the mechanism as code-switching to test environmental leadership standards. Chin continued by describing the ability to code-switch as a way of showing various versions of oneself depending on the situation or circumstances. This

process may enable women of color to adapt, but it may also appear to be authentic. Fitting into the social roles of race and gender is a daunting challenge for African American women, and many failed in their effort to adapt.

**Sacrificing Self.** Hannum et al. (2015) found that the differences in commitment between men and women add to the leadership divide and a positive connection between family and guidance that increases the success of a leader. Studies suggest that African American women who are raised in homes that are gender-neutral in household responsibilities are conditioned by these activities that they need to over-prepare and work twice as hard. Hackett and Byars (1996) explained that expectations about taking on any position have resulted in many African American women acquiring more skills, including those historically held by males and has been associated with them continuing their educational pursuits. This unsaid choice of sacrifice impacting African American women was defined as another form of gender inequality based on social norms.

Though the many health and fitness challenges African American women face due to aggressive work conditions and pressures, women have sacrificed themselves. Marcus (2016) reported in a survey of over six hundred professional women focusing on balancing goals found the most significant compromises to be a lack of emphasis on intimate affairs and family life. In the survey, women indicated that their goals and wishes of success had forced them to risk love, friendships, family, and spending time with family and friends.

African American women Practices

### *Women's Resilience*

According to Greene (2002) women's resilience is a biopsychosocial and spiritual phenomenon. Blaine and Reed (2015) described a resilient leader as someone successful,

showing the capacity to grow, adapt, and improve a range of hurdles that arise. O'Bryant (2015) made clear that African American women must be resilient while striving for senior leadership roles. Davis and Maldonado (2015) argued that African American women leaders require a higher level of resiliency. Studies suggest that resilience plays a crucial role in any organization and helps predict employee satisfaction and job efficiency. Blaine and Reed (2015) and O'Bryant (2015) stated that the definition of resilience encompasses both human characteristics and a welcoming campus environment. To foster an environment of sustainability, individuals and institutions of higher education must evaluate their existing processes and policies.

O'Bryant (2015) stated that when looking at the strength of African American women, personal characteristics, and attitudes associated with job performance have been crucial to helping African American women develop internal strategies for success. Blaine and Reed (2015) explained that African American women had faced numerous challenges in their search for higher education leadership roles. However, they must continue to press forward and continue the pursuit. A welcoming workplace climate may serve to enhance the morale of all workers, especially under-represented groups of people. As a result, both Grijalva (2018) and Tahira et al. (2015) concluded that African American women need to be resilient and show strength, problem-solving skills, and experience to adapt to growing competition and the patriarchal social environment.

### ***Professional Development***

Gamble and Turner (2015) recommend that organizations provide their employees of color with more resources for career advancement. Smith (2015) explained that significant leadership and networking programs must be provided to African American women, starting early in their careers, as the lack of exposure to professional development early in their



professions may impact future advancement opportunities. Hannum et al. (2015) explained that they performed a study on women in senior leadership roles. They noted that the women in leadership found exposure to professional development early in their careers to be advantageous on their ascent to leadership positions.

The American Council on Education's (ACE) leadership program has established a variety of unique leadership learning projects for leaders at any point of their careers (American Association of Community Colleges, 2018a). The American Association of Community Colleges discussed the ACE leadership program and pointed out that they offer guidance to managers and senior management, as well as to those on the rise of leadership. The AACCC offers leadership programs, which include instruction for rising leaders as well as existing senior staff, including college presidents and administrators. Also, the AACCC leadership Package offers leadership counseling to help drive organizations to optimum results. Wilder et al. (2013) explained that offering these tools allows ways for African American women and women of color to flourish in a campus environment, engage in expanded networks between staff and administrators, and actively support one another.

### ***Mentoring***

Mentoring to improve women's participation in leadership positions has been suggested. Burke and Carter (2015) agreed that mentoring is a vital bridge that helps strengthen transition problems, advise structural causes, offer career-dynamic knowledge on workplace patterns, and help African American women advance to senior leadership positions. Grant (2012) found that mentoring African American women in the field of education allows them to improve awareness, make and build relationships, and learn how to work effectively in educational leadership. Amah (2017) addressed mentoring and stated that the success of mentoring relies on the relationship

between both the mentor and mentee. Amah described mentors as being a significant contributor to the growth and advancement of emerging leaders, especially those who need to build skills to rise the ladder.

### ***Social Networking***

Schipani et al. (2009) also highlighted networking as an integral part of the growth and advancement of leadership, explaining that it is key to producing successful career advancement results. Van den Brink and Benschop (2014) pointed out that studies propose that networking and becoming a network affiliate were good opportunities for job progress. List and Sorcinelli (2018) described social networking as a marketing skill that is valuable at every point of an enterprise. Kuwabara et al. (2018) also made clear that creating, sustaining, and optimizing relationships is part of leadership development. Grayson et al. (2007) agreed and stated that networking is a bridge between relationships inside and outside the institution, and the relationships focus on success.

### **Chapter Summary**

Chapter 2 offered a brief historical overview of community colleges, leadership and race frameworks, a historical perspective of African American women in leadership and higher education, and some of the challenges African American women may experience during their journey towards community college leadership. Additionally, the literature revealed that despite the implementation of Affirmative Action and The Equal Pay Act, African American women still experience significant barriers when seeking senior-level administrative positions. This proposed study is an effort to explain African American women's individuality, struggles, achievements, and obstacles encountered in higher education administration and the strength of character, persistence, and leadership believed to reside in all of them. The African American women's

strength of character in leadership roles in public higher education is interpreted to mean the willingness, to work across, within, and through cultures or structures of the campus.

The literature addressed how the theoretical frameworks used in this study helped the researcher to address the problems directly relevant to African American women's experiences in higher education in greater detail. Discussions on how sticky floors, glass ceilings, concrete walls are all included in this Chapter as systematic obstacles known as barriers to the career advancement of African American women. This chapter also contains best practices and strategies. Best practices such as conformance and sacrifice of self, along with best practices, women's resilience, professional development, mentoring, and social networking. This chapter has covered the specific obstacles found by African American women in the literature and the methods used to address those obstacles.

Chapter 3 reports on the study's approach. Research design areas and chosen methods are presented, and descriptions of the appropriateness of chosen participant collection technique measures are included. Share the guidelines for methods of engagement security and data collection. The steps are taken to ensure the integrity of the study, and protocols for processing data have been carefully designed and outlined. Lastly, it requires approaches by the researcher to reduce personal prejudice and not allow it to affect the analysis.

## **Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology**

### **Introduction**

This qualitative research study was performed to explore and describe the experiences of African American women leaders in community colleges. The phenomenological approach to this research study was structured to explain the experiences of these participants and to provide practical solutions and best practices for African American women leaders. Maxwell (2005) wrote that a qualitative research study implies interconnection and contact between various design components. Therefore, using this approach enables understanding and theory to line up and relate how African American women leaders in higher education encounter specific phenomena in their leadership roles.

Chapter 3 includes a detailed overview of the methodology used to perform a qualitative research study, following an explanation of the study design, sampling techniques, data collection methods, data processing procedures, and verifying validity and reliability. Discussions of how the research study dealt with personal bias are also highlighted. This chapter outlines the frameworks observed during the entire process and the researcher's interests in preserving accuracy in the research study process.

### **Re-Statement of Research Questions**

This chapter explains the methodology of analysis related to the study's objectives. The research questions were developed from current literature. The study aimed to identify strategies and best practices for African American women leaders in community colleges and to answer these four main research questions:

RQ1: What challenges and barriers do successful African American women leaders face in advancing to leadership roles in Community colleges?

RQ2: What strategies and best practices do African American women utilize in advancing to leadership roles in community colleges?

RQ3: How do successful African American women in leadership roles at community colleges measure and track their career success?

RQ4: Based on their experiences, what recommendations would successful Senior level African American women make for aspiring African American women leaders?

### **Nature of the Study**

This study is a qualitative research study. According to Creswell (2009), Qualitative analysis is a way of investigating and understanding the nature of social or societal issues for people or communities. According to Merriam (2009), in qualitative research, definitions and interpretations are exchanged with human data sources as the researcher attempts to recreate the experiences of the subjects. For this research study, a phenomenological research approach was most suitable to capture African American women's lived experiences and perceptions from their viewpoints and to establish themes that question systemic or normative assumptions (Lester, 1999). Therefore, participants were encouraged to share their perspectives and experiences discussing this dynamic topic and addressing gender and racial leadership disparity problems.

The research study used a qualitative research design to explore the living experiences of African American women who held leadership positions within community colleges. Within this context, the purpose of the methodology of the research was to concentrate on the participants' views. The best approach for this study was the qualitative analysis, as the essence of the research questions was a desire to learn about the perceived experiences of the participants. The

researcher aimed to identify methods that could be used by potential leaders to discuss the growth of leadership and the rise of African American women to leadership positions. Merriam (2009) stated that qualitative scholars are interested in learning how people perceive their experiences, how they build their environments, and what they attribute to their experiences.

The strength of qualitative phenomenology is the phenomenon and the common experiences of African American women leaders in higher education. This methodology emphasizes the lived experiences of individuals, which is aligned with the existing literature and research. The weakness of the methodology is that Phenomenological studies are naturally limited, due to the assumed accuracy of the participants' comprehension, reflections, and memory. Creswell (2013) described a phenomenological study as a characterization of a phenomenon that uses interpretations of participants' experience.

## **Methodology**

The methodology used in this research study is the qualitative phenomenological approach. Creswell (2009) discussed five specific qualitative designs in sociological literature: (a) Narrative research, (b) phenomenological research, (c) grounded theory, (d) ethnography, and (e) case studies. Narrative research is a design that will not work for this study, as this study used a large sample. The narrative approach focuses mainly on one or more individuals and their experiences. Grounded theory is a design that also does not work for this study as the design is an abstract theory of a process. A study on ethnography derives from anthropology and sociology, where evidence is collected to explain the habitus of a single social group. This study focuses on African American women's experiences rather than habits. Lastly, the case study approach does not apply to this study. The aims of this research study involved the mutual exchange of best practices and strategies among multiple individuals in various settings.

Creswell (2014) explained that phenomenology research examines the significance behind the live events described, recalled, and experienced by the participants, identifying this approach as the most appropriate for this research study.

McMillian (2004) wrote that phenomenology is an interpretive research technique intended to convey the nature or sense of the living perception of a phenomenon as interpreted by participants. Becker (1970) stated that in order to grasp the perspectives of a person, we need to know how the individual perceives the situation, the challenges that the individual feels he or she is experiencing, and the alternatives available. Creswell (2015) explained that when we want to inspire people to tell their experiences, we use qualitative analysis. Researchers perform qualitative studies in order to clarify how participants in the study approach a topic or circumstance, reduce the power dynamics that occur between studies and participants, or to follow up on quantitative analysis, and help explain processes or connections in causal theories.

### ***A Structured Process of Phenomenology***

The experience of African American women in community colleges is the phenomenon of the study. A part of the participant requirement is determined by the phenomenological approach in that all participants must have experienced the same phenomenon. Hycner (1985) stated that the phenomenon governs the selection and types of participants for the study. The researcher requested a list from professional development organizations that support the advancement of women of color leaders in higher education. From the list, the researcher was able to apply inclusion and exclusion criteria to choose African American women who were currently serving or have served in senior leadership roles in community colleges. The interviews were semi-structured, offering participants to recall their experience of the phenomenon. The interview questions were open-ended, allowing themes to evolve naturally from the experience

of the participants

**Appropriateness of Phenomenology Methodology.** Creswell (2013) explained that a phenomenological research study explains the general sense of a concept or a phenomenon for many people through their lived experiences. This research study aimed to understand the experiences of African American women community college leaders without influencing the interview process with patterns, trends, ideas, or suggestions of those experiences. The phenomenological approach is appropriate for this research study due to the desire to understand the lived experience of African American women in leadership roles. This methodology is consistent with the current literature and research questions in this research study. While the methodology is consistent with the research, there are drawbacks to the phenomenological approach. Creswell (2013) described these factors as a limited time with the participants, a formal interview approach, the cautious nature of the selection of participants, and the researcher's personal bias.

### **Research Design**

The compilation and retrieval of data in this study are just as important, if not more important, than the data itself. The research methodology is the ultimate approach to fix research problems. This section describes the method of study, population, sample, and collection. The phenomenological approach allows careful attention to the study participants based on their shared knowledge of phenomena.

### ***Analysis Unit***

According to Creswell (2015), qualitative research analyzes a population sample or sample selection to evaluate a basic unit of analysis. Creswell et al. (2007) identified the value of a unit of analysis in a phenomenological study as a sharing experience. This study focuses on



One African American women who has worked or currently work in the United States and has a minimum of three or more years' experience in community colleges with a senior-level title consisting of a director or higher. In addition the participant had a senior-level title of chancellors, provost, chiefs (i.e. academic affairs, financial officer, institutional effectiveness), president, vice president, dean, or director positions in community colleges in America in their current institution, multiple institutions, or a combination of positions. The selected participant was the analysis unit a professional in higher education and well-rounded about the practices, policies, and processes of the college.

### ***Population***

The population targeted for this study were all African American women who worked or currently work in the United States and have a minimum of three or more years' experience in community colleges with a senior-level title consisting of a director or higher.

### ***Sample Size***

Sample size refers to the number of participants or findings that are present in the study. Qualitative sample sizes should be adequately large enough to gather enough data to explain the phenomenon of interest and adequately answer the study questions and limit the sample size at the point of saturation. Creswell and Poth (2018) indicated that a study needs five to 25 subjects. Bauer and Gaskell (2000) stated that the number of participants did not assess the quality of data in a qualitative research study and proposed the inclusion of 15 to 25 interviews when the study was performed by a single researcher. Creswell (1998) suggests 5–25, while Morse (1994) claimed that at least six were needed, and Bertaux (1981) argued that the smallest possible sample was 15.

### ***Purposive Sampling***

Judgmental sampling is another name for purposive sampling (Pajo, 2017). Purposive sampling is a commonly used qualitative method. The use of the method is a means for identifying an audience that will appeal specifically to the context of the research study. Merriam (2009) suggests those who have the time required to engage and meaningfully understand the information in a substantive way. This practice allows the researcher to select participants of interest for the study. For example, this study is unique as the focus is on African American women in leadership roles within higher education. Although the population is narrow, a skilled researcher can use purposive sampling to identify potential participants and approach them individually using specific sampling techniques (Pajo, 2017).

### ***Criterion Sampling***

Criterion sampling was appropriate for this study. Criterion sampling is a selection of participants who meet predetermined criteria of importance. A group of 15-25 African American women was selected to form a sample group. According to Creswell (2015) in qualitative research, participants understand the core phenomenon better. The research data offered a framework for the experience. The data translated into trends and best practices for those African American women who will encounter the phenomenon in the future and others with a vested interest.

### ***Participation Selection***

According to Tongco (2007) the sample is essential to the accuracy of the data collected; therefore, it is important to ensure the reliability and competence of the source. Creswell (2007) explains a profound appreciation for the individuality of human experience is at the center of phenomenology. Creswell went on to say that the ever-present individuality will always allow an

effort to establish a genuinely comprehensive theory of human experience. In this research study, it was significant to select participants through the sampling framework.

### *Sampling Frame*

According to Given (2008) a sampling frame is defined as a series of steps taken to obtain participants and the requirements that decide whether a participant is eligible for inclusion in the study. Stated previously, in this study the unit of analysis is an African American woman leader who is affiliated with LinkedIn and who currently works or previously worked in community colleges in the United States. LinkedIn is a public professional network used to find African American women leaders actively involved in leadership and career advancement through a diverse network. This approach was consistent with phenomenology and shared experiences, along with the research questions that focused on African American Women Leaders in community colleges. The quest to connect with the analysis unit was a six-step process: LinkedIn Search, creating a master list using an Excel Spreadsheet, filtering of the master list by applying inclusion and exclusion parameters, and then applying the criteria for maximum variation.

- The researcher utilized LinkedIn to search for potential participants. The search was consistent with criteria of inclusion.
- To limit the search results; inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied. The inclusion, exclusion criteria, and maximum variation were used for a thorough selection process.
- A maximum variation was applied to the final sample selection. Every participant on the list was contacted via email to determine their interest and meet the criteria; notification of potential participants through email with a recruiting script (Appendix A) and consent form (Appendix B) was provided.

### ***Criteria for Inclusion***

The selection process for this study was filtered through African American women leaders through the inclusion criteria to find possible matches. These women participate in social networking via LinkedIn. According to Skeels and Gruden (2009) LinkedIn is a social networking site geared towards professionals; it is most useful for people looking to network and broaden business connections. According to Salkind (2010) inclusion and exclusion requirements are predefined characteristics that encourage the researcher to include or exclude participants in the research study's population. These requirements were consistent with the goal and research questions of the study. The outlined inclusion is listed below:

- Affiliated with LinkedIn, the social platform geared towards professionals
- self-identify as an African American or Black woman
- Five years minimum of higher education experience
- age (35-70), and years of service in a community college setting
- at least three years in a senior-level position in the current institution, multiple institutions, or a combination of positions
- a current or past leader in a community college with the title of a director or higher
- leadership experience as a director or higher in a community college system has been for a minimum of three years

### ***Criteria for Exclusion***

For this research study, the criterion for excluding participants is as follows:

- Unavailable for the interview dates provided
- The participant will not allow recording during the interview
- Participant refuses to sign the consent form

- must be available to meet virtually for the interview.
- Due to the COVID-19 national pandemic, face to face interviews are optional and at the comfort level of the participant.

### ***Criteria for Maximum Variation***

According to Palys (2008) maximum variance is the method of choosing participants who span a range of experiences. Creswell (2013) indicated that the maximum variance in the number of participants should be included as a selection technique to allow for different circumstances and multiple viewpoints. If, after applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, the study is more than 20 individuals, the criteria for maximum variation will be applied as follows:

- Preference will be given to those African American women who held several leadership roles for more than five years
- Population-based on years of experience. 3-5 years, 6-8, 9-12, 12-15 years in a community college setting
- Population-based on age. The selection of African American women between the ages of 30-75.
- Population-based on college type. The population was representative of African American Women Leaders in community colleges, two-year institutions, and trade schools
- Population-based on the 50 states in the United States of America

### **Protection of Human Subjects**

Pepperdine University provides precise ethical and legal requirements for the safety of interviewees. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) within Pepperdine University has two goals. The primary goal is to protect the welfare and dignity of human subjects. The second goal is to assist investigators in conducting ethical research that complies with applicable regulations"

(Pepperdine University, n.d.). This research study used human subjects to interview and collect evidence.

According to Creswell (2013), the board's approval of human subjects must be obtained so that the research can be checked for any possible adverse effects on the participants. Before any participants were recruited, approval was granted by Pepperdine IRB (see Appendix C). The participants were then emailed their consent form, confirming their readiness to participate. The consent form contained details on the intent of the research, the specific steps requested by each participant, the advantages and risks of participating, and the procedures that will be used to safeguard the confidentiality of participants. Also, the consent form contained a provision telling the participants that they could withdraw or decline to participate anytime during the study.

### **Data Collection**

The researcher contacted the selected participants from the master list by email, text message, and phone, offering an invitation to an interview and requesting a signed consent form. Upon receiving the consent forms, individual emails were sent to the final list of participants requesting an interview. Zoom web-conferencing was the platform used for the study. Virtual meeting links were sent to participants to confirm the dates and times with automatic synchronization to Google calendar. In preparation for the interviews, the researcher sent notifications by email one week prior to the interview. A reminder email was also sent fifteen minutes before the interview. Zoom was the primary recording unit for data collection by clicking the record button in the web conferencing tool. The iPad was a secondary recording device along with a pencil, and a notebook, to take notes on non-verbal interaction observations.

### **Interview Techniques**

Strauss and Corbin (2015) state three types of interviews for a qualitative research study:

unstructured interviews, semi-structured interviews, and structured interviews. Unstructured interviews give the interviewee versatility, control of the rhythm, tempo, questions, and direction of the interview. Strauss and Corbin (2015) suggest that this style can be challenging to master and lacks consistency for this research study. Qu and Dumay (2011) highlighted that structured interviews provide limited flexibility; and consist of a fixed list of questions. Merriam (2009) and Strauss and Corbin (2015) explain that semi-structured interviews allow the same topic for discussion in each participant's interview. After the interview, additional questions, or remarks that the participant may feel are essential to the research study. Semi-structured interviews were appropriate for this study, to maintain consistency of the topic and allow the freedom to ask or say something that is not listed but may be relevant to the study.

The interviews for this study were conducted synchronously in a video-conferencing format, depending on the availability. The face-to-face format was as an optional offer due to the national health pandemic, COVID-19, and the social distancing requirements mandated by the United States. The researcher met with the interviewee via zoom, the video-conferencing platform. The researcher thanked the participant for their participation in the study, clarified the purpose of the meeting, and asked for verbal consent to audio-record the session. The researcher read the consent form to the participant and asked if there were any questions and continued with the interview questions. Following the interview, the researcher thanked the participant for their time. The researcher also reminded them of the following steps in the study and asked for input on the experience.

### **Interview Protocol**

Willis (2005) stated that when developing interview questions, the researcher must not demonstrate inappropriate vagueness in communicating the intentions of the designer or the real

sense of the question when creating interview questions. To explain the phenomenon correctly, asking the right questions is equal to providing an accurate account of the research participants' experience (Phillips-Pula & Pickler, 2011). The interview protocol questions in this study were designed to address how strategies and best practices fostered the advancement of African American women into leadership roles. Gill et al. (2008) explained that the questions should be emotionally sensitive, unbiased, and comprehensible.

Relationship between research and interview questions. Our experiences and perceptions form our views. People see things through the prism of our own life, values, behaviors, attitudes, and our surroundings. Through this filter, the researcher can also see the participants, interview process, and the course of this analysis. The body and soul of a qualitative researcher act as a research tool that consumes, sifts, and interprets the world through observation, interaction, and interviewing (Tracy, 2013).

The validity of the study. Describing validity in the qualitative analysis is the degree to which the results are accurate, reliable, truthful, and consistent (Creswell 2007; Creswell 2009). Creswell (2007) finds 'validation in qualitative research to be an effort to determine the quality of the results as better defined by the researcher and the participants. Golafshani (2003) stated that validity requires deciding whether the study is assessing what is meant to be measured and whether the analysis has produced accurate findings. Merriam (2009) contends that validity is deciding how the results of the study fit the facts and imply that validity must be measured in terms of something other rather than fact. Therefore, the researcher used a three-stage validation approach consisting of a prima facie material validation, peer analysis to ensure the validity of this instrument



### *Prima-Facie and Content Validity*

This word applies to what is visible at first glance. Prima facie content validity as an adjective implies that it is appropriate to assess a fact or case unless refuted (Hill & Hill, 2009). Following the development of interview questions from current literature and research study questions, the next move was to ensure exact consistency with the findings of the research study questions. Establishing the correlation table (see Table 1) offered appropriateness in deciding whether the interview questions were suitable for the research study. This analysis established the prima facie content validity relevance of the interview questions.

**Table 1**

*Original RQ Correlation Chart and Related IQs*

Research Questions	Corresponding Interview Questions
RQ1: What challenges and barriers do successful African American women leaders face in advancing to leadership roles in Community colleges?	<p>IQ 1: What has contributed to your interest in becoming a leader?</p> <p>IQ 2: What are some professional challenges or barriers you have experienced along your career path?</p> <p>IQ 3: What are some personal challenges you have experienced along your leadership path?</p> <p>IQ 4: What lessons have you learned as an African American woman in leadership positions</p>
RQ 2: What strategies and best practices do African American women utilize in advancing to leadership roles in community colleges?	<p>IQ 5: How has your organization supported your career advancement?</p> <p>IQ 6: How did you overcome those professional challenges?</p> <p>IQ7: How did you overcome those personal challenges?</p>

Research Questions	Corresponding Interview Questions
RQ3: How do successful African American women in leadership roles at community colleges measure and track their career success?	<p>IQ 8: What does professional success mean to you?</p> <p>IQ 9: How do you measure success?</p> <p>IQ 10: How have you tracked your success moving up the career ladder?</p>
RQ4: Based on experiences, what recommendations would successful Senior level African American Women make for aspiring African American women leaders?	<p>IQ 11: Based on your personal experience, what advice do you have that would be beneficial to aspiring African American women leaders</p> <p>IQ 12: Based upon your experiences, what advice would you give to African American women leaders considering a career in higher education</p>

*Note:* Identifies four research questions and related interview questions as developed by the researcher.

### ***Peer-Review Validity***

According to Creswell (2013), peer review offers an objective oversight of the research study process. Outside experts were recruited to verify the data collection method through peer review (interview protocol). To match research questions with corresponding interview questions, a table was created (See Table 2). Two subject matter experts were selected by the researcher to engage in the peer review process: two doctoral students who both were enrolled in the Doctor of Educational Leadership, Administration, and Policy program and together have around 15 years of experience working in education. To assess the validity and reliability of the data collection tool, their experience in higher education and leadership as well as their knowledge of the research method qualified them as having the necessary expertise to assess the validity and reliability of the data collection tool. The interview questions were given to each peer reviewer and asked to:

1. Comment on whether the interview question answered the research question.

2. Note whether the interview question is applicable to the research questions.
3. Provide feedback and suggestions for changes to the interview.
4. Suggest and provide additional recommendations that are applicable to the interview questions.

Changes and additions to the interview questions, as illustrated in Table 3 and in the Proposed Interview Questions Validity Survey in Appendix D, have been made as a result of the peer review validity process.

**Table 2**

*Peer Review Revised RQ Correlation Chart and Related IQ*

Research Questions	Corresponding Interview Questions
Icebreaker	IQ 1: Tell me about your career journey?
RQ1: What challenges and barriers do successful African American women leaders face in advancing to leadership roles in Community colleges?	<p>IQ 2: Based on your experiences, what are some of the biggest professional challenges or barriers you have faced throughout your career?</p> <p>IQ 3: Based on your experience, what are some of the biggest personal challenges or barriers you have faced throughout your career?</p> <p>IQ 4: What lessons have you learned as an African American woman in leadership positions?</p>
RQ 2: What strategies and best practices do African American women utilize in advancing to leadership roles in community colleges?	IQ 5: What things helped facilitate your access to leadership roles and similar opportunities in higher education?

Research Questions	Corresponding Interview Questions
	<p>IQ 6: How has your organization supported your career advancement?</p> <p>IQ 7: How did you overcome those professional challenges you mentioned earlier?</p> <p>IQ8: How did you overcome those personal challenges you mentioned earlier?</p>
<p>RQ3: How do successful African American women in leadership roles at community colleges measure and track their career success?</p>	<p>IQ 9: How would you define professional success?</p> <p>IQ 10: How do you measure success?</p> <p>IQ 11: In what ways have you tracked your success throughout your career?</p>
<p>RQ4: Based on experiences, what recommendations would successful Senior level African American Women make for aspiring African American women leaders?</p>	<p>IQ 12: Based on your personal experience, what advice do you have that would be beneficial to aspiring African American women leaders</p> <p>IQ 13: Is there anything else you would like to share?</p>

*Note.* Research Questions Correlation Chart and Interview Questions (Revised). The table illustrates four research study questions and relevant interview questions with revisions to IQ 1,2,3,5,8,10 and 12 based on peer reviewer's review.

### ***Expert Review Validity***

The expert reviewers were the dissertation committee members. The Dissertation Committee provided advice, suggestions, and aided in the development of research study questions. The committee gave a preliminary analysis of the interview questions compatibility with the research study questions and integrated their input into the finalized version of the interview questions. For the final series of interview questions used in the research study, see

**Table 3**

*Final RQ And Related IQs After Reviewing by an Expert.*

Research Questions	Corresponding Interview Questions
Icebreaker	IQ 1: Tell me about your career journey?
RQ1: What challenges and barriers do successful African American women leaders face in advancing to leadership roles in Community colleges?	IQ 2: Based on your experiences, what are some of the biggest professional challenges or barriers you have faced throughout your career?  IQ 3: Based on your experience, what are some of the biggest personal challenges or barriers you have faced throughout your career?
RQ 2: What strategies and best practices do African American women utilize in advancing to leadership roles in community colleges?	IQ 4: What lessons have you learned as an African American woman in leadership positions?  IQ 5: What things helped facilitate your access to leadership roles and similar opportunities in higher education?  IQ 6: How has your organization supported your career advancement?  IQ 7: How did you overcome those professional challenges you mentioned earlier?  IQ8: How did you overcome those personal challenges you mentioned earlier?
RQ3: How do successful African American women in leadership roles at community colleges measure and track their career success?	IQ 9: How would you define <b>YOUR</b> professional success?  IQ 10: How do you measure <b>YOUR</b> success?  IQ 11: In what ways have you tracked your success throughout your career?

Research Questions	Corresponding Interview Questions
RQ4: Based on experiences, what recommendations would successful Senior level African American Women make for aspiring African American women leaders?	IQ 12: Based on your personal experience, what advice do you have that would be beneficial to aspiring African American women leaders  13: <b>Was it all worth it? Why?</b>  <b>Closing question:</b> Is there anything else you would like to share?

*Note.* Research Questions Correlation Chart and Interview Questions (Revised). The table illustrates four research study questions and relevant interview questions with expert reviewers (dissertation committee).

**Reliability of the Study.** Consistency is the core of reliability for qualitative analysis (Carcary, 2009). This means that the findings of the data gathered as a researcher are either accurate or consistent. For this study, more than one research study interview was conducted to ensure the reliability of the interview questions. After the interviews, the participants were asked about the experience: Were the questions understood? Were they clear? Were the questions consistent? Was the sequence of questions appropriate for the study? What input or feedback might the participants offer the researcher regarding her interview approach? This input was integrated into the questions and structure of the interview.

**Pilot Study.** Marshall and Rossman (2016) state a pilot study is used as a proactive measure to address any issues, remedy any potential ethical or procedural dilemmas, and eliminate barriers of technical difficulties before embarking on the full study. The pilot study used one participant for this study and was virtually completed. The pilot study participant was an African American woman, a Director in her late 40's, employed at a community college for more than three years in an administrative role and more than five years employed in higher education. After the interview, the participant was asked about the experience: Was the questions

understood? Were they clear? Were the questions consistent? Was the sequence of questions appropriate for the study? What input or feedback might the participants offer the researcher regarding her interview approach? The pilot participant was purposely selected as a representation of the study participants.

### **Statement of Personal Bias**

Personal biases linked to a research study are inevitable. Creswell (2013) recommended that a declaration of personal prejudices linked to the research study be enforced as a validation technique. Showing personal biases acts as a standard method for improving the ability to determine the accuracy of study results. The researcher carried out a mirrored observation of self before choosing the subject to recognize aspects in which her perception and experience were relevant. The researcher admitted that she is an,

- African American woman,
- who currently works in a community college in a mid-level position,
- who has worked in higher education for more than eight years,
- who has experienced differing levels of higher education jobs, including graduate assistant, intern, investigator, and internal auditor,
- who has experienced various challenges and barriers when trying to advance to leadership roles; and,
- has received little to no support throughout her career journey

### **Bracketing and Epoche**

The act of withholding judgment regarding the real world is Epoch or bracketing. According to Husserl (1962), unnecessary elements of symbolic definitions are stripped to the root, leaving only the nature of what constitutes the object. Husserl (1962) states that bracketing

in phenomenology allows one to free ourselves from biases. Often, to preserve the integrity of our independence as observers, so that we can see things as they are, regardless of their presuppositions. To recognize that the researcher is an instrument for qualitative approaches and biases, the researcher used bracketing to minimize the detrimental consequences of the data collection and analysis processes.

Moustakas (1994) stated that Husserl created the term *epoche*, a Greek word meaning to remain away from or abstain from suppositions. In the epoch, perceptions, assumptions, and preconceived notions about stuff are cast aside. According to Moustakas (1994), In performing the *epoche*, the researcher must reflect on a circumstance, individual, or topic, and put aside perceptions, assumptions, stereotypes, and prejudices to return with a readiness to approach the experience with new expectations and aspirations. Creswell (2007) explains this is an effort to put aside the researcher's background, such that the attention may be oriented towards the study participants. The *epoche* process offers an initial focal point for both the researcher and the reader to direct their interpretation of the participants' knowledge of the phenomena.

### **Data Analysis**

Creswell (2014) outlined steps taken in data analysis, including arranging and planning the data, reading all the data, coding the data, explaining the codes, creating the themes from the explanations, and interpreting the meaning of the phenomenon. This phenomenological research included the use of interview transcripts for the creation of a list of statements, the grouping of significant statements into themes with explanations of actual encounters and their contexts, and the writing of an overall summary of the phenomenon, including the details described above. The data collected produced recordings, interview notes, and information on the participants. The data was then analyzed, organized, checked, defined, encoded into themes, and interpreted.



The researcher typed all written interview notes and observations during the data organization process of the study, transcribed the interviews, and arranged the transcriptions by numerical order. In a Microsoft Word document, the researcher typed the interview notes, transforming the document into an electronic copy of the interview procedure which was used for the purpose of continuity with each interview. Underneath each question in the Microsoft Word Document, the responses for each participant were typed. Once all the data was recorded electronically, the researcher read all the data three times to get acquainted and gain a general understanding of the data.

### ***Coding***

The method of selecting and categorizing the data into codes is coding. Codes have been described by Saldaña (2016) as words or short phrases that symbolize a part of the data "essence-capturing." Codes may represent patterns and ideas from previous literature, shocking and uncommon concepts, and the reader's unique and unfamiliar concepts (Creswell, 2013). According to Moustakas (1994), the participants' transcribed statements and phrases are included in coding process and are used as verbatim examples to express their personal memories of their experiences. In research, numerous kinds of coding methods are used.

The steps of this coding process took place directly after the organization and reading of the data. The researcher collected word for word phrases that stood out from the transcripts, capturing the nature of the data of the participants, and wrote the codes in the margins of the transcripts. The word for word phrases were then transferred to a coding spreadsheet. The codes were then simplified by sorting them into groups, color coded, and used in the next phase of inter-rater review. The researcher applied a four-step, interrater reliability, and validity review protocol to assess reliability and validity in the data analysis system.

### *Interrater reliability and validity*

According to Creswell (2015) research's credibility depends on internal and external validity and reliability. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) stated that ensuring the validity and reliability of qualitative studies requires ethical performance. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) went on to state that all researchers are concerned with seeking true and accurate findings in their research study, specifically internal and external validity, and reliability. The following steps were taken in the data collection process, ensuring validity and reliability of the analysis:

1. Following the data analysis process as described previously, the researcher first coded data from two interviews, identifying and grouping related concepts and identifying thematic categories from these groups.
2. To test the coding performed by the researcher, the researcher then identified a panel of two co-reviewers. These co-reviewers are doctoral students who are familiar with qualitative research and are acquainted with the themes of coding and review. The transcripts of the interview and themes from step 1 were given to the reviewers. The translations, topics, and key words were separately reviewed by the co-reviewers. They then consulted with the researcher to approve or suggest improvements and changes to the themes. If a decision could not be achieved, the researcher then discussed these recommendations with the expert reviewer/dissertation committee before finalizing the process.
3. The researcher evaluated and coded the rest of the interview transcripts after steps 1 and 2. The outcomes were presented to the co-reviewers after the conclusion of all interviews. The researcher and co-reviewers discussed themes, until an agreement was reached.

4. If consensus could not be reached, the expert reviewer/dissertation committee was consulted for expert review validity.

## Chapter Summary

The topic discussed in this chapter was aimed at explaining the research design and the methodology used to gather and interpret data for this research study. The research methodology of the qualitative phenomenological approach provided the framework for strategies and best practices for African American women advancing to leadership roles within community colleges. The chapter contained several versions of questions and protocols designed to ensure the fairness and efficiency of the interviews. The protocols for the data processing and the coding method were outlined and their methods for checking reliability and validity. The systematic approach to collecting data and interpretation led to positive and measurable outcomes and reliable strategies and best practices for African American women in leadership roles within community colleges.

## Chapter 4: Findings

### Interview Preparations

Using the prism of their lived experiences throughout their career paths, this research study aimed to gain a better understanding of the best practices of African American women leaders in community colleges. Their lived experiences and responses to interview questions were analyzed using a qualitative phenomenological approach to determine these best practices for aspiring African American women leaders. The research study sought answers to the following four questions:

RQ1: What challenges and barriers do successful African American women leaders face in advancing to leadership roles in Community colleges?

RQ2: What strategies and best practices do African American women utilize in advancing to leadership roles in community colleges?

RQ3: How do successful African American women in leadership roles at community colleges measure and track their career success?

RQ4: Based on their experiences what recommendations would successful Senior level African American Women make for aspiring African American women leaders?

Interview questions were determined to provide answers to the research study questions. The interview protocol was semi-structured and included 12 questions, one introductory question, and one closing question. The introductory question was used as an icebreaker enabling the participants to easily share an overview of their professional paths. The closing question was used for participants to share, additional information. The responses from the introductory question and the closing question was not included in the data analysis. The introductory question was not directly related to the research study and the closing question did not yield

responses directly related to the research study. The following questions were asked of the participants:

1. Tell me about your career journey? (Ice Breaker)
2. Based on your experiences, what are some of the biggest professional challenges or barriers you have faced throughout your career?
3. Based on your experience, what are some of the biggest personal challenges or barriers you have faced throughout your career?
4. What lessons have you learned as an African American woman in a leadership position?
5. What things helped facilitate your access to leadership roles and similar opportunities in higher education?
6. How has your organization supported your career advancement?
7. How did you overcome those professional challenges you mentioned earlier?
8. How did you overcome those personal challenges you mentioned earlier?
9. How would you define professional YOUR success?
10. How do you measure YOUR success?
11. In what ways have you tracked your success throughout your career?
12. Based on your personal experience, what advice do you have that would be beneficial to aspiring African American women leaders
13. Was it all worth it? Why?

Closing question: Is there anything else you would like to share?

The researcher gave an overview of the research study to each participant prior to start of the interview. Each participant was provided specifics of the interview: the number of questions, and the estimated time length 45-60 minute for the interview. The participants were reminded the

interview was recorded and asked if they were clear about the process and had any concerns. Once each participant affirmed their complete understanding of the interview protocol, the recorded interview began. For responses where more clarification was needed, each participant was asked to explain or clarify their answers in such a way that the true sense of their responses was captured as precisely as possible. All participants were found to have sufficient comfort to answer all questions. There were no objections from the participants on any of the questions. Chapter 4 describes the participants, the data collection process, the data collected, and the research study results.

### **Participants**

A total of 15 African American Women Leaders who held the title of director or higher in a community college setting participated in the research study. They range in age of 39-69. The participants comprise of three directors, four deans, one retired dean, two associated vice president, three vice-presidents, one president, and one chancellor.

### **Data Collection**

The researcher performed a LinkedIn search utilizing phrases and keywords “African American Women leaders in community colleges”, “Black women leaders’ in community colleges, 2-year college, technical college, and junior college”. A list of possible participants was compiled in the Microsoft Excel spreadsheet with a list of attributes: age, position, years of leadership experience, and location. The researcher was not been able to ascertain age through this search. The list was filtered by years of leadership experience, age, position (director or higher), and location. To narrow the search results the inclusion and exclusion parameters were applied.

IRB approval was granted February 16, 2021. A LinkedIn, message was sent to 67 African American women who met the initial criteria inviting them to participate in the study. Once interest was expressed in the study and the age was confirmed an email address was obtained. A recruitment script (see Appendix A) was sent to schedule a date and time for a virtual session via zoom, along with the informed consent letter (see Appendix B), requesting completion prior to the interview. The first interview was held on February 17<sup>th</sup>, and the final Interview on March 1, 2021.

**Table 4**

*Participant Information/Interviews*

	<b>Interview Date</b>	<b>Region</b>	<b>Current Position</b>	<b>Years of Experience</b>
P1	February 17, 2021	West	Dean	13
P2	February 19, 2021	West	Director	10
P3	February 19, 2021	West	Dean	9
P4	February 19, 2021	West	Vice President	12
P5	February 20, 2021	West	Dean	17
P6	February 20, 2021	West	Associate Dean	11
P7	February 22, 2021	East	Associate Vice President	12
P8	February 22, 2021	East	Dean	15
P9	February 22, 2021	West	Vice President	23
P10	February 25, 2021	West	Associate Vice President	16
P11	February 26, 2021	South	Director	15
P12	March 1, 2021	East	Retired Dean	26
P13	March 1, 2021	East	President	18
P14	March 3, 2021	Mid-west	Vice President	10
P15	March 3, 2021	Mid-west	Chancellor	15

**Data Analysis**

According to Creswell (2013), codes can reflect trends and ideas from previous literature, surprising and unusual concepts, and new and unknown concepts to the reader. Saldana (2013) wrote that each interview would have the same patterns with each other as interviewees

experienced the same phenomenon. All 15 interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed, data was coded, the coding process was peer reviewed to reach a consensus about general patterns, and the data was analyzed to draw conclusions about the phenomenon. The researcher was directly involved in the data collection process therefore epoche and bracketing was used. A term noted by Moustakas (1994) which suspends any personal biases of the researcher that could influence the interpretation and analysis of the data coded. Therefore, I developed a list of phrases from the transcripts and grouped them into themes, a data analysis technique adapted by Creswell (2013) and outlined by Moustakas (1994).

Following the discovery of the meaningful statements and phrases used by each participant to describe their experience, the lived experiences were clustered and thematized. To summarize the results of these interviews in a clear and meaningful way, a collection of frequency charts was developed. The results were documented, color-coded, and included in the inter-rater review process.

### **Inter-Rater Review Process**

A spreadsheet was created to record the main responses from each participant to each interview question after the first three interviews were completed. These main responses were examined for commonalities in statements and context, and themes were developed based on the grouping of similar responses. The responses were color coded to make it easier to identify common phrases and categorize them into themes. Two other doctoral candidates trained in coding procedures were given these color-coded themes to review and provide recommendations. The recommendations were accepted.



**Table 5***Inter-rater Coding Table Edit Suggestions*

Interview Question	Theme	Inter-rater Recommendations	Revised Theme
2	Lack of Diversity and sense of belonging	I might consider shorter more succinct themes that encompass all the words listed	Sense of Belonging
4	Exceed Expectation/ Share Knowledge/ Community	I feel like that captures everything written	Intentionality
7	Support System/Self-Love/Acknowledgement	I think mental health incorporates self-care, self-love, and acknowledgment. I would do support system as one and mental health as another theme that incorporates self-love, acknowledgement, and self-care	Support System
			Mental Health

**Data Display**

The organization and presentation of data was the result of the study and related interview questions. Four research questions (RQ) and 12 interview questions (IQ) were grouped together based on their relationship. RQ1 was linked to IQ 2 and 3; themes were classified separately for each question and graphed to display frequency of each theme. The remaining RQs and IQs followed the same pattern. RQ2 was matched with IQs 4,5,6,7 and 8. RQ3 matched with IQs 9,10, and 11. Lastly, RQ4 matched with IQs 12 and 13. IQ 1 and Closing question, not included in the frequency chart as one is an icebreaker and the other a close out question yielding no content for study. As visual representations of the findings, the frequency data was formatted into bar graphs. To avoid loss of coherence, the researcher purposefully developed three themes in each frequency chart, per question. According to Attride-stirling (2001), there are no hard and

fast rules about the number of themes that should be included in a data display. To develop more robust themes, the themes were merged. The themes are presented in enough clarity and depth to illustrate the data's richness and complexity.

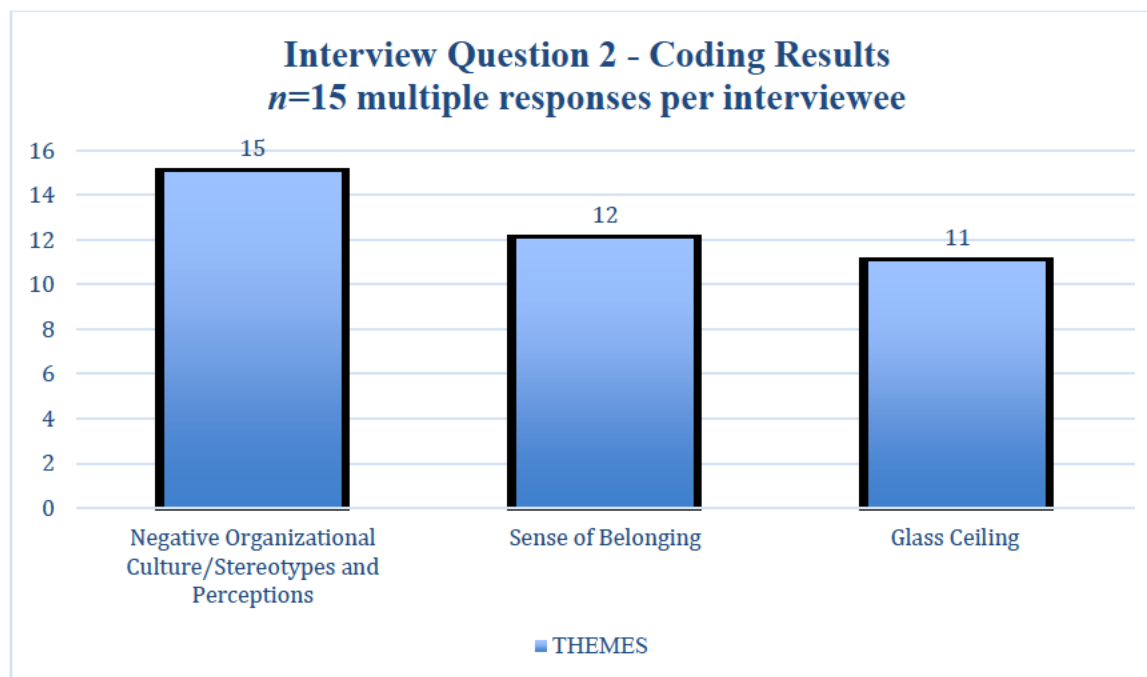
### **Research Question 1**

Research Question 1 asked, based on your experiences, what are some of the biggest professional challenges or barriers you have faced throughout your career? Two corresponding interview questions related to professional challenges faced by African American women. IQ 2 Based on your experiences what are some of the biggest professional challenges or barriers you have faced throughout your career? IQ 3 Based on your experiences, what are some of the biggest personal challenges or barriers you have faced throughout your career?

**Interview Question 2.** Based on your experiences, what are some of the biggest professional challenges or barriers you have faced throughout your career? Three common themes were identified from this question: negative organizational culture/stereotypes and perceptions, sense of belonging, glass ceiling (See Figure 1).

**Figure 1**

*Professional Challenges faced by African American Women*



***Negative Organizational Culture, Stereotypes and Perceptions.*** This was a common theme when it came to interview question 1. This theme was directly linked to professional challenges of understanding the power structure and align themselves with the structure and culture without being perceived as the angry Black woman when expressing themselves. This theme revealed two commonalities. The first commonality identified by twelve participants was negative organizational culture. African American women leaders identified negative organizational culture as the biggest challenge. P13 stated, “my biggest challenge was not understanding the political climate and where it could take you, or where it could destroy you.” P6 noted, “if I’m going to be completely honest about what’s happening the politics are very alive and you have to know where the power lies within the college and ensure a personal alignment to that power”. P6 continued, by saying, “If you disagree with that course, you must carefully navigate around the inconsistency or address it carefully, so it does not to appear misaligned with

the powers that be.” Eight participants noted that not understanding and knowing the power players can affect your advancement to leadership roles.

The second commonality revealed stereotypes. Eight participants spoke about stereotypes encountered and this oversimplified idea or image of the African American women. P5 stated, “We have those stereotypes, we’re quote unquote the angry Black woman if you speak up and your aggressive if your adamant.” P3 indicated,

I became very passionate about a topic and my passion is given the impression that I frighten the room, some find that passion as being angry, so I’ve been told to be careful not to become the angry Black woman in the room.

In addition, P15 stated,

You have to be very careful how you are delivering messages because they can be taken out of context or through the lens of bias, because as a Black woman, everything that you do is being critiqued, so you have to be very careful about how you're structuring your conversations with people, you don’t want to be labeled the angry Black woman.

The third commonality that emerged was perception. Perception is the idea or attitude towards African American women. Five participants agreed that there is a preconceived persona that Black women are going to be combative, and they are going to be hard to work with.” P10 noted, “That the challenge is other people their perceptions of our capabilities, and I think its driven by obviously race and gender.” P10, continued by stating,

people just don't second guess a man or a White man or even a White woman, people also think that they know what they're talking about, whereas a Black woman you might as well be ready for it because you will be second guessed.

P7 stated, “They see our first name and they already think she's probably Black, and so they have this image, and they start at the top of resume.” P7, postulated, “that our resume has to be tighter than anyone else’s.”

***Sense of Belonging.*** This themed also emerged as a challenge for African American women leaders. This theme referred to the professional challenges of being the first or one of

few African American leaders in the community college, twelve participants discussed a sense of belonging. P12 stated, “There was no one that looked like me when I came in as a leader, and that wasn’t good thing.” P4 added, “I’ve learned that many times you’re going to be the only one at the table and you must take yourself seriously. P1 shared that, Sometimes, I think. Do they really want a young Black woman in this role, will they accept a young Black woman in this role?” P6 goes on to say, “There is no true support group of African American women, where do we go for support. P5 said, “Being authentic and openly Black, is who I am and I’m unapologetic about it, my Blackness makes folks uncomfortable, which has excluded me from many things.” Six participants indicated that it is a constant challenge to try and fit into an oppressive institutional system that is not for you, not for people who look like you or who have the same identity as you.

***Glass Ceiling.*** This was last theme to emerge as a challenge for African American women leaders. Eleven of the participants mentioned that there was a proverbial glass ceiling or a concrete wall and White counterparts with less experience, and maybe the same level of education being able to ascend to leadership roles. P6 stated, “I have wanted to move up into a vice president position, but I’ve been robbed of the opportunity”. P6 goes on to say,

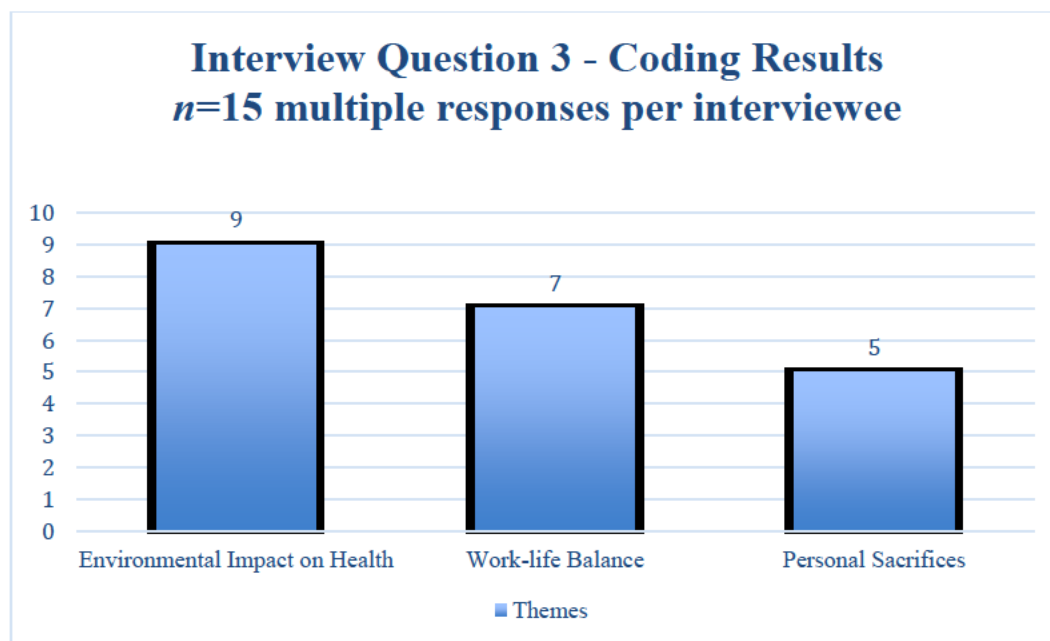
I’ve interviewed for the vice president position at three campuses in the district in which I work, later to find out that I was a finalist, but the power players did not select any of the finalists, instead they went back into the pool and selected a person who was not a finalist and offered the position to that person.

P4 stated, “they are always picking White people, you’re not even considered, because they don’t see you and that is a huge thing.” P14 added “There a few seats at the top and African American women are not afforded the same opportunities as men and White women. P14 indicated, “The playing ground has never been fair, I don’t think it’s ever going to be fair; and we are always going to have to struggle to get to those positions and that is unfortunate.”

**Interview Question 3.** Based on your experience, what are some of the biggest personal challenges or barriers you have faced throughout your career? Three common themes were identified from this question: environmental impact on health, work-life balance, personal sacrifices (See Figure 2).

**Figure 2**

*Personal Challenges Faced by African American Women*



***Environmental Impact on Health.*** The first theme of IQ 3 was the challenge of environmental impact on health. The participants mentioned health related issues such as headaches, ringing in ears, blurred vision linked to their work environment. Three themes were found relevant to interview question 2. Environmental impact on health emerged as the top theme. Nine participants agreed that their health was starting to exhibit certain behaviors and their body was showing certain symptoms. P3 stated, “I have something called tinnitus, and that is ringing in your ears.” P3 goes on to say, “I have this because of stress, and it is the stress of holding back on what I need to say.” P15 noted, “Being challenged so often you become

defensive, and it starts to take a toll on your health.” P7 added, “I have blurred vision and headaches at times, and it contributes to stress; the stresses of not having support, being second guessed often, not taken seriously and the microaggressions faced daily related to sexism and racism.” Seven Participants agreed it’s a daily struggle to find balance between being authentically themselves and conforming to what is acceptable for others.

***Work Life Balance.*** Work life balance was the second theme that emerged from interview question 2. Seven responses were related to the work-life balance and the expected gender roles as personal challenges in the participants career journey. The participants gave examples of managing family needs, furthering education, and spousal support. Three common factors emerged from this theme: demands of family, continued education, and spousal support. The seven participants agreed it was a challenge deciding how to prioritize work and family. P8 stated, “I am the primary provider and I have two children. I have no husband, so I often feel guilty when I have to pick between family and work.” P10 stated, “My husband, works evenings and its challenging to have extended family care for your children, when your enrolled in evening classes. P10 added,

The guilt is unexplainable and so many times, I would call my husband, crying letting him know I’m quitting school and work, however he encouraged me to keep pressing forward, with the constant reminder that this was just a moment in time.

Six participants agreed that the support received from their spouses and family has been instrumental in helping them advance to leadership positions. However, all five participants explained that the guilt doesn’t subside, because important moments were missed, and they can revisit those moments in real time.

***Personal Sacrifices.*** Were related to giving up something they desire for a greater good. throughout their career journey. Relocation, wanting to marry and have children were mentioned.

Five participants pointed out that they spent so much time driving their careers they've missed out on husbands and children. Three participants agreed they lack intimate affairs and family life because of their careers. P9 stated,

I accepted a position 100 miles from my home. I was paying rent and a mortgage in two different cities, my parents health started to decline. They could no longer manage their main home or their rental properties. These factors were a strain on me trying to move-up professionally, while taking care of my family.

P3 indicated,

I gave up a lot to be a well-rounded and balanced woman moving forward in my career never married, no children and I have a lot of guilt behind it. These intimate and unpredictable life experiences were characterized as extremely difficult to concentrate on and advance in one's career.

**Summary of RQ1.** The first research question aimed at identifying the challenges and barriers successful African American women leaders face in advancing to leadership roles in Community colleges? RQ1 one was informed by two interview questions:

2. Based on your experiences, what are some of the biggest professional challenges or barriers you have faced throughout your career?
3. Based on your experience, what are some of the biggest personal challenges or barriers you have faced throughout your career?

For the two interview questions, a total of six themes were established by evaluating keywords, key phrases, and African American Women leaders experiences. The six themes identified were: negative organizational culture/stereotypes and perceptions, sense of belonging, unequal opportunities, environmental impact on health, work life balance and personal sacrifices.

#### Research Question 2

Research Question 2 asked, "What strategies and best practices do African American women utilize in advancing to leadership roles in community colleges?" Five corresponding

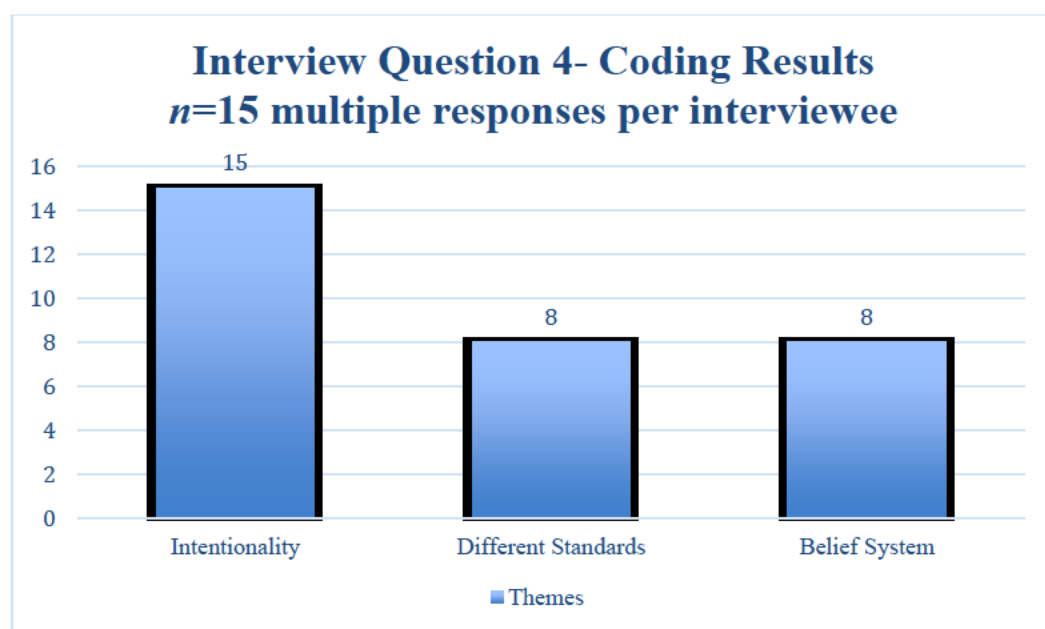


interview questions related to advancing into leadership roles. IQ 4 What lessons have you learned as an African American woman in a leadership position? IQ 5 What things helped facilitate your access to leadership roles and similar opportunities in higher education? IQ 6 How has your organization supported your career advancement? IQ 7 How did you overcome those professional challenges you mentioned earlier? IQ 8 How did you overcome those personal challenges you mentioned earlier?

**Interview Question 4.** What lessons have you learned as an African American woman in a leadership position? Three common themes were identified from this question: intentionality, different standards, belief system (See Figure 3)

**Figure 3**

*Lessons Learned by African American Women*



***Intentionality.*** The participants mentioned they learned to be deliberate about their actions to advance into their leadership positions, by carrying themselves professionally, building relationships and sharing information. Three common factors were identified from this theme. Exceed expectations emerged as the top common factor, as twelve participants mentioned

they must take themselves seriously and must always carry themselves at an extremely high professional level. P1 stated, "I cannot have any missteps. I must be intentional about my career and must continue to stay ahead of the game. I must make sure that my grammar is correct and the writing I present is intact." Share knowledge was the second common factor identified by the participants, as seven participants agreed that sharing information has helped position them to ascend to a leadership role. P12 noted, "You can't do it alone. It is important to share your knowledge. I freely give information or share knowledge. I found that to be a great lesson and it should be a common practice amongst African American women." Community was the third common factor identified; five participants agreed there was intent when seeking to build relationships. P8 stated, "You need to build relationships, everywhere, positive relationships, everywhere. P11 added, Find a mentor. Find someone outside your race, they don't have to look like you. I have several mentors, that way I get different perspectives." P15 went on to say,

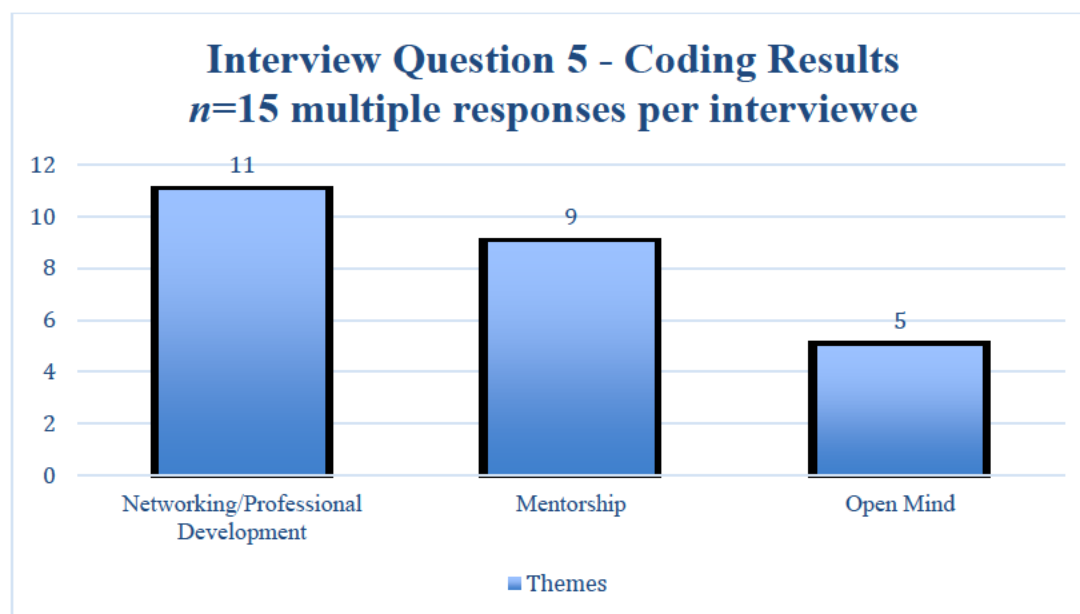
Get in there, make the connections. That's what it really comes down to, who's going to be in my corner and cosign for me when I go to the next level. Harness those relationships, when things happen, you have people that have enough clout to root for you. It's all about relationship building.

***Different Standards.*** Eight Participants mentioned having to do more than their counterparts, when trying to advance to leadership roles. The participants mentioned being super woman, the mothers of the workplace, having to communicate more effectively than their counterparts, and justifying the ability to operate and execute the expectations of the role even with sufficient experience and exceeding credentials. Participants 4,5,9,10,11, and 13 discussed having to work twice as hard for the same accolades as non-African Americans. P1 stated, "We truly must work harder than others. We must be able to communicate more effectively than others in the environment, i.e. White male, or White female." P2 indicated,

We're always going to be judged differently, not even just our White counterparts but, Asian and Latina/ Latino counterparts as well. No matter how smart we are or no matter what contributions we give to the overall success of the institution, when it comes down to it we have to work so much harder to break through and be able to continue to move up.

**Belief System.** Eight of the Participants believed they were the best candidate selected for the leadership role. The participants mentioned taking themselves seriously, not giving up and continue to push through. They participants also discussed when given the opportunity to perform in a leadership a role it is their belief they would excel. Two common factors emerged from this theme. Perseverance was the top common factor. P2 said, "Continue to have self-worth and self-belief. If it is something that you really want, not to give up, and continue to push through it." P6 went on to say, "You have to be comfortable in what you're doing." Participants 5,8,10 added, they have to bring their best self to the table, despite difficulty. The second common factor for this theme is spirituality. P11 stated, "Always trust God first and be led by him on a personal level." P13, indicated "I've learned the best thing that you can do every day is to make sure you spend a little alone time with God. That spiritual component is very important to me."

**Interview Question 5.** What things helped facilitate your access to leadership roles and similar opportunities in higher education? Three themes were revealed from IQ5: networking/professional development, mentorship, open mind (See Figure 4).

**Figure 4***Facilitation to Leadership Role*

***Networking/Professional Development.*** Networking and Professional development emerged as the stronger theme and participants agreed this is one of the tools used to facilitate their access to leadership roles. The participants mentioned the importance of building relationships through networking and professional development that can help shape their leadership roles. Eleven participants mentioned networking was a huge played a huge role in building relationships. P1 stated, “I try to put myself in positions where I’m able to network. P7, stated, “I think my biggest help has been my circle of Black women who allow me to safely, consult with them, and navigate with them.” P9, goes on to say “I try to make sure that I’m collaborating and getting to know all parts of the constituent groups. I believe that has helped to catapult and get me to the next level and help me advance into leadership opportunities.” P3 added “It is really about relationships that has really allowed me to enter leadership spaces, and to be authentic and trustworthy.” Eight participants mentioned professional development. P15 stated,

Show up to events. Nobody will know that you're interested in anything if you don't participate. If there are Employee Resource Groups, if there are ally ships that you can become a part of, participate. If there's volunteer or stretch of opportunities, put your name out there and get in the hat.

P12 added, I joined a lot of professional organizations and that helped to get my name out there. You can't just kind of halfway do it, you have to go all the way but, the access I think is the connections.”

***Mentorship.*** Mentorship was the second important theme for IQ5. The importance of mentorship rains truth for the participants as they spoke of mentorship as the necessity to guide and coach them through learning critical business skills, business strategies and the needed support for career growth. Nine Participants mentioned having mentors helped facilitate their access to leadership roles. P4 indicated, “My mentors are all genders, all nationalities.” P2 added, “Having those people that see something in me that continue to push me further is definitely a plus. Not only did they make recommendations, they connected me with network of people, and they encouraged me to do more. Seven Participants said, mentorship is critical. P7 stated, “You can't do it alone, you really need people to shape you.” P14 added,

A few of my colleagues and I formed an organization that mentored students, faculty, staff who look like us, to make sure that they had some help, and that they have an umbrella of services and because of that I started to ascend really quickly into leadership.

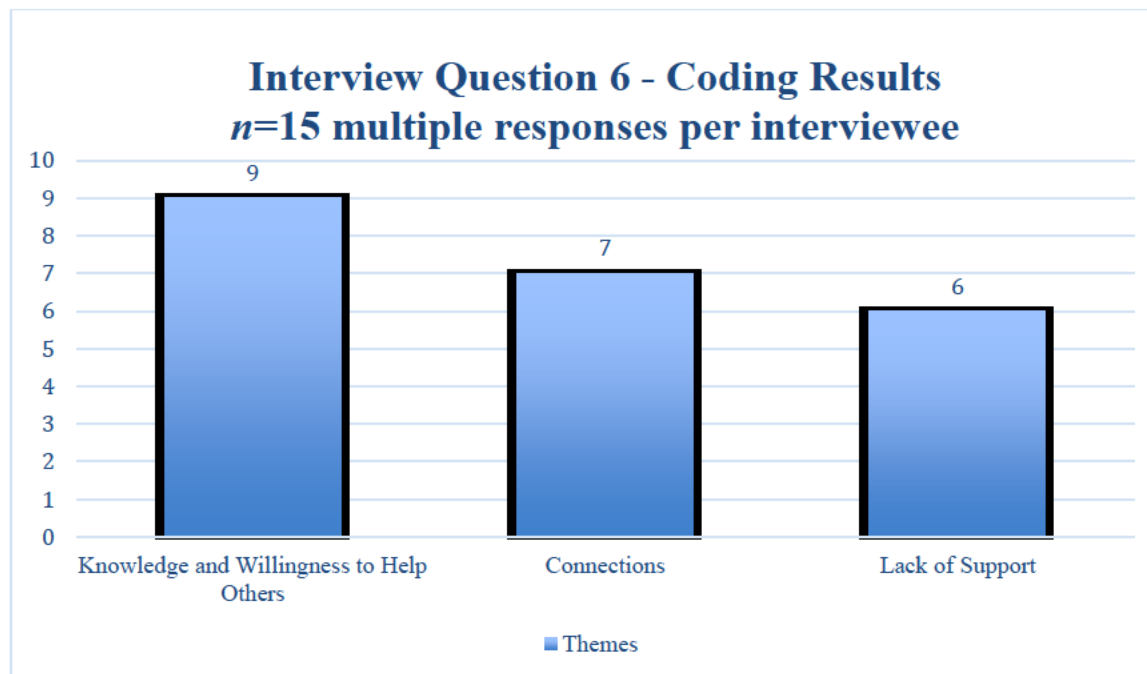
***Open-Mind.*** Open mind was the last theme to revealed from IQ5. The participants mentioned pushing themselves forward into the things that you've never done before and being open to positive feedback and positive reinforcement. Participants 2,5,8,9, and 13 agreed that being receptive to a wide variety of ideas and information aided in facilitating their access to leadership roles. P3 stated, “It was important that I released my fear of failure, my fear of not being perfect and embrace positive feedback and positive reinforcement. Just really kind of drawing on their experiences I mean they've been there, they've done that.”

**Interview Question 6.** How has your organization supported your career advancement?

Three common themes were revealed from IQ 6: Knowledge/Willingness to help others, connections, lack of support (See Figure 5).

**Figure 5**

*Career Advancement for African American Women by Their Organization*



***Knowledge/Willingness to Help Others.*** It was noted by nine of the participants that the most rewarding aspect of aspiring towards leadership roles is the knowledge received and the organizations willingness to help career growth and accomplishments. P6 stated, “Education is the great equalizer.” P2 responded, “My organization offered, opportunities to volunteer in other departments and learn outside the scope of my immediate assignment.” P8 added, “I have to say my president has been very supportive of my career advancement, she sends me career opportunities.” Participants, 1, 2, 6,8 and 11 agreed mentioned leadership programs with their organization. P11 noted,

We have a wonderful leadership program. Directors, managers, supervisors, and above,

can go through the college leadership program. They also have another leadership program for faculty. The topics discussed are the things that you may face with in a leadership role. This helps provide some level of understanding with through the presentation of different scenarios, different topics, employees, all those kinds of things a person may encounter in a leadership position.

**Connections.** For this theme connecting with the community complimented the measurement of career advancement stated as” networking” mentioned by seven participants.

P12 stated,

My college was really supportive, because I had a connection with the community. I was a hometown girl and really known throughout my city.” Three participants also mentioned working relationships as a rewarding part of making connections with people linked to or associated with career advancement.

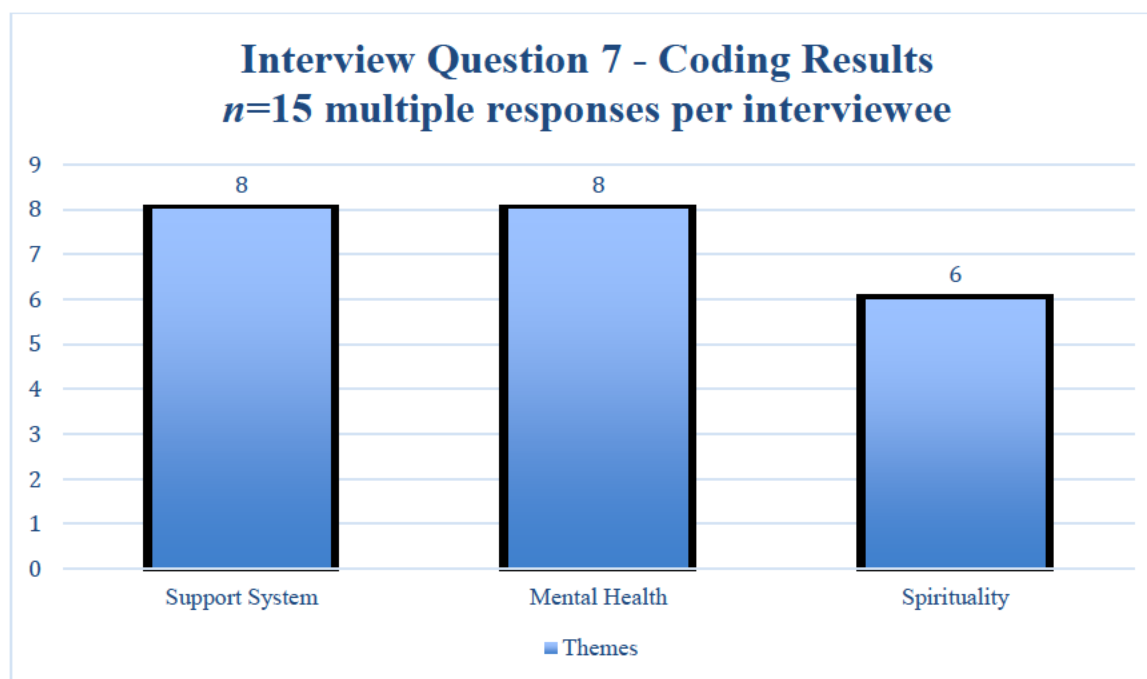
P1 indicated, “connecting the student learning experience, being student centered and embracing, the mission, vision and goals of the entire community college system helped me in my career advancement.

**Lack of Support.** Lack of support for career advancement discussed by six participants was the last theme revealed from IQ 6. Participants 3, 4, 7, 10, 13, and 15 mentioned not having any support in their career advancement. P3 stated, “My organization has not supported my career advancement. It was a promotion when I was hired at the organization, since then my career advancement has not been supported.” P4 added, “I cannot say that the individual institutions I’ve worked for have been supportive. P15 indicated, “I blaze my own path. I really built this myself.”

**Interview Question 7.** How did you overcome those professional challenges you mentioned earlier? This question shed light on core drivers that impacted their careers and sustained them in the face of adversity. Three common themes were revealed from IQ7: support system, mental health, and spirituality (See Figure 6).

**Figure 6**

*Overcoming Professional Challenges Faced by African American Women*



***Support System.*** Support system was a term used by more than a few participants as a description of mentors, colleague support and support from others such as community. Eight participants believed surrounding themselves with a support system helped to overcome professional challenges. P3 indicated, “I found and surrounded myself with individuals who were going to continue to support me. We meet for coffee, talk, role play, and they offer advice.” P12 said, “I have been blessed to be surrounded by terrific staff members, who are right there no matter what they pick me up as much as I support them, and they push me.” Reaching out to mentors and colleagues for support was another common factor mentioned by five participants. P2 shared, “I do a lot of reaching out to not only to mentors, but other colleagues, and even other people that I mentor. Getting additional support or reminders from others that yes you know your stuff helps me.” P14 added, “I reached out to my mentor to seek advice.”

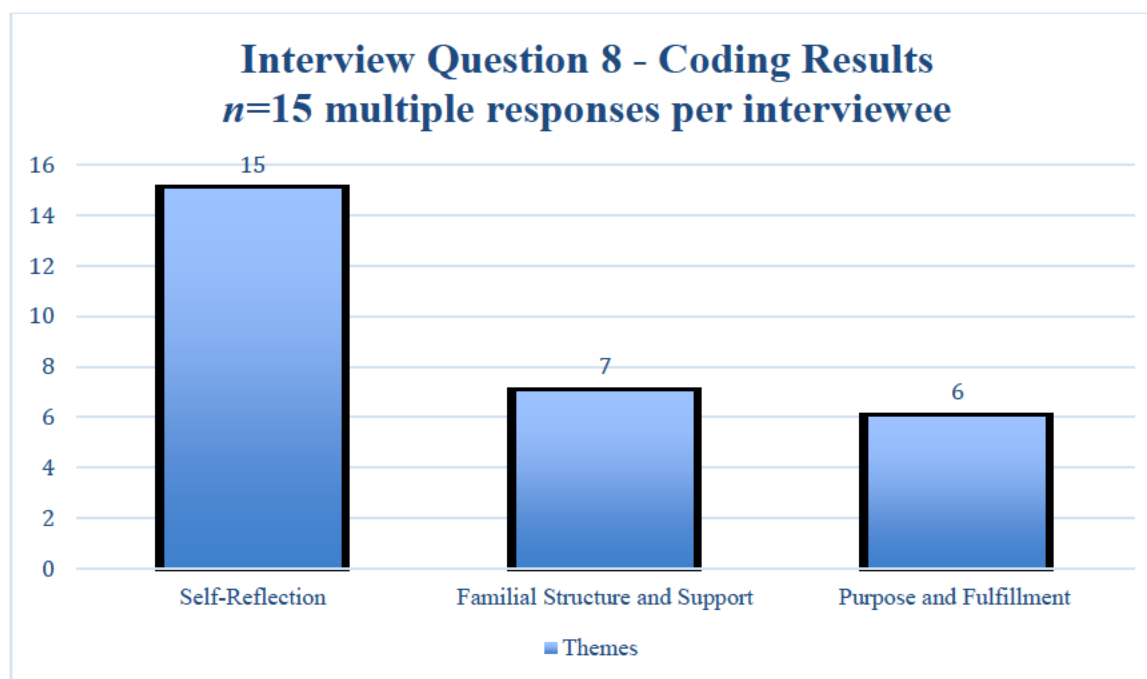
***Mental Health.*** Mental health was the second theme revealed from IQ7. Participants



spoke of physical activity and mental care. Eight participants believed self-care was necessary in maintaining a healthy mind and body. P1 indicated, "I am an avid gym goer. I usually go early morning somewhere between 4 and 4:30 am to prepare my mind and body for the day." P3 went on to say, "To be honest, I am very much a person who believes in mental health. My therapist and I are great friends." P9 added, "I do a lot of meditation, which helps me with a lot of internal work."

***Spirituality.*** Spirituality and acceptance is the third theme revealed for overcoming professional challenges. Participants mentioned their relationship with a higher power and leaned heavily on that power for guidance and direction. Six participants agreed that spirituality has played a significant role in overcoming professional challenges. Participant 2 and 3 mentioned their relationship with God and constant prayer. P5 noted, "I pray and ask GOD for understanding and direction." P13 added, "I asked for my higher power to order my steps and to lead me to the right people, the right decisions, the right opportunities and, shut doors for those not meant for me. P15 said, "There is nothing that God has for you. This not for you."

**Interview Question 8.** How did you overcome those personal challenges you mentioned earlier? Three common themes were revealed from IQ8: self-reflection, familial structure and support, and purpose and fulfillment (See Figure 7).

**Figure 7***Personal Challenges faced by African American Women*

**Self-Reflection.** Self-reflection was the most common theme revealed for IQ8. Self-reflection was important for all participants; they discussed soul searching throughout, focusing on difficult personal times, and taking personal responsibility for their emotional makeup and outlook. P11 responded, “I believe in my own personal self-reflection to allow myself time to reflect, be introspective in that and take what I get from it and make change. Focusing on self-love, self-care was rewarding for six participants. P12 stated, “It is all about looking at self, which I do often. It is a takeaway from personal and professional experiences observations that I’ve made and how can I take those experiences observations and help someone else.”

**Familial Structure/Support.** Familial structure and Support was another common theme revealed for IQ8. The participants described their family dynamic and support system in terms of their family's ability to lend a hand whenever needed. Seven participants mentioned the positive aspects of support from family and friends helped them to overcome personal challenges. P3

shared, “I had a supportive family who supported me in being successful on my job. If I had to work late night at work. My husband would keep the kids or do whatever needs to happen.” P15 added, “The great thing about our culture is that we have a history of community. I have some good friends. Surround yourself with people to support you, you can't do it by yourself.” Three of the participants also mentioned supportive colleagues who supported them and their family.

**Purpose/Fulfillment.** Purpose seems to align with participants as an essential aspect of healing and continuing to move forward and uplift individuals. Six participants mentioned how they've normalized being able to pick themselves up quickly after a setback. P3 responded, “all of our lives from the day we're born, we're taught to think outside the box, if I did not, I wouldn't have been able to survive. It's called resilience, and resilience requires you to think outside the box.” Four participants said It's uplifting building other people up. P5 shared,

I continue to try and build people up even in challenging times. I did it in a book format, which allowed me to take my experiences and observations and put them in a format where I could help and easily share with others.

P12 added, the true purpose is paying it forward, which brings me such fulfillment.”

**Summary of RQ2.** The second research question aimed at identifying strategies and best practices African American women utilize in advancing to leadership roles in community colleges? RQ two was informed by five interview questions:

4. What lessons have you learned as an African American woman in leadership positions?
5. What things helped facilitate your access to leadership roles and similar opportunities in higher education?
6. How has your organization supported your career advancement?
7. How did you overcome those professional challenges you mentioned earlier?
8. How did you overcome those personal challenges you mentioned earlier?

For the five interview questions, a total of fifteen themes were established by evaluating keywords, key phrases, and African American Women leaders experiences. The twelve themes were identified were: intentionality, different standards, belief system, Networking/Professional Development, Mentorship, Open Mind, Knowledge/Willingness to help others, Connections, Lack of support, Support System, Mental Health, Spirituality, Self-Reflection, Familial Structure/Support, and Purpose/Fulfillment.

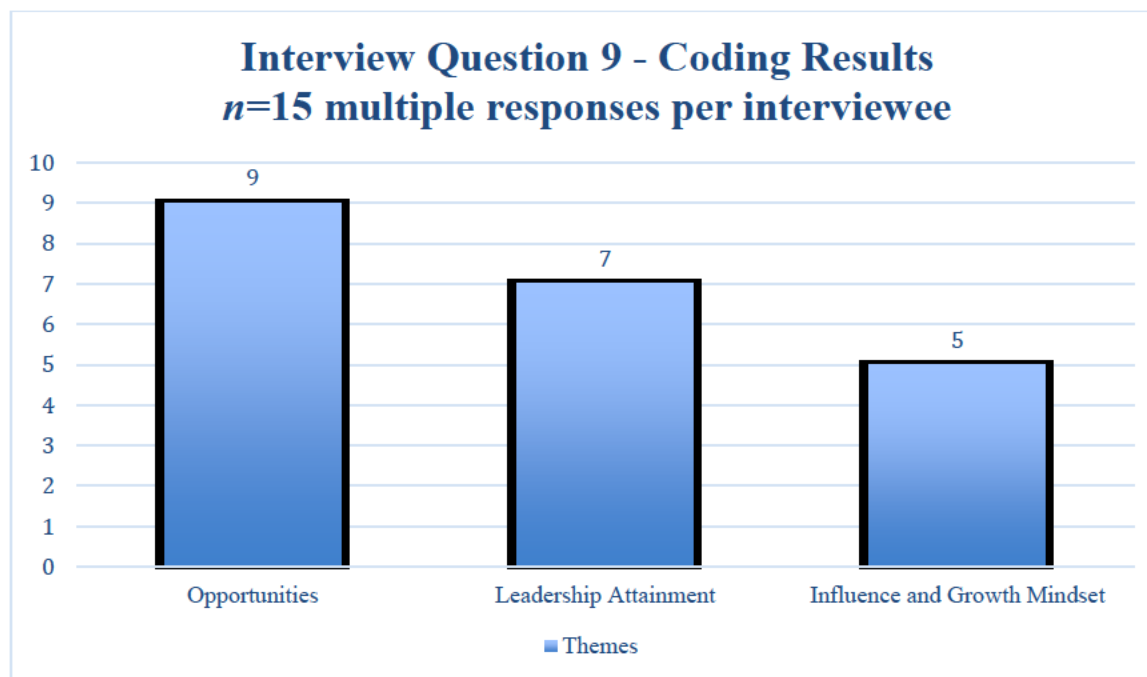
### Research Question 3

Research Question 3 asked: How do successful African American women in leadership roles at community colleges measure and track their career success? Three corresponding interview questions related to measuring and tracking career success for African American women leaders derived from the literature. IQ 9 How would you define your professional success? IQ 10 How do you measure your success? IQ 11 In what ways have you tracked your success throughout your career?

**Interview Question 9.** How would you define professional YOUR success? Three common themes were revealed from IQ9: opportunities, leadership attainment, influence and growth mindset (See Figure 8).

**Figure 8**

*Defining Professional Success for African American Women*



***Opportunities.*** Opportunities was the most common theme, that was revealed from IQ9.

Participants defined their professional success, as the result of being promoted or given more responsibilities. The participants identified three common factors. Nine participants defined their professional success as a blessing. P1 indicated,

I think that I've been blessed to have opportunities, being able to ascend so quickly when I was younger, was definitely a blessing. I'm successful at this level of dean" Some participants mentioned having the opportunity of learning through lateral movement.

P15 added, "I was able to learn a lot and get the additional skills necessary to be a cross functional person within the business, without title and only lateral movement. The lateral movement is what gave me the access into leadership." The participants also commented that opportunities didn't come easily they had to work towards the opportunities and professional success was defined as a work in progress, that is on an upward trajectory.

***Leadership Attainment.*** Leadership attainment was the second theme revealed from IQ9. Some participants mentioned reaching their desired goals defined professional success while other participants mentioned building relationships. making connections, getting more being service oriented. P12 indicated, “I think success is defined by the goals I’ve reached. I’ve reached the VP, so my next step is presidency.” Seven participants also mentioned joy, satisfaction, making connections and being service oriented as positive aspect of leadership attainment. P14 shared, “I’m reaching out and meeting more people, talking and learning more and getting more involved. I walk with integrity, pride, and a good reputation.”

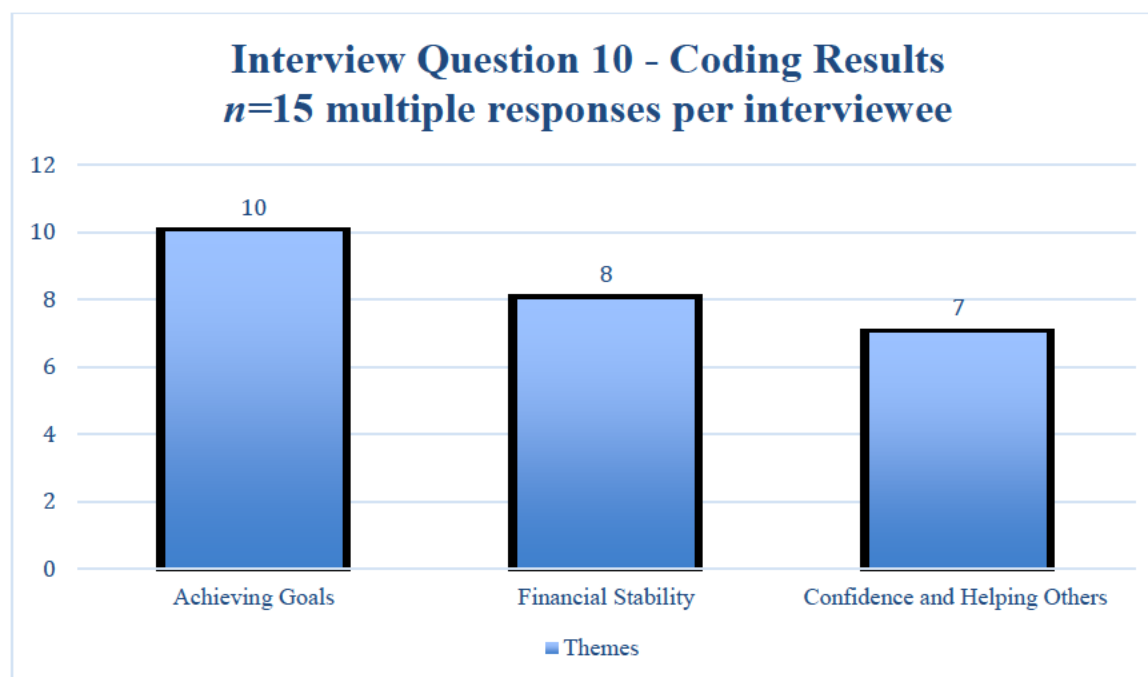
***Influence and Growth Mindset.*** Influence and growth mindset were another common theme revealed for IQ9. Five participants mentioned that they don't want to take any opportunities for granted and they need to make sure that they stay grounded and humble. P10 responded, “Success is just not really where you are, per se, but how can you help others achieve their goals and objectives. To me that far outweighs a level or position that one can reach.” Participants commented that success to them was overcoming the imposter syndrome and realizing they are supposed to be in that space. P13 added,

My decisions must also account for employee growth and ensure the success of those who work for me.” Participants also spoke about how important it is to recognize one's gifts and abilities, and how their specific perspectives are required in those environments.

**Interview Question 10.** How do you measure your success? The three common themes revealed from IQ10 were: Achieving goals, financial stability, confidence/helping others (see Figure 9).

**Figure 9**

*How Success is Measured by African American Women*



***Achieving Goals.*** When it came to measuring participants' success, this was the top theme. Many of the participants mentioned they put a plan together to accomplish their goals. P15 indicated, "I measure my success by the plans I write out." P4 stated, "I hold myself accountable for achieving the goals I set for myself. P1 responded,

I put together a plan, a while ago. I'm pretty much following that plan. I able to measure the fruits of my labor through acquired knowledge, skills, and my abilities to achieve more, and by putting myself in difficult yet challenging positions to achieve.

Ten participants said the measurement of success for them was, asking themselves have they accomplished what they set out to do or is it a goal still in progress. Although, all they participants mentioned writing goals and having plans, it still was clear as to how it was measured as the measurement of success differed all.

***Financial Stability.*** Another common theme revealed was financial stability. When deciding the measurement of success, many of these participants look at their title and pay first. Some of the participants replied by explaining why they thought money was a good indicator of progress. The driver for looking at wage raises as a metric was family financial stability in many of the participants answers. P10 stated, “Financial stability is the goal, as I am the primary provider for my family.” P3 added, “I have managed to go from the person who basically was sweeping the floor, mopping the floor to the person who hires the people who mops, the floor.” On the surface, these may seem self-serving, but at least eight participants pointed out that an increase in title and pay often implies an increase in power and control. This rise in power and popularity helps them to measure their own success while also putting them in a position to help others.

***Confidence/Helping Others.*** Confidence/helping others was the last theme revealed for IQ10. Confidence was defined by the participants as the willingness to carry out their work and make informed recommendations. Seven participants mentioned being secure about who they are as individuals, unapologetic about by their race and gender, and bringing their unique characteristics and culture to the table. P4 responded, “Be authentic in the workplace, be the leader you want to be.” Some participants agreed that helping others was a way they measured of success. P4 stated, “I measure my success, based upon the people around me, and the students that I've touched. If I made a difference in educational programs, or in the individual students lives than that is a measure of success to me.” P5 shared, “If I can help somebody achieve their goals and objectives on average, then I've reached the level of success.”

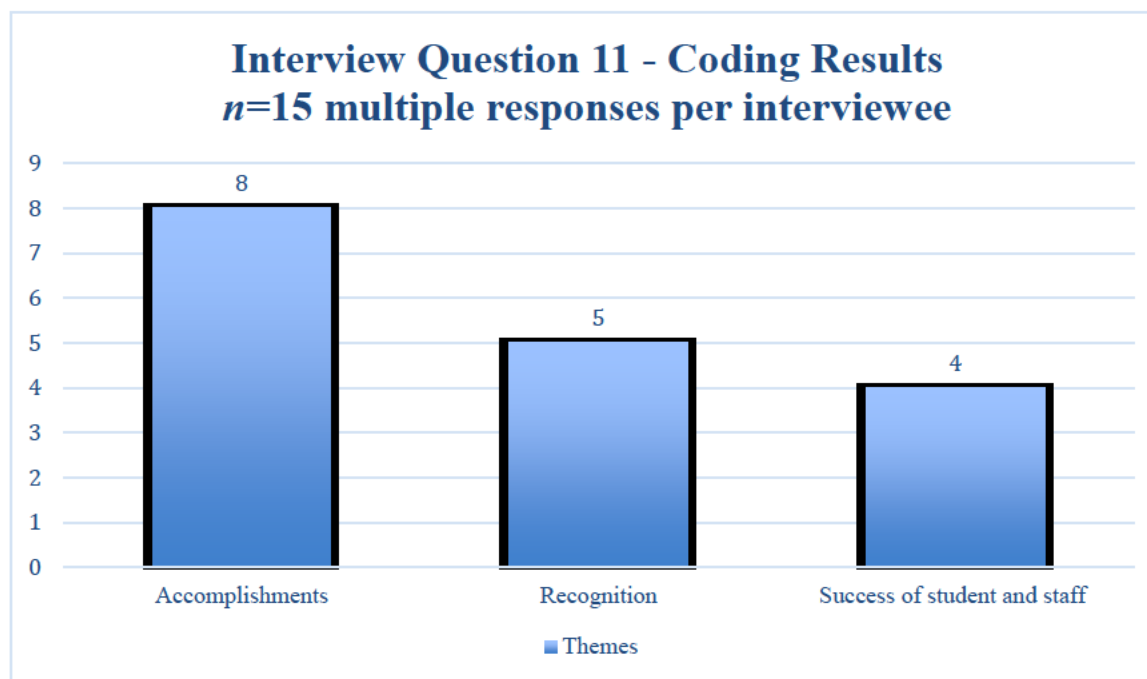
**Interview Question 11.** In what ways have you tracked your success throughout your career? Three common themes were revealed from IQ11: accomplishments, recognition, success



of student and staff (See Figure 10).

**Figure 10**

*Ways African American Women Tracked Career Success*



*Accomplishments.* This theme was the most important theme revealed from IQ11. The basic result of being promoted or given more responsibilities was often referred to as evidence that the participant's actions were successful. Eight participants mentioned tracking their success by how much they progressed in their career. P12 stated, "I track my success through career advancements." P14 shared, "My success is most definitely through title and of course, always through salary. I feel very privileged to have it." P15 added, "I track my success by checking to see if I have gotten to these places that I would like to be, you know my written plan." As a measure of achievement, these participants place a heavy emphasis on career status and accomplishment. Power, title, and pay are all tangible indicators of performance that can easily direct a person to continue or reassess their behavior and shift as required.

**Recognition.** Recognition was the second most important theme revealed from IQ11. Participants identified recognition as an indication that their efforts made a difference and reflected on the effect they have on others. P5, 7, 9, 11, and 13 mentioned feeling recognized when they are referred to as the person to go to for answers from multiple organizations. P5 added, “I feel recognized when people reach out and ask for assistance and I'm able to provide them with something that helps them achieve their goals and objectives.” Six participants said directly or indirectly that they feel recognized for doing a good job in an area outside the scope of their direct assignment.

**Success of student and staff.** Success of student and staff was the last important theme revealed from IQ11. four participants discussed tracking success through the lives of the students, progress. P8 shared, “I track success by the number of students that return and gives praise or give gratitude. P2 responded, “I also track my success through thank you notes from either my students or someone in another department or emails received reminding me that I am doing a good job and I'm continuing to affect change.”

**Summary of RQ3.** The third research question aimed at identifying how successful African American women in leadership roles at community colleges measure and track their career success? RQ three was informed by three interview questions:

9. How would you define your professional success?
10. How do you measure your success?
11. In what ways have you tracked your success throughout your career?

For the three interview questions, a total of nine themes were established by evaluating keywords, key phrases, and African American Women leaders experiences. The nine themes were identified were: opportunities, leadership attainment, influence and growth mindset,

achieving goals, financial stability, confidence/helping others, accomplishments, recognition, and success of student and staff.

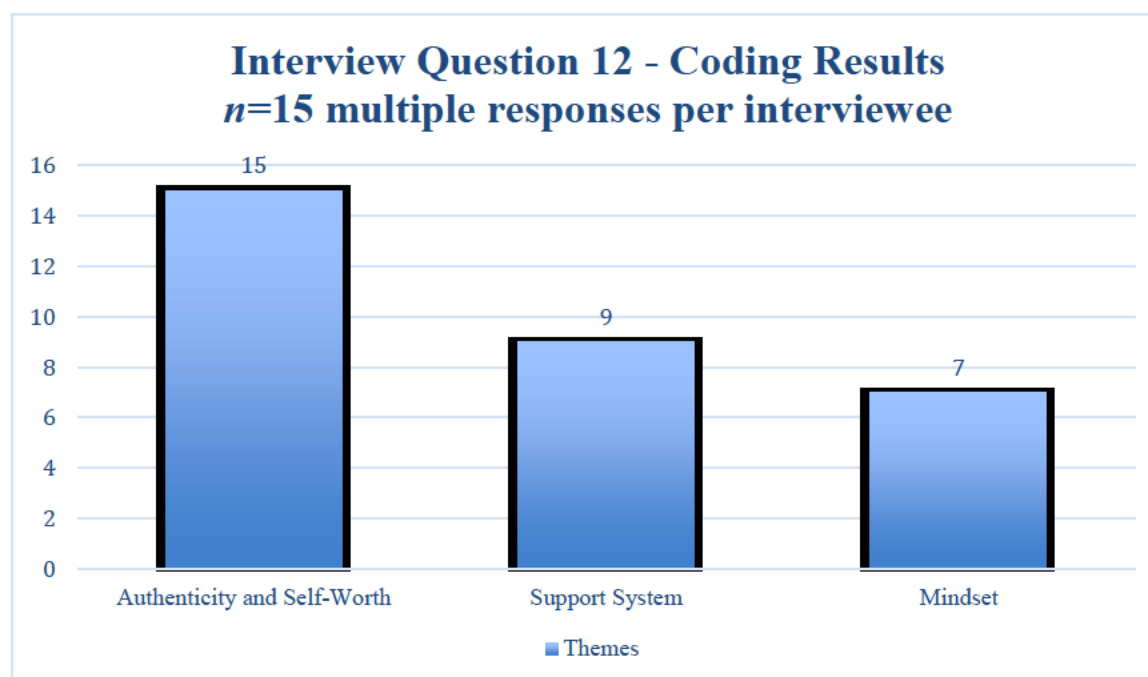
#### Research Question 4

Research Question 4 asked: Based on experiences, what recommendations would successful Senior level African American Women make for aspiring African American women leaders? Two corresponding interview questions related to advice for aspiring African American women leaders. IQ 12 Based on your personal experience, what advice do you have that would be beneficial to aspiring African American women leaders? IQ 13 Was it all worth it? Why?

**Interview question 12.** Based on your personal experience, what advice do you have that would be beneficial to aspiring African American women leaders? Three common themes were revealed from IQ12: authenticity and self-worth, support system, mindset. (See Figure 11).

**Figure 11**

*Advice for Aspiring African American Women Leaders*



***Authenticity and Self-Worth.*** The most important theme revealed from IQ12 was authenticity and self-worth. All the participants major advice to aspiring African American women leaders was understanding who you are and what you want. P5 responded, “Show up authentically.” P15 added, “What people want from you is the real authentic you, so you don't feel exhausted attempting to live through somebody else's eyes. P1 shared, “As an African American leader we're not looking for mimics of someone else we're looking for your best unique self.” The participants mentioned turning on self-love and turning off self-doubt. P7 stated, “Be fearless, understand what your limits are. Four participants said do not disregard intuition.

***Support System.*** Support System was the next most important theme revealed from Q12. Again, the participants mentioned having a core advisory group comprised of sponsors, mentors, and allies. P7 indicated, “Your support team can be individuals that you have met along the way along your journey, keep them close because you need confidence and people that you can talk to.” Nine participants suggest finding a group of women who are willing to support you. P4 shared, “You must find some great mentors that you can call on those dark days, that can help you through it.” P13 shared, “Seek out, professional development programs. Look for people who have specialized and what you want to do. Find opportunities to get involved where you can volunteer for a program.” P10 added, “Make connections outward. Making the connections with other Black women in the field of interest, that way you can all kind of play off one another and support one another because you have shared experiences.”

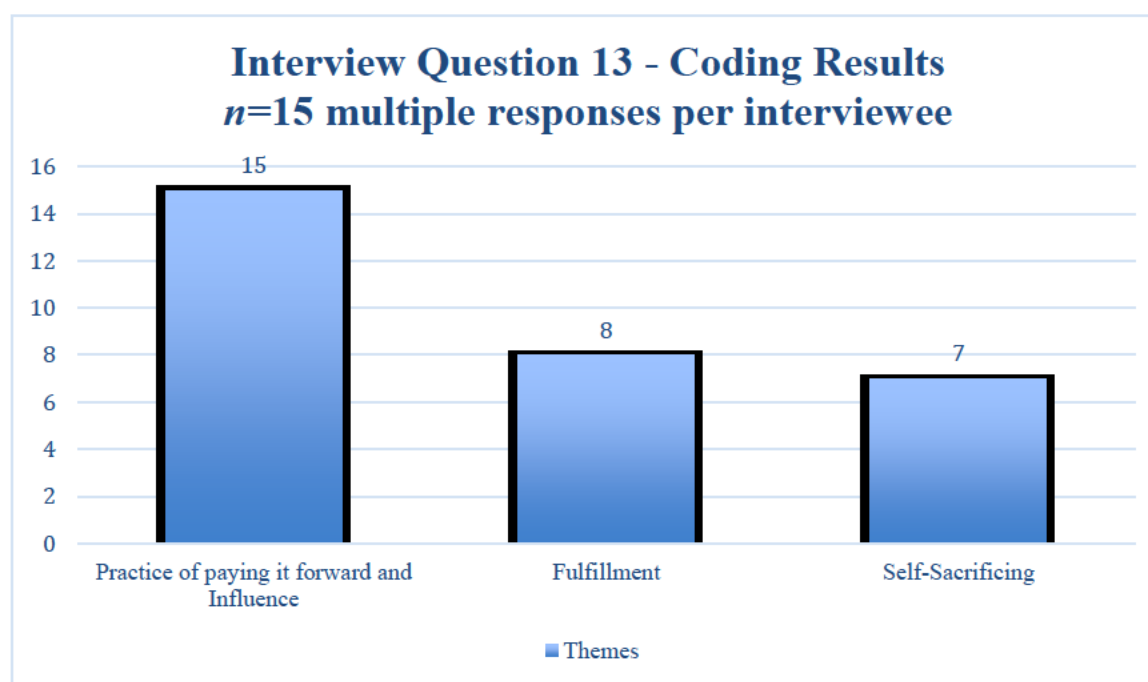
***Positive Mindset.*** The last theme revealed from Q12 is mindset. Once again, the participants advised to never be complacent. P9, stated, “Dress for the job you want, not for the job you have. Seven participants mentioned acknowledging patterns of behavior. P12 indicated,

“You need to get a plan. Write your plan out. Set some goals long term & short-term goals, and then work on it.” Four participants suggest do everything that you can to make yourself competitive. P5 responded, “Be an observer and listen to what's being said, how something is being said is very important. P8 noted, “It's not about me it's what can I do for other folks.”

**Interview Question 13.** This question asked was it all worth it? Why? Three common themes were revealed from IQ12: fulfillment and paying it forward, self-sacrificing, position attainment (See Figure 12).

**Figure 12**

*Was It All Worth it and Why?*



***Practice of Paying It Forward and Influence.*** Paying it forward and legacy was the top theme revealed for IQ13. All the participants mentioned paving the way for others that looked like them. P7 stated, “I have young, Black women who have followed my lead and follow the instructions and have progressed professionally.” P10 added, “I realize we as Black women need representation, and it gets me. God has me where he wants me. So yes, it was all worth it.” P14

stated, “Representation matters. If it wasn’t worth it, I would not be having this conversation with you, nor interested in this study. It is not about me it is about you and paying it forward.” Nine participants discussed influencing others along the way. P11 noted, “Yes, because if I can open a door for somebody else behind me, it’s worth it.”

***Fulfillment.*** Fulfillment was also another theme that gained a lot of input from the participants. The element of fulfillment, according to eight participants, is living in your purpose. P12 shared, “I’ve had a very fulfilling career, and I set out to do what I thought was necessary for me as a leader in my community.” P15 commented, “Yes it’s worth it, my roles have been very fulfilling and rewarding. I can showcase Black women as leaders. I display Black women empowerment, Black women achievements.” P2 shared, “It was worth it because of the journey and I just have a special affinity for Black women and Black students.”

***Self-Sacrificing.*** Self-sacrificing was the last theme revealed from IQ13, which gain much input from the participants. The Participants commented giving more of themselves and embracing who they became on their journey. They also mentioned terms such as evolving and growth being worth it, seven participants shared, they feel Black women, work harder to get to leadership roles. P6 stated, “I look back and I see the footsteps that I’ve taken. I recall and I get emotional because some of the things I’ve had to go through to get here.” P8 added, “I have evolved in so many ways. It’s who you become on the journey. Growth was absolutely worth it.” P3 responded, “Yeah, it’s worth it, not because of what I’ve read in a novel, but because what I’ve been through means everything.”

**Summary of RQ4.** The fourth research question aimed to identify advice that would be beneficial to aspiring African American women leaders. The following two interview questions are related to RQ4:

12. Based on your personal experience, what advice do you have that would be beneficial to aspiring African American women leaders

13. Was it all worth it? Why?

For the two interview questions, a total of six themes were established by evaluating keywords, key phrases, and African American Women leaders experiences. The six themes identified were: authenticity and self-worth, support system, positive mindset, practice of paying it forward and influence, fulfillment, and self-sacrificing.

#### **Chapter 4 Summary**

The purpose of this study was to understand the best practices and strategies employed by African American women leaders in community colleges. Fifteen African American women leaders were recruited to become participants for the research study. Fourteen questions were asked in total: One icebreaker question, twelve semi structured interview questions; One closing question. All the interview questions were based on the following research questions:

1. RQ1: What challenges and barriers do successful African American women leaders face in advancing to leadership roles in Community colleges?
2. RQ 2: What strategies and best practices do African American women utilize in advancing to leadership roles in community colleges?
3. RQ3: How do successful African American women in leadership roles at community colleges measure and track their career success?
4. RQ4: Based on experiences, what recommendations would successful Senior level African American Women make for aspiring African American women leaders?

The twelve interview questions were used to collect data for this study. The researcher started coding the data and sought feedback from two Pepperdine University doctoral

candidates with qualitative research experience. Previously mentioned in Chapter 3, data analysis was carried out using a phenomenological approach. Forty-one themes were generated from the data analysis. Table 6 represents the summary of themes revealed from the interview questions. Themes, implications, and recommendations are discussed in Chapter 5.

**Table 6**

*Summary of Themes for Four Research Questions*

<b>RQ1. Challenges &amp; Barriers for African American Women leaders</b>	<b>RQ2. Best Strategies and Practices for African American Women leaders</b>	<b>RQ3. Measuring Success for African American Women leaders</b>	<b>RQ4. Recommendations for aspiring African American Women leaders</b>
negative organizational culture/stereotype, and perceptions	intentionality	opportunities	authenticity and Self-Worth
sense of belonging	different standards	leadership attainment	support System
glass ceiling	belief system	influence and growth mindset	success of student and staff
environmental impact on health	networking/professional development	achieving goals	positive mindset
work-life balance	mentorship	financial stability	practice of paying it forward and influence
personal sacrifices	open mind	confidence/helping others	fulfillment
	institutional support in professional growth	accomplishments	self-sacrificing
	connections	recognition	
	lack of support	success of student and staff	
	support system	leadership attainment	
	mental health		
	spirituality		
	self-reflection		
	familial structure/support		



<b>RQ1. Challenges &amp; Barriers for African American Women leaders</b>	<b>RQ2. Best Strategies and Practices for African American Women leaders</b>	<b>RQ3. Measuring Success for African American Women leaders</b>	<b>RQ4. Recommendations for aspiring African American Women leaders</b>
	purpose/fulfillment		
<i>Note: This table demonstrates a summary of all the themes derived from the data analysis process.</i>			

## **Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations**

African American women rising to the highest levels of leadership in community colleges face a range of unique challenges. This research study aims to illuminate the essence of these obstacles as well as African American women leaders efforts to overcome them. This research study interviewed fifteen African American women who have held or currently hold a senior level administrative position about the challenges they have faced to advancement, the strategies and best practices employed to overcome them, and their advice for aspiring African American women pursuing high-level leadership positions in higher education. Leaders participating in this study have had success in community colleges, with titles ranging from director to chancellor. These women leaders have unique and unusual insight on the most successful approaches to overcome the obstacles facing Black women leaders, who aspire to leadership roles within community colleges. The perspectives shared by these leaders highlight a collection of unavoidable tenets about the steps Black women leaders must take to advance their careers in community colleges. In the words of Maya Angelou, when you learn, teach, when you, get give.

Chapter 5 will provide an overview of the research study, revisit the results, and highlights the main findings. Chapter 5 also assists in the review of the research study's recommendations and conclusion. In addition, research study recommendations are shared, and the chapter concludes with final thoughts.

### **Summary of the Study**

The aim of this research study is to learn more about the challenges and obstacles that African American women leaders face in community colleges; and to understand the best practices and success strategies employed to obtain and maintain leadership positions. Four research questions and twelve open-ended interview questions were constructed based on the

literature review for this research study. Much of the existing research on Black women in leadership and the challenges they face as they navigate higher education administration structures due to racial discrimination and stereotypes was validated by this research study. The data gathered reflected the lived experiences of African American women leaders who work or have worked in administrative roles, director and above at community colleges.

The research study was as a qualitative phenomenological study. The aim of this research was to learn about the best practices used by African American women leaders in community colleges. According to Patton (2002), phenomenology is most useful when the aim of the research is to understand human perceptions of a specific topic and their memories of their emotional responses to those problems.

For this study, African American women who hold or have held the title of director or higher in a community college setting were invited to participate. The 15 participants invited to participate, were selected through criterion sampling approach and maximum variation sampling was applied. Maximum variance sampling was used to identify any commonalities in the lived experiences of those who are a part of the phenomenon. Maximum variance, according to Palys (2008), is a way of selecting participants with a wide set of experiences.

From the four-research question, 12 interview questions were developed along with an ice breaker question. Interviews were validated by two doctoral candidates from Pepperdine University as well as a panel of experts. Each interview from the fifteen participants was audio recorded and transcribed later to a Microsoft word document. To identify commonalities, the researcher analyzed and coded the data. The two doctoral candidates worked as inter-raters in providing pointers and edits to the researcher. There were modifications to the original codes noted in Chapter 4.

## Discussion of Findings

The purpose of this study was intended to identify the best practices and strategies that successful African American women leader employ to advance to leadership roles in community colleges. The study's findings are discussed in detail in throughout the following section.

Furthermore, the current literature was linked to the results of this study to support the findings.

**Results for RQ1.** Research question 1 asks, “What challenges and barriers do successful African American women leaders face in advancing to leadership roles in Community colleges?” An analysis of the responses and the origination of themes reveal the major challenges faced by African American women leaders in community colleges. The six themes directly linked to the first research question (RQ1) helps describe the challenges and barriers that African American women face in rising to positions of leadership. The challenges are:

- African American women face racial and gender inequality in aggressive settings, which varies from that of White women. They challenge those stereotypes and denigrated images of Black women illustrated as loud, harsh, sassy and angry.
- Being overlooked for promotions despite your qualifications White people with less job experience, who have the same level of education, rise to positions of leadership.
- The difficulty of being the first or only one of the few African American women leaders can give rise to feelings of exclusion and loneliness. When people notice that only a small percentage of people of a minority gender, race, or age are given a position of importance, it often causes people who belong to that minority to see that group to be discriminated against in some capacity to be devaluing or stigmatized. Consequently, social exclusion makes it impossible to feel connected to others.
- The difficulty of trying to assert yourself constantly due to lack of confidence and low

standards relating to the skill and ability of African American women due to ethnic and cultural stereotyping.

- The complexities of balancing job duties, family life and unpredictable life events, while simultaneously questioning social expectations such as gender stereotypes, in addition to combating ethnic and cultural inequality at work.

An important aspect of this research study involves examining racism, sexism, and bias/stereotypes. The Black woman leader is aware that potential challenges or problems cannot be defeated by the current actions or resources at their disposal. In addition, there are things found by the participants that are beyond the individual's power.

**Discussion of RQ1.** Negative workplace culture/stereotyping and perceptions, sense of belonging, glass ceilings, environmental effects on health, work-life balance and personal were themes that were revealed from challenges shared by participants. These themes were identified in the literature such as negative workplace culture/stereotyping and perceptions (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2003; Crites et al., 2015; Howard-Baptiste, 2014), sense of belonging (Howard-Hamilton, 2003); glass ceilings (Barnes, 2017; Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Eagly 2016; Giscombe & Jones 2004; Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000; Morrison et al., 1987; Ragins & Sundstrom, 1990; Tan 2016); environmental effects on health (Crites et al., 2015; Henry et al., 2012), work-life balance (Marcus, 2016).

Participants stress that challenges of negative workplace culture/stereotyping and perceptions and sense of belonging is very much a part of their current experiences. Hannum et al. (2015) asserted that the African American women's challenges and barriers are arbitrary and deeply rooted in organizational culture. Howard-Baptiste (2014) confirmed African American women in academia are stereotyped by faculty, colleagues, students, and families. The literature

also revealed that, when women hold leadership roles, they encounter socio-cultural barriers related to behavioral norms, gender congruity and stereotypes (Giscombe, 2008). In addition, the literature showed that there is no sense of belonging as African American experiences culturally and personally does not fit with the majority group (Howard-Hamilton, 2003).

Literature revealed that the limited advancement of Black women leaders is due to the glass ceiling (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000). The Participants in this study shared having challenges advancing because of the proverbial glass ceiling. The participants discussed having the same level of education and more experience, than their White counterparts, but had difficulty ascending to leadership roles. Morrison et. al. (1997) confirmed that the glass ceiling is an invisible barrier that prevents eligible women from rising the organizations ladder due to sexism and racism.

According to the literature reviewed Crites et al. (2015) confirmed that the environmental effects on health in compromising positions can be stressful for African American women, especially in the workplace, resulting in psycho-social challenges, social discord, and distorted perceptions of self. Participants expressed their mental and physical health has become a challenge. Some participants mentioned that their health was exhibiting certain behaviors and their body was showing certain symptoms, such as tinnitus.

The participants discussed finding a balance between work and life as a challenge. Some mentioned the complexity of juggling all the responsibilities of work, while lacking intimate relations and family life. Marcus (2016) confirmed, through a study that balancing goals, found the most important sacrifices to be a lack of priority on intimate affairs and family life. In the study, women explained that their aspirations and desires for success caused them to lose marriage, friendship, family, and spending time with family and friends.

**Results for RQ2.** Research question 2 asks, “What strategies and best practices do African American women utilize in advancing to leadership roles in community colleges?” There was total of 15 themes identified for RQ2 through IQ 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8. The following themes represent the top five common strategies used by Black women in senior leadership positions in community colleges to overcome the challenges mentioned in RQ1:

- Intentionality in exceeding expectations and seeking out educational opportunities
- Networking/Professional Development to aid in facilitating their access to leadership roles
- Mentorship as a system of support
- Institutional support in professional growth, the organizations willingness to help
- Self-Reflection

**Discussion of RQ2.** Participants expressed that they were intentional in exceeding expectations. Despite organizational challenges, a combination of continuing education and professional growth was a strategy and best practice used to keep developing professionally. Literature revealed that exceeding expectations, have resulted in many African American women learning more skills, which has linked to them continuing their educational pursuits (Hackett & Byars, 1996).

Participants discussed building relationships as a strategy and best practice used when advancing to leadership roles. Relationships are key and developing a coalition of resources aided participants in retaining and persevering in their leadership roles. Participants addressed the value of mentors and the role that good mentoring relationships played in their path to executive leadership. Kuwabara et al. (2018) confirmed that part of leadership growth is

establishing, retaining, and maximizing relationships. Grayson et al. (2007) agreed, noting that networking acts as a connector between internal and external partnerships, with the latter focused on success.

The third strategy for overcoming challenges was institutional support in professional growth and the organizations willingness to help. Davis and Brown (2007) clarified that, to encourage and sustain African American women in higher education institutions, an awareness of their special status must take place at organization level. This phenomenon took various forms with each person, some of the organizations were able to campaign for and assist African American women as they navigated unique cultural barriers related to race and the political climate, while other organizations navigation system did not work.

Self-reflection was another strategy and best practice identified by the participants. The participants in the study emphasized their own self-worth and sense of self. The ability to deftly transform obstacles such as self-doubt and excessive attention into opportunities to develop, strengthen, and ultimately reach and surpass expectations. The African American women leaders in this research study were insightful and transformational leaders. Each participant persevered in the face of unusual obstacles, and established strategies and best practices to aid in their advancement to leadership roles each expressed the need for persistence and resilience.

**Results for RQ3.** Research question 3 asks, “How do successful African American women in leadership roles at community colleges measure and track their career success?” The data analysis revealed the most common successful measurement methods and tracking strategies for African American women leaders in community colleges:

- Opportunities
- leadership attainment



- influence and growth mindset
- achieving goals
- financial stability
- confidence/helping others
- accomplishments
- recognition
- success of student and staff

**Discussion of RQ3.** In this research, the definition of success for Black women varied greatly. Their definitions of success and how they were measured were linked to their reasons for success. Participants who spoke about opportunities, leadership attainment, influence and growth mindset, and achieving goals as measurement indicators felt they were called to their position. This concept of measuring success was intriguing, as they had previously discussed a lack of recognition, racism, and hostile cultures based on racial and ethnic differences in another interview question. According to Hannum et al. (2015) lack of opportunity and support is a challenge for women. These women all expressed a strong dedication to community and the college's mission and vision. Studies confirmed unequal and hostile work environments that African American women face in the workplace (Giscombe and Mattis, 2002). Given the lack of leadership opportunities for African American women, studies revealed that all women possess responsive, resilient, and unique leadership qualities that help organizations achieve their goals and objectives (Hill et al., 2016).

Some of the participants identified and tracked success in terms of the degree of financial stability, confidence/helping others, accomplishments, recognition, and success of students and staff. These were all markers of progress in the forward progression of participants. Their title

and pay conveyed power and authority, validating not just their talents but also the actions they took to achieve success. Participants also felt that they were successful if personally fulfilled, paying it forward, growing professionally, developing their skill sets, and increasing their career experience. Obtaining a promotion and a leadership position, gaining recognition and gratitude for one's efforts, and being paid appropriately for one's role were all measures of achievement and advancement for participants. Many leaders in the educational institutions have claimed that people of color faculty positions increase people of color student performance by acting as role models, mentors, and advocates for the students Ladson-Billings (1992); Pitts (2007). Alleman et al. (2018) emphasized that mentoring connections are mutually beneficial and encouraging for both mentor and mentee. Mentoring connections are critical for training and preparing African American women to advance to senior leadership positions (Burke and Carter, 2015). Mentoring provides social support, job opportunities, and services entrenched in employment networks that assist in educating sponsors and exposing them to professional and leadership chances (List and Sorcinelli, 2018).

**Results for RQ4.** Research question 4 asks, “Based on experiences, what recommendations would successful Senior level African American Women make for aspiring African American women leaders?” The data analysis process ended with the following advice from the participants as successful strategies for African American women leaders in community colleges:

- Be authentic and know self-worth, understand who you are and what you want
- Have a support system, a core advisory group comprised of sponsors, mentors, and allies.
- Positive mindset, do everything that you can to make yourself competitive (i.e.

continued education.)

- Practice of paying it forward and influence, paving the way for aspiring African American women leaders
- Personal fulfillment, living in your purpose
- Self-sacrificing, who you become on your leadership journey

**Discussion of RQ4.** There were parallels between the advice participants provided to aspiring Black women leaders and the success strategies presented in the literature. Black women leaders were influenced by the people with whom they are affiliated. Mentors, sponsors, and allies were examples of these networks. Nearly all the participants discussed having a mentor(s) or being mentor in their professional careers. Mentoring relationships, according to Alleman et al. (2018), are reciprocal relationships that cultivate and promote both the mentor and the mentee. Literature suggests the importance of mentoring relationships in training and preparing African American women aspiring to senior leadership roles (Burke and Carter, 2015).

Burke et al. (2015) analyzed why career networks provided access to upper-level positions and examined the relationship between employment opportunity and access to information, skills, and recommendations for career mobility. The participants in this study explored how their access to a social network resulted in a promotion to a higher-level job opportunity. The women described how they developed into exceptional leaders not only because of their qualifications, but also because of the social networks they were able to use. They talked of mentors that connected them to opportunities that unlocked doors they were unaware existed. The participants addressed the challenges associated with gaining entry. Everyone identified a mentor or sponsor as the root of the initiation or entry point into the influential social network.

For Black women, race and ethnicity provide a unique barrier to establishing professional networks, which are considered essential for advancement to upper-level leadership roles (Burke et al., 2015; List et al., 2018). The literature indicated that finding mentors with similar experiences and histories to African American women is a challenge; which can be difficult in higher education due to the low number of African American women having reached positions of power (Hannum et al., 2015).

### Implications of the Study

African American women leaders' contributions to post-secondary education have been marginalized, according to Hall et al. (2007), and researchers have found it difficult to gather clear ideas about their leadership position. This research study revealed the barriers and challenges faced by Black women, and success strategies, best practices and advice for success used by Black women leaders who have persevered and evolved in the face of adversity. Harvard (1986) found that academic leadership positions for Black women were mostly unexplored. The findings for the research study have some important implications that can be extended to the following groups: (a), African American women Leaders, (b) Aspiring African American women, (c) Colleges and Universities, (d) Policy Influencers and Society.

**African American Women Leaders.** Research from this will benefit African American women by supporting their professional goals in furthering their desire for post-secondary education. More precisely, when women can skillfully turn obstacles such as self-doubt and undue scrutiny into opportunities to grow, improve, then fulfill standards, they are simultaneously building their own identities and becoming better leaders. African American women can practice authentic leadership, in conjunction with demonstrating profound self-awareness and the desire to build their own identities.

**Aspiring African American Women.** This research study offers a blueprint for identifying the challenges, success strategies, and best practices of pursuing and achieving leadership positions in academia as an African American Women. This guide helps African American women gain an understanding and learn from the perspectives of women who came before them. This research study can also validate feelings that African American women are experiencing but are unable to communicate. Furthermore, it will enable future generations of African American women leaders to look back on this research study with optimism and encouragement and help further advance African American women.

**Colleges and Universities.** This research can also be used as a recruitment and retention tool for community colleges as they seek diverse talent to serve their student population. As student populations are rising and evolving rapidly, a potential exists to close the gaps through these changes. Eagan (2007) stated the overall faculty and staff presence is not representative of the student body. Finkel (2019) added that as community colleges undergo a season of transition, a disparity in leadership positions is acknowledged, especially in the categories of race and gender; community colleges must realize that diverse leadership is necessary to serve and support their student and faculty populations.

**Policy Influencers and Society.** Bias against African American women that are reinforced by historical and contemporary standards and the resultant oppression, must be removed. African American women face enough obstacles in the workplace and outside of it without having to step into positions that have historically been reserved for women. Women have gained growing responsibility in the workforce. Traditional duties such as household management, cooking meals, and caring for children have remained constant. This research study calls on policy makers to enact gender-neutral policies.

## Study Conclusion

The researcher began this study with the desire to add to the existing body of literature for aspiring African American women leaders in community colleges. The researcher sought successful African American women leaders, recognizing the strategies and best practices, they utilized to make them successful, while juggling discrimination, microaggressions, ethnic identity perceptions, cultural inequalities, lack of opportunities and support systems such as mentors or professional development. To achieve this mission, the researcher interviewed 15 African American women leaders who served or have served in a leadership role as a director, or higher in a community college, utilizing twelve open-ended questions that were derived from the four research questions that initiated the research study. As a result, the study gained real experience of the situations that these participants face daily, which afforded the researcher the opportunity to identify the following key findings per the research question, described below:

**Research Question 1.** The literature reviewed identified many challenges faced by African American women when advancing to leadership roles. The biggest challenge African American women face in community colleges is negative organizational culture, stereotypes, and perceptions. Organization cultural bias, outdated perceptions and stereotypes can be intimidating. For decades, literature identifying many of the problems that African American women face have been clear and stagnant, in contrast to White women's experiences, African American women bare the dual responsibility of becoming a woman and navigating the pervasiveness of prejudice and inequality in higher education institutions. Slow progress has been made towards resolving the issues confronting African American women. This fact reaffirms the critical nature of undertaking ongoing, rigorous research to hold organizations responsible for continuous improvement. Numerous perceived issues stem from the environment and a lack of systemic

accountability. Institutions must be more deliberate in their efforts to combat institutional racism and sexism, which both disproportionately impact African American women.

Another significant result is that colleges systematically withholding Black women promotion opportunities and incentives for job advancement depending on their contribution or dedication to a department. According to the explanations provided by the participants, this situation recognizes the employee's contribution to the college without regard for the employee's ability to progress. To maintain talent at the college, participants described administrative or leadership activity as acts of praise directed at the participants' exemplary work without regard for advancement to higher positions. This research study's advice on this subject matter was to identify when the college is deliberately keeping someone static for its own gain and to make the necessary preparations to transition, and move to a position where one's abilities, expertise, and cultural resources are valued.

**Research Question 2.** Intentionality is the most effective tactic African American women in community college use to excel. Intentional in the pursuit of education, building relationships (i.e. sponsorships, mentorships, professional development, networking) and volunteer opportunities. Learning and using skills acquired to help them along the path of attaining leadership positions. Relationships are at the core of networking, career growth, and mentorship. Research stressed the importance of building relationships through mentorship, networking, allies and sponsorship (List and Sorcinelli, 2018). Participants discussed how difficult it has been to find mentors on their journeys to leadership due to "double bind," a term that refers to being Black and female.

Collins (1998) mentioned women of color experience the world through an intersectional lens that focuses heavily on race and gender positionality. The intersection of race and gender

was highlighted because research indicates that African American women have a doubly bound race and gender consciousness that comes with its own set of expectations (Crenshaw 2005; Collins 1990, 2000). Crenshaw (2005) explained that social identity categories contribute to discrimination and place African American women in circumstances where they must defend several statuses, coining the term “intersectionality”. Additionally researchers noted that the challenge is locating mentors who have the same experiences and history as African American women, which can be difficult in higher education due to the low number of African American women in senior leadership positions (Hannum et al., 2015).

Many of the leaders suggested that there is a need to develop a mentoring model that supports women, particularly Black women, seeking leadership positions at community colleges. The leaders shared a need for mentors both inside and outside of the hierarchical support system. The participants emphasized how challenging it is to be the only Black woman at the table. They defined the unspoken demand to represent other excluded constituencies' mass voices.

**Research Question 3.** Although, this key finding was not emphasized in the literature review. This finding uncovered the need for improved and comparable measurement methods for African American women. Many African American women leaders did not consciously chart their achievements. Additionally, they judged achievements based on how influential they performed in their jobs. Furthermore, some of them identified achievements by their willingness to affect others. They gauged their development by the success of their former students and faculty in their respective sectors in the world. This critical discovery underscored the importance of developing objective achievement measurement methods for Black women.

**Research Question 4.** When asked about recommendations for aspiring African American women leaders, the participants mentioned the significance of becoming unapologetic



and secure of one's cultural context, as well as being aware of one's intersectionality. One participant shared this country was built on the strength of African American women. They mentioned we have shown up and we've supported, we've encouraged, we've guided others to their level of success, and I think it's time that we do it for each other and not compete. Another significant observation was the suggestion to get acquainted with oneself. Recognize yourself and focus on yourself. Acknowledge your patterns of behavior. Show up authentically, but we don't know what authentic is until we take some assessment of who we are and know what authentic means for us. Be careful not to take a position simply because it carries a title that entails a slew of responsibilities that, in your heart, you're not going to want to do. Do not discount the intuition that occurs. Refrain from taking a title that does not fit who you are. You must be certain of your personal cap. Be fearless and aware of the boundaries. Additionally, do not berate yourself. The reality is that we will be Black, Black people, and women, and there is no way to avoid that. African American women are resilient individuals who, with the right opportunities, can and will rise to positions of leadership in academia.

The key findings suggested that the experiences of African American women participants were marred by challenges, stereotypes, patriarchal views, and social barriers. None of the individuals let such perceived obstacles discourage or prevent them from achieving leadership positions. All participants expressed a willingness to contribute to the development of an institutional environment that is inclusive of others, including people of other marginalized communities among faculty, staff, and students. Though Black women have risen to positions of power, their journey has been fraught with traumatic emotional baggage. This study identified that community college leaders have a responsibility to contribute to the establishment of

conditions that allow all employees, especially women and Black women, to excel and succeed in leadership positions.

### **Recommendation-Glow Box Model**

As a result of this research study, a framework of considerations for African American leaders and aspiring African American leaders was created (see Figure 13). The GLOW box model can be used by any African American woman leader or aspiring leader interested in community college leadership. The model gives tools needed to succeed as an African American woman leader. The GLOW box model is an emblem of shimmy shine, a showcase of strength and perseverance, and a reflection of universal awesomeness. Counteracting the negative stereotypes that are frequently placed on African American women by the outside world and by themselves.

The ingredients of the GLOW box for advancement is listed in Figure 13 by the researcher. The GLOW box model is one-of-a-kind. Depending on the area of development, some GLOW boxes will look identical, while others will look somewhat different.

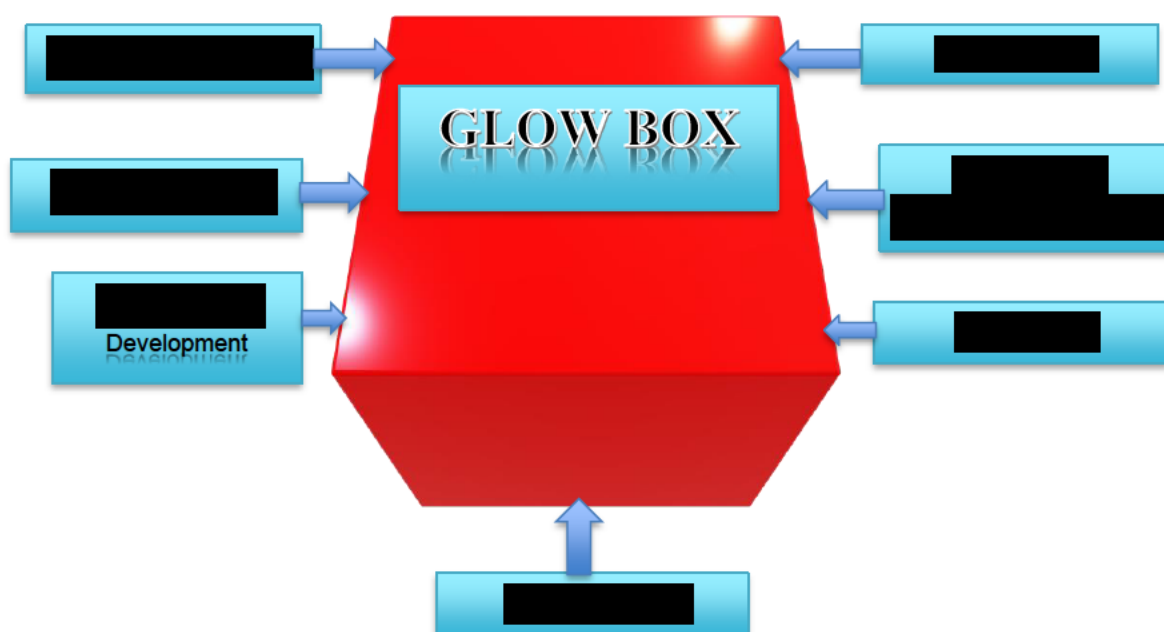
Each GLOW box is unique to everyone, it comes with 5-7 items. Ranking them is required by the individual. They are ranked in the order of strengths. The GLOW box is scaled 1-7, seven being the least amount of growth needed and one being the most needed area for growth. Indicative to the need of the leader or aspiring leader. For example, someone ranks networking activities as a seven, that's a strength for them, they have 2000 connections, but there not so great at follow through, which may theoretically ruin credibility, due to lack of delivery, which leads them to GLOW notes, ranked one by the individual. GLOW notes list gems that help the African American women leader or aspiring leader overcome obstacles or difficulties. That also leads to knowing your audience and overcoming your failures, all located in GLOW notes.

The same ingredients in the glow box is for everyone, but the order in which they are ranked will not be same for every person. Constant nurturing of the box is required. Things that people are familiar with must be nurtured on a regular basis because they change over time as people do not stay the same. When required, re-rank the ingredients in the GLOW box.

Its shine time and how one person shines may be different from how some else shines. This box should be open to all African American leaders and future African American women leaders. The following GLOW box applies to personal and professional strategies for African American women leadership advancement. (See Figure 13)

**Figure 13**

*GLOW Box*



### **Glow Box**

- Continued Education: completion of trainings, certification programs, degree programs
- Career Pathways: assuming positions that lead to desired leadership roles (i.e. dean of academic affairs and VP academic affairs, prior to applying for Presidency).
- Professional Development: Be authentic; applied training activities that advance the career of an individual
- Community: be intentional in finding mentorship, networking, sponsorship, allies and family support
- Leadership Development Activities:
- Self-Care: physical and mental health, perceptions thereof
- GLOW notes: list gems that help the overcome obstacles or difficulties; they guide ho
  - How to Recognize my audience?
  - How to build credibility, trust, influence?
  - How to leverage networks and capabilities?
  - How to address mistakes?
  - How to recover from mistakes?

### **The Essence of the Shared Experience**

The findings revealed that the path to leadership positions for Black woman leaders can be challenging but not impossible. This study demonstrated the critical value of Black women holding leadership positions and actively participating at the decision - making table. The leaders have had a strong beneficial effect on college cultures and contributed to the development of a vibrant and welcoming campus community for many marginalized populations. Although Black women leaders remain a novelty in higher education, those who have excelled to the leadership

roles continue to emphasize the importance of additional funding, research study, and partnership to help effect progress in the wider sector of higher education.

Sustainability cannot be just a buzzword; it must be backed by concrete actions. The study concludes that more Black women leaders are needed and that paths to leadership positions must be built by mentoring services and access to key social networks, as well as through eliminating cultural inequalities and institutional bias and sexism. Creating a diverse and inclusive college campus environment includes research, and the institution's strategies and practices must comply and align with the college's mission and vision.

Many of the strategies proposed, did not explicitly discuss the disparities between White men and women and Black women. Barriers to leadership prove to be more complex to explain. The participants in this research study spoke candidly about the methods they used to tackle challenges and obstacles. Participants concentrated on leadership presence, direct and succinct feedback in all ways, aligning priorities with the college's broader mission, and maintaining transparent responsibility. They discussed how they tracked their decisions and often consulted with peers and bosses to avoid surprises.

While each leader excelled through different leadership qualities, the leaders shared parallels in their leadership journeys. Each participant told personal stories about their successes and struggles, pleasure and suffering, triumphs and losses, and their experiences ranging from being heard and validated to being silenced and overlooked. The African American women leaders embraced their cultural backgrounds and upbringings, discovered their voice in leadership roles, and work with an unwavering commitment to success regardless of the narrative surrounding them on campus. While these leaders addressed the various leadership characteristics that allowed them to succeed and advance along their journey, they all stressed

the value of persistence and resilience.

Resilience was viewed as an inherent leadership trait in my research study. Blaine and Reed (2015) described resilient leaders as those who are capable of healing, learning, and developmental maturation in the face of adversity. The African American women leaders consistently repeated that leaving or surrendering was not an option. They discussed how they turned up and persisted, despite being unsupported or feeling like an outsider inside the suit.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

By exploring the experiences of Black women leaders employed at community colleges, this research study contributed to the corpus of knowledge. The findings will assist students, school managers, faculty members, and community members in comprehending the experiences of Black women in leadership roles at community colleges and serve as a roadmap for administrative policies and procedures, recruiting, retention, and promotion practices, as well as assisting in the development of a more diverse and welcoming campus culture. The research study furthers the discussion and encourages additional studies on African American woman leaders in community colleges. While the data provided unique insight, several factors of the research study yielded more insight into the issues. As a result, some suggestions for future studies are made:

- This qualitative study should be repeated with more Black women in leadership roles at PWIs, HBCUs, HSIs, faith-based, private, public institutions of higher education and other industries.
- Researchers should study how to build more deliberate paths to executive leadership for Black women in higher education.
- A research focused on best practices and evidence-based programs with an established

track record of reducing hurdles and eliminating obstacles is needed.

- A quantitative or mixed methodological approach may yield valuable results and insightful data, and the sample should be extended to other nations.
- Conduct a quantitative study of all African American women community college leaders to gain more specific data concerning challenges and successful strategies they used to achieve a leadership positions in higher education.
- Conduct a nationwide study to develop a profile of African American women community college leaders, showcasing qualities and characteristics that they feel helped them advance to a position of leadership in a community college.

### **Final Thoughts**

Both Griffin (2016) and West (2015) stated that there is no research study that specifically explains the successful higher education strategies used by African American women. The methods used to manage the advancement of African American women in higher education leadership roles are still very obscure and largely unknown. Knowing that the disparity or divide continues to exist, it is important for higher education institutions to search for the best solutions that result in equitable access and opportunities for African American women working in higher education.

This study offered suggestions for African American women who want to succeed despite the obstacles they face. These strategies and best practices have been demonstrated to be essential for African America women to overcome obstacles to success. The strategies mentioned do not eliminate all the obstacles that African American women face in their leadership progress, but they do help to confirm and navigate those problems. The existence of tools in the context of best practices does not imply that the obstacles can be ignored.

This study was of particular interest for the researcher. As an internal auditor in a community college district, advancement opportunities to leadership roles have not been made available to African American women. She has seen firsthand the tremendous potential African American women have to be successful leaders only if the right tools are provided to them, despite all the challenges they may face. Witnessing the resilience and perseverance of these Black women and listening to them speak of exceling in leadership roles and the purpose of paying it forward for the future generation of aspiring African American women leaders has been an incredible experience. These women shared their most intimate personal and professional experiences seeking leadership positions. Despite the struggle, while working tirelessly to break the glass ceiling and crack into the concrete wall, African American women tend to show up, fulfill their responsibilities, and continue to work actively to prove their worth and importance. These African American women success to leadership roles is to be celebrated.

Diverse leadership is vital for sustaining a healthy college community. Black women leaders bring a wealth of experience, contextual awareness, resilience, and sensitivity to the table, all of which contribute to the development of a healthy campus culture. Thank you to who all that contributed to this research study and helped make it a success. Message to Black women: you matter, your opinion, your advice, and your support matters. Aspiring African American women leaders need your guidance and support.



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## APPENDIX A

## IRB Approval



Pepperdine University  
24255 Pacific Coast Highway  
Malibu, CA 90263  
TEL: 310-506-4000

**NOTICE OF APPROVAL FOR HUMAN RESEARCH**

Date: February 16, 2021

Protocol Investigator Name: Laschanda Johnson

Protocol #: 20-11-1473

Project Title: KEYS TO SUCCESS FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN LEADERS IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES

School: Graduate School of Education and Psychology

Dear Laschanda Johnson:

Thank you for submitting your application for exempt review to Pepperdine University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). We appreciate the work you have done on your proposal. The IRB has reviewed your submitted IRB application and all ancillary materials. Upon review, the IRB has determined that the above entitled project meets the requirements for exemption under the federal regulations 45 CFR 46.101 that govern the protections of human subjects.

Your research must be conducted according to the proposal that was submitted to the IRB. If changes to the approved protocol occur, a revised protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before implementation. For any proposed changes in your research protocol, please submit an amendment to the IRB. Since your study falls under exemption, there is no requirement for continuing IRB review of your project. Please be aware that changes to your protocol may prevent the research from qualifying for exemption from 45 CFR 46.101 and require submission of a new IRB application or other materials to the IRB.

A goal of the IRB is to prevent negative occurrences during any research study. However, despite the best intent, unforeseen circumstances or events may arise during the research. If an unexpected situation or adverse event happens during your investigation, please notify the IRB as soon as possible. We will ask for a complete written explanation of the event and your written response. Other actions also may be required depending on the nature of the event. Details regarding the timeframe in which adverse events must be reported to the IRB and documenting the adverse event can be found in the *Pepperdine University Protection of Human Participants in Research: Policies and Procedures Manual* at [community.pepperdine.edu/irb](http://community.pepperdine.edu/irb).

Please refer to the protocol number denoted above in all communication or correspondence related to your application and this approval. Should you have additional questions or require clarification of the contents of this letter, please contact the IRB Office. On behalf of the IRB, I wish you success in this scholarly pursuit.

Sincerely,

Judy Ho, Ph.D., IRB Chair

cc: Mrs. Katy Carr, Assistant Provost for Research

## APPENDIX B

## Recruitment Script

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

My name is LaSchanda Johnson, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Graduate School of Education and Psychology at Pepperdine University. I am conducting a research study examining the lived experiences of past and present African American/Black Women leaders in Community Colleges to identify common barriers and best practices in achieving leadership and maintaining leadership positions.

I invite you to participate in the study and support my efforts in understanding how we can bridge the divide between gender and racial leadership in higher education. If you agree, you are invited to participate in the interview process. The interview is anticipated to take no more than 60 minutes and will be conducted via Zoom (password protected) which will be recorded. Participation in this study is voluntary. Your identity as a participant will remain confidential during and after the study.

Confidentiality will be maintained using a password protected laptop to store all data collected including informed consent, the recorded interview, and the transcribed data. All data will also be deidentified using a pseudonym which will be assigned to each individual recording. If you have questions or would like to participate, please contact me at [laschanda.johnson@pepperdine.edu](mailto:laschanda.johnson@pepperdine.edu).

Thank you for your participation,  
LaSchanda Johnson  
Pepperdine University, GSEP Doctoral Candidate

## APPENDIX C

## Informed Consent Form

**IRB #: 20-11-1475**

**Formal Study Title:**

AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN LEADERS MATTER:  
KEYS TO SUCCESS FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN LEADERS IN  
COMMUNITY COLLEGES

**Authorized Study Personnel:**

Principal Investigator: LaSchanda Johnson,

**Key Information:**

**If you agree to participate in this study, the project will involve:**

- Females between the ages of (35-70)
- Procedures will include (Contacting participants using the recruitment script, informed consent, data collection via structured interview, transcription of data, analysis of data, documentation of findings)
- One virtual visit is required
- This visit will take 60 minutes total
- There is minimal risk associated with this study
- You will not be paid any amount of money for your participation
- You will be provided a copy of this consent form

**Invitation**

You are invited to take part in this research study. The information in this form is meant to help you decide whether or not to participate. Your participation is voluntary. Please read the information below. I am available to answer any questions you may have prior to your commitment to participation. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form. You will also be given a copy of this form for your records.

**Why are you being asked to be in this research study?**

You are being asked to be in this study because you are a leader in the Higher education industry. You must be 35 years of age or older to participate.

**What is the reason for doing this research study?**

The purpose of this study is to understand best practices and success strategies for African American women who have obtained and maintained leadership positions in community colleges. Participants share challenges and strategies to overcome them, tools used to track their progress, and advice to aspiring women of color leaders.

**What will be done during this research study?**

You will be asked to complete a 60-minute semi-structured virtual interview. The PI will ask you a series of questions aimed at figuring out what strategies are used by leaders in your field. While the research will take approximately 26 to 52 weeks, your interview will only take 60 minutes.

**How will my data be used?**

Your interview responses will be transcribed, analyzed, and aggregated in order to determine the findings to the established research questions.

**What are the possible risks of being in this research study?**

This research presents minimal risk of loss of confidentiality, emotional and/or psychological distress because the interview involves questions about your leadership practices. You may also experience fatigue, boredom, or anxiety as a result.

**What are the possible benefits to you?**

You are not expected to get any benefit from being in this study.

**What are the possible benefits to other people?**

The benefits to society may include better understanding of leadership strategies used within your industry. Other emerging leaders might also benefit from any additional recommendations that are shared through this process.

**What are the alternatives to being in this research study?**

Participation in this study is voluntary. There are no alternatives to participating, other than deciding to not participate.

**What will participating in this research study cost you?**

There is no cost to you to be in this research study.

**Will you be compensated for being in this research study?**

There will be no compensation for participating in this study.

**What should you do if you have a problem during this research study?**

Your welfare is the major concern of every member of the research team. If you have a problem as a direct result of being in this study, you should immediately contact one of the people listed at the beginning of this consent form.

**How will information about you be protected?**

Reasonable steps will be taken to protect your privacy and the confidentiality of your study data. The data will be deidentified and stored electronically through a secure server and will only be seen by the research team during the study and until the study is complete.

The only persons who will have access to your research records are the study personnel, the Institutional Review Board (IRB), and any other person, agency, or sponsor as required by law. The information from this study may be published in scientific journals or presented at scientific



meetings but the data will be reported as group or summarized data and your identity will be kept strictly confidential.

**What are your rights as a research subject?**

You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study.

*For study related questions, please contact the investigator(s) listed at the beginning of this form.*

For questions concerning your rights or complaints about the research contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB):

Phone: 1(310)568-2305

Email: [gpsirb@pepperdine.edu](mailto:gpsirb@pepperdine.edu)

**What will happen if you decide not to be in this research study or decide to stop participating once you start?**

You can decide not to be in this research study, or you can stop being in this research study (“withdraw”) at any time before, during, or after the research begins for any reason. Deciding not to be in this research study or deciding to withdraw will not affect your relationship with the investigator or with Pepperdine University.

You will not lose any benefits to which you are entitled.

**Documentation of informed consent**

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to be in this research study. Signing this form means that (a) you have read and understood this consent form, (b) you have had the consent form explained to you, (c) you have had your questions answered and (d) you have decided to be in the research study. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

**Participant**

**Name:**

\_\_\_\_\_

(First, Last: Please Print)

**Participant**

**Signature:**

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature

Date

### Interview Protocol

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1. Tell me about your career journey?
2. Based on your experiences, what are some of the biggest professional challenges or barriers you have faced throughout your career?
3. Based on your experience, what are some of the biggest personal challenges or barriers you have faced throughout your career?
4. What lessons have you learned as an African American woman in leadership positions?
5. What things helped facilitate your access to leadership roles and similar opportunities in higher education?
6. How has your organization supported your career advancement?
7. How did you overcome those professional challenges you mentioned earlier?
8. How did you overcome those personal challenges you mentioned earlier?
9. How would you define your professional success?
10. How do you measure your success?
11. In what ways have you tracked your success throughout your career?
12. Based on your personal experience, what advice do you have that would be beneficial to aspiring African American women leaders
13. Was it all worth it? Why?

**Closing question:** Is there anything else you would like to share?

## APPENDIX D

## Peer Reviewer Form

Dear reviewer:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research study. The table below is designed to ensure that my research questions for the study are properly addressed with corresponding interview questions.

In the table below, please review each research question and the corresponding interview questions. For each interview question, consider how well the interview question addresses the research question. If the interview question is directly relevant to the research question, please mark “Keep as stated.” If the interview question is irrelevant to the research question, please mark “Delete it.” Finally, if the interview question can be modified to best fit with the research question, please suggest your modifications in the space provided. You may also recommend additional interview questions you deem necessary.

Once you have completed your analysis, please return the completed form to me via email. Thank you again for your participation.

**Table 1D**

*Research Questions and Corresponding Interview Questions*

Research Questions	Corresponding Interview Questions
Icebreaker	IQ 1: Tell me about your career journey?
RQ1: What challenges and barriers do successful African American women leaders face in advancing to leadership roles in Community colleges?	IQ 2: Based on your experiences, what are some of the biggest professional challenges or barriers you have faced throughout your career?  a. The question is directly relevant to research question— <b>keep as stated</b> b. The question is irrelevant to research question— <b>delete it</b> c. The question should be modified as suggested:

Research Questions	Corresponding Interview Questions
	<p>I recommend adding the following interview questions:</p> <p>IQ 3: Based on your experience, what are some of the biggest personal challenges or barriers you have faced throughout your career?</p> <p>a. The question is directly relevant to research question—<b>keep as stated</b>  b. The question is irrelevant to research question—<b>delete it</b>  c. The question should be modified as suggested:</p> <p>I recommend adding the following interview questions:</p>
<p>RQ 2: What strategies and best practices do African American women utilize in advancing to leadership roles in Community Colleges?</p>	<p>IQ 4: What lessons have you learned as an African American woman in leadership positions?</p> <p>a. The question is directly relevant to research question—<b>keep as stated</b>  b. The question is irrelevant to research question—<b>delete it</b>  c. The question should be modified as suggested:</p> <p>I recommend adding the following interview questions:</p> <p>IQ 5: What things helped facilitate your access to leadership roles and similar opportunities in higher education?</p> <p>a. The question is directly relevant to research question—<b>keep as stated</b>  b. The question is irrelevant to research question—<b>delete it</b>  c. The question should be modified as suggested:</p> <p>I recommend adding the following interview questions:</p> <p>FU to 6: How has your organization supported your career advancement?</p> <p>a. The question is directly relevant to research question—<b>keep as stated</b>  b. The question is irrelevant to research question—<b>delete it</b>  c. The question should be modified as suggested:</p>

Research Questions	Corresponding Interview Questions
	<p>I recommend adding the following interview questions:</p> <p>IQ 7: How did you overcome those professional challenges you mentioned earlier?</p> <p>a. The question is directly relevant to research question—<b>keep as stated</b>  b. The question is irrelevant to research question—<b>delete it</b>  c. The question should be modified as suggested:</p> <p>I recommend adding the following interview questions:</p> <p>IQ8: How did you overcome those personal challenges you mentioned earlier?</p> <p>a. The question is directly relevant to research question—<b>keep as stated</b>  b. The question is irrelevant to research question—<b>delete it</b>  c. The question should be modified as suggested:</p> <p>I recommend adding the following interview questions:</p>
<p>RQ3: How do successful African American women in leadership roles at community colleges measure and track their career success?</p>	<p>IQ 9: How would you define <b>YOUR</b> professional success?</p> <p>a. The question is directly relevant to research question—<b>keep as stated</b>  b. The question is irrelevant to research question—<b>delete it</b>  c. The question should be modified as suggested:</p> <p>I recommend adding the following interview questions:</p> <p>IQ 10: How do you measure <b>YOUR</b> success?</p> <p>a. The question is directly relevant to research question—<b>keep as stated</b>  b. The question is irrelevant to research question—<b>delete it</b>  c. The question should be modified as suggested:</p> <p>I recommend adding the following interview questions:</p> <p>IQ 11: In what ways have you tracked your success throughout your career?</p>

Research Questions	Corresponding Interview Questions
	<p>a. The question is directly relevant to research question—<b>keep as stated</b></p> <p>b. The question is irrelevant to research question—<b>delete it</b></p> <p>c. The question should be modified as suggested:</p> <p>I recommend adding the following interview questions:</p>
<p>RQ4: Based on experiences, what recommendations would successful Senior level African American Women make for aspiring African American women leaders?</p>	<p>IQ 12: Based on your personal experience, what advice do you have that would be beneficial to aspiring African American women leaders</p> <p>a. The question is directly relevant to research question—<b>keep as stated</b></p> <p>b. The question is irrelevant to research question—<b>delete it</b></p> <p>c. The question should be modified as suggested:</p> <p>I recommend adding the following interview questions:</p> <p>13: Was it all worth it? Why?</p> <p>a. The question is directly relevant to research question—<b>keep as stated</b></p> <p>b. The question is irrelevant to research question—<b>delete it</b></p> <p>c. The question should be modified as suggested:</p> <p>I recommend adding the following interview questions:</p> <p><b>Closing question:</b> Is there anything else you would like to share?</p>

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