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UNAPOLOGETIC! LEADING IN WHITE SPACES: A CRITICAL RACE GROUNDED
THEORY STUDY ABOUT THE EXPERIENCES OF BLACK WOMEN COLLEGE
PRESIDENTS AT FOUR-YEAR PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS AND
GENDERED RACISMS'S INFLUENCE ON THEIR LEADERSHIP APPROACH

A Dissertation Presented

by

DAMITA A. DAVIS

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies,
University of Massachusetts Boston,
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

August 2023

Higher Education Program

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ABSTRACT

UNAPOLOGETIC! LEADING IN WHITE SPACES: A CRITICAL RACE GROUNDED
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August 2023

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For higher education to be responsive to the changing national and student population, its leadership must be “reflective of the world around it, (which) will be key to managing the challenges of today and the unknown challenges of tomorrow” (American Council on Education, 2017, para. 4). Unfortunately, despite the increasing diversity of the student body, college presidents remain primarily white; therefore, maintaining a limited view of leadership. Centering the experiences of Black women as a “strength to build, develop, and perform leadership” (Lloyd-Jones, 2016, p. 66), and understanding their ways of knowing, is an important step for postsecondary education in meeting these challenges.

Therefore, a more nuanced examination of Black women college and university presidents is needed.

The purpose of this study was to understand how the leadership practice of Black women college presidents at four-year PWIs was informed by their lived experiences. Centering the voices of participants, critical race grounded theory as a methodological framework was used to inform participant selection, and the data collection and analysis processes. Nine semi-structured interviews with Black women college presidents at four-year PWIs was conducted. Line by line coding was used to analyze the data, which resulted in the emergence of seven themes. The seven themes of the study's findings and Black feminist epistemology, developed by Collins (2000) led to the development of a new leadership model, authentic black feminist leadership.

ABFL provides Black women, researchers, and the field of higher education with a more applicable framework that recognizes the influence of race and gender on as well as describes Black women's ways of leading. Unlike other leadership models ABFL does not center whiteness or masculinity, instead this model highlights the different dimensions that influence how and why Black women lead. A model created for Black women, by Black women, ABFL describes the distinct ways they lead within an environment that is not representative nor reflective of who they are. In addition, this model illuminates the factors that inspired Black women to become altruistic and community focused leaders. As a leadership model.

DEDICATION

To my angels,

Wilbur “Nick” Davis, Michael Vincent Davis,

Dwayne Allen Davis, Michael Vernon Davis

and KeTara Janae Richardson, I love and miss you tremendously.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The saying ‘it takes a village’ has been a constant aspect of my life. I literally grew up in a village, Wiggins Village housing to be exact. My village included very large maternal and paternal families, neighborhood aunties and uncles who were not actually blood related and a host of friends. This foundation has been vital throughout my life and in my pursuit of higher education. My village instilled in me the importance and value of getting a college degree. Although going to college and earning a degree was a priority, there were times where I doubted my ability to accomplish this lofty goal. However, my village believed in me. They believed in me when I pursued a bachelor’s degree, and they believed in me when I returned to school to get a graduate degree. They continued to believe in my when I began the journey to earn a doctorate. They provided the inspiration I needed to keep going. Like this message my Uncle Roderick sent me during a time when I felt defeated. He said, “on your way to your doctorate, never give up, never quit when it gets tough. You can do this. You have the knowledge, skill, and ability. God takes care of his own. Be great!” This was one of many words of encouragement my village gave me over the last 6 years. I am forever grateful for the love, encouragement and support, my family and friends gave me. I did it!

I have been fortunate to expand my village over the past 20 years. The most recent additions to my village, have been the folks working in the higher education doctoral program at UMass Boston. My time in the program was the best experience I had as a student; it was and is the most affirming learning environment. As a Black woman I was represented in the curriculum, and I saw myself in the faculty. I am profoundly grateful to be part of a community of learners, practitioners, scholars, and change agents. Such an

environment cannot exist without faculty and staff who wholeheartedly believe in its mission. Dr. Ching, Dr, Dee, Dr. Franke, Dr. Giles, Dr, Parker, Dr. Saltmarsh, Dr. Talusan, Amy and Shantal your efforts to live the live the mission and purpose of the program, and your unwavering support of students is an amazing gift. Words cannot express how special you all are to me. Thank you!

The best gift I received as a member of this program is my cohort: Scholars for the People! You are such an incredible group of human beings. I am so grateful to have gone through this experience with you. It may sound cliché, yet it is true, I could not have done this without you. From our first summer session until now, I cannot imagine my life without any of you in it. The support you gave and continue to give me is unmeasurable. I hope I have given you at least some of what I have received for you over the past 6 years. Melba, Gail, Duane, Tawanya, Sarah, Chris, Kamala, Jesse, Arlene, Jacinda, Isabelle and Sara, thanks for being my village. Thanks for being my family! I love you!

Next, I want to acknowledge and thank all those who took time, to send me words of encouragement, served as proofreaders and editors, met with me in person or virtually to write, was a shoulder for me to cry on and just held me down when I was ready to quit. I want to give a special shout out to Saturday Writing Team. Liza, Amy, Sara, Nicole, Eric, Karen, Karl, and all those who ever joined the party, Thank You! To Jason, thanks for all the support you gave me, even at the expense of your own research. I am looking forward to returning the favor. Finally, I want to thank Lorraine for your support. It is not easy to start a new job, in a new state and continue doctoral research. Your empathy and holding me accountable was extremely helpful. Words cannot fully express what a blessing you have been to me. Thank you!

I shake my head in amazement that I have earned my doctorate and conducted a study that was a true labor of love, hate, tears and laughter. As a Black woman, I have always been committed to telling our stories. It brings a new sense of purpose to my life, personal and professional. This commitment stems from my own need to feel heard, be seen and understood as a Black woman, in the academy. So, I intentionally surround myself with and I have always loved being around amazing, gifted, and impressive Black women. This village feeds my soul and replenishes me. Thus, my research on Black women was a no brainer, it really did not come as a surprise to anyone that knows me. How could I not? How could I not tell our story, share what we have contributed and still contribute to higher education? We are consistently overlooked in research in the academy and beyond. How could I not, through my study, demand to be heard, seen, and included in the body of knowledge in the field.

Our stories need to be told, the joys, the heartbreak, the setbacks, and the accomplishments. All that we are as beautifully complex beings needs to be shared. And we, Black women, must be the ones to tell our stories, in their totality. More importantly, the way Black women lead, despite the racist and sexist constructs that pose challenges must be told. Their leadership approaches and strategies participants used to lead and manage challenges resonated with me. I saw myself in the stories and wisdom participants shared with me although our life and career paths have differed. The concept of Ubuntu, I am because You are, was manifested in my conversations with the presidents. I saw each of them in one another. An affirming experience, it validated what I always believed, our ways of knowing and being is grounded in our African and Black roots and culture. Our roots are an essential part of who we are and how we show up in the world. Unapologetically! There is POWER in possessing this knowledge.

I was moved and inspired by the women who agreed to participate in my study. Honestly, it is not easy getting college presidents to participate in a research project, let alone one that asks them to share who they are as a leader, woman, and person of color. To be vulnerable with me in discussing their path to the presidency and how racism and sexism impacted that journey, was very moving. I hoped participants would be as open as possible with me, they were and then some. They candidly shared times of laughter, tears, and frustrations they have experienced as leaders in the academy. They shared their hopes and dreams for the future, not only for their institution but for the larger society. I am honored to have been entrusted with their stories. I hope I represented them and their experiences well.

I will be forever grateful to and in awe of Drs. Winslow, Grant, Baker, Gilbert, James, Shaw, Banks, Reese, and Waters, for giving me so much of their time and a piece of themselves in my journey to becoming Dr. Davis. You are incredible leaders and more importantly amazing human beings. Thank you for paving the way and making the collegiate president a reality for Black women in the academy now and into the future. Thank you for espousing the values rooted in African and Black American culture, traditions, and heritage. Thank you for affirming the worth and value of Black women. Thank you for leading by example and leading your own way. Thanks for being a shining example of Black womanhood and the importance of having a strong sense of self, and what a gift that is to possess. I am very appreciative of the wisdom, the kinship, and the connections you provided. Thanks for sharing your humanity with me and to those who will read my dissertation. I could not have and would not have made it to the finish line without you.

Black women have more than earned a seat at the leadership table or any position of authority we choose to occupy. We have powerful and meaningful stories to be shared and

those stories are valued added to any space we decide to occupy. For the Black women who will read my labor of love, I hope you will feel empowered and see yourself in the amazing women, and leaders I spoke with.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Leadership in predominantly white colleges and universities does not often reflect the increasingly diverse student population enrolling in institutions of higher education. In 2017 the American Council on Education (ACE) estimated that by 2024, students of color, those who are Latino, and Black will make up 44% of all college students. In addition, women currently make up over 50% of all enrolled undergraduates (ACE, 2023). However, even with increased gender and racial diversity, the current archetypal college president is still a white married male in their early sixties (Seltzer, 2017) who has earned a doctorate in the field of education and has served as president for at least seven years (ACE, 2012). Although, the representation of women and people of color in the collegiate presidency have increased since 2011, it still lags far behind white males who comprised 83% of all college presidents in 2012 and 2016 (ACE, 2012, 2017). By 2016, only 30% of all college and university presidents, in the United States were women, of which 17% were women of color, while 9% of all women college presidents identified as Black (ACE, 2017). The most recent data from the ACE President's Report (ACE, 2023) indicates that there has been some improvement in this area. In 2022 women made up 33% of all college presidents, 69% of whom identified as white, 31% identified as women of color, most of whom identified as Black women. Black women now comprise 14.1% of all women college presidents (ACE, 2023). While the

representation of Black women college presidents increased by 5.1 percentage points among all women, their presence as head of an institution is extremely low in comparison to their white, female, and male counterparts.

The progress made over the past 25 years has been slow. In 1997, Black women comprised only 1.4 % of all college presidents in the country, and 55% of them lead community colleges, served at state satellite campuses, or headed historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs; Waring, 2003). The data provided in the ACE President's Report (ACE, 2017) showed, Black women made up 2.7 % of all college presidents nationally, primarily serving at the HBCUS, two-year and/or minority serving institutions. This was an increase of only 1.3 percentage points between 1997 and 2016. The current ACE President's Report (ACE, 2023) indicates the percentage of Black women college presidents has doubled since 2016, moving from 2.7 % to 5.4%, over the past 6 years. However, neither the 2017 or 2023 reports disaggregated the data by race, gender, and institutional type (ACE, 2017, 2023). Moreover, most Black women presidents continue to lead community colleges, HBCUs and public satellite institutions, they are less represented at predominantly white, four-year institutions.

As highlighted by the data points provided, Black women have had some success in becoming a college president, yet they still face challenges. The literature has given considerable attention to the persistent patterns of gender and racial discrimination Black women experience in academia, as well as the sense of isolation and lack of strong mentors and networks Black women in leadership roles experience when trying to advance their careers (Hill, 2012; Jackson, 2004; Jackson & Harris, 2007; Parker & ogilvie, 1997). Scholars have also identified organizational structures in addition to the racial and gender

discrimination Black women encounter in postsecondary education. Gamble and Turner (2015), for example, found that organizational structures, specifically power held within an “old boy” network, and biased hiring and promotion practices are barriers to career advancement for Black women in higher education. Additionally, search committees tend to overlook Black women as they often “screen and identify candidates who most reflect their own credentials and goals” (Howard, 2017, p. 74).

When considering institutional type, racial and gender discrimination is most present for Black women faculty and administrators who hold leadership positions at predominately white institutions (PWIs; Gardner et al., 2014; Jackson, 2004; Mainah & Perkins, 2015; Williams, 1989; Ware, 2000). Patton and Hayes (2018) assert that Black women are subject to harmful stereotypical perceptions, like the angry, loud, and disruptive Black woman. This perception can lead to one’s abilities being frequently questioned by their peers and subordinates (Williams, 1989). Further, the racial and gender discrimination experienced by Black women administrators and faculty compromises their upward mobility in higher education as they spend a great deal of energy combating the negative and stereotypical perceptions that results in unnecessary barriers about who they are and their capabilities (Coker et al., 2018; Ware, 2000). As a result of these negative perceptions barriers are formed that limit the access Black women have to leadership roles in higher education. This may be a result of Black women not being seen as leaders, having their authority undermined and capabilities and credentials questioned (Museus et al., 2016). An additional factor that may hinder Black women’s access to leadership roles in the academy is the perceptions held about leadership that were developed by studying white male leaders (Parker & ogilvie, 1996). The predominate use of leadership models, that are based in Anglo-American male

hierarchical structures are additional barriers. The use of these models to understand leaders in higher education, nullifies the ways in which Black women approach their leadership (Parker & ogilvie, 1996). Consequently, those who study leadership in higher education generally, do not consider how these models impact the underrepresentation and/or experiences of Black women presidents at four-year predominantly white institutions (PWIs).

Problem Statement

For higher education to be responsive to the changing national and student population, its leadership must be “reflective of the world around it, (which) will be key to managing the challenges of today and the unknown challenges of tomorrow” (ACE, 2017, para. 4). Unfortunately, despite the increasing diversity of the student body, college presidents remain primarily white; therefore, maintaining a limited view of leadership. Centering the experiences of Black women as a “strength to build, develop, and perform leadership” (Lloyd-Jones, 2016, p. 66), and understanding their ways of knowing, is an important step for postsecondary education in meeting these challenges. Otherwise, those enrolling in colleges and universities can expect little change in the make-up of their leaders (Patton, 2016). Therefore, the problem this study sought to address was the need to understand how the experiences of Black women informed their leadership practice to navigate the barriers that limited access to the collegiate presidency at four-year PWIs.

Moreover, we know little about Black women college presidents’ experiences. Much of the literature regarding leadership and Black women in the academy focuses on administrators, generally, while the experience of Black women college and university presidents, particularly at four-year PWIs, is rarely studied (Howard, 2017; Turner Kelly & Winkle-Wagner, 2017). Additionally, among the existing literature much of the research

tends to treat Black women in higher education as a monolithic group, failing to acknowledge the difference in their experiences as a member of the faculty, administration, or senior leadership (Henry, 2010). A more nuanced examination of Black women college and university presidents is needed.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following questions:

1. How do the lived experiences of racism and sexism influence the leadership approach of Black women college presidents?
 - a. In what ways can these experiences help describe how Black women college presidents lead?
2. How do Black women college presidents define their leadership approach?
 - a. What strategies do Black women college presidents employ in their leadership practice?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of my study was to understand how the leadership practice of Black women college presidents at four-year PWIs is informed by their lived experiences. Given the scant number of Black women who hold this position, it is important to understand their leadership approaches and their professional development in higher education (Grant, 2016). For the purposes of this study, I defined Black woman as a person, born in the United States, who identifies as female and is part of the African Diaspora. I also used the terms Black and African American interchangeably keeping in line with the various ways in which researchers describe this population. In addition, the terms approach and/or practice were

used interchangeably when speaking about one's leadership style. I defined approach/practice as a particular repeated manner in which one leads.

Significance of the Study

My study is of most interest to Black women in senior academic and administrative positions, like dean, vice president or department chair as well as faculty and staff who aspire to become a college president. In addition, my study offers Black women a framework that recognizes the influence of race and gender on and appropriately identifies their leadership praxis, by providing a new narrative, perspective, and a framework they can use to articulate their leadership approach. In line with Wolfe and Patterson Dilworth (2015), my study filled the need to further examine diversity in institutional leadership, with a focus on the intersecting identities and experiences of Black women.

Furthermore, key stakeholders, including, boards of trustees and executive search firms responsible for recruiting and hiring the president gain tools to better evaluate Black women as candidates for leadership roles in the academy. As a result, executive search firms and boards of trustees will be able to tap into this underrepresented population, diversifying applicant pools. Likewise, professional organizations with programs to increase the presidential pipeline for underrepresented populations, like the American Council on Education's Fellowship program, can also tap into this population, while tailoring their leadership development programs to speak directly to the ways Black women lead. Identifying the gender and racial experiences that influence Black women's ways of leading will inform the recruitment and hiring processes for Black women in leadership positions in the academy.

Additionally, this study would be valuable for students from diverse backgrounds. As institutions become more racially and gender diverse, students are looking to see themselves represented among faculty, staff, and administration. Increasing the percentage of Black women presidents can provide the reflection students are seeking and concretely show them what is possible. Finally, as it relates to research, my study would provide scholars with a new leadership framework developed by and for Black women, in which to conduct additional research. Said research could be expanded to Black women presidents beyond four-year PWIs, as well as across administrative and academic positions, thereby filling in the gaps that currently exist in the literature regarding Black women's leadership practice.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The discussion of the literature begins with conceptual and empirical studies related to the experience of Black women in the academy. The focus will be the barriers Black women face due to gender and racial discrimination as well as the impact these obstacles have on feelings of isolation and the lack of access to social networks and mentors in their career advancement. Given the limited body of literature on Black women presidents, literature about Black women administrators and faculty will be included in the discussion about barriers. The discussion then moves on to the collegiate presidency, the characteristics, as well as the career path of all college presidents and then Black women college presidents. Next, a review of the concept of leadership will take place. To provide context for this area of the literature, the dominant Eurocentric model of leadership, the “great man” theory will be discussed. This will be followed by a discussion about the impact race and gender has on Black women’s approach to leadership. Black feminist thought and epistemology and their influence on leadership theories applied to understanding Black women’s leadership practice foregrounds the discussion of leadership theoretical framework. Finally, to round out the discussion on leadership, the following leadership theories will be discussed: transformational leadership, applied critical leadership and leadership for social justice.

Black Women's Experiences in the Academy

The literature about the experience of Black women in the academy tends to focus on the barriers they face. These barriers are primarily racial and gender discrimination that may lead to a sense of isolation as well as a lack of meaningful mentor relationships and access to networks (Santamaría, 2014). As a result, the strategies, knowledge, and information Black women use to interrupt the cycle of oppression in the academy, are limited (Santamaría, 2014). Moreover, these racial and gender barriers discourage Black women from ascending to leadership positions in higher education as well as keeping them from being productive members of the academy (Grant, 2016). Additionally, the literature about the experience of Black women college presidents is limited. What exists, tends to treat Black women in higher education as a monolithic group, no matter if they hold a faculty, staff, or administrative position; thus, negating their unique experiences as a member of the staff or faculty (Henry, 2010). Much of the literature discusses the experience of Black women within the framework of intersectionality. Briefly, intersectionality describes the status Black women hold as members of two marginalized groups and the resulting discrimination they face based upon their race and gender (Lloyd-Jones, 2019). Intersectionality rejects the single lens framework related to anti-racists and feminist approaches that erase the experiences of Black women (Crenshaw, 1989; Nash, 2008). According to Nash (2008) because race and gender as a social process occur simultaneously, intersectionality is a tool that disrupts the gender race binary, allowing for a more complex understanding of marginalized identities. Although I have separated the discussions of the literature barriers by gender and race, there will be parts of the literature where these experiences will be discussed jointly, as they are not easily discussed in isolation. I will begin this section of the literature review with a discussion of

gender barriers, followed by racial barriers, then a discussion on isolation and finally mentors and networks.

Gender Barriers

As it relates to sexism, women generally must contend with working in a hostile work environment due to sexual harassment and issues like the wage gap between women and men. For example, women earn approximately 20% less than their male counterparts at four-year institutions (Hill et al., 2016). This trend is most prominent within student affairs, where women of color are not promoted or received increases in salaries as often as their white male colleagues (Henry, 2010). Additionally, Black women administrators were continually paid less for doing the same job, while holding the same credentials as their white colleagues (Gardner et al., 2014). Black women in the professoriate often held less powerful, less valued, low earning and less prestigious faculty positions in institutions across the U.S. (Jayakumar et al., 2009; Pittman, 2010). This trend can also be seen among women in leadership positions in the academy. In a recent study that examined gender disparities in leadership roles in Massachusetts postsecondary institutions, Dube et al. (2019) found the wage gap (22%) between women and men was higher than the state's average (17%); this gap is most acute at terminal degree-granting institutions where women did not have roles among the highest compensated positions. Among the top ten institutions with the ten most compensated positions (football coach, men's basketball coach, president, faculty, managing director, and executive dean of admissions), only two of those positions were held by women: president, and a faculty member (Dube et al., 2019). In addition, unlike their male colleagues, women, during interviews are also subject to inquiries about family planning, and

whether their family responsibilities will interfere with work obligations, research agendas and their career advancement, resulting in limited leadership opportunities.

Women generally and Black women specifically also experience a difference in standards of performance than men in leadership roles. A study conducted by the American Association of University Women (Hill et al., 2016) found that discouragement, sabotage, and unfair expectations were barriers for women in leadership positions at a college or university. For example, study participants reported feeling pressured to attend public events more than their male counterparts (Hill et al., 2016). Although all women may experience gender discrimination, Hill et al. (2016) found that Black women experience sexism differently than white women. For instance, Black women must adapt their behaviors to those of their predominantly white colleagues while having to challenge the status quo to achieve success in the academy (Patton & Hayes, 2018). In addition, Black women tend to work in unsupportive environments that require them to perform at a higher level than their male and white colleagues (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). For example, Black women faculty and staff are expected to counsel students more frequently, especially students of color and engage in university service at a higher rate (Seo & Hinton, 2009). Vigil Laden and Hagedorn (2000) found that Black women faculty spend more time with students outside the classroom as well as in formal and informal advising activities. Additionally, Black women faculty are expected to conform to gender roles, by taking on more “nurturing and service responsibilities than their male counterparts (Pittman, 2021, p. 185). Such disparities may lead to feelings of isolation, stress and low job satisfaction among Black women faculty and staff in higher education (Thompson & Dey, 1998). The next section will highlight the racial

barriers Black women experience in academia. This discussion will be followed by an examination of the literature regarding isolation and Black women.

Racial Barriers

Racism, not sexism, has been found to be the greatest barrier to career advancement for Black women at PWIs (Grant,2016; Parker & ogilvie, 1996; Pittman, 2010; Zamani, 2003). The researchers cited here, with varying foci, using different methodological approaches came to this conclusion by connecting the impact of race in their studies on leadership. Parker and ogilvie (1996), took a theoretical approach to their study on leadership of Black women in higher education. Specifically, the researchers sought to challenge the application of white-male hierarchical and distinctly female models of leadership to Black women. The contextual interactive cross-cultural model to understand leadership was used in the study to dispel the assumption that women are a homogenous group and illuminate the importance of race and gender on the leadership practice of Black women. Parker and ogilvie found for Black women in leadership positions, race not gender is the primary hinderance to career advancement in predominantly white organizations. More pointedly, they found for study participants, society sees their race first before their gender (Parker & ogilvie, 1996). As a result, Black women are disadvantaged socially and economically, they contend with stereotypical images others hold of them, and their leadership ability is overlooked (Parker & ogilvie, 1996). Consequently, these racial barriers impact the roles and status of Black women in the academy (Parker & ogilvie, 1996).

Grant (2016) and Zamani (2003) both used a historical approach in their research on the experience of Black women in the academy. Grant examined the historical and current literature related to the impact of the glass ceiling effect on the career progression of Black

women, while Zamani studied the roles Black women held throughout the history of postsecondary education in America. The authors' historical review also identified racism as the primary barrier to Black women's career progression. Zamani (2003) found that Black women are more conscious of the ways they are disadvantaged by their race. Furthermore, study participants assert that the obstacles they face, like limited access to education in and beyond K-12, to positions within education such as teacher or principal and lacking the same opportunities as white women; are due to being Black. Grant (2016) further asserts that historical and current racial oppression influence negative attitudes towards Black women, thus impacting their ability to break through the glass ceiling of leadership in the academy.

The challenges to career advancement for Black women faculty is a bit more nuanced, because of the tenure and promotion process. Unlike administrators, faculty are evaluated based on their research, teaching and service. Black women faculty experience a lack respect and recognition for and face higher scrutiny of their research agenda from colleagues; thereby they must work harder to be viewed as legitimate scholars (Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001). This may be due to the "ideological ancestry of academic culture" in which the intellectual contributions of faculty of color are automatically dismissed (Thompson, 2008, p. 50). Additionally, Black women historically and contemporarily are viewed as non-academic or producers of illegitimate knowledge (Croom, 2017). For example, Frazier (2011) found that research interests of Black faculty were not valued by tenured faculty, further marginalizing those seeking tenure. Faculty whose research focus is on race, underrepresented and oppressed populations or incorporated diversity were rejected and discredited (McCray, 2017; Tuitt et al., 2009). As a result, Black faculty women or men are negatively impacted in pursuing tenure or promotion.

In addition to the lack of respect for their scholarship, Black women are often disrespected in the classroom which can impact their ability to earn tenure. In a narrative study, Pittman (2010) found that Black women faculty faced challenges to their authority, intellect, and teaching ability. For example, study participants shared how white male students would engage in passive aggressive behavior through the tone of their emails or sitting with their arms crossed during class. Elaborating on this behavior, a study participant stated how “white males will open my door to my office without knocking ... No one else just opens my door” (Pittman, 2010, p. 188). White male students would also refer to Black women faculty by their first name not their formal title, negating their position as a faculty member deserving respect. Such negative experiences with white students appear in course evaluations, especially classes that focus on race and diversity (Turner & Myers, 2000). In opposition to faculty of color, white students have used course evaluations as a weapon (Parker & Neville, 2019) labeling faculty of color as racist, less effective or a bad professor (Witherspoon Arnold et al., 2016). Negative evaluations may be used to deny Black women faculty tenure and/or promotion (Witherspoon Arnold et al., 2016) as well as impact perceptions of their performance (Chambers, 2011–2012).

On an institutional level, racial discrimination either covert or overt in employment was found to be a barrier to having a successful career for Black women in the academy (Gardner et al., 2014). Gardner et al. (2014) interviewed 10 student affairs administrators to gain a better understanding of their experiences in higher education. Their focus on issues of adjustment, career dynamics and institutional factors lead researchers to identify themes that either hindered or enabled the academy. Researchers found enablers of success included mentoring relationships, institutional commitment to diversity, professional preparation and a

healthy sense of self-motivation and support networks. Conversely, barriers to success were feelings of separateness, perceptions of prejudice, discrimination within the work environment and lack of advancement opportunities (Gardner et. al, 2014). Although this study highlighted the impact racism has on Black administrators in academia the findings are still limited. The study included Black men in the sample yet did not include Black women in leadership roles or those in the faculty.

Further exacerbating the underrepresentation of Black women in the college presidency is the persistent racial discrimination that is characteristic of being “in the White man’s world, (where) Black women are viewed as having little or no worth” (Jones, 2005, para. 1). O’Neill Green and Meraz-Lewis (2019) and Zamani (2003) found that because of their intersecting identities as Black and female, Black women historically “have been preceded by white men, white women, and African American men in importance and standing” (p.206). Davis and Maldonado (2015) conducted a phenomenological study on the impact the intersection of gender and race has on Black women in higher education. Through purposeful sampling, the researchers interviewed five Black women in leadership positions in the academy, to better understand their lived experiences and development as leaders. The authors found that race and gender influenced how they developed as leaders in the academy. As a result of the constant racism and sexism at play, it was difficult for members of the dominant culture to see Black women’s worth beyond their labor (Patton & Hayes, 2018). Such discrimination oppresses Black women in higher education (Grimes, 2005) and make the road to the presidency more limited for them than it is for White women (Gamble & Turner, 2015).

Isolation

Administrators of color have reported feelings of isolation and heightened sensitivity to criticism from colleagues (Wolfe & Patterson Dilworth, 2015). Such feelings of isolation may be attributed to Black women being placed in unwelcoming, isolative and insensitive campuses (Henry, 2010). Feeling invisible and marginalized can be exhibited in formal and informal ways (Lloyd-Jones, 2019). In a phenomenological study exploring the experiences of Black women administrators at PWIs, O'Neill Green and Mezar-Lewis (2019) found among participants not being invited to lunch with colleagues, or to after work events lead to feelings of isolation. Of the 10 Black women interviewed and/or surveyed from two four-year institutions in Michigan, one participant shared that she was only included in meetings because her title and administrative position did not allow her colleagues to avoid inviting her. The study did not indicate what title or position the participant held. Moreover, the same participant further stated, that even when she was included in meetings, "having people not listen to or acknowledge your voice" heightened her feelings of isolation (O'Neill Green & Mezar-Lewis, 2019, p. 198).

Turner and Wagner (2017) found other factors, like an institution's workforce demographics, environment, and culture, were salient and contributed to feelings of isolation among Black female faculty at PWI's. The researchers also found the lack of diversity led study participants to feelings of being the only one, within their departments or programs. Further the individualistic nature of research and publishing, which is counter to the preference of working collaboratively, exacerbated participants feelings of isolation at their institutions. Additionally, Black women faculty contend with assumptions of being an affirmative action hire by their white colleagues, as well as receiving minimal institutional,

college or departmental support impact their level of success (Edwards et al., 2011; Pittman, 2010). Further, the exclusion of Black women in leadership positions in higher education decreases their access to positions of influence (Grant, 2016).

Limited Access to Mentors and Networks

As a result of race and gender-based discrimination, Black women also have limited access to mentors and formal and informal social networks. In taking a deeper look into the literature on mentors, Santamaría (2014) asserts that mentors are essential to the success and survival of Black women in higher education. Although Black women have benefited from having Black and white mentors, in their careers (Jackson, 2004), they face specific challenges in establishing a strong mentor relationship. First, there is a lack of Black women in senior administration that can serve as role models in the academy. Jackson and Harris (2007) found that Black women who aspire to top leadership positions in higher education, are limited by the lack of Black women role models who have been successful in surpassing gender and racial barriers to advancing their careers. Having more Black women leaders, specifically Black women presidents, would be greatly beneficial to this population. Hill et al. (2016) posit, role models who are from the same racial and ethnic group, are powerful for those looking to advance in their careers. The second challenge specific to Black women in finding a mentor is establishing a meaningful and strong mentor relationship, particularly mentors within PWIs that may be white. O'Neill Green & Mezar-Lewis (2019) assert that establishing a trusting mentor relationship at PWIs, is challenging for Black women who have been let down in the past by white mentors when they were vulnerable.

While accessing mentors is difficult for women of color, it is more challenging for those seeking sponsorship another form of mentorship in which “sponsors share both status

and opportunity,” provide key contacts, meeting opportunities, and seeks career opportunities on one’s behalf (Hill et al., 2016, p.12). Unlike a mentor, a sponsor connects one to opportunities by making that person visible to leaders in the institution and provides support when challenges arise (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Thus, having a sponsor is more effective than the traditional mentor role (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Ironically, Davis and Maldonado (2015) also found in their study that Black women tend to be sponsored by white men. Because white men predominantly occupy senior level positions with decision making power can provide Black women with career opportunities. The researchers found Black women would develop “strategic mechanisms to navigate career advancement” (Davis & Maldonado, 2015, p. 58).

In addition to the lack of access to mentors and sponsors, Black women also contend with little to no access to networks, formal or informal. Such networks can “provide information about jobs, promotions, professional advice, resources and expertise” (Lennon, 2012, p.19). In addition to career advancement, Edwards et al. (2011) assert involvement in networks and with mentors, or the lack thereof, is critical to Black female faculty persisting in the tenure process and academic profession. However, Black women faculty are excluded from networks based on gender by men of color, race by white women and both race and gender by white men (Pittman, 2010) making career advancement difficult. Davis and Maldonado (2015) found that Black women were also excluded from formal and informal networks, because they did not have “card-carrying membership” to the “good old boys” club (p. 59). Not having membership in this club makes career advancement more challenging for women of color generally and Black women specifically; as their outside of work life is less likely to overlap with their managers, who tend to be white. For example, potential

networking activities like playing golf, tend to be viewed as masculine, thus, requiring women of color to make more of an effort (Hill et al., 2016). Despite the obstacles Black women face in the academy, some persist, pursue, and succeed in becoming a college president.

The College Presidency

To better understand the experiences of Black women presidents, it is important to discuss what the literature says about the role/responsibilities, the challenges faced, and the skills needed to serve in this capacity. The role/responsibilities of a college president will be discussed first, followed by their challenges and the required skill sets. According to Freeland (2017) the primary role of a college president is to provide a strategic direction for an institution. This is accomplished by establishing priorities for the various units within a college or university, ensuring they have the resources needed to meet their goals, while simultaneously monitoring institutional progress, redirecting when moving off course and promoting the importance of that strategic direction to key constituents (Freeland, 2017). The enormous role college presidents have come with enormous challenges, which I will discuss next.

In an ever-changing world, college presidents face a multitude of challenges in leading institutions of higher education. Such challenges include political uncertainty, financial pressures, changing student demographics and changes in technology (Freeland, 2017). In addition to financial pressures, presidents also reported faculty resistance to change, campus politics, and limited time to think about or address institutional concerns, in their role (ACE, 2017). As a result, the skill sets a president needs to carry out their responsibilities is wide ranging. In a 2017 article, president emeritus of Northeastern

University, Richard Freeland highlighted three core skill sets a president needs to be successful: organizational design, team building and strategic leadership. These skills are vital to articulating and executing a vision for the institution, while getting buy-in from key stakeholders and building an organization's capacity to fulfill the vision (Freeland, 2017).

The American College President Study (2017) conducted by ACE, further illuminates why such skills are important. For example, presidents reported among internal stakeholders' students (62%), faculty (57%) and department heads (32%) were least likely to understand the challenges they face. Conversely, those in the office of advancement, in the provost and the president's office staff were more understanding. Among external stakeholders, state legislators and the media were least likely to understand the challenges of a college president. Therefore, college presidents need to be highly skilled to manage the expectations of internal and external stakeholders while addressing the needs of the institution.

The Path to the Presidency

The path one takes to a college presidency, regardless of institutional type, can vary by individual; no two journeys are the same. However, those serving as president tend to follow a similar pattern. Over 80% of college presidents, previously served in a leadership position within higher education (ACE Presidents Report, 2023); 54% served as the chief academic officer or in some other senior level academic affairs position, while 28% were president at a previous institution. The remaining 9% of all college presidents had roles in senior level positions outside higher education within the K-12 system, and/or business, and government immediately prior to becoming a president. Finally, over 80% of all women and 4% of women of color college presidents were members of the faculty, spending approximately 10 years in the classroom before serving as president (ACE, Presidents

Report, 2017). In other words, 90% of women of color college presidents were members of the faculty in comparison to 80% of all college presidents.

When considering one's gender in ascending to a college presidency, women do not fare as well as their male counterparts. According to a major study conducted by the Colorado Women's College at the University of Denver, found that ascending to the presidency at an institution while already holding this position at another is an additional challenge for aspiring women presidents (Lennon, 2012). The study, conducted as part of the *White House Project: Benchmarking Women's Leadership*, examined raw data in 14 sectors across the country including academia, K-12 education, law, medicine, technology, and sports, to name a few. One of the major findings from the study showed that although women were top performers in their various industries, they were not represented in top leadership roles. This finding is particularly salient to my study, as the research demonstrated that one of the factors that contributes to the low representation of women in the presidency is many presidents laterally moving from one institution to another: further disadvantaging women and women of color seeking a college presidency. In other words, white men are moving from one presidency to another, thus limiting opportunities for women generally and Black women specifically. Although the study captured major trends based on the data that was reviewed, it was limited. Due to the numerous ways the government categorizes race and ethnicity, the data sources related to race and ethnicity were inconsistent and/or not readily available. However, this study does shed light on the factors that may contribute to the lack of representation by women within the college presidency. For example, among women presidents, the successful path to the presidency was through their role as a senior academic affairs officer (Trotman Reid, 2012).

Hill et al. (2016) found 52% of women college presidents served as provost or chief academic officer prior to becoming a president, in comparison to 42% of men. When taking race into consideration, Black presidents, women and/or men were more likely (20%) to come to the presidency from a non-academic senior level positions than any other ethnic group (ACE Presidents Report, 2017). In addition, over 20% of Black presidents were promoted internally, a rate lower than their white (26%) and Latino (26%) colleagues (ACE Presidents Report, 2017). However, as the primary way to become college president, climbing the faculty and academic administrative ranks is especially important for women who aspire for the top leadership position in the academy.

Reviewing the literature that considers race and gender on one's path to the collegiate presidency Black women have followed the same pattern as their male and white counterparts. They were either presidents at a prior institution or served as a provost or in another senior academic affairs role, before assuming the presidency (ACE, Presidents Report, 2017). Working from the premise, that this is the career path one should take to become a college president, one may assume that this path is more challenging for Black women. For example, researchers like Davis and Maldonado (2015) and Hill et al. (2016) have reported that the lack of Black women presidents is due to a shortage of qualified candidates. Also known as the pipeline problem, this phenomenon indicates that the lack of qualified Black women with the education and experience are not available to be hired (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). However, any assumption regarding the lack of qualified candidates does not hold up under examination. Lloyd-Jones (2016) posits the underrepresentation of Black women presidents is due to the "resistant and persistent

presence of discriminatory practices and biases that sustain them,” not the supposed large pool of unqualified Black women.

For example, Black women earn more degrees than any other racial/ethnic group, regardless of gender. I will share the data related to Black and white women. Among all degrees awarded to students in 2016, Black women earned 64% of bachelor’s degrees, 70% of the master’s degrees and 66% of doctorates, while white women earned 56%, 62% and 53% of bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral degrees respectively (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). The data illuminates how Black women are held to a higher standard in the academy. The majority (93%) of Black women college presidents hold a doctorate (Jackson & Harris, 2007) as compared to 30% of white women (ACE, 2017). Given this information, the existence of other possible factors, like persistent racial and gender discrimination may account for the underrepresentation of Black women presidents across the higher education landscape. Museus et al. (2016), assert that the lack of qualified applicants is based on racial myths, not the actual existence of unqualified candidates. Upon further examination of the literature about faculty of color recruitment, Museus et al. (2016) found that there is a plethora of qualified people of color with terminal degrees, however, they remain an untapped resource in the academy. The low percentage of Black women in the collegiate presidency contributes to a gap in the literature that hinders a full understanding of how Black women lead. Such a gap in the literature does not allow for a thorough comprehension of the challenges Black women experience that can impede upward career movement, thus limiting researchers and administrators from developing strategies to address this phenomenon (Lloyd-Jones, 2016).

The literature reviewed thus far has, primarily consisted of qualitative studies that focused on the experiences and challenges, Black women face in the academy. Specifically, the research reviewed has shown that Black women in the academy experience barriers due to the intersecting oppression based on their racial and gender identities. Such barriers impact the career progression of Black women because they are limited in their access to important networks and mentors, as well as working in a hostile environment. Understanding the importance of meaningful mentor relationships and networks in the career advancement of Black women is essential to addressing their underrepresentation in leadership roles. Of note, is the need for Black women to have exposure to other Black women in leadership positions that can speak to their unique experiences.

While college presidents rose to their position through the faculty ranks and senior academic affairs positions; differences do exist when taking a closer look at one's race and/or gender. More often than male presidents, women ascend to the presidency from senior academic affairs position, approximately 50% of the time, while men tend to assume a presidency while already occupying that position at another institution. While some researchers (Davis & Maldonado,2015; Hill et al., 2016) have discussed that the lack of Black women presidents is due to a shortage of qualified candidates, the studies reviewed in this discussion did not present the same conclusion. Capable Black women are available to serve as a college president, if the concept of leadership held in the academy is expanded upon and the racial and gender barriers reduced. However, because Black women are often hindered in advancing their career, little is known about those who are successful in assuming leadership positions in higher education. To address this gap, I will now move to the discussion about Black women's leadership styles and practice.

Gender, Race, and Leadership

The concept of leadership in the United States has been based upon the perspective of the white middle class and is reflected in the behaviors, styles, and traits of the dominant culture (Parker & ogilvie, 1996); and historically, been assumed to be masculine (Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Lloyd-Jones, 2016). As a result, women in leadership roles are expected to emulate male models of leadership (Green & King, 2001). The most notable, is the “great man” theory of leadership. First popularized in the 19th century, the great man theory assumes that leadership is a trait one is born with, not learned (Malos, 2012). Borgotta et al. (1954) found in their study of 300 men that, the great man theory focuses on identifying the best “man” for top leadership roles: specifically, leadership roles in the military and politics. Since its inception, the “great man” theory has become foundational to subsequent leadership theories, thus establishing leadership as fundamentally male (Gamble & Turner, 2015).

The long history of white males in leadership positions has infused the notion of leadership with stereotypical masculine traits (Hill et al., 2016) attributable to white men (Grant, 2016). These traits, as Lloyd-Jones (2016) describes, include being forceful, authoritative, and aggressive. Despite this theory’s lack of wide-ranging applicability to all, it continues to influence who is seen as capable leaders, negatively impacting the access women of color have to leadership opportunities (Lloyd-Jones, 2016). Furthermore, the “great man” theory reinforces beliefs and stereotypes about Black women’s inability to lead (Lloyd-Jones, 2016). Thus, Black women’s leadership opportunities are affected by the perceptions white men and others hold of them as based upon their race and gender, among other identities that they may hold, like sexual orientation or age (Hill et al., 2016). As a result, Black women have often been left out of higher education leadership (Jones, 2005).

Research on the influence of women's leadership seldom considers race. The existing literature on women's leadership has assumed that white and Black women have parallel experiences, and views women's leadership through a white female lens (Parker & Ogilvie, 1996). Further examination of the literature that considers both race and gender's influence on leadership, has focused on the expectation of behavior. These expectations serve as a double-edged sword for women generally, and Black women specifically serving in a leadership role in the academy. Traditional leadership traits have been primarily aligned with masculine behaviors, like being competitive, objective, and rational (Hill et al., 2016). However, women leaders are expected, by society, to act in more communal ways than to exhibit agency (Livingston, 2018), as well as be sensitive, caring, compassionate, democratic, participative, and nurturing (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Women who exhibit a high level of agentic qualities, being ambitious, self-confident, and assertive, are seen as aggressive and pushy (Lloyd-Jones, 2016) and tend to be punished for this behavior. For example, Livingston (2018), citing Heilman and Chen (2005), asserts that women who demonstrated positive organizational citizenship or helpful behaviors were not rewarded for such behavior, while men were. Additionally, Heilman and Chen (2005) found women who were not helpful in their organization, were punished, passed over for promotion or increase in salary, men were not. Davis and Maldonado (2015) argue that "when the female gender role is inconsistent with a leader role, prejudice toward women as leaders is a common outcome" (p.49). However, a difference does exist for women based on one's race.

Livingston (2018) and Hill et al. (2016) discussed how race is gendered; influencing the perceptions on how one is to behave as a leader. For example, Hill et al. (2016) literature review examined the environment where leadership develops. They found being Black is

aligned more with being masculine while femininity is more aligned with being Asian. Like Hill et al., Livingston's (2018) literature review, highlighting the factors that contribute to the underrepresentation of women and people of color in leadership positions, found that Black women are perceived to possess more masculine traits than white women. As a result, Black women are not penalized for exhibiting male aligned leadership traits. However, they are disadvantaged in different ways than white women (Hill et al., 2016). For example, Livingston (2018) notes that Black women are disproportionately penalized for making mistakes, which are viewed as proof of their inability to lead. This contradictory finding in Hill et al.'s study demonstrates the complexity that the combination of gender and race has on leadership. Therefore, Black women "tend to be defined as non-prototypical, marginal members of their racial and gender groups rendering them invisible" (Livingston, 2018, p. 6). Furthermore, little attention is given to how Black women's leadership practices that are counter to stereotypical gender roles are assessed (Hill et al., 2016). Green and King (2001) assert that using Eurocentric theories of leadership are not appropriate to understand the behaviors, values and needs of Black people (and women); as these intersecting identities are vital to the leadership practice of Black women (Lomotey, 2019). This assertion is salient to the study of Black women's leadership. Fisher and Koch (1996, as cited in Gamble & Turner, 2000) in their examination of empirical studies and their own experiences explored the transformational leadership styles of college presidents; found that race and gender are factors that impact the selection of senior leaders and presidents of colleges and universities. Therefore, scholars studying leadership must consider how race and gender impact Black women leaders and how their behavior is evaluated.

The great man theory of leadership has permeated higher education's view of leadership; thus, impacting who is seen as leaders and who is not in American higher education. Black women do not fit this view. As a Eurocentric model of leadership, the great man theory does not consider gender nor race in its application. Those selecting institutional leaders still rely on male characteristics of leadership, being aggressive, forceful, and authoritative, as the most desired and appropriate traits to possess. Additionally, leadership models that do consider gender, do so from the perspective of white women. There is no consideration for the unique perspective and leadership traits Black women bring to the academy. For higher education to be more inclusive in terms of its leadership, alternative models that centers the voices and experiences of Black women is needed. However, before I discuss this body of literature, I will discuss Black feminist epistemology (BFE) and its influence on the theories applied when studying Black women in academic leadership.

Black Feminist Epistemology's Influence on Leadership Frameworks

Black feminist epistemology (BFE) is not often thought of as a leadership framework. However, BFE influences the leadership theories used to understand the leadership praxis of Black women. For example, Collins (2000) describes Black women's leadership in terms of their use of power within organizations. Collins further asserts that Black women possess distinct notions of leadership, which focuses on fostering the leadership abilities of others and teaching them to be self-reliant. As a result, the focus on empowering others influences Black women's behavior within an organization. One's work or role within an organization is seen as a place to foster change. Drawing on their understandings (knowledge) of family and community, Black women create alliances to expand their sphere of influence within an organization by establishing and maintaining strategic relationships. In other words, Collins

(2000) suggests that Black women pull on their lived experience to lead; the first principle of BFE.

Feminist Scholarship

The foundation on which Black feminist epistemology is built is feminist scholarship. Feminist scholarship through the centrality of gender challenges the traditional notions of leadership development (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). To better understand the leadership praxis of women, “feminists have developed an organizational leadership model of shared power” which “aims at operationalizing community within the ... workplace” (Arches, 1997, p.116). In this model decision-making is a group process, where “mutual support, interdependence, shared power, and nurturing social relationships” is highly valued (Arches, 1997, p. 116). However, by focusing on gender equity, feminist scholarship does not consider the impact of race and gender on women’s oppression in the research (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). As a result, Black women’s concerns and well-being were not considered in the early beginnings of feminist thought (Zamani, 2003). Since these intersecting identities, race, and gender, cannot be separated, Black feminist theory provides Black women the opportunity to talk about an experience that is unique and unknown to other women (Davis & Maldonado, 2015).

Black Feminist Theory

An African-centered framework, Black feminist theory was designed by and for Black women and focuses on their unique experiences (Lomotey, 2019). According to Arches (1997) “this perspective manifest particularly in ... a leadership style that view the individual’s problems” in relation to those of the community (p.116). Essentially, Black feminist theory recognizes one’s interconnectedness to larger social systems, the reliance on

one another for survival, exhibits caring and supportive behavior and recognizes organizational problems in context with larger society (Arches, 1997). In addition, the more contemporary Black feminist movement relies on collaboration and coalition building to solve societal problems for the greater good (Santamaría, 2014). As a result, Black feminist theory provides a space for Black feminism to add to the discourse about Black women as well as the larger body of scholarship, centering their experiences (Santamaría, 2014).

Santamaría (2014) posits that intentionally thinking about Black feminism is another way to combat oppression, while simultaneously “being responsive to multicultural, multiracial, and fluid sexual images” in the context of dominant systems in society (p. 117). In addition, Black feminist leaders recognize the various learning styles of others, are focused more on quality not quantity as a measure of success and place a higher value on interpersonal relationships (Arches, 1997). Finally, Black feminist theory, seeks to “flatten hierarchy, downplay superordinate-subordinate relations, promote participatory management, and encourage an equitable distribution of power in a community context” (Arches, 1997, p. 118). This notion is emphasized in both feminism and Afrocentrism.

Black feminist theory critiques what is considered knowledge, again centering the experiences and voices of Black women. Additionally, Black feminist theory addresses the oppression Black women experience because of their ways of knowing being suppressed. Black feminist theory provides the foundation for Black feminist epistemology. A useful framework to understand the ways in which Black women create and disseminate knowledge, BFE has not been applied as the collectivist leadership approach that it is. Thus, widening the gap in the literature about Black women’s leadership in the academy. Furthermore, BFE provides an alternative to the dominant narrative about leadership, as well

as highlights how Black women use their own ways of knowing to lead. Therefore, Black women are best equipped to name and define their leadership approach.

Defining Black Feminist Epistemology

Developed by Patricia Hill Collins (2000), Black feminist epistemology is a sub-construct of Black feminist thought. Black feminist thought criticizes the traditional view of evaluating knowledge in the academy (Coker et al., 2018). Knowledge evaluations that are assessed by white men tend to perpetuate “the marginalization of Black women in academia and in leadership positions in higher education” (Coker et al., 2018, p. 48). Dotson (2015) asserts that Black feminist thought is “one of the most comprehensive treatments of knowledge problems” that oppresses Black women through the erasure of their thoughts, triumphs, challenges, and lives. A body of critical social theory, Black feminist thought sheds light on the epistemological failings that lead to oppression, through the suppression, trivialization and omission of Black women’s experiences and ways of knowing. (Dotson, 2015). To that end, BFE strives to address the failings of feminist theory highlighted by Black feminist thought.

As an alternative model to assess knowledge, BFE describes how Black women’s ways of knowing are significant in developing distinct theories about society to gain social justice for all marginalized groups (Allen, 2009). A collective experience, BFE outlines how Black women, as members of an oppressed group, construct, and share knowledge to bring about social change (Collins, 2000). Therefore, BFE as an alternative theory can serve as the foundation to understand the ways Black women lead. Collins (2000) offers four principles that are part of BFE: (1) knowledge and wisdom gained from lived experience, (2) dialogue

as a way to assess knowledge claims, (3) an ethic of care, and (4) an ethic of personal accountability.

The first BFE principle comprises two ways of knowing, knowledge and wisdom gained from lived experience. This principle illuminates how one's lived experience serves as criteria for credible knowledge claims (Collins, 2000). One's lived experiences provides meaning, allowing Black women to make sense of and engage in the world. Black women need wisdom in knowing how to navigate the world as beings with intersecting marginalized identities. Collins (2000) notes, "knowledge without wisdom is adequate for the powerful, but wisdom is essential to the survival of the subordinate (p. 257). An additional characteristic of this principle includes the high value placed upon how knowledge gathered through one's experiences is valid and deemed more credible. The second principle illuminates the place of dialogue to assess knowledge claims. More specifically, this BFE principle demonstrates how connecting with others through conversation is vital to the production of knowledge. Emphasis is placed on the influence of Black American culture and African oral traditions in how Black women find their voice and speak and listen to others. In other words, knowledge claims made using dialogue is not developed in isolation, it requires active participation from the community.

The third principle of BFE, ethic of care, describes how emotions, empathy, and expressiveness are "central to the validation (of knowledge) process" (Collins, 2000, p. 263). There are three interrelated components of this principle, appropriateness of emotions in dialogue helps provide meaning in a conversation; capacity for empathy or the ability to see the perspectives of others; and emphasizing an individual's uniqueness, grounded in the African humanism tradition recognizes that each person is a "unique expression of a common

spirit” (Collins, 2000, p. 263). In other words, speaking from the heart, displaying emotions in dialogue, and being capable of empathy are appropriate in the production of knowledge.

The final principle of BFE, ethic of personal accountability (Collins, 2000), describes the way a person’s knowledge claims are assessed based upon their character, values, and ethical beliefs. Essentially, Collins asks, does a person take responsibility for their knowledge claims and/or actions? If so, then those who are respected for their ethics and morals and take responsibility for their words and deeds hold more credibility among Black women.

In a study conducted by Horsford and Tillman (2012) and a book chapter written by Tillman (2007) provide examples of how the principles of BFE show up in the leadership approach of Black women. For example, Tillman’s (2007, as cited in Santamaría, 2014) literature review on African American school leadership highlights how Black women leaders pull from African roots and traditions to inform their practice as leaders. This is a prime example of the first tenet of BFE, knowledge gained from lived experiences. The second example is directly aligned with the third tenet of BFE, an ethic of care. In studying the leadership skills of Black women educators in the K-12 system, Horsford and Tillman (2012) found that Black women exhibit great care in their leadership, by serving as the voice of the community, nurturer and by implementing policies and practices to improve the learning environment for students and educators. However, more needs to be learned to fully understand BFE as a leadership approach.

Patton and Hayes (2018) attempt to do so in their recent study. In their assessment of institutional change models, Patton and Hayes assert that to bring about institutional change, BFE must be at the center when discussing Black women’s work in the academy; and for that

change to be approached intersectionally. Essentially, oppression based on one's race and gender must be considered to create real change related to the college presidency.

Furthermore, Patton and Hayes posit that BFE as a framework can be used by higher education leaders to see the leadership possibilities rooted in Black women's ways of knowing and doing. As Patton and Hayes alludes to in their study, I assert that BFE is a valuable framework in which to view Black women in leadership roles, particularly the college presidency.

Black Women's Approach to Leadership

Black women who have assumed a leadership role in academe tend to act in communal ways, they serve as community "othermothers," spokespersons, activists, and caretakers (Grimes, 2005). Such characteristics can be attributed to several factors. In Waring's (2003) study of 12 Black women college presidents' leadership styles found they were influenced by their (1) social class, (2) education, (3) their reluctance to be leaders, (4) the encouragement of others, (5) to be of better service to students, (6) their own concept of leadership, (7) race and gender and (8) institutional imposed challenges and opportunities on their leadership. Although study participants were reticent to assume the role of president, they did so because they believed they would have a greater impact on educational opportunities for underrepresented students (Waring, 2003). Participants also believed that they were more effective leaders when they attended to relationships across the institution as well as taking a team approach in the decision-making process (Waring, 2003). Essentially, the findings in Waring's study confirmed that one's leadership approach is influenced by one's personal histories, racial and gender identities, and skill sets. Of utmost relevance to my study, is how the findings showed that the participants' racial identity was most

influential on their concept of leadership as well as their ability to build relationships. Black women placed an emphasis on relationships to move their agenda forward and demonstrate their abilities to convince others that they have earned their status as a leader. Although Waring does not describe participant leadership styles in this way, what she has discussed is an example of transformational leadership.

Leadership: Theoretical Frameworks

Upon examination of the literature on Black women's leadership in higher education, the following leadership theories have emerged: transformational leadership, applied critical leadership (ACL), and leadership for social justice. Many of these studies have also applied Black feminism/Black feminist epistemology to these theories to provide a full view of how Black women lead. There is a plethora of literature regarding transformational leadership and Black women's use of this theory. Therefore, transformational leadership will be discussed first. However, the discussion about Black women's understanding and use of ACL and social justice leadership will be limited due to the lack of literature.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership takes into consideration the socio-political and socio-historical experiences of educational organizations, and their practice of equity and social justice (Steimke & Santamaría, 2016). This form of leadership supports the intellectual development of individuals within an organization and enhances their level of satisfaction to the benefit of said organization (Arches, 1997). Furthermore, transformational leadership focuses on including all in the decision-making process to empower and foster the leadership ability of organization members (Arches, 1997). Given that leaders from marginalized groups are not part of the dominant culture, transformational leadership serves as a “values added

component” to their leadership practice (Santamaría & Jean-Marie, 2014, p. 339). As a result, leaders working within the dominant culture (Santamaría, 2014), seek opportunities to challenge the status quo, through a shared vision that they and their followers can make a difference (Santamaría & Jean-Marie 2014).

Black women in the academy tend to adopt a transformational leadership style (Santamaría & Jean-Marie, 2014). Black women tend to lead by example and exhibit two of five universal characteristics of this framework: (1) challenge the status quo and (2) enable others to act as a collective (Santamaría & Jean-Marie, 2014). Thus, leaders are moved to think about educational leadership in new and innovative ways by embodying a culturally specific transformational leadership practice (Santamaría & Jean-Marie, 2014).

Transformational leaders motivate and inspire others in their organization, moving beyond their own interests to focus on the vision and mission of the organization (Kezar & Eckel, 2008). In this instance, transformational leaders assess the vision and needs of others while making clear their needs and vision to support both (Arches, 1997). According to Patton and Hayes (2018), this form of leadership is “rooted in authentic, honest and urgent leadership” (p. 14) in which institutional change can be facilitated by Black women. Despite the strengths of transformational leadership theory, it is limited as it applies to Black women.

Transformational leadership does not solely focus on the intersecting identities or experiences of Black women in educational leadership (Santamaría & Jean-Maire, 2014); it is applied to all those serving in a leadership role.

Applied Critical Leadership

A leadership framework that considers gender and race in its framework is applied critical leadership (ACL). ACL is “an approach or way of thinking about culturally

responsive leadership for social justice and educational equity based on transformative leadership, critical multiculturalism and critical race theory” (Santamaría et al., 2016, p. 19). Those who use ACL to lead, do so through a critical race theory lens and using components of transformative leadership and critical multiculturalism (Santamaría et al., 2016). There are nine characteristics indicative of ACL leaders, (1) they draw upon positive aspects of their racial, gender, and cultural identities; (2) considers various perspectives using critical race theory; (3) in the decision making process consensus is preferred; (4) leads by example in tending to unresolved educational needs; (5) honors the voices of others; (6) builds trust with dominant culture constituents; (7) are transformational leaders who work to serve the greater good; (8) provides evidence based information regarding marginalized groups and, most important ,(9) engages in critical dialogue to enact change (Santamaría et al., 2016). Since Black women tend to adopt a transformational leadership style, ACL is applicable to understanding their leadership approach. (Santamaría et al., 2016). ACL also considers the positive attributes of one’s racial, gender and cultural identities (Santamaría et al., 2016). Another framework that considers both race and gender is leadership for social justice.

Social Justice Leadership

Although there is no one definition for social justice leadership, in the context of Black women’s leadership practice, it “re-constructs the idea that the African-American woman is a model of social justice and empowerment for the community” (Grimes, 2005, p. 4). In studying the leadership of Black female administrators, Jean-Marie (2003, as cited in Grimes, 2005) identified several characteristics of social justice leadership: (1) to prepare new Black scholars, (2) to interpret “their role as a spiritual vocation that serves that greater good” (p. 4), (3) to provide students with the assistance they need to be successful, and (4)

leading to foster change. In her study Grimes (2005) applied social justice leadership within a Black feminist framework as it is a communal model of leadership; and asserts that this model is more appropriate to describe Black women's leadership. However, the literature in this area tends to focus on social justice leadership as an outcome, and not necessarily a leadership approach.

The alternative models used in this literature review, transformational leadership, applied critical leadership and social justice leadership does center the voices of Black women, to an extent. For example, much of the literature about Black women's leadership approaches highlights transformational leadership as the primary approach used in educational leadership. With its emphasis on equity and justice, transformational leadership challenges the status quo by including all members of an organization in the decision-making and leadership processes. However, this theory is limited as it does not consider the specific experiences of Black women.

Although the theories discussed in this literature review illuminate the leadership approach of Black women in the academy; they are inadequate in describing how Black women lead. The leadership frameworks discussed in this literature review not only influence one another, they have pulled from BFE as well. For instance, many of the characteristics in the leadership frameworks discussed are examples of BFE principles. Transformational leadership, for example, considers how educational organizations foster equity and social justice (Steimke & Santamaría, 2016) which is indicative of the third principle of BFE, ethic of care. This is demonstrated through the tremendous care Black women exhibit as leaders in serving as the voice of the community and implementing policies and procedures to improve the educational environment (Horsford & Tillman, 2012). However, to fully understand the

leadership development and practice of Black women, their experience and voice must be centered in the research (Dotson, 2015). Therefore, I assert that Black feminist epistemology may be a more accurate framework to describe Black women college president's leadership praxis.

Sensitizing Concepts

For the purpose of this study, using a conceptual framework, specifically, sensitizing concepts, will be helpful, as it is an interpretive device and a starting point for data analysis in qualitative research (Bowen, 2006). Charmaz (2014) defines sensitizing concepts as a “broad term without definitive characteristics” that peaks a researcher's thoughts on topic and ideas about what questions to ask and how to approach the research (p. 30). For my study, Black women's ways of knowing, also known as Black feminist epistemology, will be the sensitizing concept used to guide the data collection and process of analysis. As a tool in grounded theory research, sensitizing concepts will help in the development of interview questions related to the lived experiences of Black women presidents and their leadership approach. BFE specifically, will help with how I view and code the data that will lay the foundation for building the analysis process (Bowen, 2006; Charmaz, 2014). The foundation for my study's data analysis is the four principles of BFE.

First developed by Patricia Hill Collins (2000), BFE is an alternative model that assesses knowledge creation and dissemination for social change by Black women. BFE can serve as a foundation to understand how Black women lead, particularly within organizations where their distinct notions of leadership are outside of the typical understanding of leadership in American higher education (Collins, 2000). Collins (2000), in defining BFE, provides four principles: (1) lived experience as a source of knowledge and wisdom; (2)

knowledge claims assessed through dialogue; (3) an ethic of care; and (4) personal accountability. By focusing on race, gender, and leadership, and applying the four principles of BFE as the sensitizing concept, will “offer ways of seeing, organizing, and understanding experience” (Bowen, 2006, p. 3). In addition, I will be able to “draw attention to important features of social interaction” to try to understand, interpret and describe the experiences of Black women college presidents at four-year PWIs (Bowen, 2006, p. 3). In other words, using BFE and its four principles will provide me with a tool to analyze the data and interpret the findings to better understand the ways Black women lead that are informed by their lived experiences.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODS

The purpose of this study was to understand how the leadership practice of Black women college presidents at four-year PWIs is informed by their lived experiences. Because the literature about Black women in the academy, specifically Black women presidents is limited, it produces an incomplete and/or false narrative. Research on leadership in higher education often applies white hegemonic constructs universally, thus silencing Black women's voices and serving to marginalize their perspectives on and approach to leadership (Grimes, 2005). However, conducting research that provides a more complete picture of their experiences as well as using methodologies that "are critically sensitive in their abilities to situate lived experience within a broader sociopolitical frame" are needed (Malagon et al., 2009, p. 253). Using a qualitative research method like critical race grounded theory (CRGT) enabled me to gather rich data on the experience of Black women college presidents, that centered their voices in a way that quantitative research could not. More specifically, using CRGT as a methodological framework, allowed me to answer the research questions: How does the lived experiences of racism and sexism influence the leadership approach of Black women college presidents? What strategies do Black women college presidents employ in their leadership practice?

The discussion on my methodology and research design begins with critical race grounded theory. The theoretical foundation of critical race and grounded theories are discussed first; followed by how this methodological framework informed the selection criteria for study participants, the data collection and analysis processes. Next CRGT as a methodology, the benefits of this framework and the ways in which it informed the data collection and analysis processes are highlighted. This is followed by the research design, which includes a discussion on the participant selection process and selection criteria, the method of data collection through semi-structured interviews as well as how the data was analyzed. This section concludes with a discussion on the trustworthiness of the study and study limitations.

Methodology

In American institutions of higher learning “meritocracy and foundational freedoms” are idealized (Fenelon, 2003, p. 88), thus denying the “reality of a racialized society,” the experience of “raced” people and the “problematic aspects of race” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 48). However, critical race theory (CRT), can “unearth what is taken for granted when analyzing race and privilege...and the patterns of exclusion that exist in U.S. society” (Hiraldo, 2010, p. 54). First developed in the mid-1970s in critical legal studies, CRT describes the permanent and pervasive nature of racism in America (Jayakumar et al., 2009). As a framework, CRT provides scholars with the ability to understand, critique and dismantle systems of oppression (Hiraldo, 2010). Scholars have identified the following five tenets of CRT:

- *Permanence of racism* is central and endemic in American society. By extension, so too are institutions of higher education that tend to ignore the existence of

systematic racism in their halls, perpetuating “structural and institutional racism” (Hiraldo, 2010, p.55).

- *Challenges dominant ideology* that allows the claims of meritocracy, equal opportunity, and colorblindness to be used as a “mechanism...to ignore racist policies” that perpetuate inequality (Hiraldo, 2010, p. 56). Thereby challenging notions of objective research that ignores people of color ways of knowing (Yosso, 2005).
- *Legitimizes the experiential knowledge of people of color* serves multiple functions in CRT analysis. For people of color, it provides a means for them to share their experience of racism using counternarratives.
- In CRT, data “*analyses are interdisciplinary*” (Urrieta et al., 2014, p. 1151). To study the relationship between race/racism and power, CRT draws from various disciplines such as critical legal studies, civil rights and ethnic studies (Malagon et al., 2009).
- *Intersectionality* rejects the single lens framework related to anti-racists and feminist approaches that tend to erase the experiences of Black women when addressing and trying to remedy discrimination (Crenshaw, 1989; Nash, 2008). As it relates to my study, intersectionality disrupts the race/gender binary inherent in a single axis framework.

Critical race theory as a methodology, challenges existing research texts, theories, and paradigms, as well as the separation of gender and race in research discussions and the impact these intersecting identities have on the experience of Black women in the academy.

Critical race methodology (CRM) is a “theoretically grounded” research approach that places

emphasis on how race and racism is embedded in the research process (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 23). A transformative solution to racial and gender oppression, CRM can shed light on the experiences of Black women by viewing said experiences as a source of strength. Drawing from various disciplines, CRM can be used to look for answers to theoretical questions related to people of color.

CRM when combined with grounded theory are complementary methodologies most appropriate in studying and generating theory about marginalized populations in academic research. To highlight the benefits of merging grounded theory and CRM, I began by discussing grounded theory followed by CRM. Grounded theory first used in the field of sociology, is a form of inquiry that “derives a general, abstract theory of a process, action or interaction grounded in the views of participants” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 13) and can produce a theory from the collected and analyzed data (Terrell, 2016). According to Charmaz (2014) grounded theory provides a way for researchers to learn about the worlds they study that are constructed through past experiences and present interactions with others. While theory development is the primary reason for using grounded theory as a method of inquiry, it also validates qualitative methods as a vigorous approach in research (Malagon et al., 2009). Generating theory from research is especially important, when current “theories used in research were often inappropriate and ill-suited” (Creswell, 2013, p. 84) in studying the leadership practices of Black women in the academy. Leadership theories or frameworks that currently exist do not describe what influences Black women’s ways of leading and fails to consider how their experiences of racism and sexism informs their leadership approach (Malagon et al., 2009). Utilizing grounded theory as the method of inquiry would provide a

more appropriate lens in which to view Black women's leadership practice in higher education.

While grounded theory was not designed to generate theory from the experiences of people of color, used in conjunction with CRM, grounded theory can be used to validate the voices and experiences of people of color often overlooked in research. Drawing from multiple disciplines, critical race grounded theory challenges white supremacy in research by seeking to build theory from the lived experiences of study participants in collaboration with the researcher (Malagon et al., 2009). Stated differently, CRGT opened the door for me as a Black woman conducting research, to partner with my participants to interpret and make meaning of their lived experiences that influenced their leadership practice. Furthermore, CRGT examines the ways various forms of oppression intersect with the lived experiences of Black women in academia (Huber, 2010). With the goal of generating an emancipatory theory, CRGT seeks to deconstruct and expose research patterns that ignore the experiences and knowledge of communities of color (Malagon et al., 2009). Thereby, CRGT is a strategy that can inform and reveal greater understanding of the experiences of Black women presidents by encompassing systematic yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing data (Malagon et al., 2009). The voices, experiences, and knowledge of Black women in the collegiate presidency, must be studied using a methodology that centers them throughout the research process. Therefore, CRGT as a methodological framework will be used to inform participant selection and the data collection and analysis processes.

Research Design

Participant Selection

Research informed by CRGT samples theory construction as opposed to population representation, as well as highlighting the experience of historically marginalized groups in traditional research methodologies (Malagon et al., 2009). In other words, CRGT is more concerned about selecting study participants whose data will lead to the development of a theory, than its applicability to a larger population. Therefore, to identify study participants, I engaged in theoretical sampling. Theoretical sampling is the process of selecting research subjects, information or events that highlight and define the boundaries in a study (Malagon et al., 2009). As a strategy, theoretical sampling looks to create properties from the developing theory within a study as well as to achieve theoretical saturation. Theoretical saturation is the point where data collection regarding a theoretical category yields no new information about an emerging theory (Malagon et al., 2009). To define the boundaries for my study, I will select Black female college presidents at four-year PWIs.

Criteria

The primary criterion for selecting participants is they must: identify as U.S. born Black or African American; identify as female; be a sitting college president at a four-year PWI. For the purposes of my study, I defined PWI as an institution with 51% or more of its student population that identifies as white and/or the executive leadership team identifies as white. Aside from this, institutional type (public, private, and liberal arts, comprehensive) was not a consideration in the selection process. Through an internet search and anecdotal information, of all Black women college presidents across the United States, sixteen potential participants were identified that met the criteria. However, to aid in the selection of college

presidents, I worked with my personal/professional networks within higher education to help identify other Black women presidents and provide me with an introduction. Additionally, I contacted professional organizations whose primary membership includes college presidents and/or offers initiatives to build the presidential pipeline, like the American Council of Education (ACE) to identify potential study participants. A letter of invitation was sent to 16 potential study participants via email. I interviewed 9 of the 16 Black women presidents at four-year PWIs that met the criteria.

Data Collection

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of how the lived experiences of Black women college presidents at four-year PWIs informed their leadership approach. Delgado and Stefancic (2017), posit “powerfully written stories and narratives may begin a process of correction in our system of beliefs ... by calling attention to neglected evidence” (p. 51). Within a critical race methodological framework, counternarratives served as a tool to expose, analyze, and challenge stories of gender and racial privilege (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Additionally, Solórzano and Yosso (2002), posit that counternarratives “can help strengthen traditions of political, social, and cultural resistance and survival. As interviews are, almost by definition, narratives or counternarratives (Luker, 2000), semi-structured interviews were conducted.

Interviews

According to Terrell (2016) semi-structured interviewing is a process in which the researcher asks a set of pre-determined questions and then asks probing or follow-up questions. All interviews were conducted via Zoom lasting no less than 45 minutes and no more than 60 minutes in length. One interview occurred over two meetings for a total of 90

minutes. The participant in this case had more they wanted to share than the originally scheduled 60-minute interview and scheduled a follow-up interview to do so. Participants were asked to define leadership, describe their leadership approach and what informed or influenced said leadership approach. Additionally, participants were asked to share their experiences with racism and sexism in the academy. All interviews were recorded and transcribed by a third-party transcription service.

Documents

In addition to the interviews, I gathered, and reviewed documents written and/or presented by study participants. As a supplemental form of data, selected documents provided background information of study participants as well as assisted in the development of interview questions. Given the demanding schedules of college presidents, documents provided information regarding participants' educational background, career path, previous professional experience, priorities, and approach to leadership. Documents reviewed for this study included inaugural speeches and curriculum vitae or resumes.

Data Analysis

As a researcher I used critical race grounded methodologies to interpret the counternarratives and perspectives of Black women college presidents, “that remain unacknowledged, invalidated, and distorted in social science research” (Malagon et al., 2009, p. 259). Counternarratives reveal the realities of sexism, racism, and classism people of color experience by disrupting majoritarian stories and perceptions (Huber, 2008). CRGT also allows the researcher to constantly make comparisons during every stage of analysis, while managing the data collection process (Malagon et al., 2009). I used deductive and inductive approaches in the data analysis process of my study. I will briefly discuss the deductive

approach first. According to Charmaz (2014), a deductive approach begins with an abstract or general concept that informs reasoning of specific occurrences. As it relates to my study, the deductive analysis was informed by a sensitizing concept, Black feminist epistemology (BFE). The four principles of BFE informed how I heard the data as well as the coding of the data.

In the inductive approach “the patterns, themes, and categories of analysis” came from the data as “they emerge ... rather than being imposed” upon (Patton, 1980, as cited in Bowen, 2006, p. 2). Inductive analysis began during the data collection process by coding the data to identify categories from participant responses (Charmaz, 2014). As outlined by Charmaz (2014) coding in grounded theory occurred in two phases, the first, initial coding is when the researcher names each segment of data. Line-by-line coding is a means to bring the researcher into the data, it helps define hidden meanings and actions as well as provides direction for further pursuit (Charmaz, 2014). In the initial coding process, I conducted a line-by-line review of participants’ transcripts; this inductive analysis included coding segments, lines, individual words, or incidents, shared by the presidents in my study (Mertens, 2020). This phase of coding helped define what was occurring in the data and shaped the analytic frame or the bones for the overall data analysis (Charmaz, 2014). An interactive process initial coding preserved empirical details, helpful for closer examination and analysis of the data while breaking them into components and keeping the research project moving towards completion (Charmaz, 2014). Given the form of data collection utilized in this study, interviews, this form of coding worked particularly well in coding for action. Additional benefits of this form of analysis included the ability to see undetected patterns in daily life, as well as dissecting compelling events to be analyzed (Charmaz,

2014). A flexible data analysis strategy, this method supported the development of theoretical categories, sparked new ideas about other data to pursue and provided credible data that strengthened the study's foundation (Charmaz, 2014). Finally, Charmaz (2014) notes, this form of analysis fulfills "two criteria for completing a grounded theory analysis: fit and relevance" (p. 133). In other words, does the study fit the empirical world based on the constructed codes and categories developed from participants' experiences? And does the study make hidden assumptions visible or processes explicit?

The second phase of analysis in my study was focused coding. In this phase, which becomes more selective, I used the most meaningful and frequent initial codes to organize, synthesize, sort, and integrate sizeable amounts of data (Charmaz, 2014). According to Mertens (2020), this phase of coding entails testing the initial codes against a broad group of data to ascertain how durable these codes are in the overall analysis. In other words, focused coding involved coding the initial codes, and testing them for theoretical strength and appropriateness (Charmaz, 2014). Like initial coding, the development of codes at this phase was used to develop a framework to construct theory (Mertens, 2020). Moreover, focused coding required me to decide which initial codes are most analytically relevant to categorize the data and "advance the theoretical direction" of the study (Charmaz, 2014, p. 138).

The analysis of the documents collected underwent the same deductive and inductive approaches and the two-phase coding process as the interview transcripts. Within a grounded theory study, document analysis placed documents under study into the proper historical and social context, supported by the interview data (Charmaz, 2014). In turn, coding the contents of the documents supported the data collected through the interviews, as well as helping organize data into categories that are related to the interview and research questions. In

addition, the codes and categories created through this process helped integrate the data collected from both methods (Bowen, 2009).

Trustworthiness

While grounded theory has built in corrective measures to ensure that my preconceived notions are not imposed upon the data in the analysis process (Charmaz, 2014), critical race grounded theory acknowledges the importance of the knowledge I bring, as researcher to this study. Through the concept of cultural intuition, my knowledge and experience as a Black woman administrator in the academy was vital to theory development (Malagon et al., 2009). Moreover, cultural intuition enabled me to ground my study in the lived experiences of Black women college presidents, while being reflexive throughout the research process (Malagon et al., 2009). To further ensure trustworthiness, “that the results of a study are the result of carefully planned, written, and conducted study and were not negatively interfered with or affected by forces outside of the study” (Terrell, 20116, p. 267); I engaged in a collaboration. According to Malagon et al. (2009), collaboration in CRGT research allows study participants to co-construct knowledge by including them in the data analysis process. Collaboration deconstructs the traditional researcher-study participant roles in academic research, creating a lateral instead of a hierarchical relationship (Malagon et al., 2009) Moreover, collaboration allows participants to determine how their lived experiences and counternarratives are represented in the research (Malagon et al., 2009). Doing so, made the knowledge created for and by Black women in the academy from my study, more accessible and useful to them. I provided study participants with a copy of the transcripts from their interview to check for accuracy. In addition, a draft of the emerging themes from

the analyzed data was shared with participants. They were asked to verify the accuracy of the emerging themes and the description of their lived experiences and leadership approaches.

Limitations

Through my research and conversation with colleagues, I have identified sixteen, Black women college presidents at four-year PWIs. Given the demands on their time, there was no guarantee all sixteen presidents that have been identified would be willing and available to participate in my study. Therefore, alternative sources of data to use for the study were determined. Additionally, my goal was to interview presidents in person at their home institutions, however, this was not possible due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, that limited in person contact on campuses across the country. Therefore, I needed to have alternative methods of data collection, like conducting interviews via zoom or the telephone in place. Finally, given the specific population that I studied the findings are not generalizable to Black women presidents at community colleges, HBCUs, or minority service institutions. Nor were the findings applicable to white women, men, or non-Black people of color who are college presidents.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

At the time of data collection, 16 Black women served as college presidents of a four-year predominantly white institution (PWI) in the United States. I interviewed nine of these presidents, to answer my research questions. At the time of the interviews, five of the nine presidents lead institutions where the student population and the leadership team were predominantly white. Two of the nine presidents served at institutions' where the student population was more than 50% students of color, and the leadership teams were more than 50% white. And two participants led institutions where the leadership teams were diverse and the student population is majority white. Depending on when participants assumed the presidency, determined whether they inherited their leadership team or were able to reconfigure their team with new members.

Upon reviewing the type of institutions, the presidents lead I noticed a pattern. Most of the presidents lead private, liberal arts colleges and universities. This is an interesting finding as the current literature indicates the more than 50% of Black women presidents serve at community colleges, HBCUs and public satellite institutions (ACE, 2017).

Study participants served at three public and six private four-year PWIs. Among the participants at public colleges and universities two served at comprehensive institutions and the other was president at a small liberal arts college. Five of the six presidents at private

institutions were liberal arts colleges, and the remaining president provided graduate education in the STEM field. Most of the participants lead private, liberal arts colleges and universities. All but one participant, interviewed for my study, rose to the presidency through the faculty ranks and academic administration. One president ascended to this role through student affairs administration. It must be noted that while this president's career focused on co-curricular life, she did have extensive teaching experience and worked in academic affairs for several years. The time-of-service as president at the time of the interviews ranged from 3 months to 11 years, with the average year of service being five years. All are the first woman, first person of color and/or first Black woman to be president of their respective institutions. And all but one of the study participants are in their first presidency.

Table 1*Study Participants*

Participant	Education	Institution	Years As President
Harriet Winslow	BA, MA, PhD	Eagle State, Public Comprehensive	8
Julia Baker	BS, PhD	Immaculata College, Public Honors College	8
Kimberly Reese	BS, MS, PhD	Southerton University, Public Comprehensive	3 months
Whitley Gilbert	BS, MPH, PhD	Lamar College, Private Liberal Arts	8
Vivian Banks	BA, MA, PhD	Patterson College, Private Liberal Arts	5
Gina Waters	BA, PhD	Avery University, Private Liberal Arts	1
Khadijah James	BA, MBA, PhD	Albanese University, Private Liberal Arts	1
Maxine Shaw *	BA, MA, JD	Barry Hill College, Private Liberal Arts	5
Lydia Grant	BA, PhD	Des Roche University **, Private Medicine/Health Sciences	11

Note.

* Serving in second presidency

** Graduate education, No undergraduate programs

Meet the Presidents

The following biographical information was gathered through a review of study participants' curriculum vitae. While the analysis of these documents did not yield a particular theme, it did highlight the career paths that led them to a collegiate presidency. To

ensure confidentiality, the names of study participants and the institutions they serve were changed. I had the honor of speaking with Dr. Harriet Winslow, Eagle State College; Dr. Julia Baker, Immaculata College; Dr. Kimberly Reese, Southerton University; Dr. Whitley Gilbert, Lamar College; Dr. Vivian Banks, Patterson College; Dr. Gina Waters, Avery University; Dr. Khadijah James, Albanese University; Dr. Maxine Shaw, Barry Hill College and Dr. Lydia Grant, Des Roche University. Except for sharing information about the colleges and universities represented, I will discuss the participants collectively.

The presidents in my study are very accomplished and impressive women by any standard. Upon reviewing their educational and professional backgrounds, study participants earned their degrees, according to U.S. News College Rankings, from schools in the top 10, 20, 30, and 50 colleges and universities in the world. Two presidents earned their undergraduate degrees from two selective HBCUs and the remaining seven attended highly selective PWIs. Six of the nine presidents earned their master's degrees from highly selective institutions and one president earned theirs from an Ivy League university. All study participants have terminal degrees, two from an Ivy League and the remaining seven earned their doctorates from a highly selective institution. Degrees earned among participants are in the STEM field, social sciences, education, law, and the humanities.

Among study participants, several are members of honor societies, like Sigma Xi, Phi Kappa Alpha, and Phi Beta Kappa to name a few. Additionally, these presidents have participated in post-doctoral fellowships for the Mellon Foundation, National Science Foundation, and the Guggenheim Fellowship. Throughout their careers, participants have earned the rank of full professor, and collectively written, edited, and published over 50 books and/or book chapters and approximately 250 scholarly articles. They also serve on

local and national boards for non-profit organizations. Finally, presidents in my study lead medium sized (5,000-8,999 students) or smaller institutions (0-4,999 students).

In Their Own Words

Happy to share their experiences with me, the presidents felt comfortable enough to forego formality, speaking in an open and casual manner. The participants were asked to discuss their road to the presidency and how the experience of racism and sexism informed their leadership approach. While commenting on what led them to their current role, participants also discussed their career paths, the challenges they face as a Black woman in leadership, described their leadership approach, the influences on their leadership praxis, and any strategies they employ in addressing the challenges, they may face. Seven themes emerged from the data collected through nine semi-structured interviews. The four principles of Black feminist epistemology—(1) lived experience as a source of knowledge and wisdom; (2) knowledge claims assessed through dialogue; (3) an ethic of care; and (4) personal accountability—informed the finding's themes. Further, BFE principles can be found throughout the stories participants shared. The themes are as follow.

1. *It is a hard job* highlights the core functions of a college/university president in relation to one's racial and gender identity.
2. *How they see me* refers to the racist and sexist perceptions and biases others have about Black women in leadership roles in higher education.
3. *Answering the call* describes participants' initial lack of interest in or any aspiration to becoming a college president and the factors that led to a change in course.

4. *A familiar place* describes the factors most salient to study participants when considering which college or university to serve as president, when the opportunity arose.
5. *Showing up authentically* describes how participants counter the racist and sexist beliefs and perceptions others hold about them by having a strong sense of self, rooted in their identity as a Black woman.
6. *A suit of armor* is the coping mechanisms participants use to manage the day-to-day challenges of holding a high-profile position as well as mitigate the experience of racial and gender discrimination.
7. *Our ways of leading* refers to the ways in which study participants engage in their leadership praxis as a college president. This includes three sub-themes that emerged during the interviews: (1) collaborators, servant leaders, and listeners; (2) consistent leadership; and (3) the personal, professional, and experiential influences on their leadership approach.

I will begin the discussion of the findings with the theme *It is a hard job*, followed by *How they see me*, *Answering the call*, *A familiar place*, *Showing up authentically*, *A suit of amor*, and finally *Our ways of leading*.

It Is a Hard Job

It is a hard job emerged as the first theme from the data collected. This theme highlights the core functions of and what life is like being a college president. Participants' descriptions varied when sharing their lived experiences of being a president. Dr. Gilbert's reflection on her presidential experience begins the discussion of findings related to this theme. She said,

It is an exceedingly satisfying job. It is an exceedingly hard job, but it is exceedingly satisfying. And I think it is because academic institutions are so mission-driven, and the mission is incredible, educating people, what higher calling can there be for our society? ... It's an incredible opportunity.

Having such an incredible opportunity also heightens the demand on one's time because of the multifaceted nature of the collegiate presidency. For example, Dr. James shared,

You wear lots of hats, and all day long you're juggling hats. Today on the Today Show, Indra Nooyi was on, she's the former president of PepsiCo, she's got a new book and she talks about what it was like to be a woman of color [in leadership].

"And there is no work-life balance." She said, you're just constantly juggling. You are the crisis manager; you are the visionary leader. You are the strategic thinker. You are the governance person for the board ... putting the best interest and advancing your university's mission is how I would describe it. Outward, you are dealing with government agencies and fundraising.... They would say, at the very least, the average president spends 25% of their time on external things. Now it's changed a little bit for COVID, but you're constantly being outward facing.

Further elaborating on the differences between the internal and external facing aspects of her role as president, Dr. James continued,

The key inward facing for me, which is very different from a provost, is that I'm a leader of leaders, and so I am working everyday with those direct reports because they are the inward facing people getting the work done. HR, Finance, the Chief Academic Affairs Officer, my Chief Marketing Officer, my Advancement person, my Student Affairs [person].... You don't get to do as much of the inward facing, kind of

have meetings with students and hold hands and do that. Like the stuff I got to do as a dean, I don't get to do as much because it's very high level.

In other words, Dr. James, as a leader of leaders, is more removed from the day-to-day (inward facing) operations of Albanese University now that she is a college president. Dr. Grant also highlighted how far removed she is from the daily operations of her institution. Leading the physical expansion of the university fills her days with the external facing (fundraising) aspects of her job. Dr, Grant said,

My days are pretty full. It is different because I don't have dorms ... So, we're graduate professionals only. I don't have dorm life. So, our students are much older with families. So, it's a different dynamic ... I have friends and other colleagues who are presidents of more traditional universities, and the challenges are different. But there are a lot of the same headaches as well. So, most of my time in the last couple of years has been focused on [the new campus we're building]. So, fundraising plays a big part in the job of getting out there and out in the community. The pandemic has slowed a lot of that down, of course. But before the pandemic, it would be rare for me to be in the office on a day-to-day basis. I'm normally out and about doing community engagements...

Also, acknowledging the impact COVID-19 has had on her as president, Dr. Waters commented,

It is as hard as I imagined it would be, particularly when one becomes a president during a pandemic ... what I do every day is manage a complex set of things on a college campus, for which being a vice president for Student Affairs prepared me well.

Similarly, Dr. Winslow noted,

The role of the president has just changed so dramatically during this pandemic that it's almost hard to talk about what it used to be like and what it's like now. But it certainly is a 24/7 kind of job. It's extremely busy with lots of different things, it's a lot of different juggling. It's a lot of being able to lead by example, to be at the front of issues.

While the pandemic impacted leaders across higher education, Drs. Winslow, Waters and Grant shared how much COVID-19 was a game changer in their presidency. The pandemic shined a brighter light on their leadership praxis, requiring them to be more involved with the day-to-day operations of their institutions.

The heightened scrutiny about the value of a college degree adds another layer of intricacy to the collegiate presidency. The complexity of the college president's job in the current climate was a key takeaway from Dr. Shaw's reflection. She stated,

Being a college president in this era has its huge complications, it's not a placid job anymore. It's mostly challenging because the landscape of our education is so ... Not only complex, but just a challenging landscape, the financial model [is] essentially broken, ... so we have to make decisions that are difficult sometimes and people can have issues with that...

Dr. Shaw's comments highlight how external factors, like the public's negative perception of post-secondary education, can impact a leader's internal management of an institution.

Dr. Reese succinctly stated, "It's not one thing. There is something you could do 24 hours a day." She added, "You know the thing that I think about in terms of being a leader is you're constantly judged." Expanding on the notion of constantly being judged, Dr. Banks said

emphatically that being a college president was “hell! ... because the thing that I have learned is that to most people, you are not a person. You are the position they think you have, and the kind of person they think you are.” Put another way, the perceptions others hold of college presidents, and Black women, attempts to dehumanize them and limits one’s ability to be their authentic self. Likewise, Dr. Baker noted,

When you're president, there are people who believe that you should have all answers, but the faculty never believes you have any answers, you just need to know there's a balance there, right? ... I couldn't imagine why anybody would want that job [of college president]. But I love my work. It's the hardest job I've ever had in my entire life. But it is worthwhile.

In other words, the vantage point from which one views the president, faculty in particular, will determine their opinion about Black women’s ability to lead. Dr. Baker further elaborated about another downside of holding such a high-profile position, the lack of privacy. She added,

You have to be aware that people are always looking at you, and there is no such thing as privacy ... You try not to do anything that will reflect negatively on your institution, and I just have a heightened sense of awareness of that. So, there's not that opportunity to just let your hair down and just be.

The increased scrutiny one is under as president, is further exacerbated by knowing that you will always in some way, shape or form be representing the institution. For Dr. Baker, she is always president and must behave in a way that does not negatively impact the college.

The president’s reflections come from the knowledge they gained from their lived experiences (the first principle of BFE) as a leader in the academy. The insights they

provided demonstrate how the role of a college president has become more complex. The changing landscape of higher education and most recently the impact COVID-19 has a lot to do with these changes. No longer a solely inward or internal facing position, presidents must consider and engage with external stakeholders and the wider community. Because there is always something to attend to as a college president, participants noted how they must be a visionary, strategic thinker, and decision maker. Furthermore, college presidents wear many hats and are constantly juggling multiple priorities in what participants have described as 24 hour 7 days a week job. While the work of a college president is hard, for these nine women, it is an incredible opportunity to lead and make a difference. Moreover, being a college president comes with its own set of challenges, that are internally and externally driven, regardless of one's racial and gender identity. However, these challenges are more complex for Black women, therefore, this study calls for me to consider these intersecting identities. The next theme, *How they see me*, will illuminate the impact gender and racial identities has on the experiences of Black women college presidents.

How They See Me

The second theme, *How they see me* emerged from study participants responses to the questions, “What is it like being a college president at a PWI and what it is like to be a Black woman leading a PWI?” This finding speaks to the perceptions others have about college presidents generally, which adds another layer to the criticisms one receives, how various stakeholders engage with them as president and their ability to successfully lead an institution. For Black women presidents, such perceptions are also entrenched with racial and gendered stereotypes, that heighten the challenges they face in their role. *How they see me* refers to the racist and sexist perceptions and biases others have about Black women in

leadership roles in higher education. Such sexism and racism show up in the forms of differential treatment towards Black women, questioning of their abilities and intellect, and challenging their authority. Sexism and racism also appear through the expectations others have of study participants grounded in implicit or explicit racial and gender stereotypes.

Dr. Baker provided the following example, “people have a tendency to challenge you, challenge your authority, challenge your intellect. Sometimes they try to do it very subtly, but I'm always aware, I'm incredibly sensitive to those kinds of things.” As a result of such challenges, Black women must constantly demonstrate that they are capable leaders. Dr. Winslow, for instance, shared:

I know that I'm a woman of color, I get many more questions about my decisions, "Why did you do it? And whatever, show me the data and show me the evidence," whereas a comparable, a white, older male stands up and makes a [similar statement] ... "Okay, that sounds ... Yeah, whatever." So that is something that is just a prime reality of the world that we live in.

That is as a Black woman Dr. Gilbert expects to be questioned more, proving her leadership abilities, while the same decisions made by a white male are not. Further the criticism Dr. Gilbert receives is constant. She added,

There is a non-stop criticism in the role of the presidency, and as I said, I think you get more if you're a person who is not the person that they imagined would be president. People will just criticize it, criticize it, criticize it, criticize it. So, I don't know how presidents become presidents that don't have really pretty thick skin because you have to be able to just let people say nonsense and not really [let it] affect you and stop you from doing the good work that you do.

In other words, if you do not look the part, or fit the image of a leader that those in the majority hold, which is white and male, the criticism one receives as a Black woman in charge is heightened. Furthermore, one must be thick-skinned to fend off critiques about your intellect, ability, and authority. Dr. Winslow continued to explain how sexist and racist beliefs come into play as a woman and leader of color; she said,

When people project onto you attributes that you don't have, or thoughts you don't possess because they don't know how you feel about whatever the issue is. And even if you tell them, they may still have these very long-held beliefs and assume that well, "I know what she wants to say because that's what I think women would do or that I think Black people would do".

Thus, people make assumptions about what she will say or do, because of the stereotypical beliefs they have about Black women, being loud, aggressive, angry, unqualified, uneducated.

Similarly, Dr. Reese began her reflection by highlighting the unrealistic and contradictory expectations others have about people of color generally. She said,

People of color are expected to run faster, last longer, be smarter in order to get the job. And so, I've always tried to not cut corners. I've always tried to be as thorough as I can be. So that people won't just have that expectation, "Oh yeah, she cuts corners, she doesn't know how to do this." People are always looking for ways to say that you can't when you always know that you can. So, it's just probably in the back of my mind comments that people used to always say. You have to show up first, and you have to always be the best if you want that opportunity. And so that's the thing that I've always had at the back of my mind.

Dr. Reese's response demonstrated that the stereotypes and biases that people hold about Black women are ever present in her mind. So, while she does not lead from a deficit mindset due to racism and sexism she may experience, Dr. Reese notes it is not far from her thoughts. Thus, she must perform at a high level to refute the assumptions held about people of color in leadership.

Likewise, Dr. Shaw reflected,

It's always the case that there are different levels of expectations for people of color in these roles, there just are. And there's also additional challenges that are ... are invisible and some are visible, and they swing both ways, frankly, in terms of what people who are not folks of color expect and demand, and people who are of color expect and demand.

The various levels of expectations placed upon Black women leaders can be like a double-edged sword. Dr. Shaw brought to light the duality of expectations, manifested when the race of key stakeholders is considered. While those in the racial majority may have low expectations of Black women in leadership, people of color may have extremely high expectations. More to the point, people of color may expect that having a person of color in a leadership position should positively benefit them and/or improve their quality of life.

Sharing how she manages these unrealistic expectations, Dr. Shaw stated,

I think what I've been able to do over the course of my career is ... I have plenty and plenty of flaws that I know very well. But one of them is not self-awareness, I'm very self-aware, and so I'm really straight forward about what I can do and what I can't do, and I'm straightforward about it publicly too.

Expanding on Dr. Shaw's reflection about the different levels of expectations for people of color, Dr. Waters, shared her thoughts on how Black women are evaluated; as well as the pressure that comes from being the first Black woman to ascend to the collegiate presidency. She stated,

There are only two evaluations for Black women. It's this. Initially, their [white people] expectations for us are actually pretty low, and then when we ... blow those low expectations through the water, then all of a sudden, we become super Negro. So, there's no in-between for us, there's no such thing as a mid, middle lane African American administrator. You're either down here, 'cause this is where you start with the low expectations, or you're like, "Oh my God, she is fabulous." Well, none of us are that good, but there's just no, ...in-between for us in terms of how people evaluate us, there is never in-between, and we know that, so we know we always have to perform at this [high] level.

Dr. Waters articulated a phenomenon that women of color experience, me included, the tension between other's expectations and how we perform. We cannot have a bad day, make a mistake, appear to be too assertive, or not being assertive enough. Black women must be a superwoman and or close to perfect in whatever role they hold. Dr. Waters use of the words Super Negro, an antiquated term, illustrates the idea of that you become an extraordinary Black person, when expectations are exceeded. She also noted the pressure to represent that comes with being the first Black woman to be president at an institution.

We all know that if I don't do well, they ain't gonna hire anybody who looks like me for a long time, right? So, there's that pressure. To feel like ... particularly when you're the first, to feel like you have to represent so that you then make a way for

others in a positive way. Because you don't wanna be the "Oh, we hired this Black woman," and they would never say it that way, but if I don't do well, then the next time around when they're reviewing applications, all the sisters are gonna be put to the side. Because they don't wanna take a chance, "'Cause we hired a sister, she messed up. We don't wanna hire another one." So, there is that pressure to represent and to represent well.

Generally, among Black women, it is understood that if Dr. Waters or any other Black woman president does not do well, the likelihood of another Black woman being appointed president at an institution decreases. As Dr. Waters alluded to, we are also aware of the coded language white people use when discussing our candidacy. Often unspoken, this knowledge was gained from the lived experience of being a Black woman outside of and within the academy, thus leading to a profound sense of duty to do well. This sense of responsibility to represent all Black women was also shared by Dr. James. She shared,

I have to do an extraordinary job, not just good, not just great, extraordinary job. I have to ensure that I'm mentoring people inside Albanese and outside ..., so that there's a pull to apply for the job at Albanese, but there's also a pull across the universe to apply for the job. You've heard of code switching, I have to almost educate people about what it is like to be a Black woman and also how to feel comfortable around Black women, because a lot of times people are scared of the Black girl magic ..., so to feel comfortable.

In addition to performing at an extremely high level, Dr. James's leadership practice is about teaching others, white people, what it means to be a Black woman and for them be at ease.

Drs. Banks, Gilbert and Baker reflected on how they are not seen and disrespected, most notably by white males, as Black women in leadership. Dr. Banks shared,

I tell you that you get everything, and part of it is definitely being a woman. They want you to ... They expect you to be the sympathetic, compassionate listener, whom they can push around and who just has to take it. And as a Black woman, they think they also can openly despise you while they do that.

Dr. Banks provided the following example of being openly despised when she called a meeting to address a faculty-related matter. She said,

There's always a crisis [among the] faculty. And so, I needed to meet with the executive committee of the faculty [senate], with the dean of the college ... and the chair of the faculty [senate] emailed ... the agenda to the other faculty members on that committee, to me and to the dean. One of the faculty members on the committee, who is a senior white man replies to this email, to everyone and says ... "In response to [the president's] call for a meeting, I'm already hearing from faculty wishing to have some clarity on this issue. I'm hoping that the president pulls through on her promise and that she is clear, for a change, about what she expects." So, I would call that openly despising or at least open and complete disrespect. That even if he didn't think I was on the Reply All, which I have to assume he didn't, [he thought] it's okay for him to send to seven other faculty members and a staff member, an email that basically says, "I hope this time, she doesn't sound like a blithering idiot, and she lives up to her word, because evidently by implication, we know she won't.

Put another way, this faculty member did not have an issue openly calling her out as an untrustworthy president, who lacks the intellect to hold such a position. Dr. Banks concluded

her story by sharing the advice she received, upon assuming her role, from a senior Black woman faculty member. The faculty member told Dr. Banks that,

She [the faculty member] had "situational Tourette's" and I would have to forgive her. She gestured at her breasts, and she said, "You just have to tell people they can't suck from these." Which sound insane and maybe, but the point that she was trying to make was that everybody wants you to be their momma, or their aunt, or their teacher, or their marriage counselor, or their preacher, or their guidance counselor, or their lawyer, or their doctor, whatever co-version of authority and nurturing they want or never had, they are going to expect you to fulfill that role.

Dr. Banks' interpretation of the advice she was given is an exemplar of the unrealistic and contradictory expectations that people have about Black women. Unreasonably Black women are expected to be all things to all people, at all times. Thus, placing an undue burden on Black women, generally and those in leadership positions to navigate effectively.

Reflecting on her own lived experience of being disrespected, Dr. Gilbert said, There is no question that I have felt disrespected many times where people just assumed that you've gotten the position that you have because of your color. Some of the white male faculty will say things to me that I know they would never, ever have said to a 6' 2" white male, which I am not ... I mean, just flat-out lies or half-truths, and they'll stand up in faculty meetings accusing you of things, or just being fundamentally disrespectful. And I spoke to another Black female president who said, "Is it always the white male associate professors at your institution?" and I said, Hmm. Why, yes, it is. So as soon as they [white male faculty] get tenure, then they become emboldened and whatever ... These folks are probably [in their] 30s and 40s,

and they just ... They will stand up and they will kind of tout it as the rules of either AAUP or faculty governance, but they're just fundamentally rude and refusing to see the power that the president has, and they're couching it in terms of faculty rights. But people have said to me, "They never said that to your predecessor."

Like Dr. Banks' experience, Dr. Gilbert's white male colleagues had no qualms about publicly disrespecting a Black woman in a leadership role. This phenomenon is known by and discussed among Black women leaders as a common experience. In either case, both reflections are clear examples of the challenges to one's authority and intellect Black women in leadership roles contend with in the academy and at the hands of white men.

Similarly, Dr. Baker commented,

The president of faculty senate says, "You know what one of your problems is?" And I said, why don't you tell me? He says, "You are too direct." And I said... "Too direct and too confident." And I said to him, I said, "Well, seems to me, you would want me to be direct. Then there is no question as to what it is I say and what I mean, so you don't have to waste any energy with that. And you would want to have a confident president, because if the president isn't confident, how do you believe in where the school is gonna go?" So, I said, "So if those are my two main problems, I'm happy with that. I'm happy with that."

I was impressed by her response and the affirming way it was delivered. The faculty member's statement, which was meant to be a dig at, or an insult to Dr. Baker, was reframed as an asset. Additionally, like Dr. Gilbert's experience, I doubt such sentiments would have been said to a man, regardless of their race. Dr. Baker also shared her experience with a more

explicit form of racism, which occurred in the town the college is located. Highlighting how the experience of racism can be also external to the institution. She said,

Being a Black woman in this community, ... I remember ... So, because I'm an impatient person, I drive fast cars fast, and I remember pulling into a parking lot to go into a store and this guy in his pick-up truck, he comes up and he pulls up right beside me. I get out of my car, and he just says, "I hate you Black niggers. Why are you here"? And I just looked at him and at first, I was like, "This guy doesn't know me from Eve, right?" And I did not say anything to him, because I didn't want to antagonize him, because these are gun-toting kind of [people] ... But those kinds of things just make you sometimes go home and say, "What in the hell am I doing here?"

Although incidents like what Dr. Baker described no longer surprise me, I was stunned. I did not have much of a response or a follow-up question for what I heard. At the same time, I connected with how quickly she assessed the situation, to determine if and how she would respond. Recognizing the threat to her safety if she did respond to this person, she said nothing. The person in this case sent a clear message that Dr. Baker was not welcome in that town. She was an intruder. It did not matter whether the college invited and welcomed her into the community or that she was the president, Dr. Baker, this Black woman, is an outsider. The question remained, what was she doing there? Fortunately, Dr. Banks answered her own question. She said,

But then at the end of the day, I go back to, I am here because of the mission of this institution, and that I believe that I can take us to where we need and do the best I can for the students. That's the only way you survive [in] these kinds of places.

Due to the highly paternalistic nature of HBCUs, Dr. Grant experienced challenges to her authority and abilities that were gender based during her tenure at two different institutions.

She stated,

You know I was in HBCUs. So, when I was at [those institutions], it was predominantly all male, African American male, so often I'm the only woman, ... It was a totally different way of operating then, different dynamic being one of [a] few women in an African American male-dominated society, that I often felt invisible, and [I] had to kinda push myself out there, so much so that I had ... someone once called me controlling ... by another African American man. And I remember trying to figure out, "Well, why? Why? I'm doing the same things that these guys are doing," ... I remember the president at the time, ... we were on an accreditation team and he had me chair the accreditation visit. So, [the president] wanted me to do it because he knew I would get things done. So, with me just kinda calling the shots and saying, "Okay, we need people to do this and that." I'm controlling now, as opposed to actually executing and delivering on a charge that had been presented to me, that my president had a lot of confidence in my being able to lead. Now, we were quite successful, but the guys [had] a hard time having me tell them what to do. So that's what that became. And I remember being crushed like, "No one's ever said I was controlling, where did that come from?" So that was that male-female kinda ego thing going on, that there were men on the team, but [the president] had chosen me to be the chair. And all of a sudden, they had to follow a command, and it wasn't me being mean spirited, but it was like, I need people to do these things, these tasks. Now, the fruit of the labor was that we were quite successful on the other side of it, 'cause we

dotted every I. Crossed, every T. Checked every box, [the president] was happy, the team was happy. We prevailed. But they couldn't quite grasp the fact that I had to be the one to tell them how we were gonna do things. So that dynamic in an HBCU was very different.

Although, racism was not at the heart of the difficulties Dr. Grant experienced at two different HBCUs; she did experience sexism at what one would consider a racially safe environment. Dr. Grant's experience further illuminates the dual forms of oppression Black women deal with regularly; and while one form of oppression, racism may be a non-factor, at an HBCU, sexism may be.

While Black women have moved into leadership roles in the academy, they are still seen as outsiders and interlopers within a space they do not belong. The lived experiences study participants shared illustrate how they are viewed in stereotypical and contradictory ways. The knowledge gained through one's experience was also shared through conversations presidents had with their colleagues; thus, evoking the second principle of BFE, knowledge through dialogue. Moreover, participants are viewed as either unqualified, an affirmative action hire or superwoman when their abilities far exceed the low expectations those in the racial majority hold. The low expectations that people hold can manifest in the following ways: one's intelligence and authority are called into question, requiring a demonstration of knowledge and ability and/or outright forms of disrespect are usually perpetrated by white males in the faculty. Conversely, grand expectations can result in presidents feeling pressure to perform at an extremely elevated level and to represent their race and gender well, so they are not the last Black woman to be president at an institution.

Despite the added challenges on top of the complexity of this role, the women in this study, answered the call.

Answering the Call

Answering the call describes participants' initial lack of interest in or any aspiration to becoming a college president and the factors that led them to "answer the call" to serve. A college presidency was not initially appealing to study participants. Most of the presidents were focused on their careers as academics, scholars, and educators. Many participants described the move to becoming a president as a calling, or that they were chosen. Participants believed their ascension, their calling to the presidency was for a greater purpose, to higher education and society. So For example, Dr, Gilbert shared,

Sometimes I think [the presidency] chose me, rather than me choosing it. I assumed that I would be a college professor and a bench scientist all of my life. I got a tap on the shoulder to take on some administrative work, and then the next one, and then the next one. So, it kind of chose me.

Similarly, Dr. Baker reflected,

I didn't really choose it. I felt like I was chosen, and I was being led down a path ... And so, then an opportunity came up to be in HERS, Higher Education Resource Services ... So, I went. And in that program, they said to me, "You're gonna be a college president." I told them I wasn't interested. But then ... I realized I could do the work, and it was good work.

Dr. Grant described her path to the presidency not only as a calling, but it was also a spiritual journey that coincided with an opportunity to participate in the American Council on

Education's leadership development program. Having been encouraged by a mentor to apply for the program, she said,

I started reflecting on well, what is my passion? What is my calling? So, I read Rick Warren's book, Purpose Driven Life, as I started my [American Council on Education] fellowship. And it's amazing how all of those things happened ... at the same time. Someone said, "Try this ACE fellowship program. This is the premier leadership development program." My president at the time invested in me to allow me to go away to do that, which was really amazing... becoming a college president became more of a calling. And it was part of a spiritual journey, ... that year [I was] an ACE fellow [matched] with [a] president at a small liberal arts school and that was my year of affirmation. So, at that point I knew this was my calling.

Dr. James too saw her ascension to the presidency as a calling, not necessarily a conscious decision. She shared,

If you would've asked me 15 years ago, I would have just thought I would spend the rest of my life being a professor, doing my research and teaching. I don't know if I chose to become a college president or if it was a calling, 'cause that's a little bit of a difference.

Dr. James then referenced the lack of women of color in leadership that moved her to respond to the call. She had lots of mentors that said,

"We need more women of color," especially on what I call the academic administrative side of leadership, so my big identity is really being an academic administrator and the ability to make scalable change is what I like about that [position].

While Dr. Grant and Dr. James referred to their ascension to the presidency as a calling, a series of accidents is how Dr. Banks describes her road to the presidency, stating,

I never started out with the desire of becoming a college president ... I would say that I ended up as a college president by a lot of accidents, and when I finally decided to take this job, it was out of a sense that ... In part, it was out of a sense that I had done everything that I could do in the job that I was in, that there wasn't much that was interesting left for me to do there, even though I was very happy at the place where I was.

In addition to feeling she accomplished all that she could in the role she had prior to becoming president, Dr. Banks shared how there

was also the sense that it was kind of a responsibility for me to use ... whatever talent I had to the best of my ability to do good in places where I thought I could do good, and ... I was being interviewed for this job [during] the 2016 election, ... I had a lot of conversations with people where we felt that higher education was really under threat and that the idea of colleges and universities being there to provide engines of opportunity and access for people who had been structurally denied it, ... The match was being lit and just tossed on that in the most flagrant and visible of ways, and it felt like, okay, I'm being called to the barricades, so I need to go and try and man them.

A sense of responsibility to ensure higher education can withstand the threats posed by external forces was key in Dr. Banks' decision to "man the barricades" and become a college president. Furthermore, she felt accountable to her community to safeguard access to post-secondary education for those at the margins.

Encouragement and support from others, mentors, headhunters, and virtual strangers were salient aspects for the following participants in answering the call or stepping up to take on this leadership role. Dr. Waters, reflecting on her path, shared,

I actually never imagined I was going to be a college president, it was not something I aspired to do or planned my career around, and I was encouraged by several mentors to consider the college presidency. I was nominated for the... presidency [I hold now] by another woman president, ... 80% of college presidents don't look like me, and so how wonderful that it was a woman who nominated me, though I had been encouraged by mentors, both male and female mentors.

Likewise for Dr. Reese it was a woman who demonstrated their belief in her ability to be president. Although not initially drawn to the college presidency, Dr. Reese was open to the possibility. She stated,

My first response was why not? My goal was never to be a university president: my goal was to be a scientist and to be famous. My decision was really based on someone calling and saying to me, "There's an opportunity. Are you interested in applying for it?" ... The headhunter who reached out to me shared with me her impression that I was ready... So, it was her pushing, giving me the confidence that I was ready and that you have to prepare for [the presidency] just like you prepare for any other type of work that you're doing.

In a manner, Dr. Reese and Dr. Waters were literally called to be a college president, a call in which they ultimately answered. For Dr. Shaw, it was a virtual stranger she met during an interview for a dean's position who would become an important figure in her

career. This new mentor affirmed that a college presidency was possible. Dr. Shaw stated,

The first time I thought about being a college president, I was interviewing for [a deanship] and I was in this room of about 30 people in that kind of U-shaped way ... And I was relatively young at the time, I think I was maybe 31, 32, and someone asked me in sort of a joking way, what did I wanna be when I grow up kind of after deanship. And I was sitting there and really, honestly, just the first thing that popped in my mind was, I wanna be a college president, and there was this African American woman ... who I'd never met before, but would become an important part of my career, and she was sitting in that room as part of the interviewing group of 30, and she literally stopped the room when I said, I wanna be a college president. She stopped the room and said, "You will be one. You will be one."

In all these reflections, study participants noted the importance of having the support of and encouragement from mentors in pursuing a presidency. Additionally having other women, who are presidents, mentors or headhunters acknowledge their readiness and capability to lead at such a prominent level was particularly salient and affirming for the presidents in my study.

Having closer proximity to the presidency while serving as provost led Dr. Winslow to shift her career aspirations. She stated,

I did have an aspiration at one point to be a provost, and then the provost, of course, is the person who is in second command to the President... it was really not until I was a provost that I seriously thought about being a president.

The notion of being a college president, was not on the minds of study participants when they began their careers in higher education. Their primary focus was on their discipline or profession. It was not until participants began to be tapped to serve on institutional committees, take on a leadership role or participate in leadership development programs, did a presidency become a career goal. Mentors, recruiters, and industry leaders also played a key role in shifting study participants' presidential aspirations. Having people believe in them and their ability to lead provided study participants with the encouragement and confidence needed to pursue a collegiate presidency. Whether they were chosen, following the path laid before them or answering the call to serve, study participants saw the need to fill the racial and gender gap among college and university presidents in the United States. Participants also found it important to preserve access to higher education for marginalized peoples, living up to the ideal of what a college education can do for a person and society. By answering the call, participants exhibited an ethic of care and accountability, the last two principles of BFE.

A Familiar Place

The fourth theme, *A familiar place*, describes the factors most salient to study participants when considering which college or university to serve as president, when the opportunity arose. Study participants were asked to share why they decided to become a president of a PWI. The answers to the question were unexpected, as participants considered institutional type and size, one's personal and professional experience, one's ability to engage with students and where one's skill set can have the greatest impact on a college or university. The racial make-up of the student body, or if the college was a federally designated a minority serving institution (MSI) or HBCU, were not factors. Institutional size,

ability to remain connected to students, being one's authentic self, leading an institution where they could affect change, and serve the public good were some of the factors that informed what presidential opportunities participants pursued.

Several participants referenced their lived experience as an undergraduate student and or professional at PWIs and took that into consideration when determining which institution, they would lead. For Dr. Waters being able to engage with students and her own experience at PWIs were most important to her. She stated,

I wanted to be president at an institution where I would still have the opportunity to connect with students, so that meant a small university ... [it] really fit with the way in which I like to show up in higher ed, in terms of my ability to interact with students and be in an institution of this scale where I could make decisions that I felt would truly make a difference to the student experience. So, while I very much believe in the mission of an HBCU, all of my experience has been a predominantly white institution.

Likewise, Dr. Gilbert, shared,

I had been to [PWIs] all of my life. I did not go to any historically Black or minority-serving institutions, so, that was the kind of institution where I had been educated and always gone, so, it just seemed pretty natural. It would have felt odd given my background, I think to go to a predominantly minority-serving institution. It just wasn't where I had gotten all of my credentials to be a president.

Dr. Reese also highlights her educational and professional background as factors in choosing to lead a PWI. She stated,

My background has been primarily in predominantly White institutions, so I understand the lens, I understand the issues that they focus on, and I think the opportunity to take my knowledge about working in predominantly White institutions the majority of my career and looking at how we can make these institutions more inclusive and engaging for everyone is an important thing that I wanna do right now in my job.

Leading a PWI was more of a natural fit for Dr. Gilbert, Dr. Waters and Dr. Reese. Whether or not a PWI was where participants earned their degrees; they concluded a PWI was the space where they can effect change and make a significant difference. Additionally, they had a greater understanding of the politics of a PWI. Therefore, it was their own lived experiences at a PWI that informed their decision to lead such an institution.

The remaining study participants considered a variety of factors in determining the type of institution to lead. Dr. Baker, for example, was more focused on leading an institution that provides a liberal arts education and has a mission she could believe in. She said,

I didn't decide ... I did not think about whether or not it's predominantly white or [an] HBCU. For me, I knew I was gonna go to ... No matter what, I wanted to work at a liberal arts college ... I totally believe in the mission of my institution, and because of that, that's what keeps me focused on doing what's in the best interest of the student.

The observed negative experience Dr. Banks' father had as a faculty member at an HBCU greatly influenced her professional journey. She shared,

I never considered joining an HBCU in part because my dad had a really negative experience, and my father used to tell me... that Black people will teach you a Black

lesson and White people will teach you a White lesson and whatever it is somebody's gonna teach you a lesson to keep you in line.

In other words, Professor Banks' experience as a faculty member at an HBCU was one in which others tried to keep him in a place they believed he should always occupy as a middle-class, educated person. To uphold proper Blackness by separating oneself from uneducated, poor Black people, and associating only with those with a similar background and professional credentials. Dr. Banks also commented on the importance of being at an institution where her skills are best suited, where she could be present, and she can be herself.

I thought my skill set was suited to a smaller institution where I generally feel like I'm pretty good at talking to people and listening to people, and I figured that in a small place, I could have a better chance of kind of being myself and just dealing with people as another human being, not as a kind of somebody who parachutes in and out, and not part of daily life.

Although Dr. James received her undergraduate degree from an HBCU, her career trajectory guided her in a different direction. Dr. James shared,

It's just the path that [my career has] taken me, and I believe we need women of color at all different types of universities, ... for me, the service has really been making a difference at PWIs ... in some ways, maybe I was tracking the PWI world. I don't even get calls that often for HBCUs, which I find very interesting.

I regret not asking Dr. James her thoughts on why she does not often get calls from HBCUs, especially as an HBCU graduate. Her perspective would have been informative to say the least.

A passion for supporting women and underrepresented populations informed Dr. Shaw's route to the institution she leads. She stated,

My career has really been driven by my dedication to women's colleges, to women's leadership and to historically underrepresented groups in particular areas, and I ended up at these institutions [PWIs] as a by-product of those desires.

While a commitment to the advancement of women and those on the margins informed Dr. Shaw's decision to serve at a PWI; it was the opportunity to participate in a leadership development program that influenced the type of institution Dr. Winslow sought to lead. Her experience as an ACE Fellow was instrumental in determining which institution she preferred to lead, a public college or university. She said,

That [ACE Fellowship] was really very, very helpful. And it also helped me understand the kind of campus that I wanted to end up, a campus that was much more focused on [the] public good, ... So, [a] campus [that] really is looking at ways that the educational enterprise provides opportunities to lift the public good, the community, the people and so forth.

Although Dr. Grant's professional experience in the academy was at institutions that provide graduate education, her preference was to lead, like Dr. Baker, a liberal arts college. She noted,

So, my path to the presidency was conflicted in some respect because I thought I'd be a president of a small liberal arts school ... [like] my undergraduate institution, but I wasn't being nominated for some of those positions, people kept saying, "But you don't even have undergrads. You've got all this experience in health sciences, but you don't even have undergrads."

In a sense, being type cast, Dr. Grant's opportunity to be a college president came from an institution that provides graduate education. Recalling her interview for the presidency at Des Roche University, she stated,

Whereas I've been in other interviews, and you just feel it [the bias] when you walk in the door ... White males would kinda look up and not wanna give you eye contact, just kinda roll their eyes, like looking at their watches, "If we can get her out of here" ... You sense all those micro-aggressions when you're at some places, I never sensed [bias at Des Roche], and I thought, "Hmm, well, what does that say about this place?" So, it was a surprise actually, that I was welcomed and supported and respected in a way that I never imagined.

While Dr. Grant preferred to lead a liberal arts college, her opportunity to become a president came from an unexpected yet welcomed place; an institution that provides graduate education in the STEM field, located in one of the whitest states in the country.

A variety of factors influenced the type of institution study participants chose to assume the presidency. What was most salient for participants was to lead an institution that fits who they are and how they like to show up in higher education, where they could be themselves. Presidents also named the following characteristics that were essential in choosing a college to lead: size of the student population, one's ability to consistently interact with students, a place where one's skill set can make the biggest impact; institutional mission and focus, prioritizing the public good, and having a passion for and ability to ensure access for underrepresented and marginalized populations. Finally, participants' personal lived experiences and/or educational background were important factors in determining which

institution they would lead. Ultimately, participants' presidential aspirations were derived from their sense of responsibility to and care for their communities.

A Suit of Armor

The fifth theme that emerged from the data, *A suit of amor*, related to the coping mechanisms participants use to manage the day-to-day challenges of holding a high-profile position as well as to mitigate the experience of racial and gender discrimination. The methods participants used varied, based upon the context or situation they were in, who they are as a person in dealing with conflict, and previous lived professional and personal experiences with racism and sexism. One of the most interesting strategies a president used to manage challenges, was her clothing. For example, Dr. Baker shared,

Clothes help you to be confident. She [the vice president of academic affairs at a previous university] used to wear the most awesome clothes. When I was a young faculty member, I just kept saying, "I'm going to be just like her." And I think that a lot of that is in me now, because I remember she used to carry herself with such grace and confidence.

Now, Dr. Baker in her own way, is like her former vice president. She explained,

I wear certain designers. St. John is my Kevlar, and especially when I know it's going to be a hard meeting ... I wear St. John to those meetings every time. And then I will have my favorite piece of jewelry on, that's my Teflon, right? But you have to have those kinds of things to give you even more confidence in your ability and that you have done everything you can to make the right decision for that institution.

Dr. Reese also mentioned the importance in the way one dresses briefly in her response. In addition, not taking things personally, gathering information and taking care in the way she

addresses things, are strategies she uses to manage the sexist and racist climate of a PWI. She stated,

A lot of the times when someone is critical or coming after you, I know it's not about me, they could do it to anyone, it's about the situation. Knowledge about the situation to inform a response is critical so many times. The other thing I think in terms of... Higher education people are a little bit more casual in the approach they used in terms of their presence, ... When I talk about presence, it's the way you show up, the way you dress, the way you express yourself. There's an expectation that people have about what they believe a leader needs to look like and to do. And I have gone through leadership development programs, I've had coaches along the way, and so ... It informs the way I approach problems. But if you are a little careless in the way you approach a problem, then people won't take you seriously.

As it relates to the challenges she may face as a Black woman president, Dr. Reese is intentional about how she shows up in the academy. She ensures that she is knowledgeable about a given situation and forms a response in a careful and thoughtful manner which enables her to be seen as a credible leader and not perpetuate stereotypes about Black women.

Similarly, Dr. Waters, in her efforts to not perpetuate the angry Black woman stereotype, maintains a calm demeanor, gained from her professional experiences to deal with the absurdity that comes her way. She asserts,

On the racial end, the calmness, part of it, it comes from my Student Affairs experience and part of it comes from, I know the stereotype of [the] angry Black woman, and people are just waiting for me to show that ... I don't have the luxury of

showing emotion in the same way that somebody who's not a woman of color might believe that they have.

Dr. Waters is also emphatic about the way she is addressed when engaging with members of the campus community, particularly students. She shared the following anecdote:

On my previous campus, the chancellor there was on a first name basis [with faculty, staff and students], and he would always laugh because he would always call me Dr. Waters, and I said, "Students can't be on a first name basis with me." I said ..., "We are not the same. We are not the same generation." I said, "They can't be on a first name basis with me. And I had to check a student the other day who said, "Well, Gina..." I said, "Dr. Gina's fine," I said, "President, President Waters, Dr. Waters, Dr. Gina." I said, "But not Gina." I said, "I've earned those letters." But my predecessor at my other institution, he's Anthony to everybody. I said, "I can't be... I can't be Gina, that doesn't work for me." So that's also part of the armor, is the title, address me properly.

Dr. Waters cannot have her authority, intellect and abilities dismissed by others, particularly students who address her in a casual manner. Her insistence on being addressed by the hard-earned title, doctor, is a way she commands the respect that would automatically be given to her white male counterparts.

Having a strong sense of self, being ever mindful of her professional achievements and experience is an important strategy used by Dr. James. She shared,

I don't know, sometimes I just tuned it out ... Now, I talked about being an academic leader and using that as my armor because when you come from the academic house, when you've been a dean and I was a fellow in the provost office, there's some things

that people can't pull on you ... So, whenever someone has tried to either use sexism or racism, I really have used that I've worked at top universities in the country, I am a Corporate Strategy professor with an undergrad [degree] in accounting, so I understand the numbers, and I'm a researcher and scholar and [I] use that to say, please no, don't try that on me.

One's educational credentials, institutional affiliations and scholarly work are often indicators of one's pedigree and prestige in the academy. Knowing this is part of the culture of higher education, Dr. James, pulls from her background as an academic, scholar, researcher, and administrator to negate attempts to challenge her as a Black woman in leadership. She makes it known that she is more than qualified to be a college president.

Similarly, Dr. Shaw noted,

I have been in this long enough to be clear about who I am and what I think is important, and to not let ... It's not that, I'm unconcerned about people's perspectives, I obviously value people's viewpoints and are concerned when people have questions or concerns, but I also have been around long enough to know that I get a chance to say, "I appreciate that. I've heard that, but this is a direction that we're going in;" and that I think has given me a certain comfort level in these roles, because over time, I think what I've learned the most is not so much that I'm confident in my decisions all the time, but I have learned to be confident in my decision-making process, because that decision-making process is so honed and set up, and when I send things through that process, I feel strong about the decision, and all of those things have made it easier, not without challenge, to balance all of these demands that are a part of these

roles and that are heightened because you happen to be a woman of color in these roles.

Dr. Winslow, a psychologist by training, pulls from her professional background when dealing with challenging situations; she stated,

So, I think that just the person I am, has helped me be able to have really measured responses to people. Not that I'm not saying that I don't get angry, sometimes people are totally ridiculous, but I'm more likely to be angry when they are ridiculous to someone else than to myself, if you know what I mean. Someone who gives unjust criticism to one of my deans or a Cabinet member or a faculty member, I do realize that background injustice and unfairness that I see does upset me, but I am a psychologist by background, ... so I don't overreact to individuals.

Dr. Winslow is intentional when she expresses emotions, like anger, given the “angry Black woman” stereotype. Any expression of anger is more appropriate for and relegated to advocating for others, who she feels are treated unfairly. Another strategy several participants discussed was having and leaning on a strong support system. Dr. Banks, when asked who she goes to for support, said,

My mother, absolutely. My husband. I've got a lot of sister-wives. I have a group of women who we all trust each other with each other's children, and we trust each other with each other's parents. We have been through a heck of a lot together, from cancer, to divorce, to childbirth, to deaths, and that's my crew. And they're ... a very motley cast of characters.

Likewise, Dr. Gilbert said,

People like to talk about grit and resilience, and some of that clearly is a bit more of an inward-facing characteristic, but if you don't have people outside of yourself to reach to, to support you at various times, I think it becomes almost impossible, because at some point, and you'll find it varies across a life cycle, but sometimes it's so intense and strong, you just have to get outside of yourself for help and support. At other times you're the one offering help and support to somebody else. So, you have to realize that it does take a group, a village, to have these kinds of jobs and the kind of support you need.

Another coping mechanism used by Dr. Baker is making time to get away, to release and fully “let her hair down.” She said,

I leave town. In the fall semester, I have traditions that take me out of town. On Labor Day weekend, I always go to New York for the U.S. Open Tennis tournament. The first weekend in October, I always go away with my girlfriends, and we always meet in a city where none of us has any relatives, and we can just let our hair down.

The opportunity to just be, to just be a person, not a college president, wife or mother is an important coping mechanism for Dr Baker.

The saying “It takes a village,” a community of supporters, has great meaning for study participants. Having a strong support system composed of family and friends is vital to their success as president. A place to be your authentic self, such support systems provide the space presidents need to manage the challenges they face as a president and a Black women president. Furthermore, when faced with challenges, participants fell back on their previous lived experiences, training and skills developed throughout their careers to respond in measured and calm ways.

Showing Up Authentically

Don't think you need to change yourself to be a leader because you don't fit the mold of being a leader, or don't think you shouldn't be a leader, 'cause you don't fit the mold, the fact is the mold wasn't made for you to fit. So don't worry about it. And if you can do the job, do the job, and do it like you're gonna do it.

—Dr. Vivian Banks

How presidents choose to enter and show up in academia is another helpful technique participants use to navigate the isms and challenges they face. *Showing up authentically*, the sixth theme, describes how participants counter the racist and sexist beliefs others hold about them by having a strong sense of self rooted in their identity as a Black woman. It became very clear from the participants' responses that they all have a strong sense of self, resulting in a heightened awareness of the gendered and racial ways they will be viewed as college presidents. When I asked Dr. Gilbert, for example, "In what ways, if at all, do you find yourself adjusting your behavior as you are interacting with others across the institution or externally?" she shared,

Well, I think whenever you are a person of color leading, you're very conscious of the fact that you're making an impression on almost everyone that you're seeing and interacting with, so, you're always mindful to try and be representing well so that you're not the last person of color in the position that you have. And I do believe that's an added burden every time that you're interacting with people. You're thinking, "Okay, I gotta make sure I'm not the last one," so, you feel like you're representing yourself and your individual point of view, but I think more so than people who are

white in the situation, you also feel as though you're lending to the impression they have more generally of people of color.

By way of explanation, Dr. Gilbert is aware that how she, a Black woman, shows up in the academy is different than how white people show up. Not to mention, how she shows up is not solely about her, it impacts other Black women.

Knowing yourself and your capabilities is key for Dr. Reese. She shared, “as a leader, you need to be really pretty knowledgeable about who you are and what you do well and what you need some support around you to do.” In sharing her experience Dr. Grant’s reflection was interesting given her tenure at two different HBCUs, where experiencing racism is not a common occurrence. She said,

Being African American here [Des Roche University] has been more me just being myself, and people have come to know me as the person, my authentic self, as opposed to having to pretend to be something other than who I am. I'm comfortable in my own skin here, and people respect that, and they've gotten to know me the person, not their image of the college president.

While Dr. Grant spent most of her career at HBCUs, a racially safe environment, she still did not feel she could bring her whole self to work. At Des Roche University, she is seen as a person and not just the position she holds. Dr. Grant’s comments demonstrate the importance institutional climate plays in one’s ability to bring one’s whole self to a place, and that place can be a PWI.

Two participants also linked the success of their presidency to being their authentic self. Dr. Waters, open to modeling some vulnerability, said,

I understood that if I was gonna be a college president that in order for me to be successful, I had to be my full authentic self, and a board had to decide whether they wanted to hire me or whether they wanted to hire somebody else.

So, I wanna be a president who affirms my African American heritage. I wanna be a president who says, "It's okay for me to be personal and to tell you what I'm wrestling with, and I know some of you might be wrestling with the same thing.

Likewise, Dr. Shaw noted,

I don't think you can survive these roles intact if you are not yourself in them, and I have always posited that the truth of the matter is that it is that self that they really selected, if you were who you were in the interview right? And that is the thing, that's one of the beautiful things. I did this chapter on [a Black female president] in this higher education leadership book that I edited, and I went down to interview her, and it was something that she said to me that I, that it resonated... It was like, listen, it is your authentic self that is the big difference maker. It is the thing that makes your leadership distinctive and special and right for the institution. That's what you have to show up as. And so, I always show up in that space, it hasn't altered how I am.

Dr. Waters and Dr. Shaw found being their authentic self was instrumental in being selected as president of their institution. Being who they are as Black women is what made them stand out from the other candidates considered for this role. In addition, showing up authentically is what led the board to select them for this role at their institutions.

The following participants similarly expressed their sentiment on the importance of showing up unapologetically as a Black woman leader, in their role as president. For example, Dr. Winslow said, "I feel very solidly rooted and situated in my own cultural

background, and that is the great roots and great strength to do whatever I need to do.” Dr. James shared, “I intentionally and proudly do bring my identity to the Presidency ... so yes, I’m a Black female president, but also, I’m an academic with a strong track record in academic leadership.” Dr. Baker, similarly, said, “You can be proud of your race and who you are, you just always have to be monitoring people's reactions to that, and you're constantly assessing, "Is this the right environment for me to be me?" That is, you need to be aware of how you are being received and continuously assess the campus’ climate.

Dr. Banks highlighted the importance of not becoming a parody of herself as a leader. She explained,

I've tried not to adjust my behavior much ... to begin with, I do not match the perceived idea of authority or leadership, so I'm not gonna wear it. Since I already don't match it, there's no reason for me to wear a costume whereby I match what I somehow turn myself into a caricature of it in order to look like it. And if people say, which students have said to me, I've never met anyone less presidential than you.

Which was meant to be an insult. I say that's because you've never been around a Black woman who was in charge of you, have you?

What a powerful statement. Dr. Banks’ experience illuminates how the lack of exposure to and/or having Black women in leadership roles, perpetuates the myth that the archetypal leader in an organization is white and male. Further, her recollection also demonstrates that to be considered a leader, one must adopt behaviors that are Eurocentric and masculine in nature. This is a notion she intentionally defies.

Participants know and are proud of who they are, grounded in their racial identities, and rooted in their culture and heritage. Not ascribing to the preconceived notions people

have of what a leader looks like or who a leader is, showing up authentically, not changing behavior or pretending to be someone they are not, are ways participants combat the stereotypes assigned to Black women. For my study participants, their success as a president is in part dependent upon being one's authentic self. Being your authentic self gives participants an additional tool needed to combat the sexism and racism they may experience in the academy. Dr. Banks described her experience of being president as living in a "theme park of the absurd." The racism, sexism, and downright disrespect Black women presidents contend with required them to develop tools; the methods to manage the absurdity that often occurs.

Ways of Leading

Everyday leadership is about being in communities that are doing our collective best to honor our ancestors and all the humans to come.

—Dr. Khadijah James

Ways of leading refers to the approach or approaches study participants utilize in their leadership praxis as a college president. The final theme that emerged in this study includes three sub-themes: (1) collaborators, servant leaders, and listeners, (2) consistent leadership and (3) the personal, professional, and experiential influences on one's leadership approach. I will begin this section by discussing the various ways participants described their leadership approach. These key descriptions will also be found throughout each of the sub-themes.

Collaborators, Servant Leaders, and Listeners

Collaborator, listener, and servant leader were some of the words participants used to define their leadership approach, with collaborator being the primary descriptor.

Collaborators have a communal approach, whereby they invite members of their

organization to be part of the decision-making process. Similarly, *listeners* invite and provide space for others to be heard and share their thoughts and opinions on the direction of an organization. Finally, *servant leaders*, in their leadership approach, focus on being in service to others or their organization; and are more concerned with the well-being and needs of others.

In defining her leadership approach, Dr. Gilbert shared,

So, I think the collaboration, the fact that you're always trying to think about how to empower someone else, train who is going to be your successor, whether literally in your position or more generally, and a combination of support and high expectations, you have to have them both.

Likewise, Dr. James, reflecting on the hallmarks of her leadership noted,

So, my leadership approach is very collaborative. So really coming together to be a community of leaders, we meet a lot in meetings, we do consensus making, we do teamwork ... we're constantly learning how we can be our best self as individual leaders and as a collective leader.

As a leader, Dr. James focuses on the strengths the organization's members possess and empowers them to pursue excellence. In addition, Dr. James strives to achieve this excellence collectively, by building a community of leaders that work as a team to come to a consensus.

Similarly, Dr. Grant also discussed her leadership approach as collaborative. She commented,

I probably came at my role in leadership already with some natural edgings about being more collaborative. I think some of it just comes from the kind of personality I have and in terms of being more external and engaging, and I enjoy interactions with

people, so I'm more apt to kind of lean forward or be more collaborative in my approach. Everything I've done, even when I was on the faculty, [with] my colleagues and working with others, I've always been more likely ... to do things more collaboratively, so it could be more of a servant leader ... That's what my spirituality kind of leads me to in terms of this calling, that I see myself more of a servant leader. I'm here to serve. I really believe I'm here to be of service to the institution, and not be served.

As collaborators, Drs. Grant, Gilbert, and James strive to foster a 'we are all in this together' culture, in which the success or failures of the institution is a team effort. In addition to describing her approach to leadership as collaborative, Dr. Grant referred to herself as a servant leader. She is a leader who is more interested in serving than being served. This approach to leadership was also shared by Dr. Reese who said,

As a servant (leader),... I see myself as a person who is helping to develop people, it is like what we do as a teacher, you develop people, and helping people to grow ... Finding the skills, the right people to do the right type of work, and doing an assessment, and then letting people move and grow.

For these participants, their leadership is based upon being of service to others, the institution and larger community, giving of themselves for a greater purpose.

Referencing the gendered nature of leadership, Dr. Baker described her leadership approach as that of a listener. During our conversation she highlighted the importance of being a listener in building consensus and empowering others. She stated,

I think women in general have a tendency to want ... to listen to more voices and to empower people, and that is the way I operate, and I talk about that kind of stuff all

the time, and [that is] one way we try to build consensus ... So, my leadership approach is to be more of a listener... giving people an opportunity to voice their views. Never speaking first, respecting their words. Appreciating people's strengths and trying to put together teams that people have complementary skill set.

Dr. Baker takes an asset-based approach to leadership; everyone has something of value to bring to the table. Therefore, to move her institution forward, she listens to the thoughts and opinions of others. Thus, requiring her to focus on building relationships with key stakeholders; an approach highlighted by other study participants. Relationships as well as institutional mission, values and coaching are the words the next group of presidents used to describe their ways of leading. Dr. Banks noted,

I try to be a coach more than a leader, which is... Or maybe a team captain more than a ... Like, a team captain is always still a player, right? And you can be the team captain and be in any position. Like, you're playing basketball, you could be the center, or you could be a point guard. It's just whoever... Somebody has that right now. And so, I really feel like I try to have a team approach to things.

Dr. Banks' leadership approach is very much focused on being part of a team, and actively engaging in the work of the institution; knowing when to take the lead herself and/or letting others do so. Key to this leadership approach is having positive relationships with key stakeholders. A sentiment shared by Dr. Waters, she also focuses on relationships and developing others. Her approach was honed from her experience as a student affairs leader and is a hallmark of her leadership approach. She shared,

My style has become my style because of my Student Affairs experiences. So, I think if you ask people what type of leader I am, they [will] tell you that I'm relationship

focused, that I am compassionate, that I am a student advocate first, always and foremost. That I care about the development of the people that work for me, in terms of their growth and their ability to go to the next level.

An institution's mission is another important aspect of one's leadership approach. Ensuring the college's mission drives the work of the institution is how Dr. Winslow describes her way of leading. She reflected,

So, I'm very mission-driven, so my leadership is about making sure that the direction of the institution is codified in the mission, and then using a mission to drive the work of the institution. So, I was lucky that I, as I said, what drew me to this campus is that [it] had a mission that supported students and collaboration and connections, and so I didn't have to change the mission, but I had to forge that mission and keep reminding people of why we do what we do ... My leadership is also about not just collaboration, but creating a culture where people want everyone to do well. So, I don't wanna say it's an opposition to competition ... [it's] a sense that all boats will rise if we do that. So, this sort of sense of, let's lift everyone, not just my unit or this individual, and so... I've done that through celebrating collaborative learners.

Grounded in the college's mission, Dr. Winslow too fosters a culture where collective success is more valued than individual achievement. She emphasizes the belief that the institution is most successful when everyone succeeds. Likewise, Dr. Shaw operates from a core set of values in her leadership approach that prioritizes the institution. She shared,

I began with a set of values that I expect all of the senior leadership team to reflect, and I go through those value systems with them whenever I hire someone or when I'm interviewing them, it would be things that you recognize, transparency, a sense of

creativity, a willingness to accept new ideas, a certain pace ..., a willingness to admit mistakes and accept mistakes ..., a sense of fair play ... I go through a set of values that are important to me ... and then we spend a lot of time talking about what it means to make sound decisions over time to create the cumulative success that we want for the institution ... It starts out with this notion that we're institutionalist, we're here to be stewards of the institution, there's no particular division or area that's more important than the institution.

A steward of the institution, Dr. Shaw's leadership approach is to put the institution first, to ensure that Barry Hill College will exist and be in good standing 100 years from now.

Ultimately, her leadership is not about her, her presidency, her leadership team or an individual. It is and should always be about the institution and its success.

Consistent Leadership

Some study participants also used the word *consistent* to describe their leadership. This was most useful when presidents engaged with various constituents. In sharing their experiences of interacting with stakeholders, I learned from study participants how being consistent is vital to their success and ability to move their institution forward. Dr. Winslow stated,

I think the style stays the same, although the approach to it might be a bit different ... For instance, if I'm talking to a community member, and there's a sense of impatience generally from the community ... The actual style doesn't change but the pace kind of changes ... my style of being collaborative and gathering information and staying mission-driven is always the same, but I do have to use different tactics, depending on the audience in front of me.

Likewise, Dr. Baker shared how she changes her tactics depending on the demographic she is meeting with. She stated,

No, it's pretty constant. Let people talk, get their ideas, speak last, be confident when I speak. I'm pretty consistent with respect to that. The words I use might be different, and it might be that there are times when I am a little bit more assertive than others. For example, with students, I try not to be assertive with them. I will be the authority, but they're at a different stage in their life, right? For example, with trustees, they're all grown-ups...it is really a bunch of partners and collaborators trying to move this institution forward. So, I think that part of my leadership got adjusted based on my relationship with the people.

Dr. Waters, also finds being consistent an important aspect of her leadership practice. Like Dr. Baker, she will adjust this approach based on the person or persons she's interacting with. In the experience she shared, the faculty, leadership team and board of trustees are discussed. Dr. Waters, said,

I'm pretty fairly consistent across all ... constituencies, ... in general. Where there's probably a bit of a difference is ... with faculty, I'm gonna be a lot less directive than I would be with my cabinet. And even with my cabinet, I think they would say I still listen, try to build consensus ... By and large. You can't tell faculty what to do. And so, I'm definitely gonna, listen more, consensus build, "Oh I hear what you're saying, let me see if I can figure out a way to solve that problem," kind of thing ... And then of course with the board. The board is my boss, I'm not their boss. So, there are things where I can be very emphatic about, "Here's what I think we should do," but I have to depend upon the will of the board to affirm a particular direction that I am suggesting.

Dr, Baker and Dr. Waters, highlighted how consistent leadership practice is often nuanced, depending on the people one comes into contact with on a regular basis. This speaks to importance of knowing your audience, behaving, and speaking accordingly. Dr. Gilbert, expanding on the importance is delivering a consistent message added,

I have found that trying as hard as you can to be consistent across constituencies is important. So right now, I am working on a presentation that I will make in my president's update to the board of trustees, at the faculty meeting three days later in a town hall, and to our Planning and Budget Council... And maybe with a slight change or two or a slightly different emphasis, I actually think it's important for each of them to see the same basic data, because what often comes out of the variations are the questions they ask and how you respond to them...because there's always gonna be somebody who is in more than one group. And if you say it really differently or show a different whole set of data, they're going to feel as though they're hearing a different message.

Essentially, Dr. Gilbert described the importance of being consistent in one's messaging across various stakeholders. Not only does this consistency builds your credibility, it evidence of trustworthiness.

Finally, Dr. Grant discussed when changing her approach is not appropriate. She posited,

It [my approach] changes as I need to change it 'cause there are some decisions that you can't do as a team. The buck stops with me. So, I have to be the final say and call a lot of times and I have had to do that. But what people have come to appreciate is that I allow everyone to have an opportunity to be heard... So, I've made some tough

calls about the institution, but I still use the same approach [as a servant leader and collaborator].

The presidents are consistent in their leadership approach and with their messaging across various stakeholders and groups. They may change their methods depending upon the situation and/or group of people they are engaging with. Thus, being consistent allows study participants to develop and maintain credibility with internal and external stakeholders.

Influences on Leadership Approach

During the interviews, study participants shared who or what experience informed their leadership approach. Three categories, professional, familial, and experiential influences emerged from the conversations we had. I will begin this section with the findings that reflect the professional influences on one's leadership approach. I will then share what I learned about familial influences and lived experiences related to their leadership praxis.

Professional Influences

Another woman president was influential in Dr. Winslow's leadership development. She stated,

One was, is a woman named Alice Miller, ... who was a mentor [in the] Kellogg's Leadership Program, ... at the time, she was a college president in Michigan, and she just is a wonderful person. A person who's very balanced, a person who's passionate and committed, and a person who always kept her students in the center. And so, I had never seen a president who was such a student-centered president before... She was a great role model for me, and so I have thought of her over the years, and certainly feel that many of the things I picked up, in terms of my style or working with my students, I got from Alice...

Like Dr. Winslow a woman was influential in Dr. Gilbert's leadership approach. She shared, I had the great fortune of working with Linda Connor Williams [a college president] ... she very much invited other people to speak up, and as much as possible, empowered the level below her to make the decisions that were appropriate for that level. She didn't try and steal decisions up for the leader to make; it was empowering the closest possible group to make the best decision possible.

Men are as instrumental to study participants' leadership approach, positive or negative, as women. This was the case for Dr. Baker. She shared how a mentor, and a supervisor informed her leadership approach. She explained,

Herman Fredericks [a president I worked with at a previous institution] is one of my mentors, and Herman is just, he's just like Dr. Samuels [another president I worked with] in that he lets everyone feel at home in his presence. I think that that's just incredibly important for people to see that you are human and humane, but you can make those decisions that are tough.

That is, Dr. Baker learned one can be a strong leader and exhibit warmth, from the example Dr. Samuels and Herman set. The other individual who had an influence on Dr. Baker's leadership approach was,

The vice president for Academic Affairs [at a university where I was on the faculty] ... was a woman who did influence me, because she was the only woman on the president's cabinet. And this university is an HBCU. Most HBCUs are highly paternalistic, and she struggled with that. And she would talk to me about how the boys would always make decisions and exclude her from the conversations, and that she would be incredibly frustrated by that. I learned I had to always make sure my

voice was heard. And that's another reason I don't speak loudly, and I don't speak first, because when you speak first, someone else can say whatever it is you said, he'll say it later and then make everybody believe it was his idea...if you speak last, you have the final word and that they should remember that.

I learned two things from Dr. Baker's story. First, ensure that my voice is heard and leaves a positive impression. Second, the timing of sharing my thoughts is important. As Dr. Baker explained, you do not want to speak too soon; another person, in her case a man, can claim your thoughts as their own, taking all the credit.

Similarly, Dr. James learned from her mentors that a leader should develop others to become leaders. She said,

[My mentors taught me how] ... to pay it forward. So, whoever I meet, I'm always trying to mentor, I'm always trying to open doors. They've taught me the importance of learning from people from diverse backgrounds, and there's vicarious learning...it's the one-on-one time of learning. I appreciated having a personal board of directors... I have these mentors at various levels... I have mentors who are white, I have mentors who are Asian, I have mentors who are men, mentors who are female.

Familial Influences

In addition to those who professionally influenced participants' leadership approach, most of the presidents shared how family members were pivotal in how they lead. Dr. Winslow talked about the strong Black women in her family who provided the foundation for her leadership approach. She said,

My grandmothers and great-grandmother and aunties were always such a big part of my life ... I bring sort of that sense of strong women to my leadership style. So,

coming from generations of strong Black women, I think it has been a very helpful foundation for me in my leadership.

The foundation laid by her foremothers, provided Dr. Winslow with a strong sense of self as a Black woman. Additionally, the strength she gained from the women in her family allows her to do what is needed as president.

The loving and affirming base provided by her mother was key to Dr. Gilbert's leadership development. Reflecting on the knowledge her mother imparted upon her, Dr. Gilbert noted,

I still think the leader, my favorite and most influential was my mother, who was executive director of the ... Girls Scout Council while I was growing up, and the only Black executive director in a major metropolitan area in the mid-1970s, so, she was my model leader growing up. And [of] all the lessons I learned ... [I learned] people will try and hurt you. And if you're not up to that and if you can't get back up after somebody's beaten you down, or that you've made a mistake yourself, if you can't forgive yourself and ask for forgiveness, you're not going to be able to be resilient enough to be a long-term leader... she woke all three of her children up every morning saying, "You can be anything you wanna be. Anything." You hear that enough times in your first 15, 16 years of life, you kind of believe it. So, what she did most was empower each of us to be anything we wanted to be and to make us feel as though we had choices ... That kind of confidence and loving base is something that I think all great leaders need at some point.

The foundation Dr. Gilbert's mother provided empowered and imbued her with confidence; a confidence that is crucial to possess as a college president. In addition, Dr. Gilbert learned

not everyone has her best interest in mind. Therefore, her mother instilled in her a sense of resiliency, not to wallow in self-pity, and to have the ability to pick yourself up when things got tough. Referencing her mother as well, Dr. Reese discussed the ways she was influential in her leadership approach. She shared the following,

I guess the way [my mother] approached things kind of ... I'm a little bit more diplomatic in how I approach things than my mom, but my mom took no prisoners. I thought she would kill me if I ever did anything wrong ... She was very protective, and she had a lot of experiences that caused her to be fearful of things. She was one of those people who wanted to control the things that may cause harm, but also if I tried to do something, she would be my first supporter, pushing me and telling me, "Don't let anybody run over you, don't let that happen to you." My mom was constantly saying those kinds of things, whenever I needed a boost or support.

This story is a prime example of how knowledge is gained and shared among Black women. The lived experiences of Mother Reese informed her 'take no prisoners' attitude, coupled with her unwavering support for her daughter. The lessons Dr. Reese learned came from the example her mother set and the messages she shared on a regular basis.

Both of Dr. Shaw's parents shaped her ways of leading. She said, I've had some really good mentors. Starting out with my parents. Both my mom and dad ... My dad was a high school principal ... What high school principals do and what College presidents do, is [similar] ... So, I certainly have had him as a ... huge influence ... And my mother, in part because she went back and got a PhD, when she was married and had three children, and had to live away from her family to do that.

So, she just kind of solidified that you can do all of that family stuff and it can exist in the same career, so that was important.

Dr. Baker shared this powerful and moving story about an important lesson she learned from her grandmother that has become a significant part of her leadership approach. She explained,

My grandmother ... So, my maternal grandmother had a 3rd grade education. She worked as a live-in maid for a Dutch family in Virginia. And so, I remember one Friday, we went to pick her up and take her home for the weekend, and I couldn't have been more than, I don't know, 6 years old, or somewhere, maybe 7 or 8 years old. Anyway, we go pick her up, and of course she was my favorite person in the world, I go running up to the back door to get her, and she has her bag, and she was getting ready to go, and then this little 4-year-old White boy said, "Gigi," that was her name. "You're not going anywhere until you give me my milk." And I had never heard anyone who's young call my grandmother Gigi, and then for that little boy to tell her what she had to do, was not good for me. So, I went running towards him, I was gonna punch him. And my grandmother grabbed me by the back of my pants and slammed me to sit down on a stool and told me to sit there and be quiet, right?

And so, I had these tears streaming down my face and she gives that little White boy his milk and his cookies and then she says, "Now we can leave." And so, then we go to the car, and she gives me a hug and she says, "I'm sorry I had to do that." She says, "But that's Mama's job. But you have to understand, that that little boy cannot hurt me, and whenever any of them do something disrespectful to me, I don't let them see me angry or upset, knowing that I will be able to get them back one day. And you

should never ever let them see you angry. That's what she told me, and that has stuck with me. And she's exactly right, because when you show that kind of emotion, then you're the angry Black woman, and then that's another layer or battle you have. And I got enough battles.

There is a lot happening in this exchange. First, racial identity is a compelling factor in the power dynamics between people, regardless of age. It is important to note that within the Black community it is a sign of disrespect for a child to refer to an adult by their first name. Furthermore, such lack of respect becomes heightened, when it involves an elder and/or the matriarch of the family. When this little boy called Gigi by her first name and told her what she could and/or could not do, it demonstrated the authority he, as a child had over an adult, because of race. Second, Gigi exhibited the power she had in this situation, choosing a response that allowed her to remain employed and simultaneously ending his authority over her at the door. Therefore, the lesson Dr. Baker learned from her grandmother was to maintain her composure, not to let white people see her angry, pick her battles wisely and choose the strategy most appropriate to use for a given situation.

Valuing the personhood of others is an important lesson, both Dr. James and Dr. Banks learned from their parents. Dr. James said, “On the personal side, I would say really that my parents taught me the importance of constantly learning and really valuing each person for who they are”.

Similarly, Dr. Banks shared,

My mom was a high school teacher and a leader of her teachers' union. [My parents] both taught us that we needed to be very clear about what we brought to any situation and the sense that we should be unimpeachable, in everything that we did, ... You will

always be subject to people trying to diminish you, so get your own ducks in order and do that first. And do your best not to leave any vulnerability. Because somebody will try to exploit it.

They also taught me that you should be the first to make sure, as far as you can, that other people get the same, ... benefit, that you should always be looking to help other people up and... Everywhere I saw either one of my parents go or anything I saw them doing, they were some of the least status-conscious people of anyone that was around them. And that meant that when ... my brother and I both would spend hours with our dad and our mom at work ... we would go sit with the janitors in their break room and talk to them ... It meant that we knew all the secretaries as well as all the faculty members as well as we'd been to the president's house for dinner, and it was ... It was all the same in the way that our parents approached it, because they always taught us that whatever you're able to do should not just be for yourself ... you need to have a purpose in life that doesn't have anything to do with you.

For both Dr. James and Dr. Banks the lesson in valuing others, no matter who they are, the status (socioeconomical, educational and professional) they possess or where they come from was instilled in them by their parents. Honoring the worth of all human beings, as well as giving back and lifting others is essential to and informs their leadership approach.

Social and Contextual Experiences

Several study participants recalled experiences they had which provided them with lessons that informed their ways of leading. Dr. Gilbert discussed how her tenure as a faculty member at a women's college prepared her for leadership roles in the academy,

I taught for many years at an all-women's college, and so, on one hand, at least I wasn't dealing so much with the gender issue there ... I do think it was empowering and emboldening. It helped embolden me ... so that when I went to my next institution that was predominantly male, I had quite a bit of confidence in my ability and my ability to manage and to lead.

She continued and said, "To just see women's leadership around you all the time, was empowering," which informed a can-do attitude:

And so, you got to other places where people are saying, "Ooh, we can't do that," I'm like, "What are you talking about? Of course, you can." So yes, I think it prepared me very well, both as a leader in the academy...

Dr. Gilbert's tenure at an all-women's college reinforced the affirming messages she got from her mother, that she can be and do anything she wants. As a leader in higher education, she sees the possibilities and makes them a reality, when others do not.

Dr. Reese's experience harkens back to a difficult time in United States history, bussing. She shared,

Some of my lived experiences being bussed as a child and how we were treated, there was differential treatment for the bussed kids versus the kids who lived in the neighborhood. People had limited expectations of us. The thing that I always drew upon is the fact that in church, I was told that I was brilliant, and I was told in my family that I was brilliant, and so there were a lot of people who were able to offset those things that people may have thought. And I guess that the way I approach some of those experiences is to believe that everyone has value, that everyone has gifts, and what we have to do as a higher education institution is bring out the gifts of everyone

who chooses to come to our campus regardless of their ability and regardless of their ethnicity or their religion.

Constantly receiving affirming messages to counter the negative aspects of bussing and being educated in a hostile learning environment, taught Dr. Reese to value others, what they bring to the table and cultivate their gifts and talents.

Dr. Banks reflected upon the cultural norms she learned growing up in the Black community and how they shaped her leadership. She noted,

There is a truism about a lot of African American life, that you live in a communitarian way. And I think I definitely grew up in a communitarian kind of life. And I feel like that is a good way to live, not just a matter of necessity. I think it's true to life that you will always be dependent on other people around you. And anytime you forget that you are being really, really foolish. So, you should treat everyone as having value and know that you don't get to say how much value they have.

For Dr. Winslow the reality of what was, could be and could not be, was significant when she was deciding on her next steps in the academy. She stated,

I ... had the opportunity to be an associate dean, then I realized that there had never at the University [where I was working] ... been a dean of color. There had never been. There'd been a couple of women, white women, but [there has] never been a dean of color. And there had never been a provost that wasn't a male. A white male, so as to be clear ... And so, I realized that the likelihood, it didn't really matter how brilliant I thought I was, that the possibility of moving into higher academic leadership was really swimming uphill at that institution. And so, it was just like a come to Jesus

kinda moment, you think, "Okay. This is the reality." This is really not about me. This is the systemic racism that's right here and sexism right here at this campus.

And I also began to understand the power and influence of a president is NOT TOTAL...That the culture and the climate of systemic racism was beyond what the person on top could do, and so what one has to do is change the culture. We can't just keep the culture and do these things; you have to change the culture. And I really began to understand that and recognize that one of the jobs for leadership in higher education is that you can't just sit in these roles and keep things moving, you have to actively, intentionally change the culture of how things are done if you want them done in a fair, equitable way, because the forces to keep it like it's always been are enormous, absolutely enormous. And people would throw past practice [at] you in a minute.

Context matters. The key takeaway from Dr. Winslow's comments for me is the importance of understanding how systems of oppression work within a specific environment. Once I identify the context, as a leader I must work to change the culture, change the status quo.

Dr. Baker shared how observing examples of positive and negative leadership was a critical lesson in developing her own ways of leading. She noted the following,

I think just watching the president ... when I was ..., a young professor, being in awe of the president of that campus, and he was well beloved. And he had an open-door policy, somewhat. That's important. If he respected you, his assistant would let you in to speak with him and [he] would make time for you. If he didn't, you never got to see him. But he was someone who could speak to almost anything with confidence, even if he didn't know. And he was able to speak with anyone on any topic at their level.

That's important to me, because I believe a sign of a truly educated person [is the ability to] do that. You don't need to put on airs, you just need to treat people like people. So, I got that from [that president]. I also learned, from the president at another institution, even though after three years, I'd had enough of that guy, he was very important for me. Because he made me more convinced that a leader has to lead in the good and the bad times and whenever there were major problems at the institution, he would literally retreat into his office and not come out.

Dr. Baker learned two lessons from each president she discussed. The first, it is important to have humility as president, to be accessible and to engage with members of the community on a human level. The second lesson, is one must be a leader that meets difficulties head on, not avoid or run from them.

Dr. Waters reflected upon the leadership traits that are most important to her as well as lessons learned from mentors in her leadership practice. Dr. Waters stated,

So often when I'm asked to give a talk about leadership, ... I will talk about five or six particular leadership traits that I have learned from my mentors that I've incorporated in my own traits or characteristics... One of my mentors taught me the important value of listening, she helped me understand that most of us talk way too much, and that there's power in inviting people into a listening space by saying things like, ... "Say more about that?" Or me being silent while you're talking and not interrupting... But there's real power in being a good listener, so that's something I learned from one of my mentors. The value of what they call "management by walking around," but really the value of getting out of your office and developing relationships with people, really across the administrative spectrum. So not just having relationships with the

people who are at your level, but getting out there and being with the people, so to speak. So, the value of management by walking around. Learning, I already talked about the art of staying cool, but that coolness. I learned that from one of my mentors who talked to me about, "Gina, you can't get mad every time somebody tries to ... A parent calls you [and] wanna cuss you out." That you can't let people see you sweat, kinda thing ... And one of the really important ones I learned is, and you alluded to this a couple of minutes ago, I call it the "art of doing battle." Because I tend to try to approach leadership by trying to achieve consensus, ... I'm trying to bring people together; I'm trying to figure out a way in which we can all walk out of the room with everybody feeling like they get a little bit of something. But sometimes that doesn't work.

Discovering you have a community of cheerleaders was an important experience for Dr. James. She said,

The one thing is, is that about being one of the few and only is, is that you always know your community's cheering for you ... the story I tell is, ... [a] University [I worked at] has its own hotel in the city... a hotel on prime real estate... and there are Black doormen. And I truly believe in tipping, I learned about tipping from one of, I would say, my reverse mentees, who did not have a good job but who was always a good tipper and... I knew to be a good tipper, but she reminded me of it. The Black doormen at the [University's] hotel... would never take a tip from me because they said their tip was seeing me do well. And they would never... And they would never take my money, and I would wanna tip them ... [they would say] because you, sister, are doing the job and you're representing us.

Representation matters within and outside of the academy. While it is important for people of color to see themselves in the leadership of an institution, it is also important for those external to higher education. Further, Dr. James' reflection is a reminder that the responsibility of having to represent your people is made more manageable when you have and feel the support of your community. Knowing there are people cheering you on can provide encouragement to keep going, when things become difficult, and your leadership is being challenged.

Finally, the lesson Dr. Shaw learned from her parents was instrumental in her leadership approach. She explained,

And part of what you have to accept if you want to have success withstanding in these roles is that it is what it is, and so complaining about it, lamenting it, it doesn't mean that in the right forums, you can't talk about it, like in this forum. But I wouldn't spend any time talking about it in any other forums, because it is what it is, it's like those stories, if you come from my generation where your Black parents told you, you have to be better than them ... and one of the things my parents wanted to make sure that I sort of understood because of that ... That that wasn't a victim statement that was an empowering statement.

She continued and explained,

So, we're not gonna be victims just because society is kind of unfair, you're not gonna get all the things you deserve ... But you succeed in spite of, you achieve in spite of, you'd be better in spite of ... And so, it was not a victim framework, it was actually empowering, it's like, you know what, ... I'm gonna make this system work for me, even though [society] may be designed ... It was specifically designed for my parents

not to succeed, ... you succeed in spite of. And that's the way I show up in the world, authentic, who I am, it's gotta be done anyway, so let's just do it.

In other words, Dr. Shaw does not spend time focusing on how unfair life is for people of color. She accepts the reality of the society we live in and regardless of the deck being stacked against her she will persevere despite the challenges life brings.

Collaborative, team approach, mission driven, listener, servant leader and consistent were the words participants used to describe their leadership approach. No matter how participants described their leadership praxis, the emphasis for all, was to provide opportunities for others, particularly those with marginalized identities, empowerment, and a sense of responsibility to the larger community, the public good. Another component of participants' leadership approach is consistency, especially when engaging with various constituent groups. When interacting with faculty, staff, students, alumni and board of trustees, study participants may change the tactic they use; they may go into a listening mode, be more directive or collaborative. Whatever tactic is being used, the presidents' message is clear and consistent. In my conversations with study participants, they shared who and/or what influenced their leadership approach. Those influences were professional (mentors), personal (family) and lived experiences. Mentors played an integral role in the leadership approach of many of the study participants. For many participants, family members had the biggest influence on their leadership approach. The lived experiences that study participants shared were influential in their leadership development. From what they observed of others or were told, experiential influences are vital to understanding how Black women lead in the academy. Furthermore, the knowledge participants gained and shared

about their ways of leading are exemplars of all four principles of Black feminist epistemology.

Based on the data analysis, BFE informed the development of the finding's seven themes. Black feminist epistemology, developed by Collins (2000) is a sub-construct of Black feminist thought. Black feminist thought criticizes the traditional view of evaluating knowledge in the academy (Coker et al., 2018). BFE, a collective experience, also outlines how Black women, as members of an oppressed group, construct, and share knowledge to bring about social change (Collins, 2000). Most important to the creation of the seven themes were the four principles of BFE: (1) lived experience as a source of knowledge and wisdom; (2) knowledge claims assessed through dialogue; (3) an ethic of care; and (4) personal accountability. The accounts provided by participants are exemplars of each principle. Knowledge gained from one's lived experience was the primary principle seen throughout each finding. Any conversation mentioned by the presidents and/or advice given by parents, mentors, friends is an example of knowledge gained through dialogue. So too are the findings of this study. The interviews and drafting of the findings are other examples of knowledge gained through oral and/or written dissemination of information. Finally, the ethic of care and the ethic of accountability can be ascertained from participants' own words; particularly in how they talk about why they became a college president, their preferred institution to lead and how they lead. The final two principles of BFE can also be seen in messages participants' family members shared about giving back to the community, to value others and to be women of integrity. These stories demonstrate the sense of responsibility presidents have, to improve higher education and larger society.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of my study was to understand how the ways Black women college president's leadership practice, at four-year predominantly white institutions were informed by their lived experiences. By understanding these experiences, my study sought to address and determine ways to alleviate the barriers that limit Black women's access to the collegiate presidency. My research was guided by the following questions:

1. How does the lived experiences of racism and sexism influence the leadership approach of Black women college presidents?
 - a. In what ways can these experiences help describe how Black women college presidents lead?
2. How do Black women college presidents define their leadership approach?
 - a. What strategies do Black women college presidents employ in their leadership practice?

Answering these research questions required deviation from existing Eurocentric definitions of leadership. Therefore, this study was deeply informed by critical race grounded theory (CRGT) and Black feminist epistemology (BFE) to develop a theoretical framework for understanding how Black women college presidents rose to and navigated a leadership position in predominantly white spaces.

Using CRGT, this study illuminated how lived racial and gendered experiences of Black women college presidents informed their leadership approach. As a methodological framework CRGT challenges white supremacy in research and sought to build a theory from the lived experiences of the study participants in collaboration with the researcher (Malagon et al., 2009) which also validates the voices and experiences of those often overlooked in research. Furthermore, CRGT seeks to deconstruct and expose research patterns that ignore the experiences and knowledge of communities of color with the goal of creating an emancipatory theory (Malagon et al., 2009) by centering the narratives, experiences, and strategies of people of color. CRGT was used in this study to inform and reveal greater understanding of the experiences of Black women presidents by encompassing culturally sustaining methods for collecting and analyzing data (Malagon et al., 2009).

My study amplifies the voices of Black women college presidents, which serve as counternarratives that expose, analyze, and challenge stories of gender and racial privilege (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Solórzano and Yosso (2002) posit that counternarratives “can help strengthen traditions of political, social and cultural resistance and survival” (p. 32). Because interviews serve as narratives or counternarratives, the methodology of this study provided opportunities for nine semi-structured interviews via Zoom as my primary form of data collection. A secondary form of data collection was conducted through the analysis of participants’ curriculum vitae and 7 of 9 presidential inaugural speeches.

In addition to CRGT, Black feminist epistemology (BFE) was used to organize and analyze the data. BFE was developed by Patricia Hill Collins (2000), as an alternative model to assess knowledge creation and dissemination for social change by Black women. BFE serves as a foundation to understand how Black women lead, particularly within

organizations where their distinct notions of leadership are outside of a limited Eurocentric understanding of leadership in American higher education (Collins, 2000).

The roots of BFE are grounded in Collin's work (2000) on Black feminist thought (BFT), a theory created by and for Black women to highlight their unique experiences that have been left out of existing theoretical approaches. Arches (1997) posit that BFT can inform a leadership style that views one's problems in relation to and context within the community. Further, BFT relies on collaboration and coalition building to solve societal problems by recognizing one's interconnectedness to larger social systems and the reliance on one another to survive. Collins (2000), in defining BFE, provides four principles: (1) lived experience as a source of knowledge and wisdom; (2) knowledge claims assessed through dialogue; (3) an ethic of care; and (4) an ethic of personal accountability. This study relied on the four defining principles of BFE as a foundation for developing research questions, validating themes within the findings, and serving as a touchpoint for discussion of how Black women college presidents navigated predominantly white colleges.

Discussion

The discussion will highlight how the leaders in my study are strong and highly accomplished Black women, whom by any measure are overqualified for the position they hold. They resolved to use their talents, skills, and privileges to effect positive change in society. Participants answered the call to lead an institution of higher learning to better the lives of others; in particular those from underrepresented backgrounds and marginalized identities, not for themselves. The altruistic approach to leading is foundational in understanding how participant's lived experiences inform why they assumed a college presidency. Further, this discussion will call attention to the gendered racism participants

contend with and how they overcome them. The findings show how Black women college presidents do not get bogged down by the isms they face; they keep it moving; focusing on the bigger picture. The seven themes found in the experiences of these women illuminate the distinct ways Black women lead. The following are the seven themes:

1. *It is a hard job* highlights the core functions of a college/university president in relation to one's racial and gender identity.
2. *How they see me* refers to the racist and sexist perceptions and biases others have about Black women in leadership roles in higher education.
3. *Answering the call* describes participants' initial lack of interest in or any aspiration to becoming a college president and the factors that led to a change in course.
4. *A familiar place* describes the factors most salient to study participants when considering which college or university to serve as president, when the opportunity arose.
5. *Showing up authentically* describes how participants counter the racist and sexist beliefs and perceptions others hold about them by having a strong sense of self, rooted in their identity as a Black woman.
6. *A suit of armor* is the coping mechanisms participants use to manage the day-to-day challenges of holding a high-profile position as well as mitigate the experience of racial and gender discrimination.
7. *Our ways of leading* refers to the ways in which study participants engage in their leadership praxis as a college president. This includes three sub-themes that emerged during the interviews: (1) collaborators, servant leaders, and listeners;

(2) consistent leadership; and (3) the personal, professional, and experiential influences on their leadership approach.

A discussion of the seven themes is below. This is followed by the new leadership model I developed and an explanation of each of the five elements: a greater purpose, environmental awareness, strategies, strong sense of self and collective leadership.

It Is a Hard Job

Being a college president is a difficult role to have. Juggling multiple, highly complex priorities, internal and external stakeholder demands, and public perceptions about higher education, being a college president is a 24 hour a day, 7 days a week job. Participants shared how work-life balance was non-existent, there was always something to attend to. This was compounded by the current postsecondary education landscape, with decreased public support for and perception in the value of a college degree and a broken financial model that necessitated cultivating external funding sources. Further, the unique demands of the college presidency brought about an unrealistic amount of pressure, scrutiny, and lack of privacy for those who served in this capacity. As noted by the participants, being a college president resulted in attempts to dehumanize them via the perceptions people have about them. One was no longer seen as a human being with personal life challenges, they became solely a president. These drawbacks were heightened for Black women college presidents who must also contend with racism and sexism.

How They See Me

The existence and permanence of racism and sexism in society and academia, elicited a heightened level of awareness of how one was perceived as a gendered and racialized person. My study's participants were cognizant that positive or stereotypical perceptions held

about who they were as Black women generally, and Black women in leadership specifically, were always at play. In our conversations, participants shared how they were not surprised to be treated differently. Although the ways such differential treatment was manifested was up for grabs.

Like existing studies (e.g., Pittman, 2021), participants described repeatedly having their authority, intellect, and ability challenged by white students, faculty, and staff. Perpetuated by white males primarily, challenges to their ability, authority and intellect would appear as public and/or private acts of outright disrespect. This was noted in the experiences shared by Drs. Gilbert and Banks, where white male colleagues used a faculty meeting and a group email respectively to openly challenge their leadership. Similarly, Dr. Baker's interaction with a white male member of the faculty senate, who felt and stated that her direct nature and according to her, her confidence was problematic. This is yet another example of how Black women presidents are mistreated. Such differential treatment and disrespect experienced by participants sends a clear message; Black women are intruding on and therefore are not welcomed in this sacred space, long occupied by white men.

Simultaneous to the mistreatment they experience, Black women in the academy are expected to conform to racially stereotypical gender roles, such as taking on more "nurturing and service responsibilities than their male counterparts (Pittman, 2021, p. 185). In other words, Black women are expected to be the embodiment of motherhood, serving, and caring for students, faculty and staff while being disrespected and challenged at the same time. These two ideas working at the same time are contradictory and very confusing Collins (2001) attributes this phenomenon to the ways elite white males attempt to control Black women's image as matriarchs, jezebels, and mammies. Participants confirmed the occurrence

of this phenomenon when they shared how members of the faculty and staff expected them to be their counselor, friend, and mother figure. An experience white men and women or men of color in leadership do not need to navigate.

Racial and gendered stereotypes and perceptions also lead to contradictory expectations being placed upon Black women. On one end of the spectrum, participants shared that expectations are low due to the belief that Black women are either affirmative action hires, or simply unqualified to hold a leadership position. To dispute these stereotypes, Black women perform at extremely high levels. They must be twice as good as everyone else to advance their careers and be seen as a capable leader. Thus, leading to the other end of the spectrum, where expectations of Black women leaders, are unrealistically high. Dr. James, for example shared how she has “to do an extraordinary job, not just good, not just great” all the time. There is no room for doing less than one’s absolute best. As Dr. Waters articulated, there is no in-between when evaluating Black women and there was no such thing as a mediocre Black woman administrator. Therefore, Black women must perform at extremely high levels.

If Black women do not consistently perform exceptionally well or make a mistake in any way, no matter how minor, they are punished. Dr. Waters provided an example of how said punishment can manifest. She said, “we all know that if I don’t do well, they ain’t gonna hire anybody who looks like me for a long time.” Moreover, making a mistake and/or performing poorly is not solely on the individual, it impacts other Black women. More to the point, the weight of not being the last Black woman president of an institution was heavier than being the first. If the women in my study do not perform well the doors to the collegiate presidency would be closed to Black women who aspired to become a president. A burden

and responsibility, the presidents in my study carried, is another example of the unrealistic expectations and double standards placed upon Black women. Despite these challenges and drawbacks participants found being a college president to be an incredible opportunity to lead and make a difference. The women in my study, focused on the value they would bring to the role, higher education, and the lives of others.

Answering the Call

Study participants were not initially interested in being a college president. They expected to continue their career as an academic or assume an academic administrative role at an institution. However, overwhelmingly the participants in this study felt called or chosen to serve and lead a college or university. They served a purpose greater than themselves, which enabled participants to set the vision for their institution, make decisions and think strategically around access and increasing opportunities for underrepresented populations. For some, the calls to the presidency came from mentors, supervisors, colleagues, and perfect strangers. The latter was the case for Dr. Shaw who during a job interview was told by a member of a search committee, that she would be a president someday, when she expressed her interest in said position. Such encouragement affirmed the participants' ability to lead an institution as well as be a member of senior leadership. For other participants the call came via opportunities to lead a committee, manage a special project, or participate in a leadership development program. For example, Dr. Grant and Dr. Baker's participation in the ACE Fellows Program and HERS leadership development program respectively, were encouraged by their president, who recognized their leadership ability. These investments from colleagues, whether financial or through allowance of time away, were further confirmation that study participants were and are capable of leading an institution of higher learning.

Additionally, a sense of responsibility coupled with external factors that posed a threat to American higher education, compelled study participants to pursue and assume a college presidency. One's sense of responsibility was derived from the Black American value of lifting as you climb; using your talents, skills, and accomplishments to help others. For example, Dr. Banks' concerns about the heightened scrutiny on the value of higher education in the national discourse coupled with her desire to use her talents and skills to do "some good" contributed to her seeking and assuming her presidential role. Contrary to literature claiming Black women are reluctant leaders (Waring, 2000), the women in my study were not hesitant to lead. Prior to assuming a collegiate presidency, participants served in several leadership positions as department chairs, deans, vice presidents and provosts. They simply did not have interest in being a college president, it was not part of their career plans or a role they intentionally sought. Finally, as there is a lack of racial and gender diversity across institutional types in the collegiate presidency, my participants saw the need for and importance of filling these gaps, thus bringing a distinct perspective to this leadership role. The opportunities to lead in various ways coupled with the support and encouragement from mentors and colleagues, the desire to better serve students, and their own concept of leadership were instrumental in participants' answering the call to the presidency.

A Familiar Place

The decision to serve as a president of a PWI was not predicated on the racial make-up of said institution's student body, faculty and/or staff. Participants' decisions to lead a PWI were more practical and personal in nature. Practically speaking, colleges or universities that had opportunities for Black women to lead, were most appealing institutions for the women in my study. Opportunities included chairing committees at various levels in the

institution, directing academic programs, chairing departments, and other leadership roles within the organization. The knowledge gained from their lived experiences, personal and professional, as well as their values, were primary factors in determining which institution they would lead. For example, participants' experiences as a Black female student, faculty, or administrator at a PWI were most salient in their decision to lead a PWI. Most presidents in my study received their degrees from and/or worked at a PWI for the greater part of their career. As a result, the presidents in this study were more familiar with the culture and politics of a PWI. Another factor that was salient in one's preference was the size or number of students enrolled at an institution. It was important for the presidents in my study to continue to engage with students, build relationships with faculty and staff. Overall, their lived experiences provided them with greater knowledge of the inner workings of potential institutions, enabling them to identify which college or university their skill set would be best suited. Further it allowed them to determine which institution would be most aligned with their personal and professional values, and identity.

An institution's designation as an MSI, HBCU, Tribal College, or PWI, were not crucial factors for participants. My participants placed greater emphasis on whether an institution's mission was congruent with their values; if the institution was open, to the extent possible, to having a Black woman in charge (positive campus climate); and to what extent the institution would benefit from their skills and talents. Colleges and universities with these characteristics made space for my participants to bring their authentic self to the position thus opening the door to the possibility of a positive and demonstrated impact on the community.

Showing Up Authentically

Unapologetic and intentional about showing up authentically in academia, participants resisted the need to adopt Eurocentric and masculine ways of leading, thereby disrupting long held impressions of who is a leader and how they should lead. Creating a new image and narrative of a leader, study participants' identity as Black women was a source of pride and strength. Cultivated and affirmed within their families, the presidents' sense of self equipped them with the awareness needed to navigate the world as a racialized and gendered person. In other words, study participants were aware of how as a Black woman, they would be perceived and treated in an academic environment by an institution's various stakeholders. As a result of this consciousness, participants resolved to enter this role from a position of strength and a place of authenticity.

Moreover, the presidents in my study were determined to not change their behavior or pretend to be someone they were not to appease others or perpetuate preconceived notions people have about Black women. Participants mentioned how they are often viewed one-dimensionally, with the sum-total of their identity being the position they hold. By bringing their genuine self to their presidency, participants demonstrated that they were more than their title; and being a college president did not preclude them from experiencing the joys and hardships that came with living life. Participants used their authenticity as a tool to show their humanity; they were consistent with their words and deeds and shared the things they struggled with as a person.

Additionally, participants felt being genuine set them apart from other leaders, it made their leadership distinct. Several participants noted that being their authentic self was crucial in their appointment as college president. Aware of how they would be viewed,

participants did not try to minimize or downplay their Blackness or their womanhood. There was no point in trying to do so, because the board of trustees ultimately determined that they wanted a Black woman to lead their institution. Participants were clear about and proud to be who they are, Black women, so the board of trustees made an informed decision when hiring my participants. Showing up authentically, also meant the presidents in my study brought all aspects of their identities as scholar, leader, wife, mother, and more to the academy and this position.

A Suit of Armor

Managing the day-to-day challenges of holding a high-profile position like college president whilst guarding against gender and racial discrimination required Black women to have a variety of coping mechanisms that serve to protect participants' sanity, womanhood, Blackness, self-respect, job and much more. These tools were derived from study participants' lived experiences as well as who they are (personality traits) as a person. The coping mechanisms employed included presence and demeanor, academic background and training, and support networks. Such strategies served to protect and recharge the batteries of Black women presidents.

Regarding presence and demeanor, some participants discussed the use of clothing to convey professionalism, leadership ability and confidence and others shared how maintaining a calm demeanor was essential to their presidency. Dr. Baker, for instance, would wear designer clothes and specific jewelry like Kevlar or Teflon when going into difficult meetings. Doing so, provided her with protection from the gendered racism that may come her way. It also served as a reminder that she was a capable leader, confident in her decision-making abilities. In addition to using, one's dress to convey confidence, one's appearance

also communicated the seriousness in which Black women took their role as president. Dr. Reese, for example shared how taking a casual approach to the work could be detrimental to her success as president. This could result in being taken lightly and disrespected by students, faculty, and staff. Additionally, participants shared how maintaining a calm demeanor, not showing anger, was a key strategy in their leadership when responding to challenges. A skill, initially taught by family members, the women in my study were very cognizant of not perpetuating stereotypes, like the angry Black woman. Showing anger was more detrimental than helpful to Black women leaders and how they were viewed. Does this mean, Black women presidents do not display emotion? No, however they were very intentional and strategic about if and when to openly express emotions.

Instead of clothing or jewelry, academic armor, that is one's educational and professional background and credentials, was another coping mechanism participants used to protect themselves. Participants in my study, fell back on their skill set, experiences as scholars and leaders to demonstrate their ability to lead at a very high level. For instance, Dr. James used academic armor, gained from her experience working at some of the top institutions in the U.S. to mitigate any disrespect that came her way. She stated, "when you've been dean ... there are some things, people just can't pull with you." Highly skilled and accomplished people, the presidents in my study knew what they brought to the table, this knowledge was a vital tool in combating the challenges they faced as Black women leaders.

Ultimately, having a strong support system was another important method used to manage the demands of being as well as, achieving success as a college president. Participant's support networks allowed them opportunities to take off their armor, to regroup

and revitalize. Primarily external to the institution they lead, participants' supporters included parents and other family members, partners, children, friends, and mentors. Dr. Gilbert emphasized the importance of and need to have a support network when taking on such a role. She shared, “You have to realize that it does take a group, a village to have these kinds of jobs” In addition, the external network of supporters, often included other Black women college presidents. Throughout my conversations with study participants, several mentioned having “each other on speed dial” to compare notes and support each other. This community of Black women leaders were also sources of encouragement, knowledge, and peer mentorship. While the role of president was held by one person it is a communal endeavor.

Our Ways of Leading

Study participants described their leadership approach in the following ways: collaborative, listener, servant leader and consistent. As listeners, servant leaders and collaborators, Black women leaders possessed a sense of responsibility to the greater community and focused their efforts on empowering and providing opportunities for others. Collaborators had a communal approach to their leadership, where all members of an organization were part of the decision-making process. Similarly, listeners provided space for others to be heard and share their opinions about the organization’s direction. Servant leaders with a focus on serving, rather than being served, were more concerned with the well-being and needs of those in the organization. In line with the existing literature, participants’ leadership approach focused on coalition building and collaboration to solve problems (Arches, 1997) or in the case of this study, to lead a college or university. Additionally, Black women leaders distributed power, and sought to develop a community of leaders and strove to create an environment where everyone could grow, develop, and succeed.

Being consistent was the other way participants described their leadership approach. They noted that being consistent in their words and deeds was a means to establish and maintain credibility across stakeholder groups. While being consistent emerged as a leadership approach, upon further analysis I concluded being consistent was a strategy participants employed in their approach as a listener, servant leader and collaborator. Never deviating from their core leadership approach, study participants used different tactics, depending on the relationship they have with those they engaged with (faculty, staff, students, alumni, leadership team, trustees) at any given time. For instance, Dr. Waters was less directive with faculty members and the board of trustees than she was with her leadership team. Instead, she tried to build consensus, listened more, and suggested particular paths to follow, with the leadership team. As a leadership approach or strategy, being consistent was predicated on establishing and building relationships with others in the community. Demonstrating once again that Black women lead with the whole community in mind. Thus, leading in a collectivist way.

Noting several influences on their leadership approach, participants named mentors, supervisors, and family members among the top three. Mentors and supervisors were key in highlighting what type of leader the women in my study wanted or did not want to be. Those who displayed behavior most aligned with participant's values and beliefs were instrumental in the techniques and approaches they acquired. Those supervisors or mentors were team players themselves, created space for others to share their voice and skills, took responsibility for mistakes made, were student centered and focused on group success over individual accolades. Conversely, those who took up a large amount of space, were not accountable for their actions and were more egocentric in their leadership approach were not viewed as

exemplars of great leadership by study participants. In other words, study participants aligned their leadership approach with leaders who were focused on the success of the whole community.

Most of the participant's community focused leanings came from the messages and lessons they learned from family members. The primary influence on study participants' approach to leadership, parents, grandparents, and aunts, were themselves exemplars of outstanding leaders. Their leadership abilities were seen in the paid and unpaid labor they did outside the home, serving as leaders in the larger community. The example set by family members instilled confidence, a strong work ethic, and a desire to excel no matter how unfair life could be. In addition, study participants learned that to be successful they had to work twice as hard and be twice as good as everyone else to do so. Their families also instilled the notion of lifting as you climb; their accomplishments were not solely individual ones. Further, family members were clear that everyone had value, and what advantages or benefits participants gained must be shared with others. A concept that participants learned through their own lived experiences of being treated unfairly and/or seen by others in discriminatory ways. The ultimate lesson taught by one's family was how one must have a life's purpose that is not self-centered; it should be one in which your gifts, talents and skills were used to benefit others.

While study participants described their leadership approach in different ways, they have a lot in common. Listeners, servant leaders and collaborators take an asset-based approach to their leadership praxis. The focus is on working from a place of strength to develop and empower others, building consensus, and working as a team to achieve success on individual and collective levels. Furthermore, Black women do not lead for themselves.

Taking on the responsibility to effect change, Black women's leadership is about contributing to the betterment of the lives of others, their institution and higher education. Participants altruistic approach to leading, was greatly informed by their lived experiences, personal and professional, of racism and sexism. This guided me to develop a new leadership model designed by and for Black women.

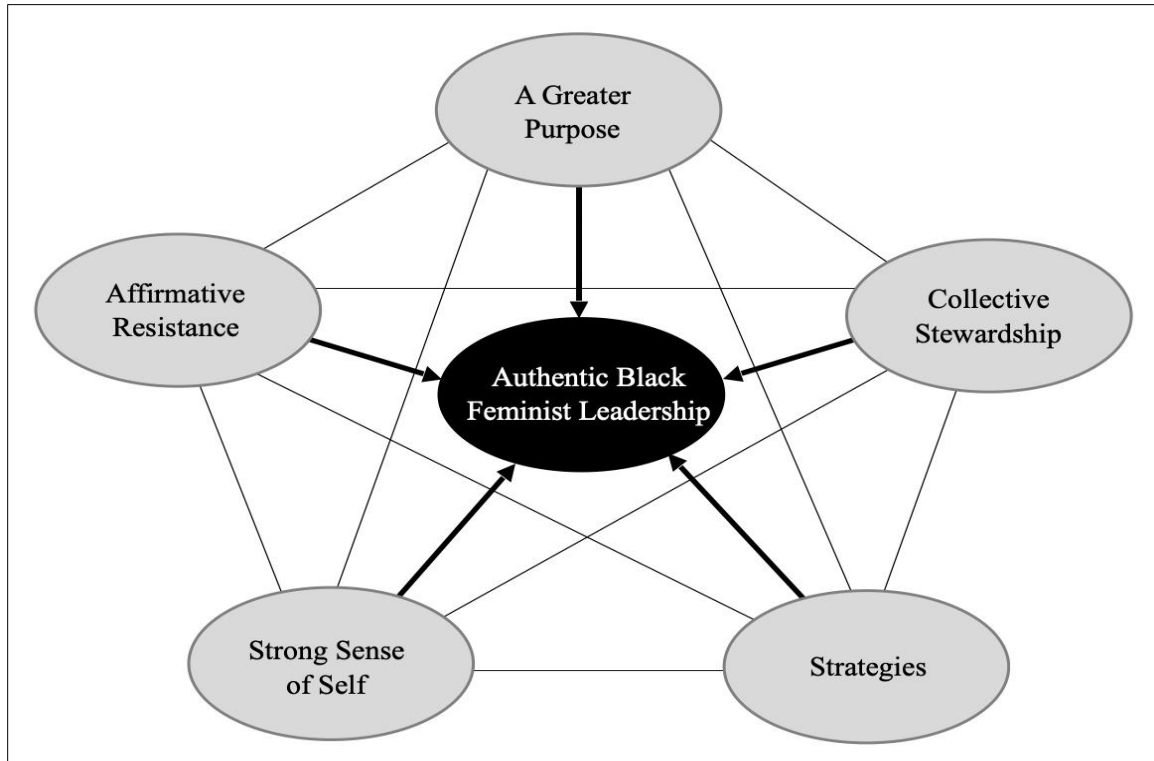
Theoretical Model: Authentic Black Feminist Leadership

Rooted in the seven themes in the study's findings and building on the theory Black feminist epistemology, developed by Collins (2000) this study led to the development of a new leadership model, authentic black feminist leadership. ABFL provides Black women, researchers, and the field of higher education with a more applicable framework that recognizes the influence of race and gender on as well as describes Black women's ways of leading. Existing leadership models/frameworks are heavily white male centered; those that consider the influence of gender on leadership treat women as a monolithic group whose experiences as a leader is that of white middle class women. Unlike other leadership models like "the great man theory," ABFL does not center whiteness or masculinity, instead this model highlights the different dimensions that influence how and why Black women lead. Moreover, Black women in leadership positions do not prescribe to only one leadership theory, as they do not fully capture our ways of leading. ABFL, a model created for Black women, by Black women, describes the distinct ways we lead within an environment that is not representative nor reflective of who we are. This model describes and illuminates the factors that inspired Black women to become altruistic and community focused leaders. Through its five elements, a greater purpose, environmental awareness, strong sense of self, strategies, and collective stewardship, this model highlights how Black women's leadership

approach is almost inherent and comes naturally because of their lived experiences as racialized and gendered people.

Figure 1

Authentic Black Feminist Leadership Model



The five interconnected elements of ABFL become prominent based upon the context in which Black women can be found. Rooted in the lived experiences of Black women college presidents at PWIs, ABFL outlines how one navigates and leads an institution that was not created to include them. Further, there is variability and nuances within each element, they become most salient as circumstances change. For example, when Dr. Baker was told she was too direct and too confident by a white male faculty member, she could

have responded in a variety of ways, including raising her voice and/or displaying anger. Instead, maintaining a calm demeanor, she chose to inform her colleague that her confidence and directness are assets to the institution, and he should be glad that she possesses these traits. In this case, the elements *Affirmative Resistance*, *Strategies* and *Strong Sense of Self* were most salient. Solidly grounded in her identity as a Black woman (*Strong Sense of Self*), Dr. Baker, clearly and calmly expressed (*Strategies*), how the statement about her directness, which was meant to be an insult, was an asset for her leadership (*Affirmative Resistance*); and her way of managing this experience of racism and sexism. ABFL as a leadership model highlights the complexity involved in Black women's ways of leading and the factors that inspire them. The five elements of ABFL will be discussed in the order in which they are listed above, starting with a greater purpose.

A Greater Purpose

A greater purpose, informed by the theme *Answering the call* and the sub-theme *Familial influences on leadership* from the theme *Our ways of leading* describes the impetus for Black women assuming the highest leadership position in academia. It is the “why” the women in my study answered the call to engage in an endeavor greater than themselves and become a college president. This element also speaks to the value of giving back to the community that was instilled by one's family, thereby influencing a component of Black women's ways of leading. One's greater purpose is grounded in a sense of responsibility to serve the community, provide opportunities for those at the margins, preserving access to and upholding the ideals of higher education, and increasing representation in the collegiate presidency.

Affirmative Resistance

Informed by the theme *How they see me*, affirmative resistance is the next element of ABFL. The ever-present existence of racism and sexism calls for Black women to develop a heightened awareness about the impact these isms will have on how they are perceived and treated in the academy; thus, informing their leadership praxis. Affirmative resistance illustrates, the ways Black women defy the existence and brunt of sexism and racism, upon entering the academy and collegiate presidency. A strength's-based approach, affirmative resistance, provides the space for Black women leaders to focus on positively changing higher education.

Strong Sense of Self

Strong sense of self describes how Black women with intersecting marginalized identities, develop a deeply rooted and positive self-concept. Developed from the theme *Showing up authentically*, a strong sense of self is grounded in one's culture and heritage. A strong sense of self provides Black women with the tools to assess institutional climate and the gendered and racial ways they will be viewed as college presidents. Central to the success and longevity of Black women leaders, possessing a positive self-image, Black women radiate a presence that commands respect.

Strategies

Black women develop strategies to manage the sexism and racism they experience as well as the challenges that come with holding this high-profile position in higher education. Derived from the theme, *A suit of armor*, the strategies employed are varied and based on one's lived experiences, personal and professional, and the traits they possess as a person. For example, remembering the training received and the skills developed throughout one's career

has been an essential strategy for both Drs. Winslow and James. Strategies serve to protect and restore Black women from the effects of gendered racism on their leadership.

Collective Stewardship

Collective stewardship describes the shared and altruistic ways Black women lead. Informed the theme *Our ways of leading*, Black women view leadership of an institution as a collective process. By fostering the leadership development of others, Black women flatten hierarchical systems by inviting others into the decision-making processes, offering their opinions on the direction of the institution. Key to collective stewardship is its foundation in Black Feminist Theory and the familial, professional, and experiential influences on the leadership practice of Black women.

Implications for Further Research and Practice

In line with Wolfe and Patterson Dilworth (2015), my study filled the need to further examine diversity in institutional leadership, with a focus on the intersecting identities and experiences of Black women. Informed by Black Feminist Epistemology and the seven themes my study led to the development of a new leadership model, authentic black feminist leadership (ABFL). As a leadership model, ABFL gives Black women a framework that appropriately defines their leadership approach, centering their voices, their stories, and perspectives. Additionally, ABFL provides scholars with a new leadership framework, in which to conduct additional research that expands upon and fills the gaps in the existing literature on Black women in leadership. Moreover, key stakeholders, like boards of trustees and executive search firms responsible for recruiting and hiring the president gain a better tool to recruit, hire and evaluate Black women candidates for leadership positions in the academy. Finally, my study is helpful to professional organizations with pipeline programs to

increase diversity in postsecondary education leadership roles. These organizations would be able to tailor their leadership development programs, grounded in ABFL, to speak directly to the distinct ways Black women lead.

Although the presidents in my study may have had similar experiences with racism and sexism in the academy, Black women presidents are by no means a monolithic group. Black women's lived experiences are nuanced by one's background, socioeconomic status, family dynamics, education and more. Variation in institutional mission and type, geographic location, degree programs offered and more, further distinguishes one's experiences in the academy as Black women reach the top leadership position in higher education. Therefore, further research on the leadership approach of Black women college presidents is needed. A wider net must be cast to gain a fuller picture of leadership at the intersection of race and gender in the collegiate presidency. I offer the following recommendations for researchers, practice, and aspiring Black women leaders.

Recommendations

Researchers

Researchers should repeat the study and include follow up interviews and campus visits as part of the methodology, research design and data collection processes. Conducting follow up interviews will allow researchers to gather additional information about responses to questions that may lead to the emergence of additional themes. For example, a few of the participants discussed the importance of their faith or spirituality in their leadership praxis. Further exploration on the influence on one's faith tradition would be valuable in understanding the ways Black women lead. Additionally, campus visits would allow researchers to observe presidents in action, determining if those actions are aligned with the

ways they describe their leadership praxis. During campus visits, researchers should also interview key stakeholders, like members of the leadership team, board of trustees, faculty, students, and alumni, in addition to college presidents. Their experience interacting with the president could provide further insight about their leadership practice, as well as confirm or refute how presidents describe their ways of leading. Additionally, engaging with key stakeholders could also help determine if they view Black women leaders in stereotypical ways.

Moreover, researchers should repeat my study to capture those who were identified and met the criteria to participate in the study but did not. Those who did not participate in my study either declined or did not respond to the invitation. Furthermore, at the time of data collection, other Black women were appointed to a collegiate presidency at four-year PWIs. Including recently appointed presidents in the study would provide additional insight into their experiences as women and leaders of color, and whether their experiences are like the participants in this study.

Finally, researchers should expand study participant criterion to include all Black women college presidents at both four-year and two-year institutions, private and public, small, medium, and large colleges, religiously affiliated institutions, HBCUs, Minority Serving Institutions and Hispanic Serving Institutions. Black women are not a monolithic group, so expansion of the criteria to include other institutional types would enrich one's understanding of how salient ABFL is in relation to a Black woman's experience at a particular college or university. For example, expanding participant criteria could assist in understanding whether affirmative resistance is only salient when a Black woman is leading a PWI, or if its also applicable at an HBCU. In addition to the expanding study criteria,

researchers should also use critical race grounded theory when engaging with populations who hold intersecting identities.

Critical race grounded theory allowed me to center the voices and experiences of Black women college presidents while accounting for their intersectionality, a critical component in understanding their experience. CRGT opened the door for me as a Black woman conducting research, to partner with my participants in interpreting and making meaning of the lived experiences that influenced their leadership practice. Additionally, using CRGT, provided a richer understanding of Black women's ways of leading by engaging in data collection and analysis processes, that are more in line with the collaborative leanings prevalent in communities of color. My study serves as a testament to increasing the use of CRGT when studying populations with intersecting identities from marginalized populations.

Practice

If institutional leadership and executive search firms want to attract and recruit Black women for a presidency, the institution's board of trustees, president's cabinet, other senior leaders, and headhunters will need to address the racism and sexism within their ranks and processes. In addition, they need to recognize that there are things Black women, unlike white men or women must contend with. Therefore, Black women presidents use affirmative resistance to confront the sexism and racism they experience; however, the extent to which they must call upon this element of their leadership could be reduced. ABFL can be used by institutional leadership and headhunters to reduce and dismantle the barriers impacting Black women's career advancement. Key stakeholders should conduct a review of and interrogate

their recruitment, hiring and retention processes that are inherently biased; and develop corrective measures, to address said biases.

In addition to reviewing and revising hiring practices trustees', cabinet members and executive search firms should participate in regular training, informed by the ABFL model, that addresses the racial and gender biases others hold about Black women generally, and those in a leadership position, specifically. Thus, those participating in said trainings would gain the knowledge and the skill set needed to work with and support Black women presidents. Doing so will also increase the knowledge institutional leaders and search firms need to address Eurocentric understandings about leaders, leadership and the impact racism and sexism has on those notions. Moreover, such training should be expanded to include faculty and staff. As noted in the literature and from participants experiences, Black women in the academy, often, have their authority, intellect, and scholarship challenges by their colleagues. For the women in my study, they described how such challenges manifest in outright disrespect. Having a greater understanding about the distinct ways Black women lead, could also mitigate the gendered racism they experience within the academy.

Aspiring Black Women Leaders

Strong support systems are vital to the success of Black women college presidents, as discussed in the theme *A suit of armor* and element *Strategies*. Therefore, Black women who aspire to and/or pursue a collegiate presidency should create a formal network that focuses on higher education leadership. A formal network can provide an affirming space to gather, provide opportunities to discuss unique experiences, and continued leadership development. Moreover, establishing a formal network of aspiring Black women college presidents could lead to formation of a leadership development program for and by Black women; informed

by the ABFL model. Since, Black women lead in distinct ways, having a leadership development program that recognizes and speaks to our ways of leading is crucial to fostering a smoother path to the presidency for Black women.

Conclusion

The purpose of my study was to understand the ways in which the lived experiences of Black women college presidents at four-year predominantly white institutions informed their leadership practice. Previous research identified how their leadership development is influenced by gender and race (Patton & Hayes, 2018); however, my study moves the understanding of Black women leadership beyond a monolithic superficial lens. Equally important to Black women's leadership development are the people and experiences that have influenced their collectivist approach to leading. Further, my participants, in sharing their journey, showed how Black women take on the responsibility to lift their communities, improve the lives of others and to foster a positive change. By centering the voices and experiences of these Black women in this study, we are gifted with a fuller understanding of how they developed their ways of leading and lead despite the obstacles they face on the road to the college presidency. Black women's leadership is authentic and unapologetic.

APPENDIX A

SAMPLE EMAIL TO STUDY PARTICIPANTS

Dear Potential Study Participant,

I am currently a PhD candidate in Higher Education at the University of Massachusetts Boston; my faculty advisor is Tara L. Parker, PhD. I am conducting a study on the leadership approach of Black women college presidents at PWIs. The purpose of my study is to understand how the experiences of Black women college presidents at four-year PWIs inform their leadership practice. Given the scant number of Black women who hold this position, it is important to understand their leadership development in higher education. Understanding the experiences that influence Black women's ways of leading will better inform the recruitment and hiring processes as well as the retention and job satisfaction of Black women in leadership positions in the academy. You have been identified as a Black woman currently serving as president of a predominantly white institution (PWI). Having met these preliminary criteria, I'd like to invite you to be a participant in this study. Participants will be interviewed once, for no longer than 60 minutes. Would you be willing and available to be interviewed for this study? If you have any questions regarding my research and/or would like to participate, please feel free to contact me. Thanks for your consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,

Damita A. Davis

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

University of Massachusetts Boston
Department of Leadership in Education
100 Morrissey Boulevard
Boston, MA 02125-3393

Consent Form for “Black Women College President’s Leadership

Introduction and Contact Information

You are asked to take part in a research study. **Participation is voluntary.** The researcher is Damita A. Davis, Ph.D. candidate, Higher Education, Department of Leadership in Education. The faculty advisor is Tara L. Parker, Associate Professor, Higher Education. Please read this form and feel free to ask questions. If you have questions, Damita Davis will discuss them with you. Damita can be reached by phone at 401-743-9090 or via email at damita.davis001@umb.edu.

Description of the Project:

The purpose of this study is to understand how the experiences of Black women college presidents at four-year PWIs inform their leadership practice. Given the scant number of Black women who hold this position, it is important to understand their leadership development in higher education. Understanding the experiences that influence Black women’s ways of leading will better inform the recruitment and hiring processes as well as the retention and job satisfaction of Black women in leadership positions in the academy.

Should you decide to participate in this study, you will be interviewed once for no longer than one hour. Interviews will take place in person at your institution or online via zoom; in addition, interviews will be recorded and transcribed for accuracy. Your participation in this study is voluntary.

Risks or Discomforts:

There is minimal risk involved for those who participate in the study. If an interview is in person, COVID safety protocols will be adhered to.

Benefits:

There is no direct benefit to you from participating in this study. Your participation may help us learn more about what informs Black women college president’s leadership approach.

Confidentiality:

Your part in this research is **confidential**. That is, the information gathered for this project will not be published or presented in a way that would allow anyone to identify you.

Pseudonyms will be assigned to each participant. A key linking the participant and data to their pseudonym will be kept in password-protected OneDrive, only accessible to the investigator. All data, recordings, consent forms, transcripts, notes and memos for the study will also be kept in the password-protected OneDrive. All identifying information, along with recordings, transcripts, notes and memos will be destroyed after three years. This account is only accessible to the investigator.

The University of Massachusetts Boston Institutional Review Board (IRB) that oversees human research and other representatives of this organization may inspect and copy your information.

Voluntary Participation:

The decision whether or not to take part in this research study is voluntary. If you do decide to take part in this study, you may end your participation at any time without consequence. If you wish to end your participation, you should contact Damita Davis via phone or email. Whatever you decide will in no way penalize you or involve a loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Questions:

You have the right to ask questions about this research before you agree to be in this study and at any time during the study. If you have further questions about this research or if you have a research-related problem, you can reach Damita Davis via email at damita.davis001@umb.edu or by phone at 401-743-9090. You can also contact Tara L. Parker, the faculty advisor via email at tara.parker@umb.edu or by phone at 617-278-7728.

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact a representative of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, which oversees research involving human participants. The Institutional Review Board may be reached by telephone or e-mail at (617) 287-5374 or at human.subjects@umb.edu.

Signatures:

I HAVE READ THE CONSENT FORM. MY QUESTIONS HAVE BEEN ANSWERED. MY SIGNATURE ON THIS FORM MEANS THAT I CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

Signature of Participant Date Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Printed Name of Participant Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consen

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

**Black Women College Presidents' Leadership
Investigator: Damita A. Davis
Interview Protocol**

1. Why did you choose to become a college president? Why a PWI?
 - a. If this is your first PWI, then why this PWI? If they've been president at more than one, why do they work at PWIs?
 - b. In what ways do you find yourself adjusting your behavior, if any? Can you recall a time when this happened?
2. What is it like to be a college president?
 - a. What is it like to be a Black woman leading a predominantly white institution (PWI)?
 - b. Please describe your experiences.
 - c. How have your experiences informed your approach as a leader?
 - d. How does being a Black women impact the way you lead a PWI?
 - e. Do these experiences influence how you show up as president? Are you able to be your authentic self, express your feelings/emotions?
 - f. How does your gender and race impact the way you lead?
 - g. In what ways are you held to a different standard than your predecessor, or white women or men you know?
3. How have you experienced racism and sexism as president, if at all?
 - a. What were those experiences?

- b. How have these experiences informed your leadership approach?
- 4. Please describe/define your leadership approach.
 - a. How do you define “successful” leadership?
 - b. Is there a leadership ideal that you work from?
 - c. What experiences informed your leadership approach?
 - d. Whom, if anyone, has informed your leadership approach?
 - e. What is your leadership approach when working with your leadership?
 - f. How does your leadership approach change among various stakeholders (faculty, staff, students, alumni, trustees)?
- 5. What professional role, from your CV/Resume, was most influential on your leadership?
 - a. How do you think this role prepared you to assume the college presidency?
- 6. What knowledge have you gained from your experiences that you apply in your leadership approach?
 - a. Where did this knowledge derive?
 - b. How do you use and share the knowledge you’ve gained in the presidency?
- 7. What, if at all, is unique about your role as president, when compared to...?
- 8. Who do you speak to or go to for support?
- 9. Is there anything that I should have asked but did not?
 - a. Is there anything additional you would like to add?

APPENDIX D

CONSENT TO RECORD

Consent to Audio Recording/Video Recording & Transcription

Black Women College President's Leadership

Damita A. Davis, PhD Candidate, Higher Education, UMass Boston

This study involves the audio recording/video recording of your interview with the researcher. Neither your name nor any other identifying information will be associated with the audio recording/video recording or the transcript. Only the researcher will be able to listen to and/or view the recordings.

The recordings will be kept for four years. The recordings will be transcribed by the researcher and erased once the transcriptions are checked for accuracy. Transcripts of your interview may be reproduced in whole or in part for use in presentations or written products that result from this study. Neither your name nor any other identifying information will be used in presentations or in written products resulting from the study.

Immediately following the interview, you will be given the opportunity to have the recording erased if you wish to withdraw your consent to recording or participation in this study.

By checking the box in front of each item, you are consenting to participate in that specific procedure:

- having your interview recorded;
- having the recording transcribed;
- use of the written transcript in presentations and written products.

Participant's Signature _____ **Date** _____

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