AT THE INTERSECTION OF MULTIPLE IDENTITIES: AN EXAMINATION OF THE MEANING MAKING AND LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCES OF BLACK WOMEN COMMUNITY COLLEGE ADMINISTRATORS

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ABSTRACT

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Although the volume of literature on Black women in higher education is constantly growing, the experiences of Black women community college administrators have not been well documented in research literature. Using qualitative inquiry, this study examined and documented the leadership and meaning making experiences among 12 Black women who serve as community college administrators. The study was presented through a Black Feminist Thought lens that underscored the intersection of multiple marginalized identities in relation to perspectives on leadership and meaning making.

This dissertation is dedicated to the Black women who use their multiple marginalized identities as a superpower.

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I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

Philippians 4:13 NKJ

First and foremost, I would like to give honor to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, without whom none of this would be possible. Why I am grateful for the credential, I am even more grateful for how my faith was stretched and confirmed throughout this process. I am excited that I was chosen for this journey and for the women's ministry that was birthed from this project. I also dedicate this project to my King and number one supporter, my husband, Terrance D. DeVoe. If you only knew how many times a day, I thank God for you. For your presence, your sacrifice, and your unwavering love and support.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

"The double jeopardy of being Black and female in a racist and sexist society may well make one less afraid of the sanctions against success. A non-subservient Black woman is by definition a transgressive- she is the ultimate outsider." –Dr. Mamphela Ramphele

The experiences of Black women are often overshadowed by broader terms such as people of color or focusing more on women in general. Increasing and advancing the success of Black women leaders in the field of higher education is a pressing and complex issue. A recent study by the American Council on Education, American College President Study (2017) notes that Black women hold 9% of leadership positions in the American higher education system. Throughout history, Black women have struggled to find inclusion as well as ascend to leadership positions in the American higher education system (Shavers & Moore, 2014). This underrepresented, understudied, and under celebrated population of women not only encounter the glass ceiling, they often have to deal with a matrix of inequalities and oppression (Collins, 2000). While many theorists have proposed leadership models, their fit and appropriateness for Black women have been criticized (Alfred, 2001). It is well documented that Black women leaders are often faced with various individual and institutional challenges in relation to race, gender, and power discrimination (Lloyd-Jones, 2009; Davis & Maldnado, 2015; Patitu & Hinton, 2003). However, these factors are seldom taken into consideration in mainstream leadership models and theories. As the workforce composition begins to shift, especially at community colleges, there is a call for empirical research that focuses on the leadership experiences of Black women who serve as community college administrators.

Statement of Problem

Black women are noticeably absent in leadership roles in the American higher education system. For example, Black women account for only roughly one-third of women president's in the American higher education system (American Council on Education, 2017). Moreover, the Black women who are successful in securing leadership positions are disproportionately located in community colleges. For instance, Black women hold 76% of leadership positions in business and financial operations, 64% of management positions, and 69% of student and academic and other education services (American Association of Community Colleges, 2016) in community colleges. Although Black women hold these leadership roles, they are often faced with managing the intersection of sexism, racism, and power in a White male dominated arena (Davis & Maldnado, 2015; Lloyd-Jones, 2009; Patitu, 2003).

In addition to challenges and barriers associated with sexism and racism, research has shown that Black women in the academy also struggle with feelings of isolation, being voiceless, undermined, and treated unfairly. Race and gender, in this way, play a salient role in the identity, growth, character building, and ascension of Black women who serve as community college administrators (Collins, 2000; Lloyd-Jones, 2009; Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Although frameworks such as Applied Critical Leadership and Culturally Responsive Leadership (Santamaria & Santamaria, 2012; Santamaria & Santamaria, 2016) were introduced to provide a framework to study the leadership of individuals of color, the breadth of mainstream leadership literature and models seldom take into consideration race, gender, power, and inequities faced by Black women leaders. These omissions often situate Whiteness and masculinity as the normative profile of leadership and pose limitations when studying Black women leaders (Ospina & Foley, 2009). As such, there is limited understanding of the strategies employed by Black Women to

manage complex challenges and remain resilient, while navigating multiple systems of oppression and making meaning of their identity as a leader. While there are scholars and researchers that argue there is indeed an exclusion of women and people of color in leadership and career development literature (Alfred, 2001: Brown & Brooks, 1996; Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987), currently, there is still a sparse amount of literature, models, and theories that have been developed to describe their experiences. Therefore, it is important that the lived experiences of Black women are brought to the forefront to help disrupt and deconstruct deficit narratives and to bring an awareness to encounters of racism and sexism in the American community college system. Black women leaders often encounter a distinct set of societal practices within a matrix of intersecting oppressions and play a salient role in the face of many challenges (Collins, 2000). For example, not only are Black women leaders burdened with the historical context and systemic structures of society, simultaneously they are hindered by the glass ceiling and often treated as inferior due to racism.

According to Alfred (2001), "An analysis of historical events in the United States suggests that there still exist today a Black world and a White world that are separate and unequal, based on educational, economic, political, and philosophical structures of power. As a result of the unequal nature of the life worlds, Black professionals must evoke power strategies to successfully combat and manage oppressive forces in the dominant culture" (p. 113). Black women community college administrators are some of the most important figures to understand how such challenges can be overcome or met in correlation with how they make meaning of their identity as leaders.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the ways in which self-identified Black women that serve as community college administrators made meaning of their identities as leaders. Meaning making refers to how individuals understand or make sense of experiences (Ignelzi, 2000). My goal was to describe and clarify the ways in which Black women community college administrators made meaning of their identities in their leadership roles. Moreover, I sought to extend the literature on Black women community college administrators by illuminating their unique experiences through empirical research. For example, Black women occupy a unique space of oppression, discrimination, and racism, therefore their experiences provide a distinct set of perspectives that will influence intellectual discourse in relation to leadership identity.

Research Questions

The following questions guided the study:

1. How do self-identified Black Women community college administrators make meaning of their identities as a leader?

    a. In what ways does race and gender influence/inform the way self-identified Black women community college administrators make meaning of their identities as a leader?

Significance of Study

While there has been an increased representation of Black women in higher education leadership roles over the past years, there is still a sparse amount of scholarship that focuses specifically on their leadership experiences. There is even less research dedicated to Black women community college administrator's development as leaders. Male gender and Whiteness are often espoused as the normative value in scholarship on leadership and leadership

development (Ospina and Foley, 2009). The exclusion and lack of Black women voices from higher education scholarship represents a significant gap in the literature.

This study contributes to higher education literature in two ways. First, the study extends literature on higher education leadership by providing an empirical inquiry that considers how race, gender, and power influence the meaning making and leadership identity of Black women community college administrators. Single focus studies do not fully address the complex multiple marginalized identities or social problems Black women face (Collins & Blige, 2012). Second, through the use of a narrative methodology, the study provides a body of knowledge that centers Black women voices as contributors and producers of that knowledge. Collins (2000) acknowledges, "Regardless of the actual content of Black women's self-definitions, the act of insisting on Black female self-definition validates Black women's power as human subjects (p. 114). Moreover, Collins (2000) suggests, when Black women define themselves, they are in the position to reject the assumptions made by the dominant narrative and popular culture.

Theoretical Context for the Study

A critical feminist lens informed the study. Specifically, the theoretical foundation of this study was rooted in Black Feminist Thought. According to Patton (2009), "A feminist lens is pertinent when analyzing the place of African American women in higher education. It provides an outlet for a richer discussion that not only focuses on race, but also recognizes how the intersection of race, gender, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation among other factors impact the lives of African American women" (p. 515). Moreover, the critical race component of Black Feminist Thought provided a channel for discussion and concentration surrounding the intersection of societal and power structures related to race.

Black Feminist Thought is a critical social theory. Collins (2000) illuminates Black Feminist Thought as ideas and specialized knowledge created and produced for and by Black Women. Black Feminist Thought highlights the saliency of the Black woman's voice as the central essence of their experience, "while recognizing and supporting coalitions with other social justice efforts" (Patton, 2009, p. 516). Specifically, BFT is comprised of six distinguishing factors. The first distinguishing factor highlights the "dialectical relationship" that links Black Women's oppression and activism (Collins, 2000). According to Collins (2000), "As long as Black women's subordination within intersecting oppressions of race, class, gender, sexuality, and nation persists, Black feminism as an activist response to that oppression will remain needed" (p. 22).

The second distinguishing factor of Black Feminist thought is the notion of similar individual and collective experiences of Black women. For example, while there are similarities in Black women stories and encounters, each woman has an individual story. Although there are shared experiences, the influence of class, religion, age, and sexual orientation plays a salient role in the complexity of understanding the lived experiences of Black women. The third distinguishing feature underscores the "dialogical relationship" of Black women. In contrast to the "dialectical relationship," the "dialogical relationship" emphasizes the collective experiences and an emergence of group knowledge and/or standpoint. Collins (2000) posits, "On both the individual and group level, a dialogical relationship suggests that changes in thinking may be accompanied by changed actions and that altered experiences may in turn stimulate a changed consciousness" (p. 30).

The fourth distinguishing feature of Black Feminist Thought is the recognition of the saliency of intellectual contribution of Black women, regardless of age, sexual orientation, class,

or educational attainment as a production of knowledge. "Placing the ideas of ordinary Black women as well as those of better-known Black women intellectuals at the center of analysis produces a new angle of vision on Black women's concerns" (Collins, 2000, p. 18). The fifth feature of Black Feminist Thought highlights the saliency of change. The notion of this characteristic concerns the ever-changing landscape of society in relation to oppression and activism of Black women, while advocating adaptability. The sixth and final distinguishing feature of Black Feminist Thought is its relationship to other social justice efforts. While the struggles of Black women are salient, unique, and significant, "Black women struggles are a part of a wider struggle for human dignity, empowerment, and social justice" (Collins, 2000, p. 41). In other words, Black Feminist Thought recognizes and supports the collective human race in relation to the promotion of social change. This feature suggests that Black Feminist Thought also aids in the advancement of other social justice coalitions.

As a theoretical framework, Black Feminist Thought seeks to illuminate the narrative of Black women by providing a nuanced look into the intersection of race, sex, and power. By disrupting the dominant narrative, and empowering the voices/perspectives of Black women, "Black feminist thought expands beyond mere theory and embodies praxis, a body of knowledge, and a way of life" (Patton et al, 2015, p.62). In other words, the underpinnings of Black Feminist Thought are demonstrated in the actions and enacted in the way that Black women make meaning and maneuver through society. Black Feminist Thought is embodied, practiced, and made actionable in the activism and lived experiences of Black women daily. As such, Black Feminist Thought was an appropriate framework for the study of the leadership experiences of Black women community college administrators as it 1) it informs the voices and perspectives of Black women, 2) it address the intersection of oppression, racism, and sexism,

and 3) it emphasizes and validates the experiences of Black women. Therefore, I used the six distinguishing features to analyze the data in the study.

Definition of Terms

In an effort to create and support shared knowledge and understanding between the reader and author, this section of the paper will provide a definition of terms. The following terms will be utilized throughout the study, some interchangeably, thus definitions are warranted.

- *Black or African American*: These terms are used interchangeably in the study to describe the race/social construct and/or ethnic group of the participants in the study. Individuals of African and American descent refer to themselves as "Black, Black American or African American" (Cross, 1991, p. vii).

- *Higher Education Administrator/Leadership Role:* Job titles may include:
  - President, Vice President, Associate/Assistant Vice President,
  - Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, Associate/Assistant Chancellor

- *Intersectionality:* The complex way in which individuals simultaneously occupy and experience different social categories as well as the events of social and political life; both in oppressed and privileged positions (Collins & Blige, 2012; Crenshaw, 1995; Sensoy & DeAngelo, 2012).

- *Personal Challenges:* A matter or situation that an individual may regard as unwelcome, harmful, and/or stressful, which affects variables associated with the private aspects of one's life.

- *Personal Opportunities:* A set of circumstances that affords an individual the possibility to make something happen.

- *Professional Challenges:* A matter or situation that an individual may regard as unwelcome, harmful, and/or stressful, which affects variables associated with and or related to one's work life or profession.

- *Professional Opportunities:* A set of formal and informal circumstances that affords an individual the possibility to make something happen in relation to their work life or profession.

- *Professional Development* – relevant training and enrichment programs associated with professional advancement (Myran, Baker, Simone, & Zeiss, 2003).

- *Leadership Competencies* – the skills and attributes learned, developed, and obtained in the leadership process (Hughes, Ginnett, & Curphy, 2009).

- *Organizational Challenges:* A matter or situation that an individual may regard as unwelcome, harmful, and/or stressful, in relation to their respective organization.

- *Organizational Opportunities:* A set of circumstances that affords an individual the possibility to make something happen in relation to their work life or profession at their respective organization.

- *Whiteness:* A dimension of racism that perceives the elevation of White people over marginalized groups (Sensoy & DeAngelo, 2012).

- *Spirituality:* "One's belief in a higher power greater than one's self" (Garner, 2004, p. 4)

Chapter Summary

Chapter 1 introduced the statement of problem, purpose, and significance of this study. Additionally, this chapter underscored the underpinnings of Black Feminist Thought, which provided the theoretical context for the research. Moreover, Chapter 1 also presented the guiding

research questions and concluded with a definition of terms to ensure the reader and the author have a shared knowledge of the terminology operationalized throughout the study. In the next chapter, I provide a review of the literature. The literature highlighted, serves as the foundation of the study. The literature review provides a foundation for understanding how Black women who serve as community college administrators make meaning of their identities as leaders.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

"You may not control all the events that happen to you, but you can decide not to be reduced by them."- Maya Angelou

There is a fundamental connection between an individual's meaning making, identity as a leader, social identities, and environment (Graci and Fivush, 2017; Jackson, 2018). As such, this literature review is organized into four main themes. In the first section of this literature review, I begin by giving a brief overview of the community college sector to provide a backdrop for the study. To begin providing context in relation to leadership, in the second section I give a broad overview of higher education leadership as well as highlight leadership literature specific to the community college sector. Next, in the third section, I highlight literature specific to women in postsecondary leadership. In the fourth section, I situated Black women administrators in higher education leadership literature to explore their experiences and gain an understanding of the ways in which they make meaning of their identity as leaders. Lastly, I concluded with a summary of the chapter.

Overview of Community Colleges

To provide an environmental context for the study, it is important to give a brief history to note the distinct features of community colleges as well as the most common approach to leadership. Commonly known as junior colleges, the first community colleges were established in the early 1900s. According to Cohen & Brawer (2008), "The American Community College dates from the early years of the twentieth century" (p. 1). Some scholars and researchers argue community colleges were designed to relieve universities from providing general education to younger students. However, others believe they were designed to provide vocational training for

immediate entrance into the workforce (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). While there is debate surrounding the reason for their origin, scholars and researchers agree the demand for community colleges were introduced into the American higher education system as a means of providing access, affordability, and workforce development. What started off as teaching institutes, vocational centers, and extensions of K-12 programming, community colleges "changed the paradigm of higher education from students having to "go away" to college to having access to affordable higher learning and job training in their local communities" (Boggs, 2004, p. 8).

Today, more than 12.4 million students are enrolled in community colleges across the United States (American Association of Community Colleges, Mission, 2016.). These institutions generally provide a 2-year education and serve almost half of the undergraduate student population in the United States. Community colleges are known for providing open access to post-secondary education and preparation to students who desire to transfer to 4-year colleges and universities. They also support the community in which they reside and afford opportunities for lifelong learning through formal and informal educational sessions, skills development, and training to the ever-changing workforce (AACC, 2016). Community Colleges are often "situated within a reasonable drive of most communities. In addition to their physical locale, the mission of the community college is to provide academic programs and services which meet human, social, and cultural capital needs of their communities" (Nevarez & Wood, 2010, p. 6). This is done through affordable credit and non-credit course offerings and training. Community colleges not only serve as the primary source of postsecondary education in the communities in which they reside, but also serve as a partner to local businesses as a training and recruitment resource.

The most distinct feature of community colleges is their open-door admissions policy, which promotes open access to anyone who wishes to pursue postsecondary education. Open access is the core element of the community college. According to Shannon and Smith (2006), "the open-door concept influences admissions and enrollment processes, curricular structures, faculty hiring, the relationships between community colleges and four-year institutions, advising and counseling activities, and colleges' responses to the needs of the K–12 sector, as well as those of the local economy" (p. 16). Additionally, the concept of open access affords community colleges the opportunity to accommodate a range of diverse students (Thelin, 2011).

Equally important to hosting an open-door policy is the institution's ability to provide students with specific training or programs to support their academic and/or career endeavors. For example, some community colleges offer remedial courses as well as specific certificate programs to their student population. "Community college students are older and more racially and ethnically diverse than students in four-year institutions. They are also more likely to exhibit a range of characteristics that place them at risk of not meeting their educational goals" (Cooley, 2000, p. 3). Recent enrollment trends related to racial and ethnic diversity show an increasing proportion of students of color enrolling in college (Renn & Reason, 2013). Through promotion of access and affordability, community colleges attract a great number of students of color. "Nationally, community colleges enroll 47 percent of Black undergraduate students, 56 percent of Hispanic undergraduates, 48 percent of Asian/Pacific Islanders, and 58 percent of Native American students" (Shannon & Smith, 2006, p. 16). This is a vast majority more, compared to four-year public institutions. Moreover, twenty-nine is the average age of students attending community colleges (AACC, 2016). In other words, adult learners are the majority of the community college student population. Adult learners bring a plethora of knowledge,

experience, and expertise to the learning environment. According to Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker (2014), "unlike full-time students at residential four-year universities, whose lives may revolve around classes, peers, and social events, community college [adult learner] students often struggle to fit requires courses, tutoring, and other educational activities into schedules constrained by part- or full-time jobs, family, commitments, child-rearing responsibilities, long commutes, or other obligations" (p. 53). Community colleges are often considered adult-accommodating and adult-oriented institutions. They have been noted as more inviting than four-year institutions, specifically in relation to adult learners, commuters, and part-time students (Hagedorn, 2015).

Higher Education Leadership

In order to properly address how Black women community college administrators make meaning of their identity as leaders, it is important to look at literature on higher education leadership. Since the dynamics of leadership is universal, research on higher education leadership spans across disciplines. According to Durderstadt (2000), "leadership plays a critical role in the university, just as it does in other social institutions" (p. 249). The literature in this section includes surveying higher education leadership broadly and from an institutional lens.

Views on Leadership

There has been an extensive amount of research conducted on leadership. While examined in many ways, the overall consensus of scholars and researchers is that effective leadership is an integral part of the success, mission, vision, and strategic alignment of an institution of higher education. Birnbaum's (1998) research set precedent in understanding higher education leadership through a systems lens. Specifically, the study examines higher

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education leadership and administration from a cybernetic lens, suggesting that higher education leadership is a science and an art. "As a science, it is directed by understanding of structure, schedules, systems, and power. As an art, administration is informed by sensibilities, connoisseurship, and intuition" (Birnbaum, 2008, p. 208-209). In other words, higher education leadership is both technical and personal. Successful higher education leaders understand and direct institutional systems as well as influence and enable others to act in the environment. While Birnbaum's research suggests that higher education leaders most constantly rebuild the organizational system to be effective, the research also implies that "Presidents and other administrators may not be able to make dramatic changes in their institutions most of the time, but by recognizing the organizational characteristics of their institution, they may still be able to provide leadership" (p. 203-204). As such, higher education leaders must be very intentional in relation to their leadership role and understand the potential impact that it has internally.

Building on Birnbaum's research, Martin and Marion's (2005) investigated how higher education leadership roles influenced knowledge processing and the learning capacity of the organization. The researcher's conducted interviews with nine presidents and provost to ascertain how they resolve gaps and enhance knowledge processing in their respective institutions. The following six leadership roles emerged as imperative in relation to the knowledge-processing dynamic of an organization: Environment Manager, Network Manager, Policy Manager, Crisis Manager, Knowledge Gap Identifier, and Future Leader Preparation. The study highlights the specific leadership task associated with each category. For example, the leader's role as an Environment Manager is to "break negative organizational behavior and to establish new methods of organizational problem solving" (Martin & Marion, 2005, p. 144).

In a similar way to Birnbaum the researchers suggest that it is up to higher education leaders to deconstruct and transform the organizational climate into one that enables knowledge processing. For example, a Network Manager's primary leadership responsibility is to remove barriers and develop an efficient network. Martin and Marion (2005) assert, "The strength of organizational networks is much larger than individual relationships; it is a collusion of multiple roles and expertise bound together to strengthen the organization" (p. 144). In essence, suggesting the goal of higher education leadership is to enhance collaboration within the knowledge processing networks. This research confirms that higher education leaders have control and broad influence on the knowledge-processing environment of institutions of higher education. This research demonstrates the relationship and collaborative efforts of leadership development and organizational learning.

While the aforementioned research discussed leadership from an organizational perspective, scholars such as Spendlove (2007) examined leadership as task oriented related to specific positions. Specifically, Spendlove (2007) conducted an empirical study that focused on effective leadership competencies in higher education. Through semi-structured interviews conducted with ten senior administrators, the study examined their leadership competencies, attitudes, knowledge, and behaviors. The study concludes that "people skills including the ability to communicate and negotiate with others" were important competencies of higher education leaders (p. 407). Moreover, "academic credibility and experience of university life" were also deemed crucial elements of effective leadership.

While Spendlove (2007) boast, "university leadership is fundamentally different from leadership in other contexts, and demands additional competence", the results of the study yielded universal leadership competencies that were very broad and/or general and could be

replicated in any social organization (p. 407). For example, in a similar study by McDaniel (2002), the scholars introduced more specific competencies related to higher education leaders. In collaboration with the American Council on Education (ACE) McDaniel's (2002) study conceptualized leadership competencies based on consultation with college and university presidents, vice presidents, and former ACE fellows. While the outcome from the study was a model of leadership competencies and development opportunities prescribed to enhance the effectiveness of senior level leadership in higher education, like Spendlove, the findings yielded specific competencies.

Specifically, the model list was framed and organized into the following four categories: Leadership Context, Leadership Content, and Leadership Processes. The Leadership Context category suggests that leaders should have a thorough understanding of the overall landscape of higher education. Moreover, suggesting that higher education leaders demonstrate an understanding of the elements of the national system of higher education, in correlation with the complexity and interconnections of issues and problems associated with institutional types, missions, and cultures (McDaniel, 2002). Interconnected, the content category suggests that higher education leaders demonstrate an understanding of institutional and/or internal variables. For example, understanding academic administration, institutional advancement as well as financial and legal issues (McDaniel, 2002). The Leadership process category "reflect[s] the values and priorities of senior leaders, and their efforts to achieve the goals of their institutions", while the communication category suggests effectively communicating internally and externally.

A few years later Smith and Wolverton (2010) refined and enhanced McDaniel's (2002) study using a quantitative methods approach. The goal of the study was to quantitatively test

McDaniel's Higher Education Leadership Competencies model. While the original study participants included presidents, vice presidents, and former ACE fellows, the refined study invited athletic directors, senior student affairs officers, and chief academic officers to participate. The researcher hypothesized that "by selecting three unique senior administrative positions, further information can be gleaned about the similarities and difference between groups' perceptions" (p. 61). On the one hand the study confirmed the saliency of variables associated with the communication, content, and context categories in McDaniel's model. On the other hand, the study also highlighted gaps and introduced new concepts. For instance, specific behavioral competencies such as written and oral communication emerged from the study, which were not identified before. As such, more research is necessary to differentiate between different forms of communication and how they relate to effective forms of communication (Smith and Wolverton, 2010).

The body of literature in this section is valuable in understanding and exploring the different facets of leadership in general. In essence, I have included it in this review to illuminate what is already known about leadership, to provide insight into different perspectives on leadership, and to garner what is left to be explored. Although these scholars present very strong arguments in relation to the benefits of leadership in relation to organizational learning, climate, network systems, and communication, the aspects of possible institutional barriers, adversity and/or limitations are missing from the discussion. I argue that there is much more to be understood, particularly in the context of Black women leader's multiple marginalized identities and underrepresentation in leadership roles, especially in regard to influencing knowledge processing in White male dominated higher education systems.

Views on Community College Leadership

While the previous section gave a brief survey of views on higher education in general, this section examines literature specific to views on community college leadership. As noted previously, community colleges have a distinct student body and unique characteristics. Moreover, the missions of community colleges are vastly different from those of other postsecondary intuitions. Therefore, scholars and researchers argue that it is imperative for community college leaders to support the demands of this specialized population while executing the mission of the institution (Amey, 2005; Hawkins, 2009; Nevarez, Wood, and Penrose, 2013).

Although existing research looks at community college leadership through multiple theoretical lenses, there seems to be similar attributes and traits for successful leadership across theories. For example, examining servant leadership, business leadership, and transformational leadership, Hawkins' (2009) study compares and contrasts the aforementioned leadership theories and suggests techniques for prospective community college leaders. While the analysis did not necessarily promote one theory over the other, it did highlight the attributes of engaging employees and incorporating systems thinking into work practices. Moreover, the author stressed that all of the models analyzed in the study highlights the importance of teamwork and effective communication. As such, these attributes are deemed crucial components of successful leadership and are necessary to improve, maintain, and sustain the institutions viability (Hawkins, 2009).

Leadership literature is inclusive of an array of leadership models and contingency theories. Centering community college leadership as the focal point of their analysis Nevarez, Wood, and Penrose (2013) work examines eleven leadership theories. Their analysis was performed through case studies and reflection to promote multiple frames and lenses to explore

the challenges faced by community college leaders. These theories represented in the study include: 1) Bureaucratic Leadership, 2) Democratic Leadership, 3) Path-Goal Leadership, 4) Situational Leadership, 5) Ethical Leadership, 6) Leader-Member Exchange Theory, 7) Political Leadership, 8) Systems Leadership, 9) Transformational Leadership, 10) Symbolic Leadership, and 11) Transformative Leadership. In the same vein as the previous study, the scholars do not promote one theory over the other, instead focuses on "contextualizing theory guided by equity, access, diversity, ethics, critical inquiry, transformational change and social justice as challenges to existing leadership practices" (Gillett-Karam, 2015, p. 1198). For example, in the transformational leadership chapter, Nevarez et al., (2013) suggest, "Transformational leaders are primarily driven by an astute awareness of individual and group psychology. Further, these leaders guide institutional affiliates with a sense of care and support and are truly committed to the self-actualization of the institutional affiliates in order to accomplish the intuitional mission" (p. 115). Overall, the authors boast regardless of leadership style, promoting diversity, innovation, learning, and reflexivity are key elements of success in community college leadership.

While Nevarez et al., (2013) examined leadership theories, Fulton-Calkins and Billing's (2005) examined leadership traits. The study posits the following nine leadership traits are essential to community college leaders success and the sustainability of the institution: 1) learn from the past while embracing the future, 2) enrich the inward journey, 3) lead from the center: values, 4) make the connections: vision, 5) look broadly for talent, 6) provide continuous leadership learning opportunities through succession planning, 7) keep faculty in the mix; 8) forge business and industry connections; and 9) do not forget students: prepare the future workforce. This list of traits supports the aforementioned community college theories,

highlighting a common theme in relation to futuristic thinking and innovation. Although the previous authors' work underscores specific characteristics and attributes of community college leaders, Amey's (2005) work uses a mental model to conceptualize leadership in the community college sector. Amey (2005) argues, "Conceptualizing leadership as an on-going process of learning relinquishes the need for a specific career orientation and focuses on developing and sharing leadership throughout the college" (p. 689). Moreover, she posits that community college leaders should consider leadership from a cognitive perspective by moving away from a traditional top-down approach. Additionally, parallel to previous studies on community college leadership, she also highlights attributes such as communication, inclusion of employees, knowledge engagement, as well as critical reflection.

Also recognizing the importance of a cognitive perspective to community college leadership, Windley Walker & Johnson McPhail's (2009) work looked at the role of spirituality and the community college leader. Specifically, using a qualitative approach the study examined 14 community college presidents and chancellors of different races and genders perception of spirituality and the role it plays in their leadership style. The findings noted that the participants hold both similar and different perceptions of spirituality based on their "faith" beliefs. However, the ways in which they executed their spirituality in their leadership roles was similar. For example, the "leaders expressed spiritual qualities in the leadership of their organizations through their principles, values, and beliefs that center or servant leadership, community building, creatively, and communication (Windley Walker & Johnson McPhail, 2003, p. 328). In other words, regardless of specific spiritual beliefs these findings demonstrate how spiritual values are embodied in the leadership styles of community college presidents and chancellors.

This collection of literature establishes a distinct difference in the leadership perspectives of higher education in general and community colleges. Clearly, the literature related to community colleges' positions the mission of the institution at the center of analysis. I have included this section of literature in this review to provide insight into leadership perspectives, specificity to the sector of the participants of the study. Similarly, to the general literature that examines higher education leadership, the majority of the literature specifically related to community college leadership is not gendered or race specific. Further research is warranted to understand the specific experiences of Black women leaders in community college settings.

Women in Higher Education Leadership

While much of the research conducted on higher education leadership literature does not account for a specific gender, often the foundation of the theory and/or conceptual framework is constructed from the experiences of White men. However, recently more women are ascending through the leadership ranks. While there is still a significant gap, according to a study by the American Council on Education (2017), "the proportion of women presidents has tripled since 1986", with a 4% increase between 2011 and 2016. As a result, more research is being conducted on their leadership experiences. Scholars are not only focusing on their leadership skills and attributes, but also investigating the adversities and barriers faced by women as they navigate their leadership pathways. While older research embraces a more monolith approach, more recent scholarship focuses on the generational differences among women. However, the overarching theme in this body of literature is the general belief that women need to be resilient and transformational leaders in order to be successful.

Views on Women in Leadership

In a different way than general higher education literature, literature specific to women seemingly focuses on their lived experiences. For example, Tunheim & Goldschmidt (2013) explores the role of a "calling" on the lived experiences of women college and university presidents. In the study, the word "calling" is used to describe a subliminal message and/or signs that suggest they should pursue the presidency. Specifically, the study seeks to ascertain if women feel called to the college/university presidency in comparison to men presidents. In another way, the study seeks to understand how women college presidents identify their calling, interpret their calling, and pursue their calling. The study was completed as a continuation and/or as a comparison of a qualitative study conducted in 2008 by one of the researchers in relation to the male college and university presidents perceived calling. In depth interviews with 15 women presidents were used to make meaning of the participants' lived experiences. The findings revealed that 80% of the participants believed they were called to the presidency in comparison to the 70% of male participants from the 2008 study. Tunheim & Goldschmidt (2013) asserts, while all participants do not believe they've been "called" to the presidency, they all believe they were prepared and secured the position based on their exceptional work in previous positions.

While the majority of literature that conducts comparisons among higher education leaders usually compares the leadership attributes, roles, and experiences of women to men, Taylor and Stein's (2014) study provided a comparison among women leaders. Using a unique lens, this study looked at the leadership practices of different generations of women higher education administrators with a mixed methods approach. Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials were compared. The quantitative participants included 282 participants, while the qualitative portion of the study included 34 participants. Although the qualitative segment of the

study revealed several similarities, the quantitative analysis noted generational differences in leadership practices of the women higher education leaders (Taylor & Stein, 2014). For instance, 8 out of the 11 managerial and/or leadership styles were statistically significant between the generational groups. "Baby Boomers and the Generation X cohort both indicated that creative problem solving and clarifying expectations are the most important managerial skills they used on the job. This is vastly different from the individuals in the millennial cohort who indicated long term planning and effective planning skills are more important" (p. 7-8). In relation to the qualitative segment, the qualitative findings were more consistent along the lines of management and leadership styles. While Generation X participants had lower scores in communication than Baby Boomers, throughout the study they mentioned the importance of communication. In other words, even though there seems to be some divide among generations, actual interviews among participants revealed otherwise. Therefore, the differences in the quantitative study may be a result of an interpretation of terms by the different generational cohort.

Bucklin's (2014) research looked at the impact of gender on female college/university presidents. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight current and former presidents that focused on their leadership experiences. "Data analysis of the interview transcriptions indicated that the influence of gender on these leaders extended into the presidential suites" (p. 173). Although all the participants noted they did not allow gender related issues to deter them, they believed that not reporting the incidents were in the best interest of the institution and their careers. Moreover, the participants felt their identity as women superseded their presidential identity. For example, one participant states, "I think whatever you do is viewed through a gender lens rather than simply the act" (p.174). In fact, the study concludes that often, female presidents believe if they are not successful, it will cause a negative perception on all women

presidents. Further extending leadership related to gender, Kezar (2014) argues, "Women's leadership is enacted in a world that is often dominated by traditional male approaches to leadership and organization. Therefore, women have to navigate their own leadership preferences within a world of hierarchical and top down organizations and structures" (p. 126). Noting distinct relationships and overlapping, Kezar (2014) posit the following characteristics are the main attributes of successful women leaders: participatory, decision-making, shared or team approach, collaboration, relational and inclusiveness orientation, harnessing multiple perspectives, empowerment, development/learning, inclusive, ethics, integrity and common purpose. Moreover, she suggests that in order for women to be successful in the higher education arena implementing a hybrid form of leadership in a necessity. In addition to honing the aforementioned attributes, women should blend in strategies associated with the success of men in higher education leadership positions. Kezar (2014) assert, "Women seeking out differing leadership perspectives and showing the ability to navigate among various approaches will be pivotal to the success of higher education in the future" (p. 132).

While the goal of Gardiner's (2015) study of 10 higher education professionals was to examine how women experience authenticity in their respective higher education leadership roles, two out of the three themes that emerged from the findings supported Kezar's study. The three themes that emerged from the qualitative study were care and relationships, contradictions with personal convictions, and gender socialization (Gardiner, 2015). In regard to care and relationships, many of the participants felt "the building of strong relationship[s] was fundamental to their understating of what it meant to lead in an authentic manner" (p. 160). In other words, supporting Kezar's claim relationship building and inclusiveness are important to women higher education leaders. For example, "Most participants identified as a goal of their

leadership the creation of an environment where people can express themselves without fear of reprisal. Specifically, they emphasized the critical importance of leaders gaining others' trust" (Gardiner, 2015, p. 160). Moreover, the convictions and contradictions themed highlighted the ethical and integrity aspect of higher education leadership. In the same way as the Kezar study, women leaders identified ethics and integrity as an important part of authentic leadership. As an illustration, "Participants described how the desire to act in a genuine manner is complicated by the fact that leaders are sometimes required to uphold institutional standards that may differ from their own", in essence seeking to find a common purpose with the institution (p. 163).

While Kezar's study did not make mention of gender socialization, this was a fluent theme in the study. Gardiner suggests gender socialization has a significant effect on the leadership experiences of women leaders in higher education. Women's appearance and/or wardrobe as well as stereotypes often have a negative effect on how they are seen as leaders internally and externally. "Several women discussed how their wardrobe played a part in how they were perceived as leaders" (p. 162). Moreover, many of the leaders also discussed how they had to overcome self-doubt due to stereotype threat. The research supported how stereotype threat created discord between their learned and perceived abilities (Gardiner, 2015).

Barriers and Adversity

The investigation of barriers and adversity is prevalent in the leadership studies that examine women. For instance, Diehl's (2014) study explores how women in leadership positions in higher education make meaning of adversity. The researcher conducted face-to-face interviews with 26 women in the roles of president, provost, or vice president from a variety of institutions. The researcher organized the participant's respective "meanings of adversity" into three levels, individual, group, and societal. The individual level captured issues related to

identity, self-esteem, and power. The group level consisted of connection, while the societal

level centered on worldviews (Diehl, 2014). The study revealed "while adversity had a generally

positive effect on participant identity, it had disparate effects on self-esteem, power, connections

to others, and worldviews" (p. 54). In other words, women leaders feel a sense of

accomplishment, pride, and/or empowerment once they overcome adversities. However, while in

the midst of adversity women leaders often experience feelings of insecurity, stress, lack of

control and disillusionment. The participants shared stories in relation to adversity and barriers

faced both in their professional and personal lives in regard to their leadership journey. An

example of some of the adversities and barriers faced by the participants were gender

discrimination, advancement issues, work/family conflict, as well as a lack of mentoring and

salary inequalities.

Diehl (2014) maintains, "that adversity can lead to growth and opportunity, but such

benefits are intertwined with pain and loss" (p. 54). Using the same data set, Diehl published

another study that discussed how women leaders in higher education could navigate adversity,

barriers, and obstacles. The strategies for navigating adversity fell into two categories, self-

empowerment and seeking help from others. The findings yield that refocusing attention,

remaining patient, taking proper care of oneself, and relying on friends/family for support prove

to be successful strategies for women leaders facing adversity. Moreover, the study suggests that

reframing, resilience, and self-efficacy are key factors that enable women to succeed in getting

through adversity despite feelings of insecurity and disempowerment (Diehl, 2014).

Arini, Collings, Conner, McPherson, Midson, and Wilson (2011) complicates the notion

of barriers and adversity for women higher education leaders with their research on women's

advancement in postsecondary institutions. The researchers conducted a study with 26 women to

ascertain factors that help or hinder their advancement as leaders. Out of the 110 incidents recorded, 74% were deemed helpful while 26% were deemed unhelpful (Arini, et al, 2011). Examples of the helpful incidents included, positive relationships with senior staff and working in environments where women were able to take on leadership roles. In contrast, examples of incidents that were deemed a hindrance were senior managers not acting in the best interest of the women leaders as well as women leaders avoiding what could be seen as confrontation in fear of losing their job.

Mentoring Experiences

Existing research on women in higher education also tends to examine their mentoring experiences. Scholars and researchers agree that mentoring has proven to be beneficial in sustaining their positions and career advancement of women in leadership roles. (Brown, 2005; Serby, Ballenger, & Trises, 2015; Dunbar & Kinnersley, 2011) For example, Dunbar and Kinnersley's (2011) study looks at the mentoring experiences of female higher education administrators. This quantitative study surveyed 239 female higher education leaders from a variety of institutions. Over half, and or 64% of the participants in the study had a mentor at some point in their leadership journey. Of the participants who had mentors, 54% had mentors of the same gender, while 46% had male mentors. Additionally, the majority, and/or 89% of the participants had mentors of the same race. Although the findings of the study concluded while there were no differences in the functions provided by male mentors, "women believed that a female mentor is important and had an impact on the effectiveness of the mentoring relationship (p. 21). Moreover, the study suggests that race plays a role in the mentor/mentee relationship. For instance, "Mentees whose mentor was of a different race perceived their mentoring relationship to be more effective than those with a mentor of the same race" (p. 22). In essence,

the participants in the study perceived that having a female mentor of a different race would foster a more meaningful relationship.

While Searby, Ballenger, and Tripses (2015) study also examines the mentoring experiences of women higher education leaders, they use a more relational lens. They surveyed 110 presidents, vice presidents, provosts, and deans. The "Survey data revealed the majority (68%) of these female university administrators experienced multiple mentoring relationships, having had both females and males as mentors" (p. 102). They found that 92% of the participants were not only being mentored, but also were serving in a mentor capacity. The participants reported servings as a counselor or a teacher to their protégé. This study aligns with Dunbar and Kinnersley's work supporting the notion of women higher education leaders benefiting from one another in formal and informal mentoring roles. In another way, Brown's (2005) research investigates the role of mentoring in the ascension to the college presidency. The study specifically examines the mentoring relationships of female college presidents. The qualitative study population included 91college presidents. "Findings indicated that most female college presidents had a mentor who assisted their move up the administrative ladder (Brown, 2005, p. 663). Notably, 71.4% of the college presidents were actively sought out by their mentors in an effort to develop the relationship. Moreover, as reflected in Searby et al's (2015) study, the majority of the presidents, 64% serve as mentors to other higher education professionals. Brown (2015) argues, through mentoring female college presidents can facilitate potential female presidents' understanding of the college presidency and empower them to attain the necessary knowledge and skills required for the position.

This section of literature examined previous studies exploring the lived experiences of women in higher education leadership roles, clearly highlighting key challenges faced by women

in higher education administration. It also investigated mentoring and meaning making in relation to barriers and adversity. This body of literature is valuable in understanding the nuanced experiences of women administrators in general and can provide insight into how to support women leaders. However, I argue there is much more to be understood in relation to the influence of race on meaning making and associated barriers. Furthermore, studies highlighting the difference in experiences associated with race and specific institutional type would strengthen this body of literature.

Black Women in Higher Education Leadership

Although the volume of literature on women in higher education leadership is constantly growing, the experiences of Black women in higher education leadership roles have not been well documented in research literature. A limited amount of research has been conducted specifically focusing on Black women college administrators, there is even less on the development of their leadership identities. However, what the literature tells us is that Black women higher education leaders manage multiple marginalized identities and are often outsiders in the higher education arena. They must employ resilience in the face of adversity, sexism, and racism. Moreover, the literature suggests that Black women administrators who have encounters with mentors and/or sponsors are often more successful in moving up the ranks.

Views on Black Women in Leadership

Much of the research conducted on Black women administrator's focuses on multiple marginalized identities. Scholars and researchers agree that managing multiple marginalized identities is a primary component of the leadership experiences of Black women leaders in the academy. It is the complex way in which Black women simultaneously occupy and experience

different social categories as well as the events of social and political life; both in oppressed and privileged positions (Collins & Blige, 2012; Crenshaw, 1995; Sensoy & DeAngelo, 2012). As such, identity and identity development are overarching themes as well as analytic tools prevalent in the literature that examines the experiences of Black women college administrators (Collins, 2008; Collins and Bilge, 2016, Crenshaw, 1995).

Acknowledging that experiences of Black women leaders should not be examined via a singular lens, scholars such as Lloyd-Jones (2009) and Davis and Maldonado's (2015) provide insight into multiple marginalized identities as a result of the duality of race and gender. For instance, Lloyd-Jones (2009) single participant case study of a Black women higher education administrator suggests managing issues associated with identity may present obstacles to self-actualization. Moreover, Lloyd-Jones (2009) asserts, because of the double jeopardy of sexism and racism, Black women college administrators are put in a unique category of experiences and must deal with the tandem of race and gender. Noting that the tandems associated with racism and sexism can have detrimental effects, she argues, "encountering issues emerging from intersectionality could interfere with an African American woman's ability to feel empowered and therefore have the capacity to affect job satisfaction, productivity, and retention" (Lloyd-Jones, 2009, p.616).

In a similar way, Davis and Maldonado (2015) added to the discussion of managing multiple marginalized identities by surveying five Black women in reference to the intersection of race and gender in their higher education leadership roles. The participants of the study include presidents, provost, vice presidents, and deans. Although the study is not generalized, Davis and Maldonado's argue race and gender informs the leadership identity of African American women in academia. According to Davis and Maldonado (2015) "African American

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women in leadership positions experience a profusion of race and gender stereotypes……. being invisible, voiceless, discriminated, isolated, undermined, treated unfairly, oppressed, challenged and demoted" (p. 59). Black women must be aware of the organizational climate in terms of gender and racial dominance and navigate a space where they may not always be privy to the same opportunities as their white male counterparts. Notably, the intersection of race and gender highlighted in this body of literature provides further impetus to understand experiences and meaning making of Black women administrations.

In addition to managing multiple marginalized identities, the literature on Black women leaders in higher education boasts research on different types of leadership skills and attributes. While the majority of the literature noted similarities in traits with other men and women of color as well as their White counterparts, a sparse amount of studies specifically looked at characteristics deemed important for Black women leaders to possess. According to Davis and Maldonado (2015), "African American women who demonstrate resilience, integrity, intrapersonal characteristics, and social skills [are] more likely to climb the career leader within their respective organizations with support of a mentor and/or sponsor" (p. 60). Their study noted the following five themes: being predestined for success, accepting sponsorship from unexpected resources, the intersection of race and gender, paying the game, and paying it forward as key success factors. In relation to being predestined for success "the women in the study commonly referred to parents and family members who provided strong guidance and support that profoundly impacted their development as leaders" (p. 57).

In terms of sponsorship from the unexpected, all of the participants acknowledged how sponsors connected them with career opportunities. It is also important to note, "many of them received sponsorship from White men" (Davis & Maldonado, 2015, p. 58). The study also notes

that Black women leaders feel a responsibility to help other aspiring Black women leaders. According to Davis and Maldonado (2015), "By paying it forward the experiences of African American women senior leaders could provide a roadmap for African American women aspiring to advance to senior leadership roles in academia" (p.60). In a different way, Waring (2003) investigated Black women leader's self-conception of leadership. The study posits relationships play a salient role in female Black president's conception of leadership. In other words, the participants in the study perceived building relationships within their institutions and with constituent groups as an important component of leadership. "Most of the women [in the study] report that they are concerned about relationships because attending to relationships makes them better leaders" (Waring, 2003, p. 40). Moreover, the study suggests race and gender also influences their leadership experiences. For example, the majority of participants in the study "reported that [as leaders] they felt they have to take more time talking with people and thinking about their presentation of self and ideas because of their race and gender" (Waring, 2003, p. 40). Additionally, Spirituality is often associated with the leadership experiences of Black women leaders in the academy. While the majority of literature view spirituality as a coping mechanism for Black women leaders (Bacchus, 2008; Bowen-Reid and Harrell, 2002), Garner's (2004) study explores how spirituality guides the leadership experiences of four Black women higher education deans. Using a qualitative case study method, the purpose of the study was to "examine the ways in which African-America women make meaning of their spiritual selves in their everyday leadership" (Garner, 2004, p. 37).

The findings of the study suggest Black women higher education administrators make meaning of their spirituality and leadership through service, ethic of care, social justice, and leading in their communities and outside organizations. According to Garner (2004), "Despite

the triple consciousness that African-American women endure in the Academy, it is their spirituality that has played an important role in shaping and sustaining their lives with an institutionalized system that often ignores their presence and inadvertently attempts to subjugate their leadership role" (Garner, 2004, p. 98). Whether used as a coping mechanism or as a way to make meaning, spirituality is a key element of the experiences of Black women leaders.

Barriers and Adversity

Existing research on Black women administrators in higher education also tends to highlight the barriers and adversity they face in their leadership roles. Patitu and Hinton (2003) contribute to the discussion on Black women college administrators with a study that focuses on issues surrounding promotion and retention. The study examined the experiences of 10 Black faculty and higher education administrators in their respective roles. The common themes found among the administrators in their interviews were experiences of racism, sexism, and homophobia in their leadership roles. While the study noted, "for most African American women, racism and sexism are not always distinguishable", racism was deemed a more salient factor in relation to retention and promotion over sexism (p. 81). The study concludes that support is vital to the success of African American women. For example, lack of support in the form of isolation, alienation, sexual harassment, and budget constraints caused these women to be ineffective in their positions (Patitu and Hinton, 2003).

In a similar way, Jackson and Harris (2007) investigate the perceived barriers and strategies employed by Black women presidents to secure their positions. The findings of the study conclude that exclusion from informal network and career development as the top barriers faced by participants. Moreover, the participants posit female stereotyping and preconceptions of women as the most frequent experience related to dealing with the glass ceiling. The study also

notes exceeding job expectations and being in position with visibility as strategies used by participants to obtain the presidency.

Mentoring Experiences

While in general higher education literature notes, mentoring plays a significant role in the ascension and retention of Black women in the field (Girves, J. E., Zepeda, Y., & Gwathmey, J. K., 2005; Tran, 2014), there was a sparse amount of literature that looked specifically at the mentoring experiences of Black women administrators. While limited, this body of literature on mentoring identifies factors that affirm mentoring as an essential element to the advancement of Black women higher education administrators as well as beneficial to the post-secondary institutions they serve. Moreover, it pushes back on the traditional models of mentoring by suggesting that Black women are not monolithic, and their mentoring experiences should be reflective of their identities and personal needs. For example, Crawford & Smith (2005) examines the importance of mentoring in relation to the career selection and professional development of seven Black female higher education administrators. Using qualitative inquiry, the scholars conducted two open-ended interviews with each participant. The study found that Black women with mentors "reported a greater satisfaction with their career development" (Crawford and Smith, 2005, p. 65).

In a similar way, Jones Bertrand & Dufor's (2012) study on Black women higher education administrators conceptualizes mentoring as a learning partnership and daily activity. Moreover, the study affirms Black women administrators need for mentorship outside of the traditional model. For instance, the women in the study discussed their desire for support from mentors in relation to "work-related issues, career advice, personal development, and appropriate professional conduct/behavior" (Jones Bertrand & Dufor, 2012, p. 29). Based on their findings,

the author's note that "mentoring is not a one-size-fits-all" process and provides recommendations on how to foster, develop, and maintain successful mentoring relationships (Jones Bertrand & Dufor, 2012, p. 28). While the study highlights the benefits of mentoring relationships, it also underscores the need for multiple mentoring relationships due to differing expertise and needs in the mentor/mentee relationship. Similarly, Tran (2014) asserts that…. "unique background along with their professional and personal experiences, influence their perceptions of the mentoring relationships" of Black women in the academy (Tran, 2014, p. 306). Thompson and Dawkins (2012) study offered a look into the service activities and expectations of Black women higher education administrators, underscoring mentoring as a primary undertaking and the most common on-campus activity. According to Thompson and Dawkins (2012), "the success of students and other professionals in higher education is often dependent on effective mentoring" (p. 38).

In another way, Futrell, Coker, and McKenzie's (2012) study explores the experiences of Black women higher education administrators who serve as mentors. While the study looks at their mentoring relationships with students, it notably argues that Black women who serve as mentors often do more than what is required in their administrative roles. For instance, the study maintains that the act of mentoring for Black women administrators "is a commitment of time and energy and must be done from the heart" (Futrell, Coker, & McKenzie, 2012, p. 53). As such, the study boasts that Black women administrators who serve as mentors not only make a difference in the lives of their protégés, they are also often seen as catalysts of change at their institution.

Overall, this body of literature suggests, while individuals have different lived experiences, commonly, Black women administrators are aware of their race and/or gender in

spaces. They often feel isolated, alienated, and discriminated against because of their social identities. While the body of literature examines barriers and adversity faced by Black women administrators, it seems to ignore the ways in which Black women administrators make meaning and/or process these experiences. Understanding and developing insight into the unique experiences of Black women higher education leaders is paramount in creating environments that seek to remove barriers.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I begin by providing a broad overview of community colleges to provide an environmental context for the study. In essence, noting the mission, purpose, and the unique population of the community college sector. Next, I described studies conducted on higher education leadership broadly, and also highlighted literature specific to community college leadership. While I examined literature that reflected different lenses, theories, and frameworks, the overarching theme of the literature suggests that community college leaders should be and/or constitute a leadership style that fosters organizational learning, focus on improving systems, promote collaborative work environments, and possess futuristic thinking. I also investigated higher education leadership literature associated with women broadly and Black women specifically. Again, there were many similarities in the literature with respect to their experiences with gender discrimination/bias, adversity and barriers, and mentoring, however the literature specific to Black woman provided a more nuanced look into managing multiple marginalized identities.

On the one hand this body of literature is relevant to the Black Feminist Thought framework as it highlights managing identity and the daily oppressions associated with race, gender, and power faced by Black women leaders. On the other hand, the Black Feminist

Thought Framework reveals that there is still an absence of recognizing the intellectual contribution of Black women as a production of knowledge in relation to identity, meaning making and ways of knowing. Considering that I was trying to understand the ways in which Black women community college administrators make meaning of their identity as leaders, I found a void in the literature associated with Black women meaning making in higher education as well as leadership models and theories that directly reflect their experiences.

There is little known research regarding how Black women make meaning of their identity as a leader, let alone ones who serve as community college administrators. As such, I reiterate that the lack of Black women voices in higher education leadership scholarships represents a gap in the literature. Accordingly, further research is needed to understand how Black women administrators make meaning of their identity as leaders in their roles. In the next chapter, I re-present my theoretical framework, Black Feminist Thought and argue how it not only supports my chosen methods and methodology, but how it also lends itself as a source of my analysis. Using a Black Feminist Thought approach informs the multiple ways that Black women exist and make meaning. It provides a multiperspective lens to view their leadership experiences.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

"As subjects, people have the right to define their own reality, establish their own identities, name their history." –bell hooks

This chapter provides a description of the methodology and methods the study employed. The chosen methods assisted in exploring 1) the lived experiences of Black women community college administrators in relation to how they make meaning of their identities as leaders, and 2) bringing Black women voices to the forefront of empirical research. First, I begin this chapter with a brief overview of the research purpose, research questions, and epistemological perspective. Secondly, I discuss the methodological approach of the study. Lastly, I discuss methods, recruitment, data collection, and data analysis.

Purpose & Epistemological Perspective

The purpose of this study was to examine the ways in which self-identified Black women that serve as community college administrators make meaning of their identities as leaders. As such, the philosophical worldview proposed in this inquiry demonstrated a constructivist perspective. A constructivist view supports the ideal that humans make meaning as they interpret the world based on historical and social perspectives as well as interactions with their community (Creswell, 2014). A constructivist view fits my Black Feminist Thought framework as they both ascribe to the understanding that participants experiences, social identities, as well as environment shapes the way "individuals develop subjective meaning of their experiences" (Creswell, 2014, p. 8). Constructivism allowed me to inductively generate a theory based on participants meaning making (Creswell, 2014).

Black Feminist Thought

Positioning Black Feminist Thought as my theoretical framework influenced the development of my research questions as well as my methodological approach. Black Feminist Thought was not only used to guide the research design, it was also used in the analysis as well as the construction and interpretation of the knowledge of the study participants. Black Feminist Thought was an appropriate framework for this study because it was designed specifically for Black women. Black Feminist Thought places "Black women's experiences and ideas at the center of analysis" by validating their experiences and ways of knowing (Collins, 2000, p. vii). Furthermore, Black Feminist Thought highlights how the identities of race and gender intersect, which is a key element of this study.

Particularly, as a former Black women community college administrator my doing this work provided conceptual insight to the current state of the literature and assisted in the extending, expanding, and generation of new knowledge. I chose a Black Feminist Thought Framework as way of validating the experiences of Black women and disrupting gender and racialized oppressions and hierarchies they face. The Black Feminist Thought framework assisted me in describing singular and shared experiences as well as providing an avenue for Black women who serve as community college administrators to be heard and thoroughly understood through their own voices, construction of knowledge, and ways of knowing.

Moreover, this approach allowed for the deconstruction of structures and existing parameters that limits access and /or the success of Black women community college administrators. For instance, the experiences of Black women in the academy are often universalized in research with Black men, other women of color, and women in general. Moreover, research suggests that more often than not, White male realties shape institutional

environments and policies (Johnson and Thomas, 2012; Petit, 2009). Using a Black Feminist

Thought framework approach for this study allowed me to1) de-center traditionally accepted

White male dominated power structures, and 2) un-censor and un-edit the voices, experiences,

and meaning making of Black women in postsecondary education. The value of this framework

extends beyond theory, it highlights the power of multiple marginalized identities and informs

the Black woman's lived experience.

Research Questions

The following questions guided the study:

1. How do self-identified Black Women community college administrators make meaning of their identities as a leader?

    a. In what ways does race and gender influence/inform the way self-identified Black women community college administrators make meaning of their identities as a leader?

Qualitative Inquiry

This study employed a qualitative design that borrowed from elements of narrative

inquiry. "Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their

experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their findings"

(Merriam, 2009, p. 5). In addition to a focus on meaning and understanding, a key characteristic

of qualitative work is the researcher as the primary instrument. According to Merriam (2009)

Since understanding is the goal of this research, the human research instrument, which is

able to be immediately responsive and adaptive, would seem to be the ideal means of

collecting and analyzing data. Other advantages are that the researcher can expand his or

her understanding through nonverbal as well as verbal communication, process

information (data) immediately, clarify and summarize material, check with respondents for accuracy of interpretation, and explore unusual or unanticipated responses (p. 15).

Furthermore, qualitative research uses an inductive process as part of the data analysis to build concepts, theories, and hypotheses. The key to narrative qualitative research is "the use of stories as data, and more specifically, first-person accounts of experience told in story form having a beginning, middle, and end" (Merriam, 2009, p. 32). These stories validate and breathe life into the experiences and knowledge production of the participants. Specifically, the narrative aspect permitted me to focus on stories told about the participants' lived experiences. According to Merriam (2009), "Stories are how we make sense of our experiences, how we communicate with others, and through which we understand the world around us" (p. 32). The use of a narrative inquiry method was appropriate because it afforded me the opportunity to clearly explore and establish the phenomenon being studied from the view of the participants. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) posit narrative inquiry is three-dimensional. The three intersecting dimensions are 1) personal and social interaction, 2) a past, present and future continuum, and 3) place and/or situation. Therefore, supporting my constructivist epistemological approach and my Black Feminist Thought framework, elements of narrative inquiry were employed to underscore the Black women community college administrator's experiences by providing depth and clarity in their own words. While basic qualitative interpretive methods seek to understand how people 1) interpret experiences, 2) construct their worlds, and 3) and make meaning of their experiences, I believe it was also important to highlight and bring the participants voices to the forefront (Merriam, 2009). As a theoretical framework, Black Feminist Thought seeks to illuminate the narrative of Black Women and places "Black women's experiences and ideas at the center or analysis" (Collins, 2000, p. vii).

As such, to complement my theoretical framework, I borrowed from narrative inquiry and focused on the stories of the study participants

Sampling/Recruitment Plan

The target sample for this study was cis-gendered Black women community college administrators who served in executive/senior level positions at institutions located in the Midwest of the American Higher Education System. The criteria used to determine participation/inclusion in the study were based on self-identification as a Black woman and their current position. For the purpose of this study, executive/senior level administrators were defined as individuals who held a variation of the following job titles:

- President, Vice President, Associate/Assistant Vice President
- Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, Associate/Assistant Chancellor

I used a purposeful sampling technique as part of the recruitment process. A purposeful sampling technique affords the researcher the ability to identify and select study participants based on set criterion. According to Patton (2002), "Purposeful sampling focuses on selecting information-rich cases whose story will illuminate the questions under study" (p. 230). In addition to the established criterion, as part of the purposeful sampling process I solicited participants at different Midwestern US community colleges to provide balance and different perspectives. As Black Feminist Thought contends, although there is a commonality among Black women, they interpret and respond to situations and environments differently. In combination with purposeful sampling, I used a snowball technique. "This approach is facilitated by the fact that a level of rapport and trust is typically established during the interview process, opening up referrals to other members of the population who might otherwise have remained unknown to the researcher" (Remler & Van Ryzin, 2015, p. 156). For example, throughout my tenure as a

community college administrator I have fostered relationships and developed networks with other Black women community college administrators. Using a snowball technique allowed me to expand my recruitment of participants outside of my personal network.

Specifically, I began by inviting Black women community college administrators in my professional network to participate in the study and asked them to refer other individuals who meet the criteria used to determine participation/inclusion. My initial contact was made via email in the form of a formal recruitment invitation. I used saturation to determine the sample size of the study, which was 12 participants. In qualitative data collection, saturation happens when "the researcher stops collecting data because fresh data no longer sparks new insights or reveals new properties" (Creswell, 2014, p. 248). In other words, during the interviewing process once I was unable to obtain new information and/or insight from the data sources that determined my sample size. Moreover, my sample size was informed based on my methods and research questions as well as other qualitative empirical research that focused on meaning making. For instance, Porter's (2013) study conducted on meaning making and identity development had a sample size of 13 Black undergraduate students. As such, 12 participants were an appropriate sample size for this study.

Method 1: Demographic Questionnaire	After agreeing to participate in the study, respondents were sent an email with a link to complete a demographic questionnaire. The form was hosted via Qualtrics. The participants were required to complete the form before their interview.
Method 2: Interview	Participants were interviewed in person or via Zoom technology.

Table 1: Data Collection Methods

Table 1 (cont'd)

Method 3: Artifact	Participants were asked to bring an Artifact to the interview.
Method 4: Reflection Prompt	After completion of the interview, the participants were sent a link to a reflection prompt. This form was hosted via Qualtrics.

Data Collection

As illustrated in Table 1: Data Collection Methods, data for the study was collected through multiple methods. First, participants were asked to complete a questionnaire to capture demographic information. Next, face to face interviews took place in a designated meeting place of the participant's choosing, or via Zoom technology. These semi-structured interviews ranged from 60 to 90 minutes and were used to capture participant's narratives, perspectives, and lived leadership experiences. For example, participants were asked to share experiences in their leadership roles where they encountered something that was directly attributed to their race and/or gender. For many of the participants their response led to further prompting, discussion, and unpacking of their encounters. The primary feature of semi-structured interviews is that the interview guide is meant to be a flexible tool and not a standardized script (Remler & Van Ryzin, 2015). Semi-structured interviews afforded me the opportunity to not only employ a set of rigorous interview questions, but also allow for the discovery and discussion of new ideas based on the responses from the participants. For instance, a sub-question that emerged was, "Do these identities (Black, Woman) shape the way you respond to challenges and opportunities?" As such, the interview guide was used as a flexible tool and not a standardized script (Remler & Van Ryzin, 2015).

In conjunction with the interview, participants were asked to bring an artifact that represented their leadership identity and/or journey. "Artifacts are objects that participants use in everyday activity of the contexts under examination"(Hatch, 2002, p. 117). While artifacts may have general functionality, they may be assigned a creative meaning (Glesne, 2016). For example, although an ink pen is a writing instrument, it may represent a more significant meaning for the participant. The artifact served as a source to elicit more dialogue, to get at the story it embodies, as well as a source of varied stories. Artifacts tell specific stories and often have both function and meaning. Further, artifacts help raise questions for interviews and supports or challenges interview data (Glesne, 2016).

Lastly, participants were asked to complete a guided reflection. The guided reflection was disseminated as an online survey via Qualtrics software. The guided reflection engaged participants in writing narratives about their experiences. A narrative inquiry method such as reflective writing is rooted in an "understanding of reflective thinking as a process of slowing down one's tacit knowing to rethink that knowing through an interactive questioning process" (Moss, Springer, Dehr, 2008, p. 503). As such, participants were given the opportunity to reflect and elaborate further on their experiences through the process of writing. "The data found in documents can be used in the same manner as data from interviews or observations. The data can furnish descriptive information, verify emerging hypotheses, advance new categories and hypotheses, offer historical understanding, track change and development, and so on" (Merriam, 2009, p. 155). In essence, the participant's reflection prompts were analyzed in the same manner as their transcribed interviews.
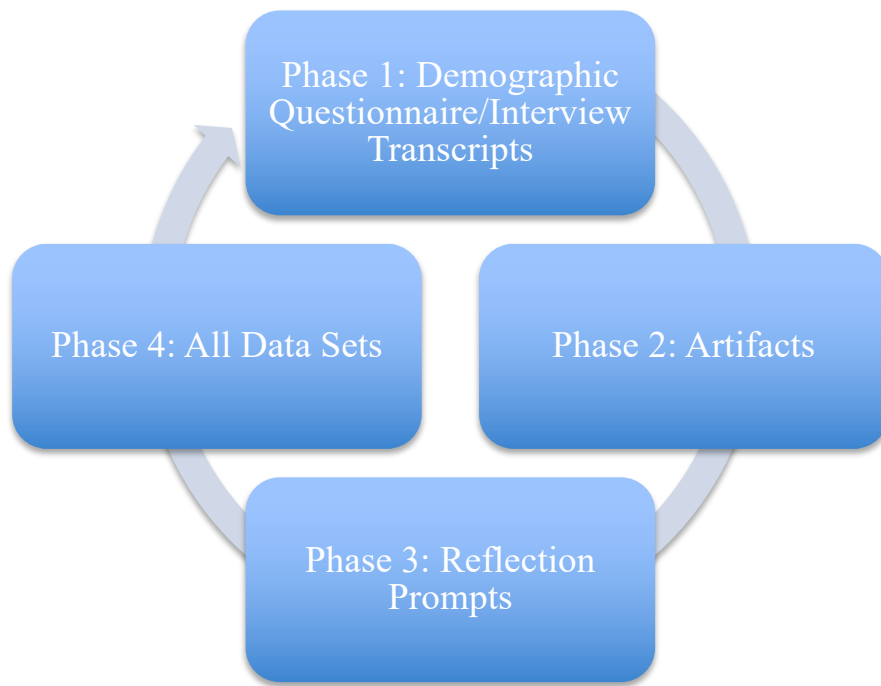
Figure 1: Data Analysis

Data Analysis

As reflected in Figure 1, Data Analysis, since my data was collected in multiple ways, my analysis was completed in the following four phases: 1) Demographic Questionnaire/Interview Transcripts, 2) Artifacts, 3) Reflection Prompts, and 4) All Data Sets. In Phase I: Demographic Questionnaire/Interview Transcripts, I began with transcription of the audio recording as well as conducting a summary of the demographic questionnaires. Next, for context, I read each transcript line by line to familiarize myself with the participant's narratives. During the next stage in the process, I re-read each transcript, using an open coding method. The process of open coding is identifying relevant and/or frequently used words in text (Merriam, 2009). The open coding method allowed me to recognize patterns among the participant's narratives and assign codes.

Since my research goal was to understand how Black women who work as community college administrators make meaning of their identities as leaders, I also employed a narrative analysis. "Narrative analysis uses the stories people tell, analyzing them in various ways, to understand the meaning of the experience revealed in the story"(Merriam, 2009, p. 38). Borrowing from narrative inquiry afforded me the opportunity to use the participant's stories as data as well as promote the validation of their first-hand experiences. In doing so, I was able to "look at how the interviewee links experiences and circumstances together to make meaning, realizing also that circumstances do not determine how the story will be told or the meaning that is made of it"(Glesne, 2011, p. 186). To move the analysis forward, I grouped the patterns that emerged into thematic categories.

In Phase II: Artifacts, I printed out pictures of the participant's artifacts inclusive of transcribed descriptions from each participant's interview. In addition to reading the artifact descriptions, I re-listened to the audio of the participants as they described each object, making note of voice inflections and revisiting my notes from each interview. The artifacts were analyzed by the narrative and/or stories the participants used to describe them as well as by pulling out themes of comparison that emerge from the interviews. Using the preexisting themes from the previous phase, I coded each artifact. In Phase III: Reflective Prompt, I read each reflective prompt, incorporating the same aforementioned techniques I employed when analyzing the interview transcripts. I read each reflection prompt line by line and used an open coding method.

Since my data analysis was rooted in Black Feminist Thought, during Phase IV: All Data Sets, I used the six distinguishing features to illuminate and understand the participant's experiences. This allowed me to attach significance to the associated meaning of all of my data

sources. For example, as illustrated in Table 2, Anfara: Data Analysis, I used Anfara, Brown, and Mangione's (2002), Research Questions in Relation to Interview Questions Matrix as a model to connect the distinguishing features of Black Feminist Thoughts to the themes that emerged in the study. The first column represents the themes and the second column represents which distinguishing features of Black Feminist Thought connected to each theme respectively. It is also important to note that throughout the process I used memo writing to record my thoughts as well as note insights and perspectives that occurred during the data analysis process. Overall, my data analysis and coding scheme allowed me to (1) organically bring the participant's voices to the forefront of the analysis, and (2) delineate the critical factors associated with understanding the unique leadership and meaning making experiences of Black women community college administrators.

Themes	BFT Distinguishing Features
The Body: I Am Not My Hair: Identity, Appearance, and the Representation of Black Bodies	2 3
The Spirit: Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is Liberty: The Role of Faith & Spirituality	3
The Soul: More than a Seat at the Table: Giving Voice to the Voiceless	1 2 3 4 5 6

Table 2: Anfara Data Analysis

Trustworthiness

This study employed three techniques to ensure the quality and trustworthiness of the study. One technique was triangulation. According to Remler & Van Ryzin (2015), triangulation

is "the use of multiple methods or analyses to confirm a finding" (p. 571). For this study, I used multiple sources of data to triangulate the data. By incorporating interviews, artifacts, and guided reflection, the study fostered a trustworthy data set that is reflective of ways in which Black women that serve as community college administrators make meaning of their identities as leaders.

The second technique I employed was member checking. Member checking provides an opportunity for participants to comment on the researcher's interpretation of the data. This is especially important when conducting narrative research because it helps to ensure an accurate reflection of the phenomenon being studied. As such, participants were sent copies of their transcribed interviews to provide clarity of their thoughts in a word document. Participants were asked to make edits and/or provide additional comments and/or feedback and email the document back. Two out of the 12 participants responded to the member checking request with updates. The participants who responded expounded more on their narrative and provided examples of what they meant to clarify statements. No changes and/or edits were made to transcripts of the participants who did not provide updates. It is important to note that member checking did not result in any changes to the data or analysis.

The third technique employed was reflexivity. While similar to memos in terms of providing a medium to record thoughts and perspectives, reflexivity writing provides a more intimate space for the researcher's thoughts. According to Creswell (2014), reflexivity exercises afford researchers the opportunity to "reflect about how their biases, values, and personal backgrounds….shape their interpretations formed during the study" (p. 247). While I took notes during each interview, immediately after each interview I allowed myself a substantial amount of time to write down my thoughts, observations, interpretations, and mental triggers. This aided in

the analysis by reducing the chances of bias. As a former Black woman community college administrator, I am very close to the study and have shared similar experiences as the participants. As such, it was important to ensure my personal beliefs and perspectives were not intertwined with the participant's lived experiences. Since the researcher is the instrument in qualitative research, it is important to understand the ways in which the researcher approaches, conduct, and acknowledge how they position themselves in their work.

Researcher's Role and Positionality

According to Sensoy and DiAngelo (2012) positionality is the "recognition that where you stand in relation to others in society shapes what you can see and understand" (p. 187). To that avail, my positionality is salient in this work. As a Black woman, former and aspiring community college administrator, I entered this research project with a vested interest in understanding the experiences of Black woman community college administrators and how they make meaning of their identities as leaders. Specifically, I resigned from my position as a Campus Dean to return to school to pursue my PhD with the hopes of becoming a college president. As I am approaching the end stages of my doctoral program and preparing for reentry into the workforce, I understand that my transition will be inclusive of me making meaning of my identities as a Black woman leader. As a former college administrator and current doctoral student, I have experienced and am aware of the tensions, challenges, and opportunities that the participants may have faced. I am also a Black female, and so the participants have the opportunity to forge an affiliation or identity with me. These characteristics allowed me to connect with the participants and prevented them from feeling uncomfortable telling their stories.

Higher Education Leadership has been an interest of mine for some time. As a matter of fact, I wrote my master thesis on the role of transformational leadership in higher education, specifically in the community college setting. With the goal of becoming a college president, I entered my PhD program with the notion of conducting research on Black women college presidents. However, as I became immersed in the literature, the components of oppression and managing multiple marginalized identities really resonated with me. While reading the literature, I often thought back to my tenure as an administrator and how I grappled with reconciling my multiple marginalized identities and trying to find my footing as I made meaning of my identities as a leader. Moreover, I was reminded of my time at the Kaleidoscope Leadership Institute, a leadership program for women of color. It was here that I was able to learn and fellowship with other Black women community college administrators who shared similar backgrounds, stories, frustrations, goals, and victories. Conducting research on Black women leaders in higher education has become a passion of mine and a salient component of my journey back into the workforce.

Ethical Consideration

The study of human subjects was a key component of exploring how Black women community college administrators made meaning of their identities as leaders. In an effort to maintain compliance with federal, state, and Michigan State University institutional policy and procedures, an exempt application along with supporting documents were submitted and approved by Michigan State University's Internal Review Board (IRB). In an effort to maintain privacy and confidentiality, all data gathered was kept in the strictest of confidence. The data was stored in a password protected electronic file. Only the researcher had access to the information. Additionally, the published results were generalized and no way traceable to a

particular participant or institution. Pseudonyms were used for the participants and institutions. Moreover, Carnegie Classification was used to help describe the institutions.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I defined and established my research epistemology. Noting that based on historical, social perspectives, and community interactions, constructivism supports the ideal that these underpinning are present in how people make meaning and interpret the world. Moreover, I described the study's methodology, methods, and mode of data analysis. Particularly, the study employed a qualitative inquiry that borrowed from aspects of narrative. Using the methods of interviews, artifacts, and reflection prompts, the data analysis took place through four phases consisting of narrative analysis and open coding. I also addressed trustworthiness and my positionality in relation to the study. Specifically, I underscored the fact I am a Black woman and my connection to the subjects as well as discussed the three techniques I employed to ensure quality of the study. Lastly, I concluded this section by discussing ethical considerations for the study. In the next chapter I will present the participants of the study.

CHAPTER 4: PARTICIPANTS

"I'm convinced that we Black women possess a special indestructible strength that allows us to not only get down, but to get up, to get through, and to get over." – Janet Jackson

Although all 12 of the participants in the study identified as cis-gendered Black women community college administrators, their backgrounds and journey into the field of higher education are diverse. In this chapter, I will present the participant sample so that the reader can gain a better understanding of the individual and collective group dynamic. First, I begin by giving a summary of the collective group. Next, I provide a brief summary of each individual participant. Specifically, I will highlight their education, immediate pass position, and their administrative pathway. Lastly, I will end with a chapter summary.

The Collective Group

The study participants worked at a combination of single and multi-campus institutions located in the Midwest and self-identified as cis-gendered Black women community college administrators. They represent four different states in the Midwest. Their institutional types included rural, urban, and urban/suburban locations. Based on Carnegie classifications, 75% of the participants worked at very large institutions, 17% worked at mediums size locations, and 8% worked at large institutions. It is important to note that while some participants are from the same institution, in most cases they work in different departments and/or at different campus locations. As noted in Table 3, the 12 participants are from six different institutions and nine different campus locations and/or departments. For example, participants Belle and Aszalee work at a predominately White multi-campus institution. However, their campuses are located in different states. The abbreviated titles of the participants included: President/Chancellor, Vice

President/Vice Chancellor, and Associate Vice President/Associate Vice Chancellor. Collectively, the participants have worked in higher education between 6 and 20 years. Specifically, the majority of the participants, 5 and/or 42% have worked in the field of higher education between 11 and 15 years. On average, 84% of the participants have been in their current role between 1 to 10 years, 8% less than a year, and 8% from 8 to 11 years. Moreover, all of the participants have held administrative positions in higher education prior to their current role. Over half of the respondents, and/or 59% supervise over 20 employees; while 16% supervise 6 to 15, and 25% supervise 1 to 5 employees.

Pseudonym	Current Abbreviated Title	Institution	Campus/ Building Location	Length of Time Working in Higher Education	Length of Time in Current Position
Brittany	Vice President	Purple	Main	11 to 15 Years	1 to 5 Years
Terry	Associate Vice President	Yellow	DuVernay	16 to 20 Years	1 to 5 Years
Mya	Associate Vice Chancellor	Blue	Goldberg	11 to 15 Years	6 to 10 Years
Hannah	Vice President	Red	Main	Over 20 Years	1 to 5 Years
Michelle	Vice President	Green	Main	16 to 20 Years	1 to 5 Years
Sarah	Vice Chancellor	Blue	Goldberg	Over 20 Years	6 to 10 Years

Table 3: Participants At A Glance

Table 3 (cont'd)

Name	Position	Campus/Building Location	Pseudonym	Years in Higher Education	Years in Current Role
Jennifer	Campus Vice President	Blue	Rashad	6 to 10 Years	6 to 10 Years
Diana	Campus President	Blue	Rashad	11 to 15 Years	6 to 10 Years
Monica	Campus President	Blue	Obama	11 to 15 Years	1 to 5 Years
Olivia	Vice Chancellor	Blue	Goldberg	16 to 20 Years	6 to 10 Years
Belle	Associate Vice President	White	Carroll	Over 20 Years	11 to 15 Years
Aszalee	Campus President	White	Morrison	16 to 20 Years	Less than a Year

*The Campus/Building Location column denotes the different campus location at multi-campus institutions. Main represents institutions with one campus location.

Brittany

Brittany currently serves as the Vice President of a division and as the Assistant to the President at an institution located in a rural setting. She directly supervises 1 to 5 employees and is part of the President's Cabinet. Her immediate past position was the Assistant to the President, and she served in that role between 1 to 5 years. She holds a master's degree in organizational management and has begun doctoral work. She has worked in the field of higher education between 11 to 15 years and has been in her current role between 1 and 5 years. Brittany came from the Natural History Museum sector and initially did not have intention on becoming a college administrator and/or working at an institution of higher education although both of her parents worked in the field. A colleague approached her on one of the museum boards that she

served about a job opening at her previous institution, and that was her introduction into the field. Brittany began her career as a Retention Specialist at a community college. In the beginning Brittany had difficulty adjusting to the environment, however the Chief Information Officer and/other administrators, who became mentors provided her with guidance. These individuals not only supported and advocated for her, they became sponsors. Brittany believes this is how her career got fast tracked, as she has been recommended for every position that she has held. Brittany's advice to current and aspiring Black women community college is "Be ready, be confident, and don't give any reason for anybody to disqualify you."

Terry

Terry currently serves as the Associate Vice President of a division and Director of Operations at a multi-campus institution located in an urban setting. She directly supervises 11 to 15 employees. In her immediate past position, she held a director title and served in that role between 16 to 20 years. Moreover, she holds a Doctorate Degree in Educational Leadership. She has worked in the field of higher education between 16 to 20 years and has been in her current role between 1 and 5 years. Terry's career in higher education began as an adjunct faculty member, teaching high school students in her intuition's high school program. After teaching, she became the director of the program for over sixteen years. Terry noted that it was not something she naturally aspired to do, the position became vacant and she was recommended for the job. In the same way, Terry was presented with the opportunity for her current position. She believes that mentorship and developing cross-departmental relationships is the reason she has been successful in her position. Terry's advice to current and aspiring Black women community college administrators is "… If you want to be a Black female leader at a community college, do

those things that other people are not willing to do. …. Sometimes you have to be the first one there and the last one to leave."

Mya

Mya currently serves as the Associate Vice Chancellor of a division at a multi-campus institution located in an urban setting. She directly supervises 1 to 5 employees. In her immediate past position, she held a director title and served in that role between 1 to 5 years. She holds a master's degree in business administration and has worked in the field of higher education between 11 to 15 years. She has served in her current role between 6 to 10 years. Mya started her career in the banking industry but decided that it was not a good fit. She transitioned to the field of higher education accepting a role in Student Services at her current institution. As a result of her education and background in finance, Mya was promoted to a Director position in the Administration and Finance Division. After transitioning to the field of higher education, Mya stated she knew early on she wanted to be a community college administrator. Noting her multiple marginalized identities, Mya highlighted the fact that she prepared for career ascension personally and professionally. Her advice to current and aspiring Black women community college administrators is "…to be comfortable in the skin you're in. Be confident in your ability and you have to have tuff skin."

Hannah

Hannah currently serves as Vice President of a division at an institution located in a rural setting. She is part of the President's Cabinet and directly supervises over 20 employees. In her immediate past position, she held a Vice President position and served in that role between 6 to 10 years. She holds a Doctorate Degree in Educational Leadership and has worked in the field of

higher education over years. She has served in her current role between 1 and 5 years. Hannah comes from a health care background and transitioned to a faculty position at a university. With limited success in advancing at the university, she sought out a career at the community college sector. She started her community college career as a coordinator, to gain administrative skills. She later became an Assistant Dean at another institution and held that position for 10 years. Hannah has been very strategic about seeking next-step positions, as she desires to become a college president. Hannah's advice to current and aspiring Black women community college administrators is "to go all the way to the presidency."

Michelle

Michelle currently serves as Vice Chancellor of a division at an institution located in a rural setting. She is part of the President's cabinet and directly supervises 1 to 5 employees. In her immediate past position, she held a Dean title and served in that role between 1 to 5 years. She holds a Doctorate Degree in Executive Leadership and has worked in the field of higher education between 1 to 20 years. She has served in her current role between 1 to 5 years. Michelle started her community college career as an adjunct instructor in business. After completing her doctorate degree, she started thinking and preparing to become a college administrator. She joined institutional committees and led the development of an Entrepreneurship Center on her campus. She was offered her first administrative role as a dean of a department by the college president. She later was promoted to her current role as Vice President. Michelle's advice to current and aspiring Black women community college administrators is "figure out what you have to offer. And let that lead you to how you approach a career in community college leadership. And be constantly open to learning."

Sarah

Sarah currently serves as Vice President of a division at a multi-campus institution with locations in urban and suburban settings. She directly supervises over 20 employees. In her immediate past position, she held an Associate Vice Chancellor title and served in that role between 11 to 15 years. She holds a master's degree in psychology and is currently a Doctoral Candidate. Sarah has worked in the field of higher education over 20 years. She has served in her current role between 6 to 10 years. Sarah's motivation to become a community college leader was from seeing other women in that role. She began her career as an Administrative Assistant to the Vice President of Educational Affairs. She often raised questions about job responsibilities and educational background to Black women administrators she came in contact with. She participated in leadership development programs as well as volunteered to be a part of special projects and other initiatives throughout the institution. She believes that honing her skills, being visible, networking, and mentoring have been the key elements of why she has been successful in her career. Sarah's advice to current and aspiring Black women community college leaders is "leverage what we do to help someone else. Be the voice for someone else at the table or behind a closed door. Push someone else along."

Jennifer

Jennifer currently serves as Campus Vice President of a multi-campus institution located in an urban setting. She directly supervises 6 to 20 employees. In her immediate past position, she held an Associate Dean title and served in that role between 1 to 5 years. She holds a master's degree in Community Counseling and has worked in the field of higher education between 6 to 10 years. She has served in her current role between 6 to 10 years. Jennifer began her community college career with a desire to work in student services or as an academic

advisor. Not long after she started, she was assigned to work as the Assistant to the Campus Vice President, putting her on an administrative track. Jennifer believes her supervisors saw something in her that she did not see in herself at the time. Shortly after Jennifer received the Assistant to the Campus Vice President position, her supervisor was transferred to another campus and she was moved into her current role, Campus Vice President. In addition to the training she received as the Assistant to the Campus Vice President, she sought out other administrators to mentor her and provide her with resources to assist her in being successful in her position. Jennifer's advice to current and aspiring Black women community college administrators is "Make sure that you communicate with your staff, you cannot be indecisive in making decisions. And also give power to people around you. Always be yourself."

Diana

Diana currently serves as the Campus President at a multi-campus institution located in an urban setting. She directly supervises over 20 employees. In her immediate past position, she served as a Campus Vice President and served in that role between 1 to 5 years. She holds a master's degree in education and has worked in the field of higher education between 11 to 15 years. She has served in her current role between 6 to 10 years. Diana's background is in K-12 administration, however she started her career in the community college sector as a project-based consultant. After working as consultant for the institution she was offered a position as the Director of Student Services. Coming from a K-12 background, Diana joined various committees and attended professional development institutions to hone her leadership skills in higher education. In addition to working in Student Services, she has also worked in Human Resources. Diana's advice to aspiring community college administrators is to know and understand that "They're going to be challenged, so they have to be prepared. We put in a lot of long hours [as

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administrators], to know that this is something that they really want to do. Because it'll have an impact on their family life, so that's really important."

Monica

Monica currently serves as Campus president at a multi-campus institution located in a rural setting. She directly supervises over 20 employees. In her immediate past position, she held a Dean title and served in that role between 1 to 5 years. She holds a master's degree in counseling education/student affairs and is currently pursuing the requirements for a Doctorate Degree. Monica has worked in the field of higher education between 11 to 15 years. She has served in her current role between 1 to 5 years. Monica began her career in higher education working in different positions at her undergraduate institution. After graduation she accepted a position as a Coordinator for Learning Communities at a university. While she held multiple positions during her tenure at the university, she began her community college journey as the Dean of Student Services. After serving as Dean for several years, she was offered the position of Campus President. Monica's advice to aspiring Black women community college leaders is "You have to work! You will not be recognized all the time. You just know, you come in and you do what you're supposed to do. …. So, it's like being on and giving more than 100%. And always seeking out things that you're interested in. It may not be in the realm of your job description, but if you think there's a skill set, do it. Because that's the only way you're going to advance. You have to separate yourself from the herd."

Olivia

Olivia currently serves as Vice President of a division at an institution located in an urban setting. She directly supervises 11 to 15 employees. In her immediate past position, she was a

Campus President and served in that role between 1 to 5 years. She holds a master's degree in education and has begun doctoral work. Olivia has worked in the field of higher education between 16 to 20 years. She has served in her current role between 6 to 10 years. Olivia's interest in higher education leadership was peeked through a class she took in her PhD program called Women in Higher Education. One of the assignments was to interview a woman administrator. At the time she found it very difficult to find a Black woman college administrator. Once she found and interviewed a Black woman administrator, she realized that role was something that she was interested in taking on. Offered an opportunity to work at her current institution by her mentor, Olivia began her community college career working in the student services division. She has also held Provost and Campus Vice President positions as well as had oversight over the institution's international education program. Olivia's advice to aspiring Black women community college administrators is " Do it! …. It's not going to be easy, but we need to do it for the generation behind us, we definitely need to do it."

Belle

Belle currently serves as Associate Vice President of a division at a multi-campus institution located in an urban setting. She directly supervises 1 to 5 employees. In her immediate past position, she held a Director title and served in that role between 1 to 5 years. She holds a Doctorate Degree in Education Administration Postsecondary and Leadership. Belle has worked in higher education for over 20 years. She has served in her current role between 11 to 15years. Belle started her higher education career working at a four-year university. She made her transition into the community college sector in a coordinator position in the Office of Admissions. While in her role as coordinator, she immediately knew that she wanted to ascend up the administrative ranks. In addition to working in admissions, she has also worked in the

Office of Multicultural affairs and with the institutions' Intercultural International Education program. Belle's advice to current and aspiring Black women community college administrators is to be "well rounded and set boundaries!

Aszalee

Aszalee currently serves as a Campus President of a multi-campus institution that has locations in both urban and suburban settings. She directly supervises over 20 employees. In her immediate past position, she held a Vice President title and served in that role between 6 to 10 years. She holds a Doctorate Degree in Educational Leadership. Aszalee has worked in higher education between 10 to 20 years. She has served in her current role less than 1 year. Aszalee began to think about college administration during her undergraduate career, as she watched and was mentored by two women of color. After graduating with her master's degree, the first position she held in higher education was Director of Student Support Services. Throughout her career she has held other Director, Dean, and Vice President positions. She believed that these different positions and serving on different committees and boards with the institution helped prepare her for her current role. Her advice to current and aspiring Black women community college administrators is "to stand on your own feet and be honest with yourself."

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I presented a collective overview of the 12 study participants as well as a brief introduction of each individual participant. While there are similarities in their journey to becoming community college administrators, they are different in their introduction into the field. For example, some of the participant's "knew" they wanted to work in higher education while others were simply presented with a job opportunity. Additionally, based on their

experiences and leadership journeys, the participants offered advice to current and aspiring Black

women community college administrators. The participant's journeys and perspectives offer

insight into their background, ways of knowing, and meaning making. Outlining the methods and

the theoretical framework, in the next section I will present the findings of the study

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS

"Every time African-American women talk about their lives, it pushes back the silence of the unknown, which has typically forecasted our lives into stereotypical fashions or objectified our lives as the exotic." –Rochelle Garner

The purpose of this study was to examine the ways in which self-identified Black women that serve as community college administrators make meaning of their identities as leaders. As a result of the data analysis, an interconnectedness of the Body, Spirit, and Soul (Mind, Will, Emotions) emerged in the findings. Specifically, underscoring that Black women are multidimensional tri-part beings and a holistic approach should be taken when analyzing their experiences. As such, this interconnectedness drew upon the following three themes: (a) The Body - I Am Not My Hair: The Identity, Appearance, and Representation of Black Women Bodies, (b) The Spirit - Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is Liberty: The Role of Faith and Spirituality, and (c) The Soul - More than Just a Seat at the Table: Giving Voice to the Voiceless. In the first theme, which represents the Body, the participants name and understand their identity as well as the perceptions of their Black body in their leadership roles. The second theme represents Spirit. Specifically, this theme conveys how faith and spirituality is woven into the seams of their identity as leaders. The third theme, which represents the Soul (Mind, Will, Emotions), demonstrates the willingness and deliberate conscious thinking to extend and carry out social justice practices and to be a voice for others. In another way, this theme illustrates how advocacy and altruism are embedded in the participant's identity as leaders. Rooted in Black Feminist Thought, in this Chapter I will present findings of the study, from a holistic view that encompass the Body, Spirit, and Soul in relation to how Black women community college administrators make meaning of their identity as leaders. This is demonstrated through a

collection of data from semi-structured interviews, artifacts, and a reflective prompt. First, I will discuss the findings of the study. Specifically, I will connect each theme, representing the tri-part being of the Black woman leader to the underpinnings of Black Feminist Thought. Lastly, I will present a summary of the chapter.

The Body:
I Am Not My Hair: Identity, Appearance, and the Representation of Black Bodies

I am not my hair.
I am not this skin
I am not your expectations, no (hey)
I am not my hair
I am not this skin
I am the soul that lives within
Songwriters: Shannon Sanders, Andrew Ramsey, India Arie Simpson, Aliaune Thiam

Whether influenced by media, history, or current events, there has been a stigma placed on Black women's bodies (Porter, 2013). For Black women, body-shaming goes beyond size or shape, it also comprises skin color, wardrobe, and hairstyles, all of which are connected to a person's identity. Regardless of educational attainment and title, these stigmas have followed Black women leaders into contemporary workspaces, including the community college setting. This theme underscores (a) the participant's identity awareness, (b) perceptions of Black bodies, and (c) (mis)representation of Black bodies. Specifically, the participants of the study shared narratives about their identity as leaders, how others see them as leaders, as well as their physical appearance as leaders.

As a collective, these women share similar experiences. However, consistent with the second distinguishing feature of Black Feminist Thought, it is important to highlight each individual story as a way of underscoring the diversity in experiences among Black women community college administrators. For example, in their shared narrative, the women of the

study disclosed encounters of sexism, racism, and ageism in their leadership roles. Although the instances shared by the participants boasted the same discriminatory nature, the exact details, actions, and unfolding of events were different for each participant. More notably, the participant's response and perceptions of their specific encounters were distinct.

Identity Awareness and Self-Actualization

As the women in the study began to make meaning of their identity as a leader, there was an acute awareness of self-actualization, specifically naming and knowing one's self. While collectively, the women saw themselves as Black women community college leaders, their individual perspectives and ways of knowing were demonstrated in the ways in which they self-identified. Participants openly shared what it meant to be a Black woman administrator in the community college setting and the influence it had on their identity as a leader. Making note of the demographics of the students who attend community colleges nationally, 47% Back and 56% Hispanic respectively Shannon & Smith, 2006 & AACC, 2016) the study participants demonstrated an awareness of what it meant for other people of color to see the physical representation of their Black bodies on the community college campus. This was readily apparent in the ways in which the leaders prioritized their identities. Moreover, the respondents openly shared a heightened level of awareness in relation to their multiple marginalized identities as well as how this awareness influenced their encounters with others in the community college sector. It is also important to note that these experiences were also influenced by the setting and demographic make-up of their respective institution.

The following narrative is particularly telling, as participants Belle, Hannah, and Monica discussed how their identity was prioritized in their roles as leaders. Significantly, they not only demonstrated the impact their identity had on their meaning making, but how self-actualization

influenced how they understood and saw themselves in their positions as community college administrators. For instance, Belle, a Vice President unapologetically talked about being a Black woman community college leader. She was very deliberate and intentional in her discourse as she celebrated her Blackness and confidence in the ways in which she presented her identities in her work and at her institution. Belle declared:

> I feel that when people look at me, they see my race first and I think that's how I present myself also. With regard to leadership, I don't know how to be anything else, other than a black woman leader because that's who I am.

In the same vein, Hannah also a Vice President specifically discussed her "skin color" in relation to how she identified. Hannah explained:

> I see myself first of all as someone that is always my skin color. Skin color comes first when people look at me. And so, I realized that I'm seen as a Black administrator, and there would be rare times when I'm seen as an administrator. But most of the time I'm seen as a Black administrator. So, I know that my skin color, me being African American that is part of my identity in terms of who I am.

In another way, Monica emphasized her identity as a leader but also noted the influence of her gender and race. Monica asserted:

> I see myself as a leader first and foremost. My gender, my race does influence, but at the core of who I am, I just think leadership. I don't think my gender influences my leadership style at all.

Monica goes on to state:

> Now, I must say, being Black... Now we're talking about how the world sees me. Now how the world sees me, it is a whole other thing. Because I think about when people see

the name, and when I walk in a room, because I'm on the younger side of things, I'm 35.

And so, I walk into a room and I'm not what people expect. I'm never what people expect.

It never fails. Not a day have I walked into a room or I've been in the room even

introduced and people are not surprised that I am the person. So how the world views me,

they see a Black female, and then they see a leader. And it's like the opposite of how I

view myself.

The participant's narrative validates the fact that Black women community college

administrators are multidimensional, and the facets of race and gender are essential components

of the meaning making composite of their identity as leaders. Moreover, this narrative is

consistent with research that argues the combination of race and gender informs the identity of

Black women leaders in higher education (Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Lloyd-Jones 2009). The

identities of race and gender were at the forefront of how the participants viewed themselves as

leaders as well as how they presented and navigated themselves in their leadership roles

throughout their institutions. Furthermore, this is consistent with the second distinguishing

feature of Black Feminist Thought, which underscores similar individual and collective

experiences of Black women. Driven by personal experiences and perspectives, the participants

shared similar individual and collective understandings of identity in their leadership role as

community college administrators.

Although Belle and Hannah both noted race as the primary identity in their leadership

role, interestingly enough, the women conveyed this through different standpoints. For instance,

Belle introduced her perspective with the ways in which she believed other people saw her in her

leadership role. On the other hand, Hannah introduced her point of view in the way she

actualized her own identity. In contrast to both Belle and Hannah, Monica prioritized her identity

as a leader initially. However, it is important to note that Monica goes on to support Belle and Hannah's comments, noting that she believed others see her race and gender first. Again, the fact that all three women in this example collectively identified in the same way, but prioritized their perspectives differently supports the second underpinning of Black Feminist Thought. Furthermore, supporting the third underpinning of Black Feminist Thought, the participant's narrative highlighted the emergence of a group standpoint. Among all of the participants there was a prominent notion that others always saw their Black bodies in relation to skin color and/or race first in their roles as Black women community college administrators.

In addition to race and gender in terms of identity awareness, multiple participants underscored ageism. For example, Mya shared an experience in relation to her identity awareness, specifically, the multiple marginalized identities associated with race, gender, and age in her leadership role. Vehemently pointing out she saw herself as a Black woman leader, Maya also noted that she was much younger than some of the employees she supervised. Recalling a time when she was intentionally cognizant of the fact that she was a "young" Black woman community college administrator, she shared a scenario of how she approached a sensitive situation with an older White, male employee that she supervised. Mya explained:

> I have to do an annual employee appraisal. One of the people that I supervise is a male, White male, who's older in age. It's sensitive anyway, just when you're dealing with that aspect of managing somebody like that [older White Male] and when you have to tell them something that might not be, that is not necessarily a positive. You have to be sensitive in general. But I think me being a younger Black woman, and delivering that to somebody, I took a lot of caution in how I tried to address that. It needed to be addressed…but I thought about it, of how I was going to address it.

Similarly, to the other participant's, Mya's narrative underscored the saliency of Black women being self-aware of their multiple marginalized identities in their leadership roles. However, her example gave a more nuanced look into how being self-aware is just one component of a Black women's leadership experience in the community college setting. This supports Waring's (2003) notion that Black women are often aware of their identities in academic spaces. Mya, along with the other participants of the study experiences not only highlights the influence of age, race, and gender on Black women identities as leaders, it also demonstrates how these multiple marginalized identities informed how they interacted with others and navigated their organizational spaces as leaders.

Perceptions of Black Bodies

While study respondents were fully aware of their identities and how they saw themselves, they also shared their experiences in relation to how others saw and interacted with their Black bodies in their work environments. In essence, in addition to their physical institutional spaces, they made meaning of their experiences and interactions using their bodies as sites of knowledge production. For Instance, Aszalee declared, "people see you differently because you're a Black woman, and you are often treated differently because you're a Black woman." Stereotype threat and preconceived notions of Blackness played an overarching theme in the dialogue of the participants in relation to their identity as Black women community college administrators. Evident in the previous section, the participants have a clear sense of their own individual identity, however they often felt their identity was under attack and burdened by the negative perceptions and stereotypes imposed on their Black bodies in their leadership roles.

The consensus of the participants emphasized that due to stereotyping and preconceived ideas, Black women community college administrators are looked upon as inferior and struggle

with the pressure of proving their capabilities in their positions. Mya, an Associate Vice Chancellor affirmed, "As Black women we always have this pressure to perform, because we're trying to prove to people as Black women that we can." In another way, Brittany, A Vice President, echoed Mya's sentiments about having to constantly prove your worth as a Black woman community college administrator with her statement, "When I'm at a meeting, it is you have to be better, you have to know your stuff, you have to be ready, you have to be competent, you have to be able to be outspoken." Along the same lines, Diana, a Campus President who has worked in the field of higher education close to 15 years vehemently asserted:

> As a Black person we try to do more, we have to be better. We have to prove to them out there, we're just as smart as, and can do as much as they can do. Coming from that background, it means that I have to prove to everyone that a Black female can do her job and do it well. So, as a Black female and also just a female, you know you have to fight with that good ole boys club. And I don't care how smart you are, or how much you know, you can't get into the good ole boys club. So that's always a challenge.

Although the community college sector boasts the largest number of Black women leaders in comparison to public 4-year institutions (American Association of Community Colleges, 2016), their presence in these roles have yet to be normalized. As reflected in the dialogue of the participants, Black women community college administrators believe because of their Black bodies, specifically race, and gender, they are looked upon differently in the workplace. In essence, they feel that they must work harder and be more qualified to garner respect in their leadership roles and often use overachievement as a way to display aptitude. In addition to feeling the pressure to perform twice as hard, the participant's narrative also highlighted experiences of being blatantly ignored and their contributions not being taken into consideration

due to their race and gender. In particular, participants Aszalee and Sarah shared almost identical examples of being marginalized in their leadership roles. Aszalee, a highly accomplished Campus President, discussed how even with her proven track record there have been times where she felt her voice was not being heard. Reflecting on previous experiences, Aszalee recalled times when she felt invisible and silenced. Aszalee proclaimed:

> There have been times for example, I would have an idea and I would express it in a meeting, but that idea would be overlooked until a White male would say the same thing.

In the same way, Sarah, a Vice Chancellor discussed a similar encounter, noting how taxing the experience can be. Sarah emphasized:

> When I'm in a situation in which I'm being marginalized, in which what I'm saying to contribute to the conversation is being diminished. Or I say something, or the person right next to me says the exact same thing and because it's a different race or different sex.... you hear that person, but you did not hear me.... That's when it becomes apparent. Like I said, I didn't know how Black I was until about three years ago. It can be a challenge.

Aszalee and Sarah's comments are a clear representation of regardless of associated power and authority, Black women community college administrator's ideas and contributions are often overlooked and rejected due to sexism and racism. Their experiences support Alfred's (2001) study on Black women in the academy that posits "Black women are rendered invisible by virtue of their femaleness and Blackness." Moreover, these examples were particularly telling as they suggest that White men are often looked upon as thought leaders, in essence invalidating the knowledge contribution of Black women. When talking about feelings of being ignored, isolated, and undermined in leadership roles due to race and gender, participants Olivia, Hannah and

Michelle shared stories that demonstrated how negative perceptions of Black bodies equated to a devalue of Black bodies. For example, Hannah somberly shared how she believed her race and gender has impeded her career ascension. Hannah emphasized:

> I've been in educational work I want to say for over 30 years, and I've been an administrator for about 20 of those 30. But I've been in positions where I have seen the president groom people that were different races, they're either White, they're either White female, or White male. I've seen them groomed for a presidency when I wasn't. When I had the degree and they didn't. When I had the experience and they didn't. I witnessed that, I want to say about 4 times in my career so far. ……. and it hurts, it hurts to see a President take an interest in someone else, and groom that person and you bring more to the table than the person that they're grooming. That hurts. And I'm encountering that even now. And so that's something that has been an experience for me that I have tried not to be bitter about.

In another way, Michelle, a Vice President who reports directly to the President of the institution shared an experience where she felt disparage, unsupported, and unsafe because of her identities as a Black woman community college administrator. Michelle melancholy told a story of an incident that took place with a White male subordinate in a staff meeting. Michelle explained:

> I challenged something that he said. And immediately he puts his finger in my face and starts yelling at me. Which, I'm your boss. I had to abruptly end the meeting, and at no point EVVVVEEEER did he feel the need to apologize to me. And so, I thought it was interesting. But one of the things that I thought was even more interesting was, I talked to some other colleagues and our HR Vice President and one of the things that I told him was - this was probably maybe about three or four weeks later. I thought about it. "Had I

been a White woman they would have called HR on him. It never crossed anybody's

mind that this man put his finger in my face and started yelling at me." I'm sure if I had

been a White woman, someone in HR would have felt the need to approach him about

that.

Hannah and Michelle's stories not only shed light on issues of oppression, but also of power and

privilege in the academy. As a result of her experience, Hannah came to understand that she

might never become a college president. Not because she did not have the credentials and/or

experience, but because of her identities. Michelle's encounter revealed a difference in the power

and privilege dynamic of Black women in their leadership role. Although Michelle was the

executive in charge by title, she believed that her subordinate's White privilege prompted him to

devalue her in that role.

Beyond just devaluing her intellectual contribution, Michelle's encounter escalated into a

disrespect and disregard of her personal space and led to a physical intimidation attempt.

Moreover, there were never any consequences for the person's action. The experiences of the

participants demonstrated limitations being placed on Black women community college

administrators due to stereotype threat and oppression as well as a general neglect of physical

boundaries. The participant's narrative is consistent with Singh, Robinson, and Williams-Green's

(1995) assertion that Black women administrators are often treated more negatively than their

colleagues of other genders and/or race. Moreover, they suffer from a great sense of isolation,

disenchantment, and lack of support in their roles. The denigrating treatment of Black women in

their leadership roles coupled with their inability to contribute intellectually or advance

professionally reproduces the narrative that they are inferior and promotes a stigma that limits

mobility as well as equity and inclusion.

(Mis)Representation of Black Bodies

Cognizant of the perception's others have of their Black bodies, negative stereotypes, and undesirable images of Black women portrayed in history and media, participants discussed how they were conscious of their outer appearance in relation to their roles as Black women community college administrators. According to Collins (2000), "Dealing with prevailing standards of beauty-particularly skin color, facial features, and hair texture-is one specific example of how controlling images derogate African American women" (p. 97). When asked do you think Black women community college administrators are expected to look and/or present themselves in a certain way, Belle simply replied, "Yes, like White people." Not only did participants share narratives about their skin color and attire/wardrobe, oddly enough, most of the discussion was centered on what was deemed as ethnic representation of hairstyles and the justification of their situated identity. For instance, Mya shared commentary about how Black women community college administrators have to be cognizant of their appearance in relation to wardrobe and hairstyles due to stereotype threat and preconceived negative notions of Blackness. Mya asserted:

> I think a lot of times Black Women get ridiculed. You read about it and hear about it all the time. Unfortunately, I think we do have to put a little more effort in things like that. We get stereotyped about hairstyles. Braids and natural hairstyles are still not accepted in certain places. Even though that is something that person wants to wear, even though I think you should have a right, as long as you look well kept. I think you should be able to look how you want to look. Unfortunately, I don't think Black women, especially in certain settings can totally be comfortable with that because it's this negative connotation with certain things.

In the same vein, Brittany, a Vice President, adds support to the idea that Black women's expressions of beauty and culture through their appearance is often frowned upon. Brittany affirmed:

I do think that having natural hair, having an Afro, men having dreads [locks], or having braids, or the traditional expressions of how we grew up with, those are not well received in a professional environment. So, I do think that we have to adjust, adapt, and conform.

In addition to supporting literature that posits Black women are often judged by their outer appearance (Collins, 2000; Harris-Perry, 2011; Gardiner, 2015), Mya and Brittany's perspectives were also confirmed by the lived experiences of Olivia. Olivia, who worked at a multi-campus institution, which has urban and suburban campus locations, shared a lived experience associated with how her outward appearance impeded her rise to presidency at one of the institution's suburban locations. Passionately, Olivia recalled:

I was a [campus] vice president at the [suburban campus location]. My boss [White male], when he was leaving …...we had a conversation. He took me to lunch, and he said, ... "I think you're ready for the presidency." I felt ready, I ran the campus. So, I felt ready.

…..I got the position, but not at [suburban campus location]. I was moved to the [urban campus location]. So, I became [urban campus location] president. And I remember talking to [the executive chancellor of the institution] at the time and saying, "I don't want [urban campus location]. I live in a [local suburb]. I've really never been exposed to city life. I've always lived in the suburbs. I'm already here, I'm established at the [suburban campus location]. Why can't I be here?" The [Executive chancellor of the institution] said, "You will fit better at [urban campus location]. You know how you put

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those head wraps on, and you always want to wear your African clothes. You'll fit so

much better at the [urban campus location]". And I never became President, at the

[suburban campus location]. But I was president at the [urban campus location]. So

instead of putting me there, you hire another White person.

Olivia's experience speaks directly to the stereotype threat and constant results of

misrepresentation of Black bodies and negative imagery associated with outward appearance. As

asserted by Collins (2000), controlling images and external definitions of Black womanhood

place limitations and restrictions on Black women leaders. In this example, there was an

unjustified connection drawn between Olivia's blackness, attire, and the urban community. The

notion that she "fits" better in an urban community suggests that she does not belong and or will

not be valued in suburban and/or predominately White space. This experience is also consistent

with Gardiner (2015), who maintains women leaders in higher education are perceived,

approached, and oftentimes defined by their outward appearance. Olivia, who is still employed at

the institution went on to discuss how this incident currently impacts her identity in her role as a

Black woman community college administrator. Olivia proclaimed:

So, I struggle with identity when I'm getting dressed in the morning. I think about it

sometimes. I want to wear a beautiful Black African outfit. Then I have to think about

what would happen if we have a meeting today. For example, we had a board [meeting]

yesterday. I consciously did not put an African outfit on because we had a board

[meeting]. And looking back now, and I'm thinking…. why didn't I put it on? Well, we

had a board [meeting]. So, the board members sit there, then I may get asked to stand up

and speak. Are they going to respect me when they see me in what I'm wearing? So, I

need to dress like them, so that I can be respected. I need to speak like them so I can be respected.

While something as nuanced as outer appearance such as clothes and hairstyles may seem small to members of dominant society, culturally, they have specific meaning in relation to the identity, individuality, and representation for Black women. Similarly, to Olivia's narrative, Jennifer, a Campus Vice-President shared how when she first started in her position, she grappled with her identity, specifically being comfortable wearing her natural hair [in locks] in her role as a Black woman community college administrator. Jennifer emphasized:

So, for a minute I was going through a physical...I guess, identity crisis. But after a while I realized that it's not about having natural hair or looking a certain way, it's about how you perform at your job.

Jennifer and Olivia specifically attached their identity as Black women community college administrators to their outward appearance. Both participants seemingly grappled with the connection of their identity as Black women and the representation of their Black bodies in their administrative roles. The overall consensus of the participants affirmed how wardrobe and hairstyle could possibly feed into negative stereotypes and devalues how Black women are viewed as community college leaders as well as the quality of their work and performance. Their responses suggest that Black women community college administrators are aware of who they are as leaders. However, it also illuminates that they understand that because of their race and gender they may be ridiculed and/or not respected in their position for their abilities when they do not conform to dominant standards of beauty. While Jennifer and Olivia dealt with internal conflict in relation to their outward appearance, Belle shared firsthand experiences of feeling attacked and ostracized because of her choice of hairstyle at her institution. Belle, a Vice

President, shared multiple experiences she faced in relation to wearing her natural hair in the workplace. Belle stated:

> My hair is out today. Sometimes I wear it straight. I try as an educator, I try to educate. But there's been times that (long sigh)....… I had a dean [White woman], my hair was in braids at the time, in micros, and she reached out to me to touch it. And I moved back, and I said "awt, awt, awt." And she said, "Well what's wrong?" And she was genuine. And I said, "you can't touch my hair." And she said, "well why not?" And I said, "because it's mine, and because I don't try to touch you or your hair and that's assault." And she was so perplexed, and she said, "well it looks soft." And I said, "it is." …. I've had a Black man on campus…….when I started wearing my hair out in an Afro, he walked by and put up a Black power fist. I'm like, "Oh, that's interesting." I've had a White man, he said to me that my hair looked like "that of an animal." .... So, the other two [remarks], the Black power, ok whatever and even the woman who tried to touch me, I took that in stride. But when the guy referenced me, my hair to an animal, I went to the president.

Belle's experience provides an example of how Black women community college leaders often have to deal with diminishing comments and negative psychological experiences in the form of microaggressions and blatant disrespect based on their outward appearance. Specifically, the physical contact and reference to "an animal" is an illustration of the social power dynamic that historically and routinely objectifies Black bodies. It is experiences like Belle's that make some Black women community college administrators grapple with compromising and altering their outward appearance in their leadership role. For instance, Michelle and Aszalee also contended with their appearance, specifically in terms of their hair as Black women leaders. So much so,

both women made decisions to alter their appearance as they accepted and/or pursued new positions. Michelle and Aszalee's, narratives discussed how they dealt with preconceptions of their Black bodies as women community college administrators. Michelle stated:

> When I first started being an administrator, I had locks and I cut them off. And people asked, "Why did you do it?" …… "Ehh, because I don't know how well that's going to play. It may distract people and I don't want to distract people." I knew those locks were distracting people. And nobody ever said anything to me, but when I cut them, they were like, "Oh, your hair is so awesome." …… "Your face is so pretty, we can see you."
> Those kinds of comments. "It looks so professional." I know what those things mean.

In the same way, Aszalee discussed the adjustments she made to her hair during her interviewing process:

> I have natural hair. …. My hair was blonde. But when I interview for positions, I would let the darkness of my hair grow out. So, it was not as blonde. Because not everyone is ready for a blonde hair Black woman who has natural hair.

While the respondents were confident in their identity as Black women leaders, their lived experiences suggest that Black women community college administrators often encounter unquestioned daily experiences of stereotype threat. As such, the participant's narratives support Collins (2000) argument that "African American women come to understand the workings of intersecting oppressions without obvious teaching or conscious learning" (p. 97). Their prescribed "preventive" action to alter their hair demonstrated a conciseness of the interworking of race and gender associated with being a Black women leader. Due to their tenor as community college administrators and previous experiences, they made a conscious decision to mitigate

perceived shaming, belittlement, and being passed over for positions due to their choice of hairstyle.

The overarching commentary shared about misperceptions of Black bodies, specifically in relation to wardrobe and hairstyles underscored a collective link of shared experiences by the participants. As noted in the participant's commentary, they made meaning with their bodies. Particularly, some participants dealt with it internally, reported the issue, while others were "proactive" and attempted to avoid the issue by making adjustments prior to actual offenses occurring. While the respondents faced similar experiences, their perspectives and responses to those occurrences varied. Again, this is consistent with the second distinguishing factor of Black Feminist Thought, which asserts Black women have similar individual and collective challenges and notes the differences in their responses. As such, this likely contributed to the diversity in approaches and grappling with the negative experiences associated with the Black women community college administrator's wardrobe and hairstyles.

The Spirit:
Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is Liberty: The Role of Faith & Spirituality

"I knew only that despite the troubles of my world, the suffering I witnessed around them and within me, there was always available a spiritual force that could lift me higher, that could give me transcendent bliss wherein I could surrender all thought of the world and know profound peace." -bell hooks

For the purposes of this study, faith and spirituality are defined as "one's belief in a higher power greater than one's self" (Garner, 2004, p. 4). While none of the interview questions asked about faith and spirituality, interestingly, faith and spirituality were common threads across the majority of the women in the study. For instance, over half of the participants explicitly identified and/or discussed their faith and/or spiritual practices. Moreover, 4 out of the 12 participants submitted Bibles as their artifact. Collins (2000) argues that in addition to the

intersecting oppressions of race, class, gender, and sexuality, religion is one of the immediate identities that Black women must come to terms with, within their lived experiences. The participant's comments were consistent with the third distinguishing feature of Black Feminist Thought. The dialogical relationships tenet of BFT, not only highlights the importance of group standpoints, but also emphasizes the connection between thoughts and actions. On the one hand, through thought and introspection, the participants examined their identities as leaders through a spiritual lens. On the other hand, the consciousness of their belief in a higher power influenced their actions as they navigated their roles as leaders as well as how they overcame barriers and adversity.

As noted previously, the missions of community colleges are vastly different from those of other postsecondary intuitions. Therefore, scholars and researchers argue that it is imperative for community college leaders to support the demands of this specialized population while executing the mission of the institution (Amey, 2005; Hawkins, 2009; Nevarez, Wood, and Penrose 2013). According to Windley Walker & McPhail Johnson (2009), "the challenging culture and proliferation of forces against the 21st century community college will require a different kind of leadership that is anchored in spirituality (p.322). Supporting Windley Walker & McPhail Johnson's (2009) argument, collectively the study participants proudly and unapologetically discussed the interconnectedness of their faith and spirituality as oneness with their identity as a leader as well as through acts and demonstrations within the community college environment.

Faith and Spirituality as Identity

Although faith and spirituality are present in literature associated with Black women higher education leaders, more often than not, it is not presented through the lens of identity and/or meaning making. While Garner's (2004) work examines the ways in which Black women leaders made meaning of their spiritual selves in their leadership roles, usually, spirituality is reflected as a bi-product of self-care and/or a coping mechanism when barriers and adversity are experienced in the workplace (Bacchus, 2008; Bowen-Reid and Harrell, 2002). This study is no exception. However, it is also important to highlight that the participants in this study not only found it important to identify as a Black woman leader, they also underscored the saliency of identifying themselves based on their faith and spiritual beliefs.

When announcing her identities in reference to leadership, Terry stressed the saliency of not losing sight of her identity and knowing who she is. Terry explained:

> My identity as a Black female leader, as a Black female Christian leader, those are the things that do define me. And I pray daily to be wise, like Solomon. So that I am doing what I've been asked to do without compromising who I am.

Not only did Terry specifically identify herself as a Christian leader, she also noted that her daily prayer was to be wise as King Solomon, a powerful and wise leader referenced in the Bible. In essence, Terry demonstrated a centering of her leadership identity and meaning making with her spirituality and Faith. Similarly, Hannah also identified herself as a Christian community college administrator. However, Hannah found it important to maintain congruence in her leadership identity by being a reflection of her spiritual belief. Hannah stated:

> I am role modeling being a Christian administrator in a post-Christian world. …. I'm not mixing church and state, I don't want to be accused of doing that, but I want people to

still be aware that [I am] a Christian. And it helps me when someone will come to me to say, "I know that you're Christian, I know your faith is strong, will you please pray for my family member?" …. "Will you please pray for this?" That tells me that I'm doing it right, that I am being respectful of the separation of church and state. But at the same time, I have a mannerism about me that depicts what a Christian administrator, what an African American Christian administrator is like.

It is evident by Hannah's intentional actions to mirror her faith through her mannerisms and interactions (praying for colleagues and staff) that her spirituality is present in her identity as a community college administrator. Supporting the third distinguishing feature of Black Feminist Thought, the influence of Hannah's faith and spirituality in her leadership role promoted the presence of clear thought and distinct observable actions. For instance, taking into consideration the role of church and state, Hannah intentionally thought about her role as a "Christian administrator" and how to execute actions that underscored her faith and spiritual beliefs in her role as a leader. Moreover, Hannah's actions are consistent with Warring's (2003) assertion that Black women leaders perceive the ability to build relationships as a primary component of who they are as leaders. As such, Hannah does this by infusing her faith and spirituality in her role as a Black woman community college administrator.

Participants Aszalee, Belle, Hannah, and Sarah submitted Bibles as artifacts to represent their identity as Black woman community college leaders. Beyond the commonality of the actual object, when describing their artifact, all of the participant's narratives provided examples of spiritually minded leadership that specifically named and emphasized a connection with a higher power. Participants Aszalee, Belle, Hannah, and Sarah shared:

Aszalee: I have a picture of my Bible. And that allows me to remain centered and grounded. And when there are challenges, not even challenges, there are times I have to give it to God and leave it there.

Belle: My Bible and it represents me. ….. I just try to stay focused on having that be ever present in my life. So that I can draw on my faith to do the best that I can. In bad times for comfort, in good times for rejoicing, [and] for discernment in all things. It's just important to me. And you know if things don't ever work out, I know it's bigger than me, it's bigger than the college.

Hannah: The Bible represents my leadership identity in that it helps me with self-control. And it also helps me with identifying my proper relationship that is not all about me. …. I have an obligation in my job to work as unto the Lord, not as unto man. And that is far exceeding what any boss could ask me to do because I have accountability.

Sarah: It is only the Father who should receive credit for any good works achieved by me.

While in the practical sense a Bible is a collection of scriptures and/or written words that denotes God's promises as well as Biblical laws and principles, symbolically, for the study participants it represents the ultimate leadership guide and tool to provide understanding. Moreover, the spiritual component of the participant's leadership identity embodies an intimate relationship with themselves and a higher power. This finding supports Garner (2004) study assertion that "It is spirituality which reminds them every day of why they are in the Academy having an impact on faculty, students, and administrators. It is spirituality that serves as the empowering resistance and allows these women to maintain their sense of moral and ethical character without compromising or sacrificing their principles for someone else" (p. 81). Moreover, the

participant's responses also support Windley Walker & McPhail Johnson's (2009) argument that, "community college leaders respond to the needs of their institutional cultures, and spiritual tenets like hope and compassion have been at the heart of community colleges since their inception (p. 342). Clearly, this is another example of how Black women who serves as community college administrators infuse their spirituality into their identity as leaders.

The Tool of Prayer

In addition to demonstrating a pronounced awareness of their identity in their leadership role, participants emphasized how they embodied their faith and spirituality through the action of prayer. For the purposes of this study the act of prayer is defined as communication with a higher power. Prayer allows you to connect with something beyond your current space as well as provides a source of strength in moments of crisis (Shahjahan, 2004). In varying ways, the women in the study discussed how as leaders when faced with barriers and adversity one of the strategies they employed was their faith and spirituality through prayer. An example of the barriers and adversities the participants faced were sexism, racism, ageism, stereotype threat, feeling isolated, and feeling invisible. Jennifer recalled a stressful situation where prayer was one of the actions she used to combat emotional labor. Jennifer shared:

> So, I think one of the most stressful times for me, we had a campus president here, probably about six years ago, prior to our current president coming in, who lacked experience and was not familiar with certain campus policies and procedures. So, every day when you came in to work you never knew what to expect. And as her second I was more so, trying to provide assistance. But she didn't take it as me providing assistance, she looked at it as something else. So, then that kind of created a negative space when I was only trying to provide assistance. ……. I released it [stress] through exercise. I do

yoga, I do that still now, so that's how I try to release it. And I prayed a lot, I'm going to

be honest with you. And eventually she was moved.

While Jennifer employed a combination of actions to relieve stress associated with her role as a

Black woman community college administrator, she noticeably emphasized the point that she

prayed a lot. Jennifer further noted that she believed because of her action of prayer, the campus

president whom she was having issues with was moved, in turn relieving her from a stressful

work environment. Similarly, the role of faith and spirituality was demonstrated by the way

Sarah responded to issues in her day-to-day practices through her spiritual ways of knowing.

Prayer played a critical role in how she constructed her identity as a Black women community

college administrator and how she managed and interacted with stressful situations. When

reflecting on a time that she was excluded from a project from what she deemed was in relation

to her gender and race, Sarah noted how she used prayer as a strategy to overcome obstacles.

Like Jennifer, what may have been seen as her not doing anything from the outside was in

essence her doing everything from the inside spiritually. This is evident from the following

statement. Sarah recalled:

> Sometimes the strategy is to do nothing. And in doing nothing, you're doing something.
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> And I'll give you an example. I had a community person come to me and say that "you
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> know you're not being included in this regional effort." I said, "I'm aware". "Well you
>
> should be fighting. You should be jumping up and down. You should be doing this, and
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> you should be doing that." And I said, "no, I'm not going to do that. Because I do
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> understand that I should be involved, and I've made phone calls and I've been ignored.
>
> So, I'm going to do nothing at this point, and it'll come back around." But I also think
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> that's because of my strong faith. And I think that I give a lot of weight to my faith. So,

with the respect of doing nothing, I may be saying that I'm doing nothing, but really, I'll

pray about it and let it go. So, it's me doing nothing and God doing everything.

Once again, the connection of faith and spirituality was demonstrated through Sarah's action in

her leadership role. Not only is faith and spirituality a part of these women's identity, it is also a

strategy they employ when faced with barriers and adversity as well as part of the way they

problem solve. Confirming the notion of faith and spirituality as a strategy for dealing with

barriers and adversity, when asked to share a strategy for managing stress as a Black women

community college administrator, Aszalee noted, "I pray a lot, I have a good spiritual connection

with my God." Similarly, Hannah's responded:

 I study the word [the Bible] a lot. I pray a lot, I'm very firmly anchored in my church and

spirituality because I need that counterbalance. ……If I didn't have my faith in my Lord

and Savior Jesus Christ, I would have been lost a long time ago. So, my faith helps me

tremendously, because it gives me a correct outlet in prayer to deal with those feelings of

rejection and anger. And also, to still encompass hope and realize that what man may do

or say is not the last say so.

The fact that these Black women community college administrators named spirituality as a

strategy they employ to combat and navigate their workspace is consistent with research that

posits prayer and spiritual beliefs assist Black women leaders in managing and coping with stress

in the workplace (Hall, Everett, & Hamilton-Mason, 2012; Shorter-Gooden, 2004; Mattis, 2000;

& Mattis 2002). Moreover, the participants' responses also support Shahjahan's (2004) argument

that spirituality is intertwined with identity and cultural knowledge. In essence, in their role as

community college leaders, through intentional thought and action, faith and spirituality provide

a source of connection with a higher power and is grounded in their demonstrated leadership application.

The Soul (Mind, Will, Emotions):
More than a Seat at the Table: Giving Voice to the Voiceless

"If they don't give you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair." -Shirley Chisholm

By virtue of their title and job responsibilities, Black women college administrators are afforded a seat at the table. In other words, they are invited to be on internal and external committees, participate in board meetings, and represent their institution in the community due to their position within the organization. However, while their title gets them in the room, it's their Soul (mind, will, emotions) that enlists them to be the voice of the voiceless and advocate for others. As a reminder, for the purposes of this study, Soul (mind, will, emotions) represents the connection of the intellectual and emotional realms of consciousness and subconsciousness. In another way, the Soul (mind, will, emotions) represents psychological experiences surrounding mindfulness, resolve, and sentiment. Accordingly, Garner (2004) emphasized that Black women higher education leader's commitment to service and sense of altruism expands beyond the borders of their work location and "proves invaluable to one's own soul satisfaction along with a continued need to carry the torch" (p. 76). Furthermore, Garner (2004) argues that for Black women higher education administrators, "service is far greater than being recognized for the titles they hold. Clearly, the title or role of these women does not define who they are, and their role is not as important as the work they do" (p. 80). For example, Brittany declared, "I've never been about position, or power, or money, and I think that's been why I've been chosen. Because those things aren't why I do things…. It's really about the mission, it really is about helping people." Noticeably, there was an overarching desire among the participants to pay it

forward by advocating, serving, and assisting other Black women and people of color in their

leadership roles.

Befitting of the attributes of advocacy and service, as previously mentioned, the majority

of Black women leaders serve in the community college sector (AACC, 2016). Nationally, the

community college sector serves the majority of students of color in comparison to the majority

of four-year public institutions (Shannon & Smith, 2006 & AACC, 2016) as well as their local

community. Seemingly, working in the community college sector affords Black women

administrators the opportunity to authentically advocate and serve students and communities of

color. The participant's narratives illustrated a component of their identity as Black women

community college leaders as an altruistic act that focused on the growth, well-being, and

uplifting of marginalized people and communities in which they belong. Moreover, the

narratives shared in this theme are consistent with the all six distinguishing features of Black

Feminist Thought.

Advocacy and Altruism as Identity

One of the most common ways in which study participants made meaning of their

identity as community college leaders was through the actions of advocacy and altruistic

behavior. To some extent, all the participants in the study noted sentiments of a personal value

that promoted ethics of caring where personal accountability and actions were a strategic process

in helping to move Black women and communities of color forward (Collins, 2000). For

instance, Terry affirmed, "I feel as a Black leader, I have a responsibility to be accountable, to be

accountable to not just work in a silo. I have a responsibility to share experiences to determine

how I help other people as they progress and the journey." In another way, Belle emphasized,

"…the opportunity to help other people, I think to me, it's just so rewarding, it's very

rewarding." While the participant's acts of advocacy and altruism were declared in different ways, collectively the nature of their standpoints offered a context embedded in their lived experience and value systems. This is consistent with the second and third distinguishing feature of Black Feminist Thought, which affirms that Black women have similar individual and collective experiences, of which group knowledge and/or standpoint will emerge. The collective standpoint that emerged was the notion of giving back to the communities they serve. These findings also support (Garner, 2004; Davis & Maldonado, 2015) the argument that Black women leaders feel an obligation to lift up others as they make strides in their role as leaders.

Not only was there a sense of obligation demonstrated via the interviews, 8 out of the 12 participants' reflection prompts reflected and/or explicitly demonstrated a desire to give back and assist others. Moreover, 3 out of the 12 participants artifacts also represented the notion of advocacy and altruism in their identities as leaders. What was particularly telling about the participant's responses was that neither the reflection prompt nor request for artifact specifically outlined acts of service. For instance, the women in the study were asked to submit an artifact that represented their identity as leaders and/or leadership journey. The reflection prompt simply stated, "As a result of my identity as a leader and/or leadership journey, I am/I will." Specifically, in their reflection prompts, participants Diana, Olivia, and Belle wrote about their commitment to helping other Black women. Diana stated:

I am committed to helping other young Black women succeed in their leadership journey.

Along the same lines Olivia declared:

> [I will] make myself available for mentoring young Black women who wish to become
>
> administrators. My experience has allowed me to notice the gaps that exist in navigating

the leadership journey. And I will do my best to be a source of support to those coming

behind me.

Similarly, Belle emphasized:

[I will} Try to empower as many Black women as I can (without neglecting self) in their

leadership journey to become an administrator, faculty member, or researcher.

One of the primary goals of prompted narrative writing is reflection and increased self-

awareness. According to Levine, Kern, & Wright, (2008), "reflection and self-awareness are

intimately related (p. 730). As such, the participant's responses clearly demonstrate and support

the claim that advocacy and altruism are essential components of how Black women community

college administrators make meaning as leaders. Moreover, it highlights the overlap of historic

and lived experiences of racial and gender bias as fuel for the participants' advocacy and

altruism. This supports the first distinguishing feature of Black Feminist Thought, which links

Black women's oppression and activism. The women in the study reported that because of their

lived experiences, they had insight and a deeper understanding of the barriers and challenges that

other Black women administrators often face. Therefore, they felt that it was important to strive

to support other Black women in their roles. The respondent's reflections confirmed Black

women community college administrator's meaning making/illustrates a connection to their Soul

(mind, will, emotions).

Along the same lines, the respondent's artifacts and articulation of their meaning also

established and inherited look into their dedication to servanthood. For example, Olivia's artifact

was a figurine of a high heel shoe. As she began to share the story behind her selection, she

instructed me to look around her office, which was located on the fifth floor of the institution's

administrative building. As I began to look around the room, I noticed wall art of shoes, shoe quotes, and an array of other items associated with shoes. Proudly, Olivia explained:

> If you look around, you see shoes. And a lot of people think I'm just addicted to shoes, but it has a symbolic meaning for me. I always walk in the shoes of the people that I lead and serve, always. So, if you look, at my shoes over there, they're here [pointing to more shoe themes items]…my clock is a shoe. There's a shoe saying there. There's a shoe tattoo on my arm. There are shoes all over and under my desk, it's shoes. But it's more than just liking shoes, it's a way for me to remember to try to walk in my students, my staff, and even my boss shoes when making decisions.

When discussing her choice of artifact, it was apparent by Olivia's narrative, tone, facial expression, and body language that she was dedicated to service. Moreover, her statement "it's a way for me to remember to try to walk in my students, my staff, and even my boss shoes when making decisions", reveals a sense of empathy and stewardship in her roles as a community college leader. Similarly, Michelle expressed the same enthusiasm as Olivia when she described her artifact. Although Michelle's artifact was different, it was also a representation of her commitment to advocacy and altruism as a Black women community college administrator. Michelle's artifact was a 3D colored wall art portrait of Harriet Tubman walking through the woods leading slaves to freedom. The portrait was a gift from staff members that she previously supervised. She received the wall art about a year after she accepted her current role as Vice President. When discussing how the artifact represented her identity as a leader, I instantly noted how Michelle's face lit up with glee as she joyfully began to describe the picture of her artifact and its origins, including a brief history lesson on Harriet Tubman. Michelle ecstatically stated:

Harriett Tubman is so inspiring to me! She says she could have freed more slaves if they knew they weren't free. I think I take my freedom as a guide to my decisions and how I navigate being an African American female leader. ….. I really do believe education is the only thing that gives you freedom. To me to be a part of helping Black and Brown kids be educated, I think it's an opportunity every day.

Michelle's artifact was literally a visual representation of lifting as you climb and/or going back to help other people of color. This visual representation is closely tied to the way she views herself as a Black women community college administrator as well as highlights the principles of advocacy and altruism in the ways in which she makes meaning of her identity as a leader. While Terry's artifact was not as elaborate as Olivia and Michelle's, her description and narrative were just as exhilarating. Terry, who has been working in higher education between 16 and 20 years presented a picture of students from the first class of a program she implemented, noting that she still keeps in contact with the majority of the students. The photo was in an 8 X 10 bronze frame and pictured were 10 students representing diversity in gender and race. Holding the frame adjacent to her face, with a smile, Terry proudly declared:

We're servants and I know that people think that's cliché, but we are servants, we are servants as leaders. We are servants and we have to be last. The Bible says the last will always be first. And I think about that. That's what I love to do.

Again, the manner in which the participants expressed their narrative, posture, and enthusiasm for serving, helping, and advocating for others illustrated altruistic behavior. In essence, supporting Garner's (2004) claim that oftentimes Black women administrators "leadership is not based on self-interest, but rather that the interest of others is placed at the forefront" (p.81). Moreover, it illustrates the powerful point that Black women community college administrator's

worldview and lived experiences shape the way they process and execute their duties and inform their identity as leaders.

Voices at the Table

Although throughout the study participants reported feelings of isolation and exclusion, they also discussed the saliency of speaking up and advocating for others. For example, Sarah emphasized, "I think it's my job to represent those who do not have a voice at the table. …..It's my job to represent the community in which I serve." In another way, Monica shared a story about her experience at a higher education women's event where she felt it was important to speak up to and for younger professionals of color. Monica explained:

> I was at a function, in a room and the person talking was a Caucasian older female. She was giving advice, "women this... and we women" ... and just all of these things, and I had to make the comment.

Monica goes on to declare:

> I'm like, "I appreciate that, I appreciate a solidarity. But do you understand that privilege that you have, I don't have? It's great that you're doing ru, ru, rah, rah, but don't you think we need to really talk about that?" Because there were other younger minorities, females in the room… who were going to walk out of there like oh yeah, me and Peggy Sue, we walked into the room and it's the same deal. No, it's not!

Affirming the fourth distinguishing feature of Black Feminist Thought, the importance of the intellectual contributions of Black women, in their leadership roles the participants of the study proved to be dedicated to contributing the production of knowledge. Monica's example is a clear demonstration of audible intellectual advocacy. She not only used her voice to speak on behalf of other women of color, she also used her voice to acknowledge, educate, and bring to the

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forefront areas of privilege. Moreover, Monica's commentary sheds light on a powerful point: the saliency and value of the Black women's voices. It supports the argument that Black women have critical insight into their lived oppressions, as opposed to others (Collins, 2000). Furthermore, it recognizes that it is the Black women intellectual's role to "…produce facts and theories about the Black female experiences that will clarify a Black women's standpoint for Black women" (Collins, 2000. p. 469). Her discourse demonstrated the ways in which women who serve as community college administrators can deconstruct false narratives and make intellectual contributions to discourse on Black women leaders.

In another way, Michelle shared how as a Black women community college leader, she felt accountable to be the voice for her race and other people of color at the table. Michelle declared:

> I feel like as a Black woman what that means, me being a leader is that I have a responsibility, for me personally, to my race that I am at that table. So, if that means that may negatively impact Black and Brown people, that we're making decisions that are not inclusive. I need to have the confidence to help make those decisions better. Being a Black leader to me is knowing that diversity matters and whether diversity is the reason you're there or not, diversity matters and you're at a table and you need to speak to the perspective that you bring.

Michelle intently goes on to share the story of how she believed her voice at the table was crucial to the well-being of students of color on her campus. Michelle methodically shared:

> We deputized our security officers during the mist of Black Lives Matter. And I'm getting chills even thinking about it. And I struggled a lot. I still struggled with if something happened to a student on campus. Did I speak to what needed to be spoken to for those young men? ……. I remember telling my own children that I got to make sure I'm

saying what needs to be said, in case something happens to somebody. I really struggled

with that, and I think, for me, it made me more aware of the fact that I am at this table for

a reason and if I don't say something, somebody could be hurt.

Supporting the sixth distinguishing feature of BFT, relationship to other social justice, Michelle's

example was clear representation of a commitment to other social justice efforts. While she

mentioned the Black Lives Moment in her example, she also noted how this decision would

directly impact young Black and Brown men of color. Moreover, the fact she mentions that she

still "gets chills" when she relives the experience, conveys an interconnectedness of Soul (mind,

will, emotions), to her commitment to service and identity as a Black women community college

leader.

The respondents in the study also demonstrated a pronounced dedication to hands on

service within their institutions and communities they serve. Acts of mentoring formally and

informally was the primary role in which the participants gave back and served others.

Thompson and Dawkins (2012) acknowledge that mentoring is the most common on campus

service of Black women higher education administrators. As such, it was no surprise that all the

participants indicated that they served in a formal or informal mentor capacity. In essence,

Hannah discussed going out of her way to advice, support and acknowledge other Black

employees at her institution. Hannah candidly stated:

> For instance, we have a number of African American young people that are, I shouldn't
>
> say a number, but well for us, it's a number because we have so few that are enrolled in
>
> [institution's name] doctoral program. And I go out of my way to congratulate them. To
>
> let them know that I'm supporting them. That anything that they need just let me know.
>
> And they've come to me to say "I really appreciate you doing that. Because I don't work

for you, I don't report to you. And yet, you really take a time out to ask about how my

studies are going, to sit and listen, and you really show me that you care."

In the same vein, Brittany noted that she had three formal student mentees at her institution. Like

Hannah, she was very intentional in her efforts of fostering mentoring relationships and

community building. Brittany exclaimed:

I'm always looking to help the underdog. I'm always looking for somebody who has that

interest in their eyes, and they may be struggling, if they just had somebody to pull them

over. …..I'm always seeking out how I can be the bridge or someone who pays it

forward.

According to Futrell, Coker, and McKenzie (2012), "Serving as a mentor requires sacrifice on

your part. It is a commitment of time and energy and must be done from the heart" (p. 54).

Hannah and Brittany's narrative clearly demonstrates how service, advocacy, and altruism are

intertwined in the leadership identity of Black women community college administrators. The

manner in which both women went out of their way to seek individuals to assist and mentor at

their institutions is a direct representation of their commitment to service and paying it forward.

While service is usually expected and required for faculty members at 4-year institutions, more

often than not higher education administrators, especially at community college are not tasked

with the same prerequisite. Like many of the other participants in the study, Jennifer's mentoring

and commitment to service expands beyond the boards of her institution. When discussing her

role as a mentor she proudly shared the diversity in her mentees in formal and informal

relationships. Jennifer stated:

I mentor my staff, I have students, young ladies at the college. I mentor young ladies in

foster care as well outside of the school.

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The overall consensus of the participants in regard to service, especially mentoring relationships was to help foster change at their institutions and communities. In conjunction with the fifth distinguishing feature of BFT, which acknowledges the saliency of change, the participants in the study articulated the notion of needing change as well as being change agents. For example, Aszalee cited, "Being able to be encouraging and also help people deal with change and also deal with their own issues that they're bringing to the table is one of the greatest opportunities" of being a Black woman community college leader. The primary goal of their acts of service is not only to assist the individual, but to cause a shift and disrupt dominant systems that often do not take in consideration Black women and other communities of color through their voice and actions. As established through the narrative of the women in this study, advocacy and altruism is a significant part of the identity of Black women community college administrators, specifically in their work in academia and beyond.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I presented the finding of the study. The data analysis yielded that Black women community college administrators make meaning of the leadership role through interactions, experiences, and ways of knowing associated with their Body, Spirit, and Soul. Moreover, race and gender informed/influenced their meaning making. As such, the themes were threaded into three parts illustrating that Black women are multidimensional tri-part beings: (a) The Body - I Am Not My Hair: The Identity, Appearance, and Representation of Black Women Bodies, (b) The Spirit - Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is Liberty: The Role of Faith and Spirituality, and (c) The Soul - More than Just a Seat at the Table: Giving Voice to the Voiceless.

Moreover, the findings indicate that Black Feminist Thought not only accurately guided the research, but also served as an appropriate application to understand and synthesize the

participant's experiences. The study findings supported all six underpinnings of the framework, existing literature, as well as informed the multiple identities that Black women possess. Additionally, the findings situated the participants in the context of the community college and demonstrated an interconnectedness of their lived experiences with the mission and institutional setting. Furthermore, this research suggests a holistic approach to examining the ways in which Black women community college administrators make meaning of their identities as leaders. As this finding was not prevalent in existing literature, there are implications for further research and practice concerning the leadership and meaning making experiences, which are further discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

"Black women have had to develop a larger vision of our society than perhaps any other group. They have had to understand White men, White women, and Black men. And they have had to understand themselves. When Black women win victories, it is a boost for virtually every segment of society." – Angela Davis

The purpose of this study was to examine the ways in which self-identified Black women that serve as community college administrators made meaning of their identities as leaders. Specifically, the study looked at how race and gender informed/influenced their identity as leaders. Garner (2004) tells us "African-American women's ways of knowing and seeing the world embody a different form of leadership, disrupting the traditional male-centered hierarchal notions that have embodied organizations for the last century" (p.89). As such, this study aimed to bring the stories and lived experience of Black women, told by Black women, to the forefront to extend the literature on Black women leaders in the American Higher Education system and leadership identity. The theoretical framework used for this study was Black Feminist Thought (BFT). In considering the leadership experiences of Black women community college administrators, BFT (1) provided a framework that proactively sought out the voices of Black women, placing their lived experiences and ways of knowing at the center of analysis (Collins, 2000, p. vii) as well as (2) offered an outlet for rich discussion on the multiple dimensions of oppression faced by Black women leaders.

Providing a foundation for the inquiry, the study's literature review provided an overview of research associated with higher education leadership, specific to community college leadership, women in higher education leadership, and Black women higher education leaders. This qualitative study borrowed from narrative inquiry placing the voices, stories, and

experiences of the 12 Black women community college administrators at the center of analysis. Through the use of semi-structured interviews, artifacts, and reflection prompts, the study investigated the following research questions:

1. How do self-identified Black Women community college administrators make meaning of their identities as a leader?

   a. In what ways does race and gender influence/inform the way self-identified Black women community college administrators make meaning of their identities as a leader?

This chapter begins with a discussion of the findings of the study, with respect to the theoretical framework and literature. After discussing the findings of the study, I present implications for practice at the individual and institutional levels. Next, I present recommendations for future scholarship. Lastly, I offer a researcher reflection and concluding thoughts.

Discussion of Findings

The duality of race and gender took center stage as the Black women community college administrators discussed and shared experiences of how being Black and a woman impacted the ways in which they made meaning of their identity in their leadership roles. This was no surprise as the identities of race and gender are prevalent in higher education literature that examines the experiences of Black women in academia (Lloyd-Jones, 2009; Davis and Maldonado, 2015; Jackson and Harris, 2007; Patitu and Hinton, 2003; Zamani, 2003). According to Johnson and Thomas (2012), "for Black women, the impact of race and gender on their identity seems to be dual in nature in that both appear to bear equal importance" (p. 159). In essence, the persisting challenge of managing multiple marginalized identities were central in the Black women community college administrator's ways of knowing, perspectives, and identity. In answering the

research questions 1) How do Black women community college administrators make meaning of their identities as leaders, and 2) If race and gender influence/inform their identity, the manner in which the participants responded indicates that race and gender was indeed a factor, and meaning making was embodied through an interconnectedness with their body, spirit, and soul.

In other words, the findings of this study suggest that in an effort to fully understand and conceptualize the ways in which Black women community college administrator's make meaning of their identity as leaders, it is important to take into account the whole person and view them as tri-part beings. Despite the small sample size, the findings suggest that their needs to be a shift in how Black women leadership experiences should be examined. Seemingly, aligning with all six distinguishing factors of the Black Feminist Thought framework and existing literature, the data advocates for a holistic approach and/or lens when examining the experience of Black women in their leadership roles. Thus proposing, the body, spirit, and soul are instrumental facets in the ways in which Black community college administrators make meaning of their identities as leaders.

The Body

The mere presence and lived experiences associated with their Black bodies, were instrumental in ways in which the Black women community college administrators in the study made meaning and articulated their identities. Supporting existing literature, the participant's experiences mirrored encounters with oppression, racism, and sexism, which influenced the way they navigated their Black bodies through their institutional spaces (Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Lloyd-Jones, 2009; Patitu, 2003). Although there has been an increase in the visibility of Black women community college administrations in leadership roles, the literature tells us racialized norms and stereotype threat are still rampant in their experiences. Historical

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narrative, negative imaginary, and assumptions made about race and gender often aid in making conditions difficult for Black women to ascend and flourish in their leadership roles (Giscombe, 2007; Heilman, 2001, Davis and Maldonado, 2015).

Using their bodies as sites of knowledge production and meaning making, the participants named and prioritized their identities in the ways in which they saw themselves in their leadership roles. For instance, some of the participant's prioritized being Black first, while others prioritized being a community college leader first. Interestingly, the participant's that identified as being a leader first noted that they believe that others see their race first. This overwhelmingly made participant's cognizant of their race in their leadership roles and what it means to be Black and a woman in that space. These findings also support the second and third underpinning of Black Feminist Thought, similar individual and collective experiences and the emergence of knowledge/standpoint. As mentioned previously, the participants have similar experiences of oppression and racism, and from those experiences the group standpoint that emerged was an understanding that others will always see their race first.

Participant's also processed their identities as leaders through their experiences and the perceptions of their Black bodies and (mis)representation of Black bodies in the academy. The study findings confirmed Johnson and Thomas' (2012) argument, "Black women's ways of knowing are those that stem directly from their position in racialized systems of hierarchy. It is this particular positionality or place that commissions a Black woman's seemingly fluid perspective about their own existence (p. 158). "Overwhelmingly, one of the occurrences encountered by the women in the study were experiences associated with their hairstyles and wardrobe. Essentially, how others viewed, perceived, and interacted with their Black bodies in their leadership roles based on their outer appearance. In their narrative, all the participants in the

study discussed experiences related to their outer appearance. Participants shared stories that varied from being told their natural hair "looks like a sort of animal" to being told that because they like to wear traditional African clothing, they would "fit better" in an urban environment. This finding supports Davis and Maldonado (2015)'s argument that Black women leaders in higher education are often treated unfairly due to gendered and racial stereotypes. Moreover, the women in the study revealed that they believed that stereotype threats associated with their appearance impeded their career ascension. Seemingly the way Black women community college administrators were treated at their institutions had an impact on the way they processed their identity in their leadership roles. For instance, participants Jennifer and Olivia emphatically shared how the negative encounters they experienced in their leadership roles in relation to hair and wardrobe had an impact on their identity. Jennifer explicitly stated, "I was going through a physical...I guess, identity crisis" after an encounter. Participants Aszalee and Michelle shared how these same types of encounters and/or experiences made them grapple with their outer appearance, particularly changing their hairstyle as a result of wanting to ascend in their career.

The findings of this study also suggest that what is often written off and/or interpreted as a microaggression or an experience with stereotype threat can indeed have an adverse effect on the social emotional and/or psychological well-being of Black women leaders. Furthermore, constant and repeated offenses can be interpreted as a form of workplace harassment and/or bullying. For example, due to the repeated incidents, participant Belle filled a formal complaint with her institution. It is clearly evident by the study findings and previous literature that Black women leadership experiences are informed and influenced by their race and gender. Again,

these findings suggest that one of the ways Black women leaders make meaning of their leadership identity is by using their bodies as sites of knowledge production.

The Spirit

Similarly, to the use of meaning making with their bodies, the participant's in the study understood and/or made meaning of their leadership identities through spirituality as well. Specifically, the Black women community college administrators made meaning of their identities as leaders through a connection with a higher being and by identifying and understanding themselves through their faith and spiritual beliefs. Without being prompted, the participants identified and expressed their faith and/or spiritual practices. For instance, over half of the participants explicitly stated they identified by their spirituality and/or submitted Bibles as their artifacts. Thus, affirming Collins (2000) argument, that spirituality is one of the immediate identities Black women often comes to terms with.

Moreover, this finding also drew out a collective experience and group standpoint that supports the second underpinning of Black Feminist Thought, "Dialogical Relationship". For instance, in addition to blatantly identifying as Christians, the group standpoint that emerged was that spirituality is an effective strategy to employ when faced with adversity in their positions. When discussing facing barriers such as oppression, racism, sexism, ageism, and stereotype threat, the tool of prayer was one of the primary strategies employed. For example, the act of prayer was used as a way of impeding stress, enacting peace, and receiving guidance when negative situations occurred. On the one hand, this finding supports previous literature that boasts spirituality as a coping mechanism of Black women professionals when faced with adversity and barriers (Hall, Everett, & Hamilton-Mason, 2012; Shorter-Gooden, 2004; Mattis, 2000; & Mattis 2002). On the other hand, the findings seemingly suggest that spirituality impacts

meaning making and knowledge processing of one's self. Arguably, proposing that one's spiritual belief is part of identity, which in turns informs practices and/or actions. Furthermore, the findings of the study are closely parallel to those of Garner (2004), who uses a qualitative case study to examine the ways in which Black women higher education administrators make meaning of their spirituality in their daily practices. According to Garner, "Spirituality remains at the core of their leadership, and has served as a way for these women to deal with the drama in a peaceful and harmonious manner" (p.93). In the same way as the current study, Garner finds that spirituality and/or the connection to a higher being is a part of the daily lives of Black women administrators and how they make meaning. In addition to affirming spirituality is indeed a part of the meaning making of Black women administrators, again this current study also extends the literature by acknowledging that spirituality is also a part of their identity as leaders.

The Soul

Supporting the second and third underpinning of Black Feminist Thought, the study participant's shared similar individual and collective experiences, that resulted in a group standpoint in relation to advocacy and altruism as part of their identity. As such, the findings of the study revealed that in addition to making meaning with their body and spirit, Black women community college administrators made meaning of their leadership identities with their soul (mind, will, emotions). For instance, as a result of understanding that servant leadership was a part of their identity, through purposeful and intentional actions of service, advocacy, and altruism, the participants used their voices and seats at the table to fight for and lift other women and people of color. As reflected in the participant's narratives, there was a constant pattern in relationship to serving and uplifting others through their leadership roles and how they identified.

Although these findings support literature that affirms that Black women leaders often feel an obligation to serve (Garner, 2004; Davis & Maldonado, 2015), it extends the literature by suggesting that a conscious desire and/or acts of altruism is embedded in the meaning making and identities of Black women leaders.

Advocacy and altruism were clearly demonstrated by the participant's intentional actions of lifting as they climb as well as mentoring. In addition to service being embedded in their identity, many of the participants cited personal encounters with sexism and racism as well as societal systems and structures of oppression as part of the reason why they choose to serve other Black women and people of color. This collaborates the first distinguishing of BFT, links to Black women's oppression and activism. There was a pronounced obligation and duty by the participants to help other Black women successfully navigate their leadership journey. Although mentoring literature indicates that Black women mentoring relationships are beneficial regardless of the race and gender of the mentor, the findings presented in this study suggest that Black women leader's mentoring committees should be inclusive of at least one person of the same race and gender. Therefore, creating a safe space that nurtures and promotes counter narratives about stereotype threat and negative imagining attached to Black women leaders. Furthermore, in connection with the sixth distinguishing feature of BFT, relationships to other social justice efforts, the women in the study recognized the significance of paying it forward, reaching back and not just helping other Black women, but also other communities of color. For example, participant Michelle shared a story of how the national Black Lives Matter movement shaped and impacted the way she understood and viewed institutional policies that would have a direct impact on Black and Brown males at her institution and in the local community. Like many others in the study, service and stewardship existed beyond the borders of the institution,

and into the communities they serve. Again, demonstrating that Black women community college leaders make a conscious decision to help and advocate for others in their leadership roles.

Another interesting finding highlighted by the study was despite feelings of oppression, isolation, stereotype threat, and marginalization the participants in the study did not hesitate to speak up for inequalities and educate others. Thus, collaborating the fourth and fifth distinguishing feature of Black Feminist Thought, recognition of intellectual contribution of Black women as a production of knowledge and the importance of change. The finding affirmed research that argues Black women leaders are sophisticated and strategic when employing strategies to elevate their voice and presence, while navigating academic cultures and politics (Johnson & Thomas, 2012; Henry & Glenn, 2009). For instance, many participants discussed how they often "played the game" and/or "picked their battles", in relation to their own experiences, however, did not hesitate to contribute their voice when inequalities arose in relation to others. That is not to suggest that Black women community college administrators do not speak up and advocate for themselves however, to underscore the ways in which they process and execute their power in their leadership role is very intentional. This intentionality is often prescribed in relation to using their voice to deconstruct false narrative and contribute to the intellectual scholarship within both visible and invisible academic structures of power.
In contributing to the production of knowledge, the participant's emphasized through their narrative the importance of change and being agents of change. For example, while in different ways and via different avenues participant's Aszalee, Monica, and Terri articulated that part of their goals as leaders was to assist in impacting change and disrupting the dominant narrative in relation to Black women and other people of color. Cleary, the findings suggest that Black

women leaders make meaning of their identity as leaders through their soul (mind, will, emotions), by not only identifying as servant leaders, but also through the intentional actions of advocacy and altruism. As such, making a conscious decision to be an advocate and actually exercising those thoughts into action.

Implications for Practice

Through a Black Feminist Thought lens, this study examined the ways in which Black women community college administrators made meaning of their identity in their leadership roles. Collins (2000) tells us, the experiences of Black woman individually and collectively provide a unique angle of vision unavailable to other groups because of the multiple oppression and historic systemic structures. The study findings supported all six underpinnings of the Black Feminist Thought framework, existing literature, as well as demonstrated the complexity of managing multiple marginalized identities. As a result, the findings from this study have practical, policy, and leadership implications, which I will present at the individual and institutional levels.

Black Women Professionals

At the individual level, the findings of the study have implications for both current Black women community college administrators and those seeking to ascend into administration. The study can be used as a framework for understanding career challenges as well as a foundation for assessing one's leadership identity and journey. As the findings suggest, this should be done through a holistic lens that takes into consideration the body, spirit and soul. Furthermore, Black women leaders should continue to share their stories, advocate for others, and fight against inequities. For example, impact can be made by providing feedback and joining institutional

committees that inform policies and practices related to their experiences and other people of color. Counter-story telling can be powerful as well as empowering for Black women leaders in higher education (Jones Boss, Karunaratne, Huang, Beavers, Pegram-Floyd, & Tullus, 2019). Moreover, when possible Black women leaders should take full advantage of the programming and resources made available by their institutions as well as search for allies who will assist and advocate for them in their institutional spaces.

Clearly, the study suggests there is a need for more support for Black women community college leaders. Although this should be done at the institutional level as well, support systems can also be fostered through initiatives led by Black women for Black women. Since the majority of Black women administrators hold positions in community colleges, creating a pipeline and/or an official organization could increase and bring more awareness to this unique population. Joining and creating organizations and communities outside of institutions can provide a safe space for sharing and professional development that is specific to the unique needs of this population. Furthermore, research confirms that mentors, sponsors, and coaches are beneficial to the careers of Black women (Crawford & Smith, 2005; Girves, J. E., Zepeda, Y., & Gwathmey, J. K., 2005; Tran, 2014). Current Black women community college administrators can take on the aforementioned roles to aid in the career advancement of aspiring leaders as well as benefit from the reciprocal learning that takes place in effective mentoring relationships. These relationships should make an intentional effort to address and assist with both career and psychosocial well-being. Black women community college leaders serving as mentors, sponsors, and/or coaches are of paramount importance in creating a sound pipeline of Black women leaders.

Institutional

As previously mentioned, the community college sector hosts one of the largest populations of Black women administrators in the American higher education system. While one of the primary objectives of the study was to bring Black women community college administrator's voices to the forefront, at the institutional level the findings of the study suggest implications to inform policy and practices that can impact the overall health and productivity of the organization. Community colleges interested in developing an organizational culture inclusive and supportive of Black women administrator's likelihood of success can use the findings of the study to develop policy and practices that champion programming that assist their career ascension, retention, and emotional well-being. From conducting a climate and needs assessments related to employee well-being, evaluation could be implemented to gain insight on the experiences and needs of Black women Leaders. Thus, increasing overall retention and climate of the institution.

Moreover, the establishment and/or strengthening of racial affinity groups on campus can provide a safe place for the women leaders to share and connect with other Black women leaders. This has the potential to lead to Black women leaders feeling less like the outsider within as well as be used as a space to provide feedback to institutional leaders about their experiences. Additionally, if an institution desires to prioritize supporting and building inclusive communities for Black women leaders, those priorities should be reflected within their training and professional development programming. Institutions should employ leadership and diversity training programs that use an inclusive framework that acknowledges the complexity of managing multiple marginalized identities. Additionally, as a sector that prides itself on

educating and serving the local community, community colleges can expand these types of programs and training to include local constituent groups.

Recommendations For Scholarship

The findings presented in this study as well as previous studies on Black women administrators in the academy clearly demonstrates a need for more empirical studies that highlight, address, and support their experiences (Haywood, 2009; Jackson & Harris, 2007; Johnson & Thomas, 2012: Warring 2003). While many Black women higher education leaders have garnered success in their positions, the struggles, barriers, and adversity they face should not go unnoticed. In essence, these experiences are significant to who they are as leaders, their journey, intellectual contribution, and the space they hold in the academy. Based on the findings from the study, I present the following five recommendations for future research: 1) Scholarship that examines Black women leaders holistically – Body, Spirit, and Soul, 2) Scholarship that examines spirituality as an identity, 3) Emotional trauma associated with the experiences of Black women leaders, 4) Black women's bodies as sites of knowledge production, and 5) Scholarship that examines Black women leaders experiences in different institutional types and industries.

Holistic Approach to Examining Leadership of Black Women

At the surface level Black women community college administrators share similar leadership styles and characteristics of other leaders of color, women, and White males. However, as illuminated in the findings of this study and previous literature, due to their multiple marginalized identities, there still are unique differences in their experiences. The physical, spiritual, and psychological impact of race and gender on Black women leaders' experiences are

understudied in academia. As such, this study can provide a framework for understanding how they make meaning of their encounters. For example, using the research from the study as the groundwork, scholars and researchers can conduct empirical research to explore how the interconnectedness of the body, soul, and spirit influence identity development of Black women leaders.

Spirituality as an Identity

While there is a vast amount of literature in higher education surrounding identity and identity development, few studies examine one's spirituality as a form of identity, especially in relation to Black women in the academy. Current scholarship examining the experiences of Black women leaders often look at spirituality as a coping mechanism and/or a form of self-care, not part of their prevalent identities (Bacchus, 2008; Bowen-Reid and Harrell, 2002). As suggested by the findings of this study, the way Black women identify spirituality is a part of their identity. Moreover, spirituality informs the ways in which they build and foster relationships as well as make meaning of their experiences. As such, future research should explore the spiritual identity of Black women leaders in the field of postsecondary education. This research can extend the literature on Black women leaders, higher education leadership, identity development, and leadership in general.

Emotional and Trauma Related Research

The findings of this study and previous research has yielded and directly implicated that Black women administrators are often faced with challenges in their leadership roles. Consistent acts of oppression, racism, sexism, and ageism have the potential to cause trauma and leave psychological scars on Black women leaders (Jackson, 2018). While many researchers and

scholars have confirmed that these are indeed the experiences of Black women leaders, a sparse amount of research examines the emotional outcomes of these occurrences. As such, further investigation should explore the emotional ramifications and adverse effects these encounters have on Black women leaders. Specifically examining emotional, mental and physical health as well as institutional and industry retention. Moreover, research should also examine what types of resources and support systems are put in place to assist Black women leaders. Again, this can extend the literature on Black women leaders. The research can also be used as a catalyst to impact institutional policies, support services, and institutional climate as it relates to Black women leaders**.**

Physical Body as Site of Knowledge Production

This study has the potential to inform potential studies that explore physical bodies as a site of knowledge production. In close parallel to Green's (2017) study, where she examined the meaning making of Black graduate students in relation to their study abroad experience, the current study also illuminated the importance of the physical body as a site of knowledge production. As demonstrated in the findings of the study, the participants used their physical body as part of the ways in which they understood and made meaning of their identities as leaders. According to Green (2017), "paying attention to the body's physical and emotional responses to daily interactions expands how meaning making occurs (p. 115). As such, further investigation should focus on the examination of Black women leader's experience through an embodied lens. Important understanding can be gleaned in relation to how meaning occurs and can not only contribute to the scholarship on Black women leaders and higher education literature, but also literature on embodied learning.

Expansion and Comparative Studies

One of the boundaries of this study is that it only examined the experiences of Black women administrators at community colleges in the Midwest. Experiences, interactions, and response related to environment, culture, and climate may differ in different regions of the United States. Although the participant's institutions were situated in different settings, an expansion of the geographic location may provide more insight into the experiences of Black women community college administrators. As such, comparative studies should be conducted to explore the meaning making experiences of Black women community college leaders nationally.

Additionally, a comparative study should be conducted on different sectors of higher education as well as different industries. Conducting an institutional and industry comparison can extend the literature on Black women leaders in higher education and Black women leaders in general. Comparing and contrasting institutional types and industries will provide a wider lens to view the experiences and meaning making of Black women leaders. For instance, comparing institutional types may illustrate that encounters of sexism, racism, and oppression may be more prevalent in certain sectors. In the same way, comparing and contrasting Black women leaders' experiences across different industries may yield these kinds of experiences that are more prevalent in certain industries. Moreover, the inclusion of Black women's experiences in different contexts can offer a multi perspective to leadership theory.

3DLM: 3 Dimensional Leadership Model

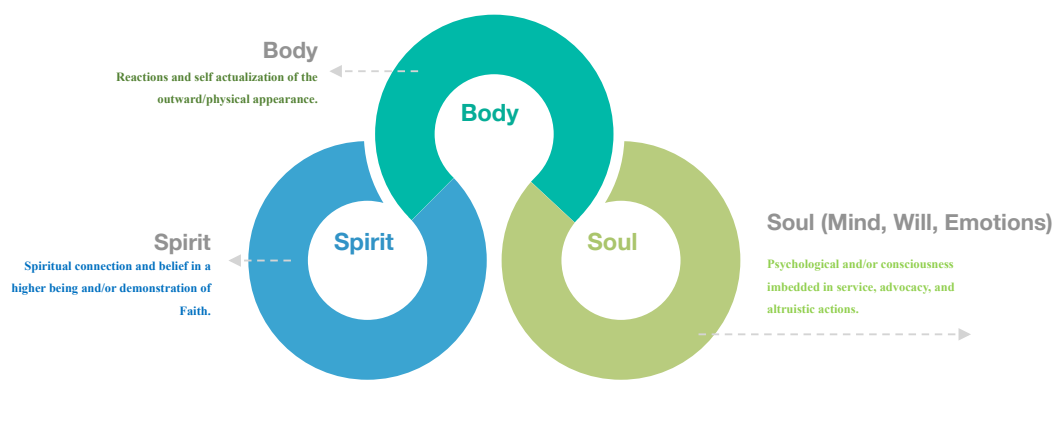A Holistic Approach to Assessing the Leadership Experiences of Black Women Leaders

Body
Reactions and self actualization of the outward/physical appearance.

Spirit
Spiritual connection and belief in a higher being and/or demonstration of Faith.

Soul (Mind, Will, Emotions)
Psychological and/or consciousness imbedded in service, advocacy, and altruistic actions.

Figure 2: 3 DLM: 3-Dimensional Leadership Model

Researcher's Reflection

I like to say that my career in higher education began accidentally on purpose. I accepted what I thought was an entry level finance position in the financial aid department of an urban community college, not realizing that it would change my career trajectory and life forever. Over the past sixteen years I have held multiple positions within the field of higher education, inclusive of serving as an Associate Vice Chancellor of Administration and Finance, a Campus Dean, and Graduate Assistant as of late. While rewarding, because of my race and/or gender I have often felt I had to navigate the personal and professional politics of academia alone. While my primary intention of returning to graduate school was to secure a terminal degree to meet the requirements to become a college president, my PhD journey has become so much more than just another credential. I realize, understand, and accept that this journey is not just about me and /or my personal success, it is also significant for the people and identities that I represent. While my

personal/professional experiences, and curiosity fueled this study, it is with my heart and great passion that I use this dissertation space to provide a voice for Black women leaders. Although the women in the study shared experiences of racism, sexism, ageism, and oppression, my intent was not to frame them as victims, but to bring their voices, narratives and stories to the forefront as a way shedding light on these occurrences, extending the literature on Black women in higher education as well as identity development. Leadership for Black women leaders goes beyond just having skills/attributes and/or certain leadership traits. For example, more often than not, having a strong leadership identity, relationships, and support system are more important in their roles. As suggested by the findings of the study, Black women leaders' experiences need to be assessed holistically. Therefore, as reflected in figure 1: The 3DLM: 3-Dimensional Leadership Model, I have begun to develop a tool for assessing the experiences and meaning making of Black Women Leaders.

Although this study afforded me the opportunity to discover how Black women community college administrators made meaning of their identities as leaders, it also exposed me to the need for healing in this community. Daily battles with oppression, sexism, and racism can be traumatic and lead to emotional scars. It can be exhausting and cause racial battle fatigue. It is my belief that some of these women are still dealing with the trauma of their experiences. I recognized this as some of the participants relived these experiences during the interviewing process. The participant's body language, facial expressions, the tremors in their voice, as well as the tears streaming down their face said more than the words that escaped their lips. It is because of these women and my personal experiences I have committed to supporting and contributing the healing process of Black women leaders.

Using the knowledge, I have gained from this study, I have created a community to lift and support Black women professionals. A Polished U (APU) is a Personal and Professional Development Community that provides a safe place for Black women to share and discuss these types of challenges and barriers. More importantly, using the 3DLM: 3-Dimensional Leadership Model as the foundation of the curriculum, workshops are provided, and resources are shared to help Black women leaders combat these challenges and offer a pathway toward healing and restoration. To date, I have hosted three women empowerment events and presented at a regional and national conference. The A Polished U community has been well received.

Conclusion

Supporting the six distinguishing factors of BFT and existing literature, this study provided insight and gave voice to the leadership experiences of Black women community college administrators. The findings of this study suggest that Black women community colleges are multidimensional and a multiperspective lens should be used when examining their leadership experiences. Specifically, one that takes a holistic approach and underscores that Black women community college administrators make meaning of their identity in their leadership roles, through an interconnectedness of their bodies, spirits, and souls. It is evident by the narratives of the participants that Black women community college administrators have an astute awareness of their multiple marginalized identities, and race and gender inform/influence how they make meaning of their experiences and identity in their leadership roles.

The voices in the study produced rich data in relation to the consciousness/awareness related to oppression, marginalization, and stereotype threat in the leadership roles and meaning making of Black women community college administrators. While the primary focus of this study was examining meaning making and not specifically identifying barriers, the findings of

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the study challenges the current discourse related to the ways in which Black women community college administrator's leadership experiences should be examined. In essence, implicating that future investigation should address the emotional toll of racism, sexism, and oppression on Black women leaders. Moreover, research should also examine the ways in which institutional policies and practices can be implemented to support Black women's success in the academy. Despite the small sample size, overall the study reiterates the critical nature of understanding multiple marginalized identities in the leadership roles of Black women leaders and assessing their experiences holistically. Developing a deeper insight into their unique experiences is of paramount importance to assisting in managing and removing visible and invisible barriers faced in their leadership roles and career ascension.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A:

Participant Solicitation

Greetings,

I hope this message finds you well. My name is Chastity Gaither and I am a PhD Candidate at Michigan State University in the College of Education. This message is being sent to you because you have either expressed interest or know others who may be interested in my dissertation study. If you are interested in participating and meet the criteria, feel free to respond to this message. If you know anyone who may be interested and fit the criteria, feel free to forward this message to them.

I am conducting a qualitative dissertation study on the leadership identity of Black women community college administrators. The purpose of this inquiry is to examine how Black women who serve as community college administrators make sense of their leadership identity and use their experiences and testimonies to expand on existing leadership literature. For my doctoral dissertation, I am looking for participants who meet the following criteria:

1. Identify as a Black woman
2. Currently work at a community college in the Midwest
3. Currently hold a variation of one of the following titles:
    o President, Vice President, Associate/Assistant Vice President
    o Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, Associate/Assistant Vice Chancellor
    o Provost, Associate/Assistant Provost

Participation is this study is completely voluntary and would include completing a demographic questionnaire, participating in a 90-120-minute interview, completing a very brief written reflection, and presenting an artifact that represents your leadership identity during the interview. As a token of appreciation for your time, you will receive a $20 Amazon gift card at the conclusion of your participation in the study. Again, your participation is completely voluntary and may be withdrawn at any time. There are minimal risks associated with this study, in that I am not applying any intervention. Your identity will remain confidential in all transcribing, analyzing, and reporting of data. Only I will have access to your identity and demographic information. If you agree, I will audio-record our interview as well as take notes throughout the process. The audio recording will be stored in an electronic password-protected file. The file will be destroyed as soon as the recording is transcribed.

 If you meet the above criteria and are willing to participate, please email me at gaither3@msu.edu. If you should have any questions, please feel free to contact me or my advisor, Dr. Brendan Cantwell, at brendanc@msu.edu.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I really hope that you consider participating in this project.

Warmest regards,

~Chastity

Participant Consent Form

At the Intersection of Multiple Identities: An Examination of the Leadership Identity of Black
Women Community College Administrators

Dear Participant:

This research study is intended to investigate the leadership identity of Black women community
college administrators. This is an invitation to complete a demographic questionnaire, participate
in a 90-120-minute interview either online or face-to-face, draft a written reflection, and present
an artifact that represents your leadership identity. Data analysis will follow standard qualitative
procedures and will be conducted by me, Chastity Gaither. As a token of appreciation for your
time, you will receive a $20 Amazon gift card at the conclusion of your participation in the study
(demographic questionnaire, interview, written reflection, and artifact).

Your participation is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time, with no penalty
for doing so. You can choose not to participate at all, or not answer some or all of the questions.
There are no foreseeable risks associated with participation in this study. With your consent, the
interview will be audio taped and/or audio recorded utilizing Zoom technology. Digital
recordings will be kept in a secure location until the study is completed, at which time they will
be erased. The information form, on which you indicate your name, contact information, and
chosen pseudonym, will be maintained by the researcher in a secure location until the end of the
study, when it will be destroyed. The information form will be kept in a separate secure location
than that of the digital recordings.

Your identity will remain confidential in all transcribing, analyzing, and reporting of data. Your
privacy will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. Participants will pick a
pseudonym (if you desire) prior to the start of the interview and analysis, and all identifying
information will be removed from transcripts prior to analysis.

It is possible that you may become uncomfortable discussing your experiences. I remind you that
you may, at any time and without penalty, elect not to answer a question or terminate your
participation.

Please indicate on the information form if you would like me to provide you with a copy of the
findings of the study, a bibliography of resources for further reading on the topic, or both. If you
have any concerns or questions regarding your rights as a study participant or are dissatisfied at
any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact the researcher: Chastity D. Gaither, 248-
227-6400, gaither3@msu.edu or my advisor Dr. Brendan Cantwell, Associate Professor in
Educational Administration, College of Education, Michigan State University at 517-355-1833
or brendanc@msu.edu.

If you have questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180, Fax 517-432-4503, or e-mail irb@msu.edu or regular mail at: Human Research Protection Program, Michigan State University, 408 West Circle Drive Room 207 Olds Hall, East Lansing, MI 48824.

_____   _____
Signature of Participant   Date

_____
Name of Participant (please print)

Interview Protocol

My name is Chastity Gaither and I am Doctoral student at Michigan State University in the College of Education. The purpose of this study is to explore and document the lived experiences of Black women who serve as community college administrators. Specifically, I am interested in understanding the ways in which Black women community college administrators make sense of their identity as a leader. Therefore, my goal is to look beyond traits, attributes, and skill sets and focus on the actual experiences and transitions associated with viewing oneself as a leader.

Please know that your participation in this study is completely voluntary and may be withdrawn at any time. I will audio-record our interview as well as take notes throughout the process. Once I turn on the recorder, I will ask you to provide a verbal conformation of your consent to record our conversation. Your identity will remain confidential in all transcribing, analyzing, and reporting. You can end the interview at any time. If you feel uncomfortable at any time you can signal to me to turn off the recorder and/or choose not to answer a question. Once the interview is transcribed, I will send you a copy for your records and review. Thank you again for agreeing to be a part of this study.

Interview Questions:

Warm Up Talk:
In an effort to build trust and/or a rapport with the participants I will share a brief personal story. Specifically, I will share my leadership journey throughout my tenure working at a community college as well as being a former administrator.

Ice Breaker Questions:

1. When did you know you wanted to be a college administrator and how did you make that decision? **Probe:** Was is it motivated by personal, professional, or community/social experiences?

2. Please share how you prepared to be a college administrator? **Probe:** Was there mental, spiritual, family/relationship preparation?

3. Do you have and/or had a mentor during your higher education career?

    a. Probe: If yes, can you share what your experience is/was like?
        i. Describe your mentor? (identities)
    b. Did you initiate those relationships or the mentor?
    c. Probe: If no, what kind of impact do you think that would have had on your leadership journey?
        i. Describe your idea mentoring situation?

4. Are you a mentor? Probe: Official and/or unofficial.
   a. Probe: If yes, how was that/those relationships fostered? Did you initiate those relationships or the mentee? What does that relationship look like? How do you provide support for them?
   b. Probe: If no, do you have a desire to be a mentor? Why or why not?

Core Questions:

5. What does it mean to you to be a Black woman leader? **Probe:** How do you see yourself?

6. Do these identities (Black, Woman) influence or inform your professional experiences? In what ways? For example, tell me about a situation where you experienced something that was directly attributed to your race and/or gender.

7. Are you conscious of your identities (Black, Woman) in your leadership role and/or the decision-making process? In what ways? For example, when interacting with others are you conscious of your approach based on your identities?

8. Do societal expectations, imagery, or stereotypes of Black women impact your understanding and/or how you view yourself and navigate as a leader? In what ways? **Probe:** Are you consciously or subconsciously attempting to debunk false narratives?

   a. Are Black women leaders expected to look and or present themselves in a certain way? In what way?

9. What are the personal challenges and opportunities you face as a Black women community college administrator? **Probe:** Do these identities (Black, Woman) shape the way you respond to challenges and opportunities? In what ways?

   a. What strategies do you employ when faced with personal and professional challenges?

10. Beyond just having a title, tell me about a time you knew and/or understood that you were a leader. To better explain what I mean, I'll give you an example: It may be a time that you commended a room and/or was the go-to person on a project.

11. What would you say was /is the most challenging part of understanding yourself as a leader? **Probe:** What internal/external impact did it have on you personally and professionally?

12. As a black women community college administrator how do you navigate your organizational space? **Probe:** Describe the types of spaces/settings you feel supported. Describe the types of spaces/settings where you do not feel supported.

Closing Questions:

13. What is a lesson you have learned from being a Black woman community college administrator?

14. What advice would you give to other Black women who are contemplating becoming administrators in community colleges?

That concludes our interview. Thank you again for your participation. The information you provided will assist me with my research. Again, once the interview is transcribed I will send you a copy for your records and review.

Artifacts

Pseudonym	Artifact	Description
Brittany	Post-It Note that says "Will I Follow Me?"	She strategically places the artifact on her computer monitor and/or in a place where it is readily visible. Her artifact is a representation of her leadership identity/journey as it a constant reminder to lead by example. Moreover, it also reminds her to continue to lift as she climbs, as she believes that she would not be in her current position if not for others mentoring, sponsoring, and advocating for her.
Terry	Framed Photo of Students	A framed photo of students from one of the inaugural cohorts of program she taught and implemented in her Director Role. The photo is showcased in her office. Terry believes that it is a constant reminder of the importance of the work she does. She believes helping students succeed is the heart of her work. Terry still keeps in contact with the majority of the students in the photo.

Table 4: Artifacts

Table 4 (cont'd)

Mya	Award	The Award was the "40 Under 40 Award presented to her from the American Association of Women in Community Colleges. My stated "It was an honor to be recognized by my peers as an outstanding community college woman under the age of 40 who is making a difference in their college campus."
Hannah	Bible	She identifies as a Christian administrator. She believes the Bible represents her leadership identity by grounding her with Biblical principles as she navigates her institution, foster relationships, and recognize that she not only has an obligation to her job and the community she serves, but to model the Christian way in her role. Hannah uses her Bible and the tool of prayer for guidance in her leadership role.
Michelle	3D colored wall art portrait of Harriet Tubman	She believes that education is the only thing that gives you freedom and it is her responsibility to assist Black and Brown students in pursuing education.

Table 4 (cont'd)

Sarah	**Bible**	**She uses it a spiritual guide to help her in decision-making and relationship building. She believes "It is only the Father who should receive credit for any good works achieved by me.**
Jennifer	Award	She received the Campus Employee of the Year Award. It represents her leadership identity because she really never really identified as a leader. "I've never really identified with being a leader. I just always felt like I was doing my job and doing the right thing by making sure people are empowered in their positions, the people that work for me, that they're in power.
Diana	Power strip	My role as a leader you have to always be on. You have to have energy. You have to be plugged in. And its room for others to fit.
Monica	Career Capsule –Mason Jar	This was her first time opening the jar in 12 Years. On the rocks in the jar she previously wrote down the things she wanted to accomplish and/or maintain on her leadership journey. She read through each one, celebrating her accomplishments.

Table 4 (cont'd)

Olivia	**Shoe Figurine**	**I always walk in the shoes of the people that I lead, always.**
Belle	Bible	My Bible represents who I am and who I want to be as a leader. Specifically, her Bible was her mother's Bible; she passed away one week before her sophomore year of college.
Aszalee	Bible	My Bible allows me to remain center and grounded and when there are challenges that not even challenges, there are times I have to give it to God and leave it there. I don't know if I can have two or one… so I have my Bible and then I have my journal. Which my journal allows me to get all my thoughts out my head and to think about what I need to do next.

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