

HIDDEN LEADERS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL RESEARCH STUDY THAT
EXAMINED THE JOURNEY OF RESILIENT AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMEN
WHO PURSUED AND CONTINUE TO PURSUE ADVANCEMENT AT A
PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTION

by

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my loving family who believed and supported me. I dedicate this dissertation especially to my mother, Jeanette Marie English. Mom, you will always be in my heart every day. I often hear your voice telling me that you are proud of me. The vision of you at my previous graduations yelling my name Punkin will always be with me! Thank you for the love, kindness, and support over the years. Continue to rest in peace.

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ABSTRACT

HIDDEN LEADERS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL RESEARCH STUDY THAT EXAMINED THE JOURNEY OF RESILIENT AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMEN WHO PURSUED AND CONTINUE TO PURSUE ADVANCEMENT AT A PWI

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In this study, I focused on African-American women who have pursued and continue to pursue administrative roles at a predominately White institution in the Midwest. Using a phenomenology approach, that employed an initial questionnaire sent to various marginalized groups in the Midwest to women who fit the research criteria. After completing the questionnaire, the women who wanted to continue their participation did so by completing a pre-interview survey. Finally, 21 women were interviewed via virtual focus groups and one-on-one interviews using semi-structured questions. Through this study, the key findings revealed that these African-American women continue to experience barriers to gaining access to advancement or promotions at predominately White institutions. The findings revealed six major themes, (1) working harder and doing more work than their White counterparts, (2) a lack of acknowledgment and being overlooked, (3) a lack of transparency to be authentic self, (4) a lack of respect, (5) the need to use support systems, and (6) the need for institutions to increase support. Based on the findings from this research several recommendations for leaders of

predominately White institutions on ways to support African-American women who seek career advancement are suggested.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

African-American women have made great strides in higher education. However, despite their accomplishments and successes, they remain the most underrepresented marginalized group among U.S. higher education administrators. These women continue to stagnate behind White women and men in terms of being promoted within the organization to various administrative and leadership roles in Predominately White Institutions (PWI). Many speculate that both race and gender play a significant role as to why African-American women continue to struggle to gain administrative roles at PWIs. Wingfield (2021) stated that both racism and sexism create an unfavorable influence on women regardless of the industry. This process is shown “through stifled leadership opportunities, the ongoing persistence of specific forms of sexual harassment, and subtle but pervasive doubts about competence, intelligence, and skills that are unrelated to actual performance” (para. 3). These interconnecting issues can be used to understand and explore why African-American women are faced with challenges when seeking advancement at a PWI and remain underrepresented in administrative roles at such institutions.

As a current African-American woman administrator at a predominately White institution, I have experienced barriers and obstacles in seeking advancement in other administrative roles. My colleagues who are of the same background and hold similar skills and educational backgrounds have indicated that they too faced challenges and

struggles to gain access to different opportunities at a predominately White institution. Although deemed qualified or overqualified for various positions, African-American women are not gaining administrator roles. Their White counterparts are progressing at a faster rate than they are. The question of why White women progress more quickly and frequently than African American women at predominately White institutions sparked my interest to explore the issue further.

Background and Context

Historically in the United States, African American women have struggled with employment issues both as women and as African-Americans. The fact of being both a woman and African American can be located under the umbrella of intersectionality. According to Gopaldas (2013), intersectionality is most commonly used to explain the numerous ways race and gender interact to describe the many facets of African-American women's employment experiences in general. Thus, it should be no surprise that African-American women in higher education are dealing with employment issues.

The inclusion of African American women in higher education has had a profound as well as tumultuous history in the United States. There was a point in time when it was illegal for slaves to learn to read and write. However, African-American women would eventually begin to learn how to read and write on their own. As time changed so did access to education for the African American community. According to Evans (2008), there were only 250 institutions that offered a college-level education before the Civil War. However only 24 of them allowed women, and almost all of them were not open to African Americans, making it very challenging for African American

women during this period. Evans (2008) noted that when there were opportunities available that would permit Black girls and women an education, it was met with adversity. African American women were not encouraged to seek an education, and when they did try to seek an education they were told no or blocked from that education. Being met with adversity and being told no led many of these women to teach themselves secretly. However, the African-American community did not let that stop them from access to education.

In 1833, African Americans began to see various opportunities open up to them that allowed them to earn advanced degrees. The beginning of African-Americans earning degrees can be credited to the opening of Oberlin College in Ohio (Evans, 2008), one of the first institutions of higher education to open its doors to African Americans. Evans (2008) stated that the act of Oberlin College opening its doors to Blacks and women creating a long history of dedication to African-American access to higher education. Oberlin would be credited as allowing the first Black woman, Lucy Ann Stanton, to receive some form of certification from Oberlin in 1850. Although Lucy did not receive a degree, she is still considered a graduate of the college. This event was seen by many African Americans as a major accomplishment for African-American women. It gave hope to other African-American women that obtaining an education was possible. By 1862 Oberlin College would see the first African American woman, Mary Patterson, graduate with a bachelor's degree and become a teacher upon the completion of her degree (Evans, 2008). Patterson's degree aided in the world in seeing African-American

women making history in the field of education which would include them entering into all facets of higher education to include holding administrative roles.

As the world of higher education expanded in the United States, it eventually became more inclusive in both employment and student enrollment. However, the concepts of inclusion, equal access, and availability remained open for interpretation. Some still believe that it is not inclusive enough and that equal access is limited. Researchers Gamble and Turner (2015) executed a study that focused on African-American women's career trajectories in postsecondary schools. From that study they reported that "employment conditions and terms have become worse for minorities in education within the last decade" (Gamble & Turner, 2015, p. 82). The researchers built their conclusions on the low number of African-American women in administrative roles found during their study. They indicated that "colleges and universities might be overlooking talent, intellect, and motivation from within its workforce" (p. 82). If colleges and universities are overlooking talented African-American women, it is an indication that those institutions are being irresponsible in employing a diverse workforce.

As an African American woman working in higher education, I have first-hand experience of the limits of inclusion and equal access to various things including but not limited to employment opportunities. I agree with researchers Gamble and Turner. I continue to see a lack of African-American women as presidents, vice presidents, directors, and middle managers in higher education unless they are working at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). According to the American

Council on Education (ACE) overview of 2017, minorities in presidential roles had increased over the last 30 years except for minority women, who continued to lag behind in holding presidential roles. ACE also reported that only 17% of college presidents were minorities and within that 17% of minority presidents only 5% of them were actually African-American women (ACE, 2017). These small percentages contribute to the story that underrepresented women are not obtaining and holding administrative roles.

Both historically and currently, African-American women are seen as a marginalized population. However, they have been described as making strides in the field of education, including entering into all areas of higher education. In the 1960s and 1970s, students of color called to see more African Americans at predominantly White institutions, and at some institutions the students would make their demands publicly known to the institution's administration. According to Mosley (1980), African-American students started to demand to see more African-Americans holding faculty and administrator positions at the schools they were attending. African-American students who attended PWIs wanted to increase pathways that would have traditionally been limited and nonexistent to qualified African Americans due to discriminatory practices. Mosley indicated that despite these demands, the number of African Americans in faculty and administrative roles in predominantly White institutions continued to be very limited. One example would be the lack of African-American women holding administrative roles, leadership, or faculty positions at PWIs. Although African-American females held many leadership positions such as deans, presidents, founders, and department chairs, these positions were at Black institutions and almost nonexistent at White institutions

(Mosley,1980). The fact that African American women were not in leadership positions at PWIs over 50 years ago and that they continue to struggle to gain leadership positions at PWIs, I view it as a problem. I view it as a problem because as enrollment and employment of marginalized groups slowly increase, I believe that the leadership should also evolve to reflect those who attend school and work there.

The lack of African-American women and men in administrative roles at PWIs has drawn the attention of researchers. Webster and Brown (2019) noted that it is not surprising that PWIs have an insufficient number of African-American representatives leading their institutions. They suggested that because of “the increasing growth, in the United States, of racial and ethnic minorities’ matriculation into college, PWIs of higher learning must pursue ways to diversify their administration” (p. 87). By diversifying their administration to include African-American women and men, PWIs will be better able to provide skills to students to allow them to be competitive in a global society (Webster and Brown, 2019). According to Townsend (2020), the lack of African-American women in higher education in any role has been a constant problem in the world of academia. Townsend argued that despite their lack of representation,” Black women administrators have expressed aspirations to obtain key leadership roles on college campuses, yet few reach these senior-level positions" (p. 2). The idea that Black women administrators are openly and publicly stating they want key leadership roles and not getting the roles they desire is concerning as more and more African American women seek advancement in higher education administrative roles.

Although there have been laws such as affirmative action enacted to aid in the removal of obstacles that all African Americans face in gaining equal employment opportunities, these policies have had limited impact on advancement opportunities for African American women in particular. Townsend (2020) stated, “The exiguous representation of African American women in leadership positions at institutions of higher education has been a long-standing issue globally that has gained little traction” (p. 1). While African American women have made remarkable educational advancements by earning advanced degrees and holding key administrative roles, it is concerning that the laws aided in helping remove obstacles have had no substantial impact in the 21st century. According to Webster and Brown (2019), the American Council on Education reported in 2017 that although female representation increased in higher education, African-American women's growth in higher education remained static in administrative roles. The fact that their status in administrative roles is unchanging despite their excelling in degree obtainment and holding a few prominent roles means there is still a problem that exists.

Conceptual Framework: Black Feminist Theory and Critical Race Theory

In exploring and understanding the lived experiences of African American women who hold administrative roles and who intend to advance within administrative roles at a predominately White institution (PWI), I explored their lived experiences utilizing two different lenses. The two lenses that support my research are Black Feminist Thought (BFT) and Critical Race Theory (CRT). Figure 1 displays how both Black Feminist Thought and Critical Race Theory directly tie into the experiences of African-American

women at a PWI. Figure 1.1 presents the conceptual framework for this study using both Black Feminist Theory and Critical Race Theory as a lens to help describe African-American Women's experiences at a PWI when seeking advancement in their career.

Figure 1.1

Conceptual Framework

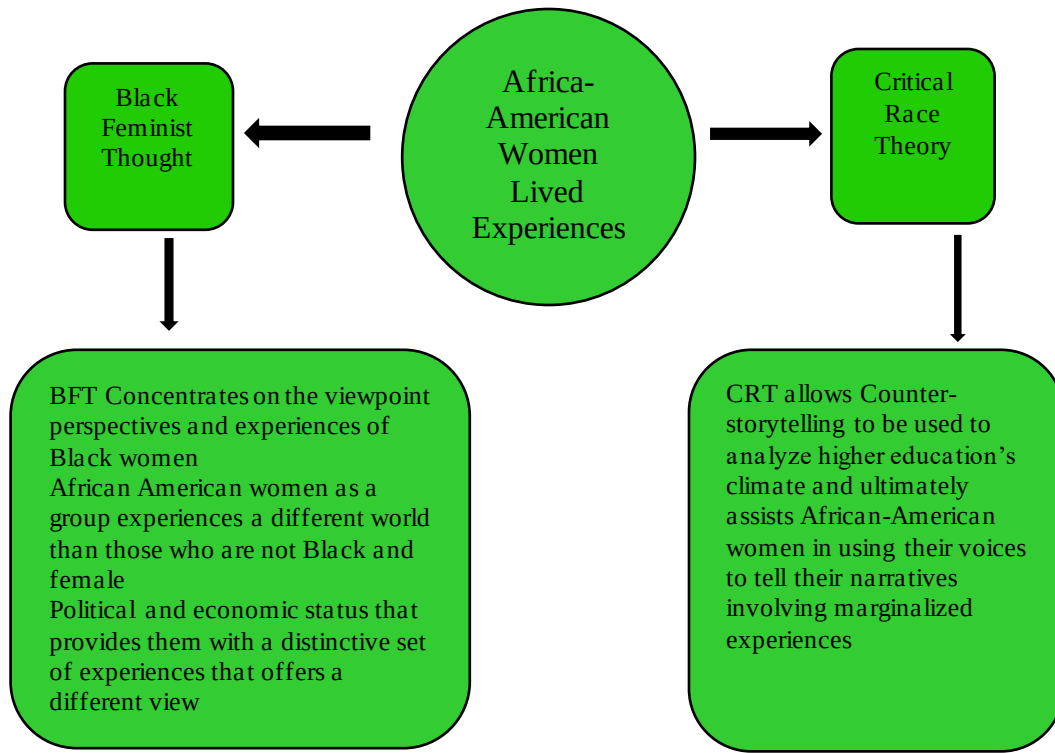


Figure 1.1 shows how my research approach through the lens of BFT allows for the focus to be on the viewpoints, perspectives, and lived experiences of African-American women at a PWI. It will allow the women to create a dialogue to show that their experiences are different than women who are not Black. Finally, BFT allows for an understanding of their economic and political status to be considered as a way to understand why they have different views and experiences. I will utilize CRT to discuss the and analyze high

education climate and ultimately assist African-American women in using their voices to tell their narratives involving marginalized experiences. It is essential that the stories of the women are reported and more importantly heard. Research that is conducted on marginalized or underrepresented populations is not only influential to existing literature but also in response to the current climate as things are evolving in higher education.

Black Feminist Thought (BFT)

Black Feminist Thought (BFT) offers a combination of information and awareness that assists others in understanding the perspectives of Black women and their place in the overall fight to diminish and eliminate class, gender, and race disparities. BFT theory centers primarily on gender and its effect on academic leadership and social environments. According to Collins (1989), Maria Stewart challenged African-American women to refuse the negative descriptions of Black womanhood during that time and emphasized that race, gender, and class oppression were the essential causes of Black women's poverty. According to Taylor (1998), the ideas represented in BFT originated in the abolitionist era of the first half of the 19th Century. At that time, the African Americans were fighting for their freedom from slavery. Taylor considered this era when Black women created a shared feminist awareness that mirrored their individual experiences as Black women, as well as the characteristics of sexism they had in common with White women (p. 235) as the earliest expressions of BFT ideas. In the 19th century, African-American women used the term "double burden" to describe the combined effects of racism and sexism. One response for many women was to engage in Racial

Uplift where they sought to improve not only their circumstances but to improve the lived experience of all African Americans (Nidiffer, personal communication, 2022).

Black feminist thought also concentrates on the viewpoints, perspectives, and experiences of Black women. According to Collins (1989), BFT is made up of two components that are joined together to make one evolving theory. Collins (1989) explained that the first component is:

Black women's political and economic status provides them with a distinctive set of experiences that offers a different view of material reality than that available to other groups. The unpaid and paid work that Black women perform, the types of communities in which they live, and the kinds of relationships they have with others suggest that African-American women, as a group, experience a different world than those who are not Black and female (p. 748).

In essence, African American women's experiences are different based on numerous historical experiences such as being denied opportunities to an equal education and employment, while their counterparts had no barriers to opportunities. Many of my colleagues with whom I have personally discussed the issue, constantly state that they have to do more work to get ahead in the field and to gain the respect of others.

The second component of BFT is based on shared or mutual experiences that Black women face as a group. The component allows for their responses to be gathered and organized to shape or make up a group knowledge base or standpoint. According to Collins (1989), a standpoint is defined as "group knowledge, recurring patterns of differential treatment such as these suggest that certain themes will characterize U.S.

Black women's group knowledge or standpoint" (p.26). In an earlier work, Collins (1989) described the second component of BFT to show these experiences added fuel to a "very distinctive Black feminist consciousness concerning that material reality. In brief, a subordinate group not only experiences a different reality than a group that rules, but a subordinate group may interpret that reality differently than a dominant group" (p. 749). African-American women who work at a PWI would be considered the subordinate group and what they experience would be very different than their counterparts partly because their reality is not the reality that their counterparts are accustomed to. Using Black feminist thought in this context will allow African-American women to explain what their reality has been and when compared to their White counterparts, how it can be viewed differently. Black feminist thought will give voice to African American women allow their stories to be heard and ultimately allow others to gain a better understanding of what their reality includes.

As researchers have explored Black Feminist Thought theory, some have examined it in comparison to other theories that may have seemed similar such as Critical Race (CRT) discussed below. Researcher, Johnson (2015) suggested that BFT and CRT were used together to address different disparities among African Americans. Johnson (2015) also explained that the comparison of the two theories illuminates which theory is best used to explain the sexism and racism that Black women experienced. In his analysis Johnson suggests that BFT is most appropriate when explaining why Black women experience both sexism and racism; while CRT is often most appropriate to address the prominences of racism in America. Distinguishing which theory is best utilized to

understand a certain phenomenon does not discredit the importance of each theory or dismiss the purpose or the need to have BFT, instead reevaluates what BFT was meant to do.

One of the main objectives of BFT was to empower and encourage African-American women to reshape their consciousness of their daily experiences. Through their awareness, they then in turn could understand how to navigate the injustices that they have endured. According to Alinia (2015), BFT concentrates on oppression but is equally focused on resistance, activism, and the politics of empowerment, whereas in comparison to other critical theories it mainly focuses on power and stratification. From Alinia's (2015) interpretation, BFT has a more grounded focus for women, and that is to focus and put effort into not only oppression but also resistance, being an activist, and understanding the politics behind power.

In applying BFT to my research focusing on the advancement of African American women seeking and gaining advancement at a PWI, African American women would be able to express their everyday experiences at a PWI and how it impacts their everyday lives not only as an individual but as a collective group of women. BFT would give voice to women who work at a PWI allowing them to explain how these experiences whether positive or negative, help to mold the everyday lives of women and in turn affect them in the workplace. According to Johnson (2015) "some Black women will experience differential treatment that other Black women will not, however, Black women as a collective will still regard these occurrences as differential group treatment and knowledge" (p. 237). Though not every Black woman may experience the same

types of treatment, they ultimately will understand what another Black woman has faced and as a group would stand in unity that the differential treatment is inequitable.

My research focuses on African American women at a PWI seeking advancement and what those experiences have been for them. Have they faced challenges? If they have faced challenges or obstacles what were they? Can the women clearly explain and identify what the issues are surrounding their journey for advancement at a PWI? BFT will allow them to explain their experiences in detail, compare their experiences to their peers, and divulge how their individual experiences have either aided in their success or hindered their success. Comparing their personal lived experience to one of their peers utilizing BFT will allow African American women to have a platform to identify a variety of oppressions that they faced at a PWI while seeking advancement.

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

Critical Race Theory (CRT) has been studied by numerous researchers and utilized to explain disparities among underrepresented or marginalized groups. After reviewing the research, I learned that CRT stemmed from the Civil Rights Movement in the 1970s and 80s, and was created by legal scholars in response to the idea that society and institutions were colorblind. In addition, CRT has been defined as both a legal and academic framework that indicates that systemic racism is part of society including housing, employment, education, and healthcare. Furthermore, CRT suggests that racism was never removed from our policies, laws, or institutions and is still part of their existence, negatively affecting people of color through various parts of their daily lives.

Since CRT's inception over 40 years ago, it has continued to be discussed, debated, and taught in K-12 school colleges and universities across the country. The discussions and debates over the years have been focused and centered around CRT's meaning and explanation of its tenets. Most recently CRT made national headlines for a variety of reasons, the first of many involved in the Black Lives Matter Movement (BLMM) which cited CRT's theory to explain why the U.S. had been experiencing an unprecedented number of social injustices. According to Sawchuk (2022), the essential objective of CRT is that

race is a social construct and that racism is not merely the product of individual bias or prejudice, but also something embedded in legal systems and policies.

Today, those same patterns of discrimination live on through facially race-blind policies, like single-family zoning that prevents the building of affordable housing in advantaged, majority-white neighborhoods and, thus, stymies racial desegregation efforts (Sawchuk, 2022).

The thought here as it relates to the BLMM is that there continues to be direct discrimination against people of color shown through their treatment by White police officers and or White citizens. The idea that social injustices exist in society can also translate to other environments such as the workplace as well.

Although CRT has continued to be taught in legal schools and in many K-12 settings to help explain historical information, numerous K-12 school districts believe that CRT is inappropriate and should not be used to teach historical perspectives.

Pearson and Borter (2021) stated that "CRT was considered a once-obscure academic

concept, has become a fixture in the fierce U.S. debate over how to teach children about the country's history and race relations” (p. 1). CRT was used to simplify how and why African Americans experienced disparities during certain times in U.S. history. One example of such disparities is that open access and availability of equal and equitable educational systems are still not available for the majority of African Americans. It is no secret that Black children were not afforded the same textbooks or educational buildings as their White counterparts. CRT aids in the explanation of these historical inequitable situations among schools and how that could contribute to low test scores among students of color.

As numerous schools debated the relevance of CRT in K-12 schools, several K-12 schools decided to ban it from their curriculum, while others continued to reference it as a way to explain U.S. history. Pearson and Borter (2021) listed the following states that currently have mandated and restricted the use and teaching of CRT: Arkansas, Florida, Idaho, Iowa, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, and Tennessee. In addition to those states that have implemented a ban on utilizing CRT in their curriculum, several states have pending restrictions up for consideration as reported by Pearson and Borter (2021). As the pending restrictions play out in court it will be interesting to learn the outcome and if CRT will be continued to be banned in K-12 schools and the impact it has on student's education.

When applying Critical Race Theory to my research topic surrounding African American women and their advancement at a PWI, CRT's first tenet of counter-story-telling will allow African American women to tell what their experiences have been at a

PWI as it relates to their experiences with advancement. This tenant will also allow the women to explain how the disparities have affected them and how those disparities show up in their everyday work lives.

Another tenet of CRT that can be applied to my research is the permanence of racism which implies that racism has a very strong influence over many facets of society which includes disparities in higher education. These disparities can be seen in hiring, promotion, wage equity, performance evaluation, admissions policies, and procedures to name a few. An example to help further explain this would be two women holding the same position, who also hold the same level of experience and education. One woman was White and the other was African American. The difference is the White woman is paid 10% more than the African American woman with no explanation of why the pay is not the same. The policies that are in place need to be reevaluated to fix and address the root of the issues in this example. According to Lean In (2023) pay disparities for educated Black women are even wider

Black women enroll in college at higher rates than men overall and—most notably—at higher rates than white men. But the gap is largest for Black women who have bachelor's degrees—they earn 36% less than white men with bachelor's degrees on average (Lean In, 2023).

This statement confirms that African-American women are fighting for equal pay regardless of education and experience. This is challenging and frustrating for me as an African American woman to experience and to state that in 2023 I am still facing disparities.

Concluding Discussion of Theories

While reviewing and analyzing Black Feminist Thought and Critical Race Theory as it relates to my research with African American women and their lived experiences at a PWI seeking advancement, I have found that both have been instrumental in serving as lenses to understand the experiences of these women. I believe that these two theories best inform my research, which, concentrates on the lived experiences related to the advancement of African American women at a PWI. While Intersectionality allows for the review of interconnections and interdependences to be viewed, it has the opportunity to overcomplicate the view I researched, the voice of the Black woman. Intersectionality takes the discussion far beyond what I needed. My research and discussion are centered around them first being a woman and then being African American. BFT and CRT allowed for the voices of the women to be summarized and compared to one another and the possibility of finding parallel similarities. The focus of my research was centered around the idea of a woman and a woman who identifies as Black and or African American, I did not look at other identities that intersectionality allows for under its theory.

Utilizing Black Feminist Thought allowed my focus to remain on the perspectives and experiences of African-American women. It also allowed for certain commonalities that may exist among these women as a group to be defined or acknowledged. Utilizing BFT to describe and explain the experiences of Black women seeking advancement at PWI provided the women an opportunity to discuss what their lived experiences have

been and allowed them to validate that these experiences are real and relevant and need to be addressed.

Critical Race Theory allowed me to theorize a possible racialized social narrative that may be a contributing factor to the unique and challenging lived experiences of African-American women seeking advancement at a PWI. CRT was most useful to help observe their lived experiences as they relate to advancement. One of the main elements of CRT is its emphasis and attention on the United States educational structure and discrimination therein. Applying the first tenet of counter-storytelling allowed me to emphasize the importance of the lived experiences of this marginalized group. Using this tenet also permitted each participant to share their stories and allow their narratives to be used as a resource to expose the unequal treatment of African-American women as a group. According to Hiraldo, (2010), these narratives can be utilized to expose biased and or discriminatory practices often experienced by staff, faculty, and even students in higher education.

Additionally, CRT implies that racism is an integral and long-lasting part of American society. CRT indicates that there is an existence of privilege that exists for the dominant race, which in American society is the White race. This privilege applies to all areas of life including housing, education, and accumulation of wealth. In higher education, this privilege exists in policies and procedures or the absence and nonexistence of policies and procedures that work to limit and or omit systematic racism.

While many Black women may have parallel experiences and similarities there is still room for unique experiences to be shared. For my research purposes, I concentrated

on the experiences of Black women as they experience advancement at a PWI which is not merely focused on feminist focus as a whole. Black Feminist Thought allowed for the recognition that every African American woman has unique encounters with discrimination and oppression and that we must consider everything and anything that can marginalize people, which includes, class, race, gender, sexual orientation, and or physical ability. CRT allowed my research to continue to focus on race combined with gender and the experiences of racism.

Research Questions

This study aimed to examine the lived experiences of African-American women at a predominately White Institution. Therefore, my primary question was: What are the lived experiences of African American women who seek advancement and or promotions in administrative roles at a predominantly White institution? To investigate this phenomenon to gain a more in-depth understanding I explored the following supplementary questions.

1. What are some of the challenges that African American women face working in PWIs?
2. What type of guidance if any, was received, and how that guidance impacted them?
3. Did they have a support system? If so, what did their support system look like and how did it impact them?
4. How did the role of education play in their journey of advancement at a PWI?

Significance of Research

There is a large amount of literature on African-American women that focuses primarily on their journey to holding executive leadership positions and how they were able to achieve those goals. My background discussion revealed that there is a void in the literature on the lived experiences of African-American women at predominately White institutions when seeking a promotion or trying to advance to higher-level positions. African American women who hold administrative positions in higher education, specifically at a PWI, continue to face barriers and challenges when seeking advancement or promotion. Some of those barriers or challenges have been identified as racism, sexism, or a complex combination of the two. Further, research should explore the lived experiences of African American women at predominately White institutions if they were able to advance to leadership roles, and what strategies were most effective and impactful.

Although these issues are not new, many African Americans continue to face barriers and challenges today at PWIs in obtaining administrative roles. In my experience as an African American administrator at a predominantly White institution with over 25 years of experience in various roles, I continue to see lower numbers of African Americans and African American women holding administrative roles as well as a lack of advancement opportunities at the institution. Evidence from the literature that I reviewed and from my own experiences support that there is a lack of advancement opportunities for African-American women in higher education institutions and that there is a unique set of barriers and obstacles to advancement in PWIs. Therefore, my research

intentions are to continue to research, explore, and examine the lived experiences of African-American women in a predominately White institution.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

African-American women have made great strides in higher education and are considered to be the most represented marginalized group among U.S. higher education administrators, yet they continue to remain stagnated behind White women and men (both Black and White) in terms of being promoted to or within various administrative and leadership roles in Predominately White Institutions (PWI). Many speculate that race and gender play a significant role as to why African-American women continue to struggle to gain administrative roles at PWIs. Wingfield (2021) stated that both racism and sexism create an unfavorable influence on women, regardless of industry, which is shown “through stifled leadership opportunities, the ongoing persistence of specific forms of sexual harassment, and subtle but pervasive doubts about competence, intelligence, and skills that are unrelated to actual performance” (Wingfield, 2021, p. 1). These interconnecting issues can be utilized to understand and explore why African-American women are faced with challenges when seeking advancement at a PWI and remain underrepresented in administrative roles at such institutions.

The literature surrounding African-American women as administrators in higher education for the most part has centered on their struggles to gain and maintain advanced or senior leadership positions, such as dean, vice president, provost, or president, or primarily focused on their administrative positions or roles in the division of student affairs, with very limited literature focused on other areas in higher education. The

literature has a substantial date range, going back as early as the 1960s, that discusses how both African-American men and women struggled to gain fair and equal access to their roles in higher education. The literature also demonstrates that African-American women had to endure greater hardships than their White counterparts and African-American men.

As higher education began to adopt diversity equity and inclusion programs and policies, more access began to open up for African-American women to hold a variety of different roles in higher education, but the struggle remains in the 21st century as African-American women lack advancement opportunities at Predominately White Institutions. Although these issues are not new, many African Americans continue to face barriers and challenges today at PWIs in obtaining administrative roles. In my experience as an African-American administrator at a predominantly White institution with over 25 years of experience in various roles, I continue to see lower numbers of African-American and African-American women holding administrative roles, as well as a lack of advancement opportunities at the institution. Evidence from the literature that I reviewed and from my own experiences support that there is a lack of advancement opportunities for African-American women in higher education institutions and that there is a unique set of barriers and obstacles to advancement in PWIs. Therefore, my research intentions are to continue to research, explore, and examine the lived experiences of African-American women in a predominately White institution.

Approach to Searching the Literature

To fully understand the lived experiences of African-American women holding administrative roles at PWI, I started searching for literature that would be relevant and current to my topic. My review of the academic literature was conducted using the following procedures. I started my search in the Kresge Library database using the following resources: JSTOR, ERIC, ProQuest, and Google Scholar. I began my search using phrases such as; African American administrators, African American women administrators in higher education, and or Black women in higher education. I will note that I used the terms African American and Black interchangeably with the understanding that it was describing their ethnic background. Utilizing the search tools mentioned above I only received 86 articles that contained my keywords, African American women administrators, higher education, and predominantly White institutions.

With these results, I began to look at what the articles were about, and the references that they used in their research. I went into this search with the understanding that not much research would be available on my topic. Additionally, I searched using Google Scholar and came up with no results with my keywords. However, after taking out the word administrator, I found more information on African-American women in higher education. After reviewing the articles, books, and dissertations I decided that I would organize the relevant literature in chronological order to show the development over the years: (1) The 1980s African American Women's Nonexistence at PWI, (2) The 1990s African American Women Coping, (3) The 2000's African American Women Perspective, (4) 2010's African American Women the beginning of success at PWI's.

Overall, I have reviewed over 100 journal articles, 10 dissertations, and over 10 books related to this topic.

My review of the literature revealed three main findings related to African-American women and their advancement at PWIs. First, the issues of racism and sexism surfaced as one of the central themes throughout the literature and have been classified as an obstacle and barrier. Both racism and sexism have been said to cause unwelcoming work environments and settings in addition to a hindrance to gaining career advancements for African American women. Next, the lack of commitment from institutions to support and promote diversity, hiring practices and policies that support diversity equity, and inclusion, and their continued lack of commitment to retain a diverse workforce. The women who participated in the various research often stated or suggested that if institutions enforced their policies regarding diversity many of the issues would be nonexistent. The third finding is a lack of support and mentoring. Throughout the literature, many African-American women indicated that having a support system and mentoring were key factors essential to their being successful at a PWI and that without that support they would not have been able to advance. These three findings combined cause challenges and barriers for African-American women to advance and fulfill their career aspirations specifically at a PWI.

Racism and Sexism

Racism is defined as a form of bias or preconception that members of a particular racial group have unique and distinctive characteristics and that these differences cause members of that specific racial group to be classified as inferior to others as defined by

the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2023). In my research, I looked at the experiences of African-American women as a racial group. Racism can result in people being treated differently, directly or indirectly, based on others' assumptions and feelings. Similar to racism, sexism is a system of cultural beliefs that one sex is inferior to the other; therefore, the other sex is considered both more valuable and exceptional as researcher Ramey (1995) described. After reviewing the literature, many African-American women who sought advancement at a PWI cited that they had experienced either racism or sexism or both when seeking advancement.

The study of African-American women in higher education is a relatively recent effort. Early research done by Felicenne H. Ramey in 1995 acknowledged that there had been hardly any written literature on African-American women in administrative positions in higher education and observed that there continued to be a lack of African-American women holding administrative roles. Ramey provided results from a qualitative study based on African American women who held positions as a dean or above at four-year institutions. The focus of the study concentrated on their journey seeking advancement and what their experiences were. Ramey reported findings that African-American women believed both racism and sexism were a barrier for them when seeking advancement. Ramey reported that “fifty-three percent of the women from the PWI listed racism as an obstacle” when seeking career moves within higher education (p. 115). This indication supports the idea that African-American women are struggling to obtain their career aspirations at PWIs due to some form of racism. Additionally, Ramey reported that in addition to racism, the women overwhelmingly reported that they had experienced

sexism as an additional barrier. Ramey further explained that the women also noted that many of their colleagues had a hard time dealing with them because they were women (p. 116). Furthermore, Ramey's findings indicated that combining both racism and sexism had also been an equal barrier for them. Concluding the study Ramey stated one resounding fact: that there is a great need for more research on African-American women as administrators in higher education.

Researchers who investigated the lived experiences of African-American women in higher education continued to reveal that racism and sexism remain an issue when seeking advancement. In a qualitative study similar to Ramey (1995), Lloyd-Jones (2009) examined the lived experiences of an African-American woman who held a senior-level administrator position at a predominantly White research institution. Lloyd-Jones's main focus was centered on how race, gender, and social class affect how women achieve advancement. Thus, they looked at the following question: "How does an African-American woman administrator at a predominantly White university pursue the achievement ideology despite experiences and challenges that emerge from her race and gender?" (p. 608). Lloyd-Jones's results revealed that the subjects' lived experiences were filled with extreme biases, based on their race and gender. Lloyd-Jones stated that one participant in particular expressed that they had experienced a lack of respect due to her race and that her work would be scrutinized due to her gender (p. 611). As a conclusion to this study, Lloyd-Jones suggested that African-American women who hold administrative roles at White institutions should understand any dilemmas that could

hinder them and how they perform their jobs and learn different strategies to handle such situations.

Ramey (1995), revealed that racism and sexism are growing ongoing concerns for African-American women at PWI's, and many continue to struggle to gain advancement based on both sexism and racism. Comparable to the studies performed by Lloyd-Jones (2009) and Ramey (1995) Crawford and Smith's (2005) intentions were to investigate the importance and impact that mentoring had on African-American women and their career selection in higher education. During their investigation, their results revealed that African-American women are often met with significant barriers on predominantly White campuses when it comes to advancement in their careers. The barriers identified by Crawford and Smith were isolation, loneliness, and racially motivated victimization, all of which were classified as hindrances to their ability to achieve academic success and tenure. These findings from the researchers support the theme that African-American women continue to face challenges, namely racism when seeking advancement at PWI. Their research explained that being subjected to racially motivated victimization (a.k.a. racism) causes many African American women to either leave their current role or seek employment outside of higher education. This type of treatment is not conducive to creating a work environment safe and welcoming for African-American women.

As the subject of African-American women in higher education continues to be investigated and explored, many researchers look for solutions to solve the issues at hand (i.e. racism and sexism) as cited by Ramey (1995). Similar to the study done by Crawford and Smith (2005) researcher Angela Thomas Davis (2009), studied African-

American women in higher education where she focused on empowerment and the challenges and obstacles they faced when it came to being promoted. Davis's findings revealed that the women had experienced both racism and sexism either together or separately. Davis further explained that the women in the study were held to different standards when being assessed which is considered a form of sexism. Davis stated that "consistent with gender stereotypes, women are expected to be considerate, cooperative and accommodative while men managers are expected to be structured competitive and authoritative" (p. 55). In essence, men and women were expected to perform at a similar level, but how they were evaluated was different based on who they were, man or woman which is a form of sexism. Furthermore, Davis suggested that these damaging views presented African-American women with obstacles that stopped and prevented women from advancing to leadership positions within higher education. Moreover, Davis stated:

the idea that African American women are treated as affirmative action tokens, compels some to feel they must prove themselves worthy. As a consequence, they take on too many tasks, often at the expense of their mental and physical health.

(Davis, 2009, p. 55)

What this quote means is that if African American women are not seen as equals to their counterparts, it will inevitably impact their ability to advance at a PWI. Therefore, PWIs would have a hard time hiring and retaining African-American women to work for them in an administrative capacity.

The issues of race and gender biases have been identified as an issue for many African American women in higher education, to the point that it hinders their

opportunities for advancement. Researchers Davis and Maldonado (2015) performed a qualitative phenomenological study that was designed to discover how the intersectionality of race and gender for African-American women affected them as leaders in the academy. The authors observed the lived experiences of five African-American women who held leadership roles in academic organizations. The results of their study revealed that, although the women were considered successful, all of the women in the study noted that they had experienced double jeopardy of race and gender discrimination along the way. They had been victims of racism and sexism. According to Davis and Maldonado combining both race and gender still plays a part as a barrier for African-American women who are seeking a senior-level position. Thus, to combat racism and sexism African American women must learn how to play the game, meaning “these women learned how to become politically savvy and navigate around potential organizational landmines” (Davis & Maldonado, 2015, p. 61). However, no matter how adverse the atmosphere became the women in the study made it clear that they would never compromise their standards, values, or morals and would always maintain a high level of integrity as Davis and Maldonado added to the understanding of learning how to play the game.

There have been many suggestions on how to handle or solve the issues of racism and sexism that African-American women face in higher education. As Davis and Maldonado (2015) concluded their research they emphasized understanding how African-American women's leadership experiences were obtained, thus creating an environment that would improve opportunities for them in academia. Davis and Maldonado stated

very clearly that African-American women are not represented in leadership roles throughout academia and that African-American women must be willing to look outside their comfort zone and create new networks of people who are different than them if they intend to be a leader in the world of academia. Although “African American women in leadership positions experience a profusion of race and gender stereotypes. For the African American participants in the study, their race and gender had negatively affected their careers” (Davis & Maldonado, 2015, p. 61). Some of the participants reported experiences of being invisible, voiceless, discriminated against, isolated, undermined, treated unfairly, oppressed, challenged, and demoted. These negative experiences of race and gender discrimination seemed to dominate the conversation when the participants reflected on their past experiences (Davis & Maldonado, 2015, p. 61). With such impactful conversations and experiences, this topic deserves to be investigated and explored even further.

The literature regarding African-American women in higher education continues to indicate that African-American women who hold administrative and faculty roles face barriers due to their race and gender. Specifically, several researchers have identified co-occurring racial and gender discrimination. There is an absence of support systems and networks, which leads to African-American women being placed in sometimes standoffish, insensitive, and isolated environments. According to DeCuir-Gunby et al., (2019) African Americans, both men and women, are at an increased risk for experiencing racism and racial discrimination in the higher education workplace. These negative experiences significantly impact both their psychological and physiological

health requiring adaptive coping strategies to ensure healthy psychological functioning (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2019, p. 1). Adding to this philosophy, Wingfield (2021) noted that racism and sexism impact women of color in a variety of professions, including higher education, causing them to experience stifled leadership opportunities, the ongoing persistence of specific forms of sexual harassment, and subtle but pervasive doubts about competence, intelligence, and skill that are all unrelated to actual performance. I intend to add to the literature and knowledge surrounding this subject to note changes, in whether African-American women are continuing to experience racism and sexism at PWIs.

In reviewing the research, racism, and sexism are very serious issues that should be addressed by institutions to resolve the disparities that are felt by African-American women. It is my opinion that every person is entitled to equitable and fair treatment and that should not be a difference for African American women.

Lack of Commitment to Diversity

Another finding that can be seen throughout the literature is the lack of commitment from institutions as it relates to diversity equity and inclusion policies. The research revealed that although most institutions have policies and procedures focused on diversity equity and inclusion they lack to enforce them or ensure that proper procedures have taken place as cited by Gardner et al. (2014). Furthermore, they (those who participated in various research), criticized institutions for not creating an environment where marginalized employees were retained, especially African American women.

To further support the idea that a lack of commitment to diversity hinders African-American women from seeking advancement at a PWI, Gardner et al. (2014)

used a consensual qualitative research approach that examined the barriers to success of African-American administrators who worked in student affairs positions at predominantly White institutions. The research revealed that the participants were not impressed or believed that their school was committed to diversity and that their efforts were lackluster. Gardner et al. noted that discrimination was a barrier to their success and an overwhelming majority had experienced some form of discrimination at one point at their current institution. As the authors concluded their research, they recommended additional qualitative research that focuses on retaining and recruiting African-American student affairs administrators who emphasize both men and women. Gardner et al. stated that PWIs “must make a commitment with real resources behind it to recruit and retain minority professional and to change the institution culture and climate for diversity on their campuses” (p. 249). This observation suggests that institutions should have fiscal resources devoted to diversity initiatives and have put forth a conscience effort as it relates to their diversity practices and policies.

Although racism and sexism were cited by researchers as barriers for African American women in higher education when seeking advancement, an additional barrier indicated suggests institutions lack a commitment to diversity. Similar to the Garner et al. (2014) study Wolfe and Dilworth (2015) performed a research study that revealed that in addition to the “-isms” (racism and sexism), African American women continue to see a lack of commitment to diversity from institutions. This lack of commitment is shown by the absence or nonexistence of other leaders who look like them in administrative and leadership roles and is noted as one of the reasons PWIs are not employing and retaining

African-American administrators whether men or women (Wolfe & Dilworth, 2015, p. 668). In concluding their research, Wolfe and Dilworth challenged the leaders of colleges and universities to have a more inclusive and diverse leadership, include minorities in all areas of administration, and represent and respect the population makeup of their campus communities (Wolfe & Dilworth, 2015, p. 685). As college and university campuses are changing, leadership should take the time to ensure that they are employing staff that represent these changes.

Continuing the research on African American women leaders and their barriers to advancement in higher education, a comparable study to Wolfe and Dilworth (2015) done by researchers Erica D. Gamble and Norma J. Turner in the state of Georgia in 2015 focused on African American women who were leaders in executive administrator positions in colleges and universities. Like other research studies that explored the lived experiences of African-American women in administrative roles at a PWI, they revealed barriers to their career success and supported the idea that institutions have a lack of commitment to diversity. Gamble and Turner (2015) revealed many of the women believed that the hiring processes they experienced were both inequitable and ultimately a barrier to obtaining a position in higher education. This finding suggests that colleges and universities are not showing a commitment to diversity by not enforcing or creating hiring processes that are fair and equitable. Therefore, the authors suggested that colleges and universities create:

a sound diverse board consisting of community leaders, faculty administrators, alumni stakeholders, and students to combat the inequities. The proposed diverse

board would essentially provide a different perspective than the internal staff which is more involved with the day to today process. (Gamble & Turner, 2015, p. 96)

This idea strengthens the idea that there continues to be a lack of commitment to diversity equity and inclusion (DEI). Therefore, it is intended to allow a PWI to be more committed to DEI standards and principles.

Additionally, it would allow a PWI to have a more non-biased objective opinion that could result in institutions having a more substantial commitment as it relates to DEI policies and practices. Gamble and Turner (2015) suggested that after a board was created, they encouraged institutions to develop non-discriminating institutional processes. This process would help guarantee that the recruiting, hiring, and retention processes are nonincriminating and sufficient in terms of acquiring and maintaining a diverse group of employees. Utilizing a board system, would allow the college or university to grant the board the ability to “emphasize the importance of diversity in recruiting, fair and equitable hiring specific and detailed job responsibilities and any other duties that a position should entail” (Gamble & Turner, 2015, p. 96-97). This idea would aid in creating a clear understanding of expectations and support that colleges and universities are standing behind their commitment to diversity and having a diverse staff.

As interest in understanding the issues that affected African-American women in advancing in higher education increased, additional researchers looked into issues that could be affecting their career opportunities. Similar to the Gamble and Turner (2015) research study, in 2019, researchers Larry C. Webster and H. Quincy Brown performed a

qualitative study that was aimed at gaining an understanding of what the enablers and barriers were that would influence and or impact African Americans' career advancement in administrative positions at PWIs. Webster and Brown (2019) identified there were “perception of the institutions, continuous inconsistency in standards and hiring practices, a lack of African American mentors, and small candidate pool” (p. 101). The lack of inconsistency in standards and hiring practices alludes to the lack of commitment to supporting DEI and having an equal opportunity for not only African-American women but all potential candidates. Webster and Brown asked their participants specifically about policies, processes, and plans that were directly related to dealing with diversity and they noted that “only one of the participants stated having procedures in place, outside of the standard federal discrimination policy at their institution” (p. 102). The fact that only one person was able to identify policies and procedures is a sign that things need to change. More and more colleges and universities have work to do with their commitment to diversity. In concluding their research, Webster and Brown suggested that institutions invest in mentoring programs for African American administrators, reevaluate their advertisement and recruitment efforts of African Americans for leadership positions, and look into succession planning so that once an administrator decides to either retire, leave or advance, a qualified African American candidate could successfully take on that role.

Given the findings from all of the researchers above, Gamble and Turner's (2015) suggestions that institutions need a firm commitment to diversity for those things to work stand out. That process may mean looking at their leadership team and realigning roles.

Nicole West (2020) said it best in my opinion “If higher education institutions are not intentional about recruiting, retaining, supporting and promoting Black women student affairs administrators, gains that have been made related to the representation of this minoritized group will be in jeopardy” (p. 18). Although she specifically called out student affairs administrators I believe it is safe to say that the statement can be utilized for African American women who are seeking advancement in higher education in general.

Lack of Support and Mentoring

Although some of the research showed African-American women have had some outstanding successes in higher education, the narrative continues to be that they continue to face substantial barriers when seeking advancement to upper-level positions. Davis (2009) stated that another barrier to the success of African-American women is not acquiring a mentor and research has proven that mentoring has been extensively utilized and exercised throughout many organizations as a respected and valuable tool for retaining and promoting employees and being beneficial as an avenue to career success. Davis also maintained that “it is believed that African American women who have a mentor are more likely to be promoted” (Davis, 2009, p. 55).

Davis (2009) explained that mentoring embraces a viewpoint and attitude about people and how important they are to institutions. Mentoring can be viewed as a valuable and attractive training method for managers and leaders in organizations. “Designing a successful mentoring program requires innovative ideas and activities that will empower both the mentor and protégé” (Davis, 2009, p. 55). This type of program allows African-

American women to develop far beyond their jobs and gives them the opportunities and avenues to learn from others who may have traveled the same path. Davis also stated that:

Mentoring is critical to female leadership development as well as the probability of promotions through employment. Mentoring also enhances the development of both genders but it is especially important for women because mentoring has not been a longstanding part of career development for women. (p. 56)

This statement is significant because of the powerful impact mentoring has on women and their opportunities to be successful in their fields. Learning from others who have paved the way is beneficial for younger women to not make the same mistakes and how to navigate the politics at PWIs. According to Davis, a mentoring platform should facilitate the transfer of knowledge and practical experience from the mentor to the mentee.

The mentoring platform should also offer an opportunity for growth and development of the mentor and protégé, allowing confirmation that the mentoring platform is doing what it is intended to do as Davis (2009) described. Ultimately “it can empower the mentee to engage in work that positively influences their sense of satisfaction in developing leadership skills an effective mentor can advance the acceptance of a talented individual into an inner circle” (Davis, 2009, p. 55).

Empowerment is key here; all women want to feel empowered especially marginalized women who are faced with barriers and challenges. Furthermore, Davis explained that growth in the number of African-American women holding key administrative positions would be “critical to develop strategies that are necessary to develop strong networks and

support systems” (Davis, 2009, p. 56). One approach would be to use cross-cultural mentor relationships in the workplace. “This allows a mutual testing of stereotypes and attributions regarding differences and also allow the development of cross-cultural communication” (Davis, 2009, p. 56). Mentor relationships also promote and show that institutions are committed to diversity in the workplace, these relationships would also help to end racism and sexism by allowing others to learn about employees who are different than themselves.

In addition to looking at African-American women's advancement in higher education, other researchers have investigated how they are advancing outside of higher education and if they experience barriers to career advancement. Similar to the Davis (2009) study, authors Eileen Linnabery, Allice F. Stuhlmacher, and Annette Towler (2014) discussed the barriers that African American women face in seeking higher-level positions inside corporate America. Using an online qualitative survey, members of a national association of Black women were invited to participate. The authors detailed how African-American women may have a more challenging journey to higher-level positions due to having a wealth of negative experiences in the workplace, more so than those experienced by White men and women (Linnabery et al., 2014, p. 541).

In spite of having a variety of negative experiences, African-American women have been credited with finding different ways to successfully navigate the workplace one of them being support systems or mentors. Linnabery et al. stated that African-American women handled adversity in the workplace through their strengths, relying heavily on social support and coping strategies directly related to their well-being. They

explained “Blacks reportedly seek significantly more social support across a variety of contexts (family, their job, their friends, or something else important to them) as a way to stay focused and well-balanced in their career” (Linnabery et al., 2014, p. 541). The idea that African American women would face fewer barriers to advancing in their careers if they used a support system is supported by the findings from Linnabery et al. The authors went on to explain that:

Black women face particular challenges in fulfilling career aspirations, Black women report less access to career development opportunities than White women, and fewer organizational experiences such as sponsorship, job discretion, acceptance, and supervisory support may be offered to black women. (p. 541)

Their findings supported the notion that social support and coping strategies are sources of strength for African American women’s happiness and welfare and opportunities to advance in their careers due to having additional support. They also concluded that organizations should consider establishing mentoring programs and social events with the hopes that co-workers and supervisors would contribute to the success of empowering African-American women to be successful and have job satisfaction (Linnabery et al., 2014 p. 547). If higher education institutions supported African American women in their roles through support systems, would that and could that be a way of retaining them?

To further understand the plight of African American women and their struggle to gain advancement in higher education, different researchers looked at it from different perspectives. However, they continued to credit mentoring as a way to enhance

opportunities for advancement. In a parallel study to Linnabery et al. (2014) Heewon Chang, Karen A. Longman, and Marla A. Franco (2014) conducted a collaborative autoethnography in which they explored 14 academic and administrative leaders of color who were employed at a faith-based higher education institution. The participants had both personal and professional experiences with mentoring and discussed how those mentoring experiences affected their leadership development. While they spoke with a few men during their research, over 75% of their participants were women. The majority of the women noted that mentoring whether indirectly or directly played a significant role in their career development.

The idea that mentoring is an added tool to assist African-American women in advancing in their careers has been noted by several researchers. Similar to findings from Davis (2009), Linnabery et al. (2014), and Chang et al. (2014), Davis and Maldonado (2015), stated that those who participated in their research study acknowledged that having support or mentorship significantly contributed to their career ascension in a leadership role (p. 60). They firmly believed that this type of support and mentorship leads African-American women to other opportunities or connects them with the right person to get them where they want or need to be. The mentorship relationship was credited for giving these women advice on how to navigate the hiring process and may advocate for them if asked. The mentors would provide guidance, professional mentoring, and upward career mobility according to the researchers. This type of mentorship is beneficial for African-American women both new to the profession or

seasoned, it seems as though these relationships will help women navigate all the challenges and barriers they may face.

Mentoring is also seen in support systems; support systems have been identified as having people surrounding a person to help navigate issues or concerns a person may be facing. The literature revealed that African-American women used support systems in the same way as mentoring relationships and received some of the same benefits. Similar to the Davis and Maldonado (2015) research study, researchers Gamble and Turner (2015) indicated that through their research they found that networking and securing a mentor was a helpful way to break down barriers to advancement. According to the researchers

African American women have been excluded from good old boy networks, the traditional male circle of power within the business world, and in response to this exclusion, women formed their networks and women have reported that these networks were beneficial to their careers. (p. 84)

In essence, this finding suggests that having a strong network and/or support system enhances African-American women's abilities to beat the odds and fight the negativity that they are up against. However, Gamble and Turner noted that the availability of African-American mentors in administration are still missing in higher education. The fact that African American mentors are missing creates an additional barrier for African Americans to become leaders because they do not have anyone from the same ethnic background to mentor them and guide them through the obstacles they may face. In most cases, it is easier to talk to someone from your same ethnic background, as they have a

better understanding of what a person may be facing and up against. The lack of African-American mentors also created a hurdle for African-Americans to earn positions in administration and leadership positions successfully as stated by Gamble and Turner. African American women have endured many things and have met challenges head-on and have never run from a challenge.

Mentoring and a lack of support from either a supervisor or the institution has been recognized as an obstacle for African Americans both men and women when looking to advance at a PWI. Research conducted by Tiffany Steele (2018) revealed that the lack of support was credited as a barrier for staff of color at a predominantly White institution. Steele performed a qualitative study using a phenomenological approach with a total of 18 participants who were either current or former staff members at a PWI, who self-identified as ethnic/racial minoritized persons. Steele's study focused on the retention of employees of a marginalized group at a PWI, the kinds of support available to them from the institution that would be geared at retaining them as employees, and finally how the work environment influenced their job experiences. The findings showed that there were four emerging themes "(1) the influence of a negative environment, (2) the invisible employee (3) support, or the lack thereof, and (4) navigating the institution" (Steele, 2018, p. 115). Although all are important to my research, I will focus on the lack of support at this time.

As outlined this lack of support is defined as support from a supervisor whether positive or negative was absent from employees' experiences. This lack of support from supervisors is considered negative and needed to be successful in their career and to have

the opportunity to advance. Most often one's supervisors have a role in creating opportunity for advancement by providing a positive recommendation. Furthermore, the employees interviewed during the study stated that they were more successful in finding support from others who were like them. Steele (2018) indicated that support is a key factor for employees of marginalized groups to feel valued and satisfied in their roles. Feeling valued and satisfied in your role as an employee would help to retain said employee at their current institution.

Conclusion

After reviewing the literature surrounding my topic on African-American women who seek advancement at PWI it is apparent that these women are continuing to face barriers and challenges in gaining advancement specifically at a PWI. The three main barriers or challenges have been identified as racism, sexism, or a combination of both, lack of commitment from institutions to support diversity and retain women of color, more specifically African American women, and finally the availability of mentorship programs.

My review of the literature revealed that there is a void in the research specifically on the lived experiences of African-American women administrators at predominately White institutions when seeking a promotion or trying to advance to higher-level positions. However, there is a large amount of literature on African American women that focuses primarily on their journey to holding executive leadership positions what obstacles or challenges they may have endured, and how they were able to overcome those and achieve those goals. The literature also showed that there is a vast amount of

research that focuses on African-American women who hold the rank of faculty their journey to gain tenure and what their obstacles and challenges were.

Another area that was found through the literature focused on African American women and their administrative roles in the division of student affairs and the challenges and barriers they faced in gaining career advancement. In my experience as an African American administrator at a predominantly White institution with over 26 years of experience in various roles, I continue to see lower numbers of African Americans and African American women holding administrative roles, as well as a lack of advancement opportunities at the institution. Evidence from the literature that I reviewed and from my own experiences support that there is a lack of advancement opportunities for African American women in higher education institutions and that there is a unique set of barriers and obstacles to advancement in PWIs. Therefore, my research intentions are to continue to explore and examine the lived experiences of African-American women in a predominately White institution.

Research should explore the lived experiences of African American women at predominately White institutions, exploring how they were able to advance to leadership roles what strategies worked well for them, and what did not work. More research is needed on the types of leadership roles they are currently holding and what is currently working well for them at PWIs. Attention should be focused on obstacles and barriers if any are relevant to them and define what those are today. Delisa Johnson and Peggy Delmas (2022) studied the professional experiences and career advancement observations of African-American women in higher education. They reported that their participants

experienced inequality/inequity and the lack of opportunities to develop or advance professionally in higher education. Furthermore, Johnson and Delmas provided the following recommendations based on their findings from their research:

Policy and practice that eliminate higher education's discriminatory systems and develop procedures that will facilitate equity and career advancement for Black women. Networks such as the "good ol' boys" should be replaced with mentorship and sponsorship programs that are inclusive of Black, female professionals. (p. 99)

This statement signals that change is still needed. Institutions should reevaluate their campus environment to identify such issues, especially if having a diverse community is important to them. Finally, Davis and Maldonado (2015) stated that it is clear that African-American women continue to be absent from leadership positions in higher education. To begin to make things more equitable, institutions need to begin "understanding the leadership development experiences of African American women in the academy is necessary for improving leadership development opportunities for them as emerging leaders" (Davis & Maldonado, 2015, p. 62). Taking the time to understand what African-American women are experiencing shows commitment and dedication to fixing the issue. It could also help to acknowledge that there is a problem that should be addressed. I intend to add to the literature base regarding this topic and hopefully uncover new information.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Research Design

After reviewing the literature that focused on my topic, I noticed that the majority of the researchers used a qualitative approach in conducting their studies. As researchers execute their research, what is being studied often dictates or determines the inquiry method. My study, investigated African American women's career advancement at PWIs through the lenses of Critical Race Theory and Black Feminist Thought using a qualitative approach. Doing so allowed me to capture their experiences and concerns. Furthermore, I used a qualitative approach to aid in my understanding of their experiences and to be able to describe in detail and give a meaningful interpretation of those experiences. Providing this clarification is what a qualitative approach is aimed to do. According to Fossey et al., "qualitative research is used to understand how people experience the world. While there are many approaches to qualitative research, they tend to be flexible and focus on retaining rich meaning when interpreting data" (Fossey et al., 2002, pp. 717-718). This is a direct reflection on why I took a qualitative approach to my research. I wanted to provide a meaningful and thorough analysis of the data collected being that it could ultimately impact how African-American women are considered and viewed for advancement at PWIs. Furthermore, using a phenomenology method allowed me to analyze the lived experiences of the women and to gain a deeper understanding of their perspectives as they sought advancement at a PWI.

Methodological Approach: Phenomenology

Phenomenological research allows the researcher to communicate a shared or collective meaning for several individuals' lived experiences based on a specific trend or phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 1997). Using a phenomenological approach allowed me to study the lived experiences of African-American women and their career advancement at a PWI. Creswell (2009) explained that phenomenological research does not compare two groups to each other, nor does it use a hypothesis, but it analyses a phenomenon unrestricted or fluidly. Furthermore, Creswell (2009) clarified that phenomenology is a research method that allows for the recognition and meaning of a phenomenon. A phenomenon is defined as an everyday normal occurrence that reoccurs as people interact with the world according to Vagle (2014). In my research, the phenomenon would be African-American women's barriers and challenges to advancement at PWIs.

There are different approaches to phenomenology research, of these, I chose to follow the transcendental approach. Husserl's philosophical approach a.k.a. transcendental was designed to investigate and review the phenomena through the individual's realization or perception according to both Lavery (2003) and Savin-Badin and Major (2013). In other words, researchers would engage in research that would allow them to comprehend and understand people's actions and motivations as they occurred, as this was what and how people understood to be or perceived to be real to them as Flood (2010) explained. Additionally, Creswell (2013) described the transcendental method as being more focused on the accounts of the study participants' experience and less on the researcher's understanding of their experience. Whereas the Heidegger or the

hermeneutic approach is defined as the ability to seek an understanding of a phenomenon as part of people's experiences as it happened in the world according to Savin-Badin and Major (2013). This approach allows the researcher to investigate a shared perception of an authentic truth or reality between two or more people according to Vagle (2014).

Based on my current understanding of phenomenology and as it relates to my research, I had to set aside the personal biases that I may have had since I am an African-American woman working at a PWI who has experienced barriers when seeking advancement. Thus, I used a hermeneutic approach for my research, as it aligned with my intentions to seek the understanding of a shared phenomenon as it happened to those involved.

Study Participants

Selection of Study Participants

For my research study, I used a convenience sample of African-American women who worked at a PWI. According to Etikan et al., (2016), convenience sampling is defined as:

a type of nonprobability or nonrandom sampling where members of the target population meet certain practical criteria, such as easy accessibility, geographical proximity, availability at a given time, or willingness to participate are included in the study. It is also referred to as the research subjects of the population that are easily accessible to the researcher. Convenience samples are sometimes regarded as 'accidental samples' because elements may be selected in the sample simply as they just happen to be situated, spatially or administratively, near where the researcher is conducting the data collection. (Etikan et al., 2016, p. 2)

By using a convenience sampling method for my research, I was able to create a timeline that would be conducive to conducting my research as well as having a clear understanding of who my population currently was. I reached out to 10 different women at various institutions asking for them to either participate or recommend a woman that they knew fit my research criteria. I began the selection process by approaching women through an employee resource group that is dedicated to the marginalized population and asking for their participation in a questionnaire regarding my research with the hopes of creating an opportunity for a snowball effect to happen. Snowball sampling is a very popular method of sampling found in a lot of qualitative research. According to Parker et al., (2019), snowball sampling is obtained when:

The researchers usually start with a small number of initial contacts (seeds), who fit the research criteria and are invited to become participants within the research. The agreeable participants are then asked to recommend other contacts who fit the research criteria and who potentially might also be willing participants, who then in turn recommend other potential participants, and so on. (p. 3)

Once my original call went out to ask for study participants through various networking groups such as Michigan ACE and the Black Employee Resource Group at a midwestern university, I hoped that those who received the request would share with others to cause a snowball effect. Using the snowball method in addition to convenience sampling solidified more participants for my study with the hopes of getting to my target population goal.

When defining my sample size, I understood that there is no wrong or right number for the study participants in qualitative research. Bartholomew et al. (2021) confirmed

there is no right answer to the question of how many study participants a researcher should have, except the number of participants should be the number to adequately answer the question at hand. Furthermore, the authors referred to Polkinghorne's (1989) suggestion of having between five and 25 study participants. Ultimately, the authors indicated that the proper number of participants can only be determined by the topic being researched and the possible findings. Finally, they stated that “variants of phenomenological methods do point to a need for samples to be small” (Bartholomew et al., 2021, p. 3). With this issue in mind, I planned to have at least five participants with the option of having more.

Once I sent out my first call to the Michigan ACE Network and the Black Employee Resources Group, I then received inquiries asking if the information could be forwarded to others, thus creating the snowball effect. Additionally, I sent it to another group, the Women of Color Collaborative an affinity group through the Michigan ACE Network, and had it posted on various social media outlets. This assistance meant that my survey reached over 200 potential study participants. I received 43 responses to my survey. The women who responded to my survey all identified as African American except one woman who identified as Biracial. The average age of the women was 44 years old with the average number of years working at a PWI being 15, and the majority of the women holding Administrative Professional positions. Of the 43 women who showed initial interest 37 of them showed additional interest in participating further in either a focus group or one on one interview. After contacting the 37 women who showed additional

interest in pursuing either the focus group or an interview, I was able to successfully meet with 21 women.

Description of Study Participants

I invited 21 women to participate in either a focus group or a one-on-one interview to discuss my topic in more depth. Once each participant had confirmed a time for their interview and/or focus group, each participant was given a pseudonym to describe them and quote them directly if selected. Each woman who participated identified as African American, having sought advancement or a career change at a PWI. Table 3.1 and Table 3.2 provide a brief description of the number of years they worked in higher education, the type of position they held, their age, and whether they participated in the focus group or a one-on-one interview and the type of position that they hold. A senior administrative position is considered a Vice President, Assistant Dean, Executive Director, Assistant Dean, or Dean type of position.

Table 3.1

Study Participant Description Focus Group

Name	Age	Higher Ed. Experience	Position Type
Jade	61	25	Clerical
Sage	29	10	Administrative
Shay	29	3	Administrative
Nita	42	1	Administrative
Betty	54	11	Administrative
Janet	32	2	Clerical
Shirley	55	23	Clerical

Table 3.2*Study Participant Description One-On-One Interview*

Name	Age	Higher Education Experience	Position Type
Melissa	40	9	Administrative
Claire	58	30	Senior Administrative
Beyoncé	39	13	Senior Administrative
Lydia	45	16	Administrative/Faculty
Heather	47	23	Administrative
Sunshine	56	18	Senior Administrative
Marlanna	44	22	Administrative
Kai	33	8	Administrative
Kimberly	45	22	Senior Administrative
Chloe	46	7	Administrative
Channel	38	8	Senior Administrative
Aaliyah	34	7	Clerical/Private sector
Cherrie	57	23	Administrative
Stacey	53	30	Senior Administrative

Table 3.1 and Table 3.2 show that the majority of the women selected to be interviewed were interviewed one-on-one. Three women identified that they held clerical positions, while six of the women identified as having a senior-level type administrative role, those roles could be classified or considered a director or assistant dean at the time of the interview. The table also documents the years of experience in higher education the women had which ranged from one year to 30 years of experience.

Data Sources and Collection

After determining the makeup of my study participants, I needed to determine how the data would be collected. According to Creswell (2013), there are four different ways to collect data and those are through audiovisual material, documents, observations,

or interviews. In addition to these four basic strategies, researchers Barrett and Twycross (2018) suggest that these four strategies in addition to focus groups be used to aid in producing data that is “holistic, rich and nuanced, allowing themes and finding to emerge through careful analysis” (Barrett & Twycross, 2018, p. 1). This observation is important so that researchers are getting the information that is needed to provide good and quality information. Various researchers have suggested the use of interviews in phenomenology research and Savin-Baden and Major (2013) also stated that one of the best practices for data collection would incorporate a mix of interviews, documents, and observation of study participants. Creswell (2013) also stated that the most frequent strategy used in phenomenology research is the interview. Barrett and Twycross (2018) stated:

Interviews have been defined as the most common and used approach for data collection. Interviews give the most straightforward approach to gathering detailed and rich data regarding a particular phenomenon. The type of interview used to collect data can be tailored to the research question, the characteristics of participants, and the preferred approach of the researcher. (p. 1)

Although the authors mentioned that interviews are typically conducted face-to-face, with the impact of COVID-19, more and more researchers have implemented virtual face-to-face interviewing using platforms such as WEBX, Zoom, or Google Meets.

After considering several options, I decided to conduct virtual face-to-face interviews via Zoom. The decision to do this was based on COVID-19 and from personal experience participating in a virtual interview for research, which I felt went well. Conducting the interviews face-to-face allowed me the opportunity to notice and observe

subtle and sly social cues and create an atmosphere that was acceptable and comfortable for my study participants allowing them to feel open when answering questions as Barrett and Twycross (2018) stated. According to Opdenakker (2006), social cues are defined as the things related to the study participants, such as their voice and if there is inflation in the voice when answering questions or their body language and movement. By observing these cues, I was able to better understand their responses. I recorded all interviews via the Zoom platform which allowed for the recording to be transcribed immediately after and then I was able to analyze and code the information accordingly.

Of the different types of interview styles that a researcher can use to collect data, I decided to focus on the semi-structured interview style. Barrett and Twycross (2018) described semi-structured interviews as

where core elements of the phenomenon being studied are explicitly asked about by the interviewer. A well-designed semi-structured interview should ensure data are captured in key areas while still allowing flexibility for participants to bring their personalities and perspectives to the discussion (Barrett & Twycross, 2018, p. 1).

A semi-structured interview approach allowed the participants in my study to tell their stories. For my phenomenological investigation, I used both a biographical questionnaire, a pre-interview survey, and interviews for my data collection protocols. The questionnaire served as a way to obtain background information for my study and to provide my participants the opportunity to reflect on their career advancement experiences. The questionnaire was also used for identifying follow-up questions that

were used during the interview process. The interviews served as my primary source for data collection.

The questionnaire I used asked questions regarding participants' educational background if they were currently employed at a PWI, length of employment at a PWI and the type of position currently held. In addition to that information, it asked a little about their experience in seeking advancement over the past five years. Finally, the questionnaire asked about how they viewed their experience in seeking advancement at a PWI.

Once the study participants completed the questionnaire they were asked if they wanted to participate further in the research, if they indicated yes, they were asked to complete a pre-interview survey. The pre-interview survey asked them to identify their contact information for scheduling, their career path in higher education, how they got started, and how they got their current position and plans for the future. Additionally, I asked if their educational background played a role in their advancement. Finally, they were asked to describe their experience as it related to seeking advancement particularly focusing on their experiences at a PWI, whether they had tried or not, and if they did try were they successful and to reflect on that experience.

Employing a semi-structured interview format allowed me to form a space that permitted each study participant the ability to answer questions in a natural flow, leaving room to add additional unsolicited information as Barrett and Twycross (2018) suggests. Furthermore, using the semi-structured approach allowed me to digress at times from a prepared list of questions when I deemed it necessary and it allowed the participants the

ability to go into further explanation and details to help me understand their responses. Savin-Baden and Major (2013) described this as a shared or collaborative approach “which is intended to evoke both a colorful description of the phenomenon as well as an empathetic understanding of ways in which individuals experience phenomena” (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). This allowed me as the researcher to allow for both genuine and unfiltered responses from my participants during the interview process. I was able to interview 14 different women for at least 1 hour in length.

Another option I utilized as a data collection method was virtual focus groups through Zoom. Barrett and Twycross (2018) defined a focus group as a method of data collection in which a moderator/facilitator (usually a coresearcher) speaks with a group of 6–12 participants about issues related to the research question. As an approach, the focus group offers qualitative researchers an efficient method of gathering the views of many participants at one time. (Barrett & Twycross, 2018, p. 2)

The one main advantage of utilizing a focus group is that I was able to interview multiple people at once and, as the researchers outline, it enhanced the conversation and provided more in-depth details about my participants’ experiences. It also allowed my participants to build relationships and create networks that they could use in the future.

Also, the fact that many people are discussing the same issue together can result in an enhanced level of debate, with the moderator often able to step back and let the focus group enter into a free-flowing discussion. This provides an opportunity

to gather rich data from a specific population about a particular area of interest.

(Barrett & Twycross, 2018, p. 2)

This type of setting is also credited with allowing for a more relaxing atmosphere which is seen to increase the participation among the participants. Additionally, researchers suggest that “focus groups also allow participants to ‘bounce’ ideas off each other which sometimes results in different perspectives emerging from the discussion” (Barrett & Twycross, 2018, p. 2). Given this opportunity for a marginalized group to come together to discuss a topic and allow them to have comradery could have the possibility to create a network or support for women in the future. Based on the responses I received from my study participants, I held two focus groups with three to four women each.

During both the one-on-one interviews and the focus group sessions, I asked each participant the following questions:

1. How would you describe your lived experiences at a PWI?
2. Tell me about your experiences being both female and Black at a PWI.
 - a. If there were any issues how would you categorize them?
 - b. Are there instances where you saw disparities among yourself or your peers?
 - c. Did you have a support system that you used? What did that support system look like?
 - d. Do you have any recommendations for institutions?
 - e. Do you have any recommendations for women who will one day be in your shoes?

3. Would you like to share any additional information regarding your lived experiences at a PWI? How about your career path and how you got to where you are today?

Data Analysis

Analysis of the data is very important for reporting clear findings. First, I started by using pre-existing themes identified from across the literature. There were three pre-existing themes that I noticed from the review of the literature, and those were racism and sexism, the need for a support system, and the lack of commitment from institutions to support DEI initiatives. For my research, I utilized horizontalization, which is the process of highlighting significant statements, sentences, and quotes that provide the researcher with a clear and precise understanding of the phenomenon experienced. While reviewing the data I collected I looked to see if any of the data could fit into the pre-existing themes first. Some statements could fall under a few of the pre-existing themes and I placed that information there accordingly.

Next, I used the cluster of meaning, where I organized my information in a thematic format. Given my personality type and the need to ensure I was accurately understating what was said by each participant, and that the statements were recorded accurately, I watched each video recording several times while taking notes on things that were not noticeable to me in the beginning or during the actual interviews. This process was done in addition to the note-taking that I had taken while completing the interviews.

I used an Excel spreadsheet to organize my information. I reviewed each transcript noting statements from each participant and grouped the statements to form

additional themes that were not a part of the original three that I noticed from the review of the literature. As I reviewed and arranged the data into different categories, I began to see patterns and connections between the participants' experiences that I was able to link together. After reviewing all of the transcripts and listening to the audio/videos I was able to determine six emergent themes throughout my data collection analysis and they are displayed in Table 3.3 below.

Table 3.3

Identified Emergent Themes

Theme	Description of Theme
Working Harder and Doing More	African-American women felt they had to work harder and do more work than their counterparts including working longer hours and taking on more responsibility with no additional pay or recognition
Lack of Acknowledgment and Overlooked	African-American women felt that they were often overlooked for positions although they were more qualified or had more experience and education than others. They felt they had to be overqualified to even look at and apply for lower-level positions
Lack of Transparency to be Authentic Self	African-American women felt that they had to change their voice to be more passive or not speak at all or else they would be considered aggressive, defensive, or angry by their peers or be categorized as the angry Black woman
Lack of Respect	African-American women felt that they were not acknowledged in general and that there was a lack of respect towards them and the positions they held. They felt that their authority was often questioned as if they could not hold the role that they were in
Utilization of Support Systems	African-American women felt that utilizing a support system was beneficial to them and that it should include a mentor or a sponsor and having one or both is extremely important while navigating their careers at predominately white institutions
Need to Increase Support	African-American women felt that predominately white institutions need to have job shadowing programs, encourage mentorship programs, and listen to the needs of African-American women to retain and keep them at their institutions. This would also help to promote them or allow them to gain other opportunities.

Table 3.3 displays the six themes I identified after reviewing and coding the data that I collected.

Reliability and Validity

Creswell (2013) recommended engaging in at least two validation processes when conducting qualitative research. Validity was ensured through several methods. First, by hosting each interview or focus group via the Zoom platform, I was able to digitally record each session and then perform a cross-check of the data transcribed by watching the recording and ensuring the transcript accurately reflected what was stated during the interview. Each interview and focus group were transcribed in their entirety and then I supplied each study participant with a copy of the transcript via email and asked for their input on the accuracy of their statements and to ensure their actual meaning was captured correctly. This process is also known as member checking. Utilizing member checking allowed me to ensure that my participant's information was accurate and allowed for follow-up conversations to clarify any part of the transcript.

As each study participant reviewed the transcript, they were able to send corrections back to me. The majority of the corrections that were sent back to me were word misinterpretations that were easily fixable after the study participant pointed it out. After they pointed out the issue, I also revisited the recording to make sure I understood exactly what was said and corrected the transcript accordingly. After correcting the transcript, I sent it back to the study participant for a last review.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of African-American women who sought career advancement at a predominately White institution in the Midwest. This chapter presents the results of the study. As I gathered data, I specifically paid attention to how the women felt their educational background assisted them in their experiences. Along with their advanced educational background, I wanted to understand if there were other issues, issues such as racism and sexism, the availability of a support system or support from their institutions, that may have played a role in how their career journey looked.

To examine the experiences of the participants, I gathered data using a questionnaire, focus groups, and in-depth interviews. It is my opinion that the women were very expressive regarding their responses based on the visual cues that I observed while they were answering the questions. While interviewing the women, I asked them to describe their lived experience in general working and or professionally at a PWI. The women responded overwhelmingly that their experiences were challenging with only one participant referencing positive experiences. These negative experiences can be better explained via the questionnaire responses that the women answered.

Questionnaire Results

To get a deeper understanding of their lived experiences, the women were asked several questions relating to their career advancement activity via the questionnaire. One

question in particular asked them to talk about their outlook on having a successful career in higher education. Figure 4.1 shows the average response to each of these statements with a possible range of Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5).

Figure 4.1

Perception of Career Possibilities at a PWI

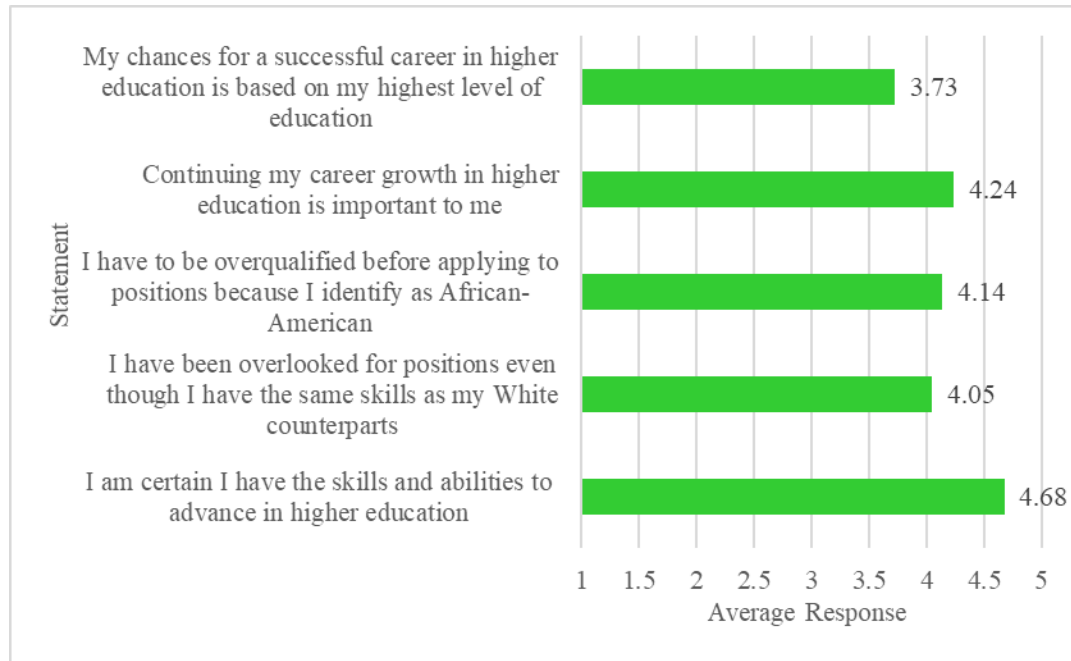


Figure 4.1 shows that the women responded very highly to the statement that they had the skills and abilities to advance in the field of higher education. However, they also responded highly that they had to be overqualified before applying and have been overlooked for positions although they had the skills necessary. Having to be overqualified for positions can be perceived as a cause for concern that the hiring practices are not fair. The women also responded highly to attest that they had been overlooked for positions while having equal skills and abilities as their White counterparts. It is also interesting to note that the women felt very strongly that they had

the skills and abilities to advance but they did not feel as strongly that they had the opportunities to advance.

Next, the women were asked to respond to questions regarding their experiences related to looking for and applying for career advancement at a PWI. Figure 4.2 shows the percentage of the women who reported going through different aspects of the process of seeking advancement in either their current place of employment (green bars) or another place of employment (black bars).

Figure 4.2

Survey Responses Concerning Career Advancement Experiences at Current and Another Place of Employment

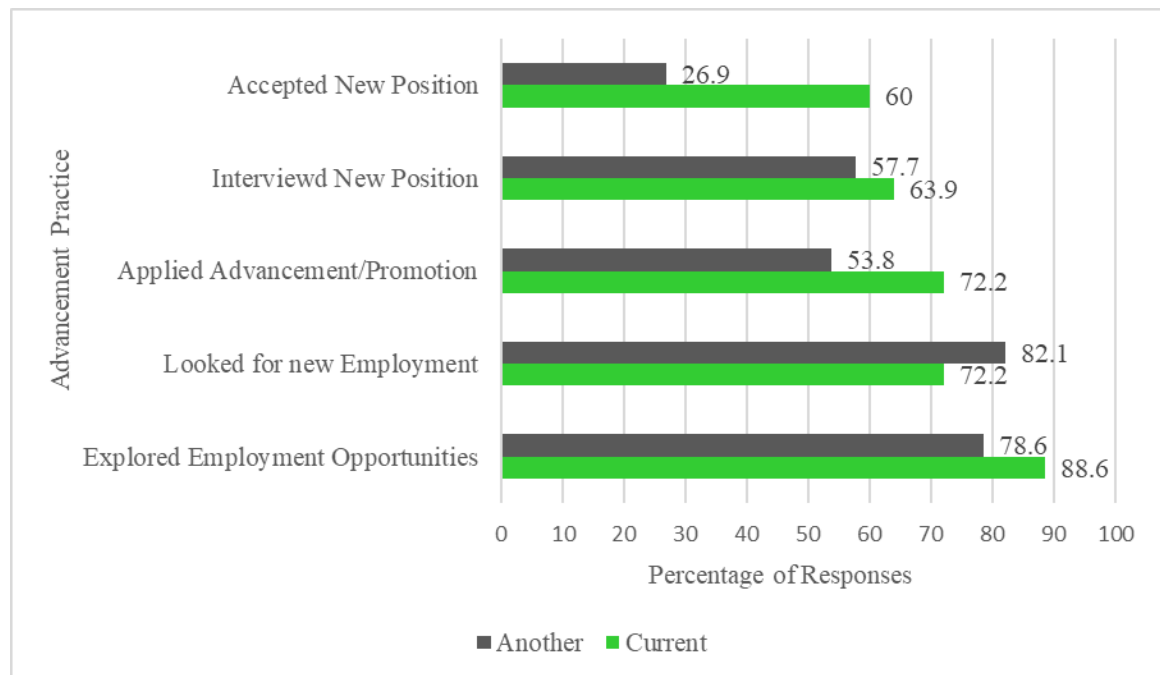


Figure 4.2 reveals that 89% of the women explored other employment opportunities at their current institution compared to 79% of them looking at other institutions. Although

89% of the women looked for advancement at their current institution only 60% of them reported accepting a new position at their current institution.

The women were also asked to respond to statements regarding their feelings about the hiring process as they experienced it at a PWI. They were asked to consider each statement while taking into consideration that they identified as both African-American and a woman and working at a PWI seeking advancement. Figure 4.3 shows the average response to each of these statements with a possible range of Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5).

Figure 4.3

Perception of the Hiring Process at a PWI

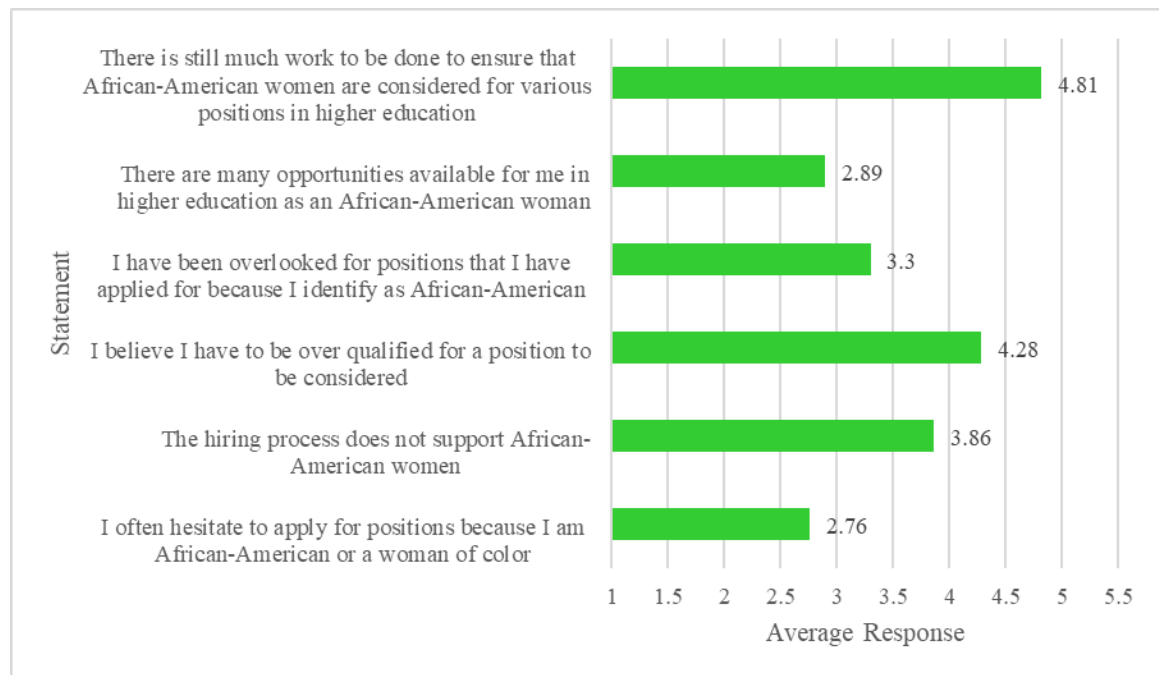


Figure 4.3 shows that African-American women do not hesitate to apply for positions, however, they responded very highly that there is still much work to be done to ensure

that African-American women are considered for positions in higher education and not be overlooked. Furthermore, African-American women responded highly that they felt they had to be overqualified for positions to even be considered. Overall the women felt strongly they were not experiencing equal opportunity in general.

Findings from Interviews and Focus Groups

After reviewing the questionnaire results and understanding their perspectives as mentioned above, I began the interview process with the women. As described in the previous chapter, I established six emergent themes from the interview transcripts, that arose from their experiences. Creswell (2009), stated that themes are similar to codes but they are combined to form a major idea. Accordingly, themes are descriptions of the researcher's findings that are formed to represent or describe an underlying idea or meaning from the data. Thus, I have organized my results around the following themes, working harder and doing more, lack of acknowledgement and overlooked, lack of transparency to be authentic self, lack of respect, utilization of support systems, and the need to increase support. I used pseudonyms in documenting the study participant's names. Each participant was identified by a name that was mutually agreed upon at the beginning of the interview.

Theme One - Working Harder and Doing More

During the interview process, the women were asked several questions regarding their lived experiences at a PWI, and about seeking career advancement. Analysis of the data revealed the participants felt they were obligated to go above and beyond normal work duties and to work harder than others. During the interview process, many of the

women referred to the difficulty of obtaining advancement stating that they, being Black women, had to always work harder and do more work than their White counterparts to be even be considered for advancement. This description developed into the theme of having to work harder and do more than their counterparts as a way to show that they were capable, they were qualified, and they were experienced to do any task assigned to them.

While interviewing Claire, a woman who currently holds a senior level role, holds a Ph.D. has worked at three different PWIs, and has over 20 years of experience stated that:

Overall as just Black and female, I find that I have to be on top of my game. I have to do my work, I have to prove myself and I just can't be sloppy at how I do things I have to come prepared and know that this is the job that must be done and then show them what I am doing

In understanding Claire's statement, she felt that she could not make any mistakes and had to perform at a standard that her other counterparts were not required nor expected to do. Claire also referenced that if she did not perform at this level she felt that she would be judged or scrutinized. Similar to Claire, Sunshine, a woman who holds an Ed.D. and is an administrator with various experiences both in higher education as well as other industries said *"we work 2 or 3 times as hard as other people and so getting in the space of not having to justify everything has been good for my mental health"*. Sunshine's statement again supports that Black women need to work harder than others at PWIs and she also insinuated that in the past she needed to justify her work, however, she did not expand on what that looked like.

Although Stacey had a terminal degree and over 30 years of experience, she reported similar feelings. She stated:

I believe being a minority on a PWI campus you feel as though sometimes you have to work harder, smarter, and faster always having to be 2 or 3 steps ahead of the game to be successful or to be seen and or be recognized or even acknowledged sometimes,

Stacey was passionate that she had to do more to earn respect and to be taken seriously with her work performance.

While Stacey and Claire both hold senior-level positions and expressed similar views, it was interesting to hear from Beyoncé who held a mid-level administration position, with over 10 years of experience and holds a Ph.D. stated that:

I definitely have experienced being overlooked because of my race and or my gender. I mean it also just re-emphasizes you know the notion of being a Black woman in education we gotta work twice as hard to even get the look when applying for a position and having more experience than somebody they choose to hire it definitely reinforces that whole notion of working twice as hard or always having to put your best foot forward because you need to always represent, instead of just being able to be yourself and knowing that your experience and your education speaks for itself.

Beyoncé's statement above was twofold. First, she felt that her race and gender played a role in being overlooked which is similar to the findings from the research detailed in Chapter Two. There were other women whom I interviewed who also felt similar to

Beyoncé with the sentiment that their race and gender played a role in their lack of advancement opportunities. The notion of being a Black woman and the need to work twice as hard to even be considered for positions became overwhelmingly a theme when speaking to the women during the interview process. I noticed that the women were frustrated based on the inflection in their voices when discussing this topic.

I then spoke with Betty, a woman who had recently completed her master's degree and had been applying for positions for the last four years with no luck in advancing. Betty has been working at her current PWI for the past six years and holds an administrative position. Betty expressed that at her institution Black women were:

doing a lot more, and not being compensated for the extra that they were doing, I don't necessarily know that they're trying to prove anything, but it's just that they're being asked to do more work, whether it's due to, you know, being understaffed, or whatever the case may be but they're doing this extra work and not being compensated or rewarded in any kind of way. While others are not being asked or tasked with all the extras.

Hearing Betty openly discuss seeing Black women being challenged with doing more while others simply are not is very discouraging to hear. The disparity between doing more and working harder became very apparent during the interview process.

Lydia, a senior-level administrator who also holds a faculty ranking and has her Ph.D. with 15 years of experience stated “*I unfortunately still believe that you gotta be better and do more and be more because that's just the standard and sometimes we have to do more than everyone else to be respected*” Hearing Lydia say this was interesting

because she holds a unique role being both an administrator and a faculty member and yet she still has the same viewpoint as the other women mentioned above.

Marlanna, a woman who has been in the field for over 20 years gave a unique interpretation of working harder and doing more. Marlanna expressed that:

I think that just from a historical perspective and just women who are Black.

Women are taught to bear it, to bear down on it, to accept it, to say, it's okay. I just have to work harder. and I think other people are not taught that from a historical perspective cultural differences, or treat it that way, that you're such a great person because of how hard you work. We're defined as we're good because we work so hard.

Marlanna's viewpoint takes the stance from a historical perspective that Black women have been taught that they had to work harder to be good or better than others. It can be questioned if other African-American women feel this way, or if they are conditioned to work harder based on her historical point of view. It made me wonder if others had that same view.

Interestingly, Kai, one of the younger women I interviewed who was working on her doctoral degree at the time of the interview felt that she was being taken advantage of by her statement *"I was being exploited for my labor as well as being told, that I wasn't being professional."* Kai's statement was in essence signaling that she was working outside of her parameters which supports the theme of working harder and doing more to the point where she felt taken advantage of.

Given the statements above it was obvious that the women felt that they had to perform at different and higher levels than their counterparts. They had to work harder to prove or solidify that they were knowledgeable and capable. Additionally, Lydia referenced the hiring process and observed:

that sometimes you'll see a White male who might have less credentials, but will pass with flying colors or will be given grace at a level where I have none or no one to give me that kind of grace

Lydia's statement resonated with me because it made me wonder why African-American women are not being granted grace at the same levels as others. It also made me think about all the work that the women expressed that they were doing was it worth it if they were not going to be recognized or acknowledged for it when seeking advancement or other career opportunities? This statement also opens the doors for the next theme, the lack of acknowledgment and the feeling of being overlooked.

Theme Two - Lack of Acknowledgment and Overlooked

While the women expressed the need to work harder and do more work than their counterparts, they also felt this work, the work they were doing, was often not acknowledged to the point that they were overlooked for positions when it came to the hiring process. Jade, a woman who holds a master's degree, is in a clerical position and has over 20 years of experience working at a PWI indicated that she works in a predominately White department where there are only two other African-Americans in the department. Jade stated that *"African-Americans often overlooked for a promotion. It's like if you are friends with the Supervisor, then you will get more precedent over*

anyone else.” She further explained that she has been asked to do work outside of normal duties, but overlooked when hiring. Jade specifically stated:

I've actually brought it to the supervisor's attention that she never suggested that I do something. It's always someone else around me, and she always comes up with an excuse. What? I didn't know you were interested. Well, you never asked and it's not like you don't know my capabilities.

Jade’s statement above identifies that she was overlooked directly and never considered although she had the qualifications and the capabilities to perform the work.

While Jade’s experience is a direct example, both Betty and Stacey shared similar sentiments of lack of acknowledgment and being overlooked. During my interview with Betty, she talked about her experience applying for positions at her current institution.

Betty shared the following statement:

I've been applying for jobs at my university for the last I want to say 4 years since I finished my master's. And I've applied to, I'm getting close to 100 positions, and you know nothing like I'll stop. I'll get to maybe a first round or second round, or I've even had references checked and still not gotten anything.

During this part of the interview, I asked Betty how this made her feel and she expressed the feeling of being overlooked and a lack of consideration which I also interpreted as a lack of acknowledgement.

Stacey mentioned a similar experience during her interview time. She talked about many women at her institution being overlooked and the lack of acknowledgment that they received, to the point where many African-American women ultimately left the

institution. Stacey went on to say that working harder and doing more is the only way African-American women can be acknowledged or even recognized. She made one thing clear by stating that:

It's not all about the salary it is the recognition, the acknowledgment that you can do the duties. It's not always about the money either. They don't give you that opportunity they like to go to the outside and bring new people in because they think that they're bringing in new ideas when all along the new ideas can come right from within.

Stacey's perspective was similar to Jade's surrounded by the notion that they had the capabilities but they were simply not acknowledged. Kimberly, a senior-level administrative who holds a Ph.D. with over 20 years of experience also expressed that there were times when she felt overlooked at previous institutions. Sage also expressed that she felt that she was overlooked for promotions, being that she works in a male-dominated field in higher education. Sage, considers herself a non-traditional worker having started in the field later in life and still working towards her degree.

Much like the women mentioned above Channel, a woman with eight years of experience with a master's degree and holds a mid-level administrator position, felt that African-American women in general are often overlooked for promotions. In her interview, Channel described what that looks like to her:

Yeah, for sure. I think that in terms of Black women, I think that they were often not given the same type of same type of opportunities, as far as like being

promoted. I think that we're given less leeway or less room for error as opposed to some of like our White counterparts.

While Channel described this experience, she relates this to her experience of wanting to do more and to gain more experience but not being acknowledged. She expressed wanting to learn more skills as it relates to the area of development and had mentioned this to her supervisor several times. She described it as follows:

So, for example, I really wanted to get some development experience. And I've been saying that for the last 3 years to my supervisor every time, I have my one-on-one. I'm asking, is there an opportunity for me to get development experience, and no one has given me that experience. So, what I've done is like, last summer I spent working on one of our local State rep's fundraiser campaign...So really being creative and looking outside the organization.

This example showed that Channel was not granted the experience that she wanted and that she had to go outside of her institution to gain that experience and to be acknowledged or allowed to show her talents.

Shay is another woman who can be considered newer to higher education. Shay is a recent graduate with her master's degree with three years of full-time experience her perspective is slightly different. Shay indicated that she believes being overlooked has to do with experience and age. She stated:

I think experience and age kind of go hand in hand a lot of the time. A lot of the younger people are overlooked for positions because they don't have enough

experience under their belt. But From my standpoint, we're the ones who are willing and ready to go to the forefront to learn and to train.

Shay expressed that she believed her age played a part in the issue of being overlooked.

Sunshine felt she too had been overlooked for other reasons. Sunshine stated:
I've applied to a couple of positions and my experience superseded what the job description did however I was not given an opportunity to even have a conversation and just understanding the dynamics of it led me to believe that that it was in fact a disparity.

Sunshine's perspective is similar to other study participants. She stated her belief that African-American women are not heard or valued. Sunshine stated:

a lot of time our voices are not heard and so I feel like from a leadership and cabinet perspective it has to come from the top down (respect and acknowledgment) that we are all important and what we bring to a specific table is valuable information.

Not being valued, respected, and acknowledged all comes from lived experiences that Sunshine experienced while seeking or trying to find new career opportunities. While the women expressed feelings of lack of acknowledgment and being overlooked they indicated that in addition to these feelings they believed that they needed to change how they showed up to spaces to be looked at and taken seriously. This leads to the next theme of lack of transparency to be authentic self.

Theme Three- Lack of Transparency to Be Authentic Self

Many of the women talked about how they had to change who they were, changing their authentic selves, by remaining silent during meetings and oftentimes not sharing or showing their passion for various topics due to the fear that they would be perceived as aggressive, defensive, hard to work with, or the angry Black woman. However, their White counterparts would display this same type or similar behavior only to be categorized as being passionate about the subject.

Melissa, a mid-career administrator with an Ed.D., I observed her getting very emotional during her recollection of this. Melissa, felt very strongly that her passion was viewed negatively and impacted her progression at her current institution. Melissa stated:

You're almost forced to pick your battles because anytime you have an opinion with any type of emotion or passion or anything you're considered angry or you know that stigma that we have any time that we voice an opinion about anything. So, when there have been issues, I usually stay quiet. I have to always test the environment to see if I feel safe enough to voice a concern or opinion but that is rare, so I don't say much as a Black female in a PWI workspace.

Melissa's statement was very impactful to me to hear. It felt as though she was being put in a bottle with no escape and no help.

Similar to Melissa, Kimberly also expressed the need to be different in her workspace. Kimberly explained:

I am probably the youngest and absolutely the only and the most diverse person in our college and I do find myself kind of toned down now because I am a

passionate person and sometimes that passion gets misconstrued because I am a Black woman and so I've been in situations where I can say something the same way that like a White counterpart can say it and they are perceived as passionate where I'm perceived as being defensive. And so, I have learned to articulate a little bit differently to make other people feel more comfortable.

Kimberly felt that because of her age and being the only person from a diverse background in her department she was misunderstood and therefore caused her to re-examine her tone and wording to accommodate others in her department.

Like Kimberly and Melissa, Channel also experienced not being able to be herself at work and in meetings. Channel confessed that:

So, a lot of times, for example, if we set up meetings, and people are being passionate about like a point, or feel very strongly about something, and how they're, you know when people do that they tend to be, you know, raise their voice, or you know, are allowed to be that way. I feel that as a Black woman, and I can't be you know, so I'm very kind of sometimes in my head, like I'll say something in my head to hear how it sounds and then, as self-edit to make sure that I say it this way, so that people don't misunderstand something and also that people don't take it differently or for something like I don't ever want to come off in the wrong light. I'm very aware of my tone of voice, and how I approach things. It's almost like you kind of have to be like you are perfect.

Channel's statement is another example of a Black woman having to change or doubt herself while working at PWI and her ability to openly express her thoughts, views, and

opinions because of the fear of how she would be perceived at work. From a different perspective, Sunshine relates to Channel's statement but adds her involvement with being on boards and other activities outside of her institution. Sunshine stated that:

Oftentimes a lot of the meetings, committees, boards, things that I'm on, I'm often the only one and so if I speak up, it's usually perceived as me going against the grain of what everybody else is talking about, and it's usually an agenda.... You put your thoughts out there it could be a passion, but it's perceived as being very controlling.

Sunshine's statement is an example of a Black woman having to limit her thoughts not only in her workspace but on different committees and boards, similar yet different than the other women mentioned earlier.

Aaliyah is a woman in her mid-thirties who earned a master's degree to stay at a PWI. Aaliyah recently left higher education after working at two different PWIs due to not being able to be promoted, also had similar experiences and views to the other women mentioned. Aaliyah stated that *"sometimes Black women are judged before we even begin to peak our minds, we are judged by our appearance we're judged by how we show up. But if we have the credentials they are still overlooked."* Aaliyah made this statement as she explained why she ultimately left higher education, and now works for a non-profit organization that works closely with those in higher education. Education is her passion, she was just really saddened that she was not able to continue her career in higher education. At the time of the interview, she did hope that maybe one day she would find her way back to higher education.

While Aaliyah pursues her career in another way, Sage a young woman who is in her mid-career at her institution also voiced similar views as the other women. Sage said:

I feel like everything I do is highlighted because of my identity. So, I've been labeled as aggressive, to blunt all of that, because, as you said..., I'm showing up authentically, and I like to address issues head-on, and I speak my mind. Like I tell them what could be changed in a process, and how we could be more efficient, I'm quick with that. And a lot of times they think I'm challenging everything, or label me as aggressive like I said so I think mislabeled as a category I would also add a belittlement or disrespect as a category.

With Sage's statement above, she has identified that she feels belittled and judged and that there is a lack of respect for her as her authentic self. I would consider these feelings challenging and overwhelming. During the focus group interview, I observed Sage showing frustration and annoyance that she would be experiencing treatment like this through her tone and her facial expression. While these women have had different experiences they all felt that they were perceived as challenging, aggressive, defensive, or even angry Black women, when in actuality they were showing up and being passionate and, in their reality, caring about the work that they do. In Sage's state, she spoke a little about being disrespected, the lack of respect is the next theme that many of the women brought up in the interviews.

Theme Four- Lack of Respect

While the women were very open and detailed about their lived experiences at a PWI, the feeling of lack of respect for them as individuals resonated with many of the

women. Heather, a woman in her late 40s who holds a senior-level administrative position and has over 20 years of experience working at PWIs talked about how she experienced a lack of respect for her being in her role or even being the only Black person in meetings. Heather stated that

I was the only Black in the space and most of the time. I think when you, your only Black person. think people take things for granted. I think that's where people accurately mess up my name. They accurately misunderstand comments regularly. Somebody is paraphrasing like there's a lot of, I think, what Heather is saying is this....

Heather's experience made her feel less intelligent and that she was not fully respected for who she was and how she showed up to meetings. Heather considers herself a very smart person, with skills and talent had she not had the skills and talent she couldn't hold the position that she holds. Channel also expressed concern regarding the lack of respect at her institution. Channel stated that:

I think some of the issues are when I'm dealing with my male colleagues, even Black male colleagues.... for example, I've had Black male colleagues who either peers like we're assistant directors and I'm an assistant director but still want to treat me as if I'm a secretary or their admin which is definitely not okay. Or I've interacted with them on campus again, (I'm thinking of 2 Black males in this example) ... where he questioned me like, what are you doing, or why are you saying that? And I'm in charge of this contract? So, it's very interesting. And then I think there's a lot of like great insane offensive things that people say the

microaggression because of being Black. I think that that's just like an ongoing kind of thing.

In Channel's description of her experience, she is experiencing being challenged and treated unjustly due to her being both Black and female from her perspective. She felt as though she was being treated unfairly and questioned by her peers although they held similar positions.

A similar experience was shared by Sunshine in the following statement Sunshine talks about how people disregard her position or lack respect to get what they want:

One of my constant battles is, that I will tell someone something and they will go to my direct supervisor and that's a constant battle. It is typically Caucasian people that are going to this Caucasian person hoping that I will change because they went to a different level. So, I feel like respect for my position and my knowledge is not always taken into consideration.

Sunshine's acknowledgment of the lack of respect her colleagues display for her is not her only challenge. Sunshine believes that the lack of respect is twofold, one because she is an African-American and the other because she is a woman. Sunshine also stated that because her supervisor is a male and Caucasian her colleagues believe they can get what they want with him. Sunshine stated:

So over overstepping my boundaries to go to someone else versus just coming to me because I feel like they can get a lot further by going to someone at a higher-level position which tends to be a Caucasian male or a male period versus just taking my word for it.

Sunshine's statement confirms her feelings about her colleague's lack of respect for her role at her current institution. The feeling of lack of respect was also expressed by Melissa who said that she was constantly being asked to bend over and change but others in her department were not being asked. Melissa expressed that always being asked to accommodate others felt like a lack of respect for her as a person and as a Black woman.

Many of the women who participated in the study talked about colleagues in various departments not showing respect to them when out on campus at gatherings or just in general. Beyoncé recalled a time when she was on her campus working and one of her colleagues approached her with an issue or concern. Beyoncé stated that the colleague did not respect who she was or what she was doing at the time. The interaction that they had bothered Beyoncé so much that she reported the incident. Beyoncé stated

she was loud and kind of irate with me and when I reported it the response I got was oh well that is just how she is. And so, it was kind of like sweep to the side as though it wasn't you know important to note that this person was treating another colleague in this manner.

Beyoncé's example indicates that equitable treatment is not always practiced in certain situations. The visible lack of respect seen by many of the women in the study was explained away by giving it credit to some type of reason. Sage, for example, credited working in a male-dominated industry as to why she experienced a lack of respect. Nita, one of the women who has the least experience working in higher education, also believed that working in finance which can be considered in some spaces a male-dominated industry why she experienced a lack of respect. Additionally, Shay stated that

the lack of respect exists until people see that you are educated and that you do know what you are talking about. Similar to the experience that Nita had. Both women felt as though they had to prove themselves to be respected.

While many of the women work through the issue of lack of respect, Aaliyah's response can be a summation of them all, as she stated:

I think just a lack of respect, honestly, as a Black woman working at a PWI and that could be twofold being Black first and then being women. You know when you working in a typically predominately male environment. At times it can be contentious you don't feel as if you belong and that there are not any brave spaces.

Aaliyah's statement indicates that she too believes that Black women are not fully accepted or respected and that it creates spaces that can be considered as antagonistic and uncomfortable. Her comments made me ponder, well how are African-American women handling these types of environments? All of the women interviewed unanimously stated that they used support systems and that it was important to have such a system in place, the fifth theme that I will dive into next.

Theme Five- Utilization of Support Systems

All of the women that I interviewed said that the use of a support system was necessary for them for a variety of reasons. Additionally, the women would encourage every woman to develop and use a support system. When asked, why they used a support system and what that system looked like, many women said that used a support system to navigate the struggles and issues they were dealing with at their current institution, and

their systems were made of up different groups of people. Melissa suggested that women should seek resources and people who look like them, furthermore, Melissa stated that African-American women should *“find people who have similar experiences or someone who is in a position that you would like to be in. I sought out different Black women in different positions and my sorority sisters who are on campus.”* Melissa’s experience was that women who have experienced similar situations that she had could help her navigate her own experiences.

Similar to Melissa, Sunshine also utilized a support system. Sunshine disclosed that she did not always seek support from those who were involved or employed at her institution but they could serve in a capacity to be an advisor to her. Sunshine, expressed having someone who understands what you may be experiencing is also important when developing that mentor/mentee relationship, much like Melissa suggested. Sunshine stated that she believed:

it's really important to find your tribe, your support system on campus. I think that women particularly African American women don't necessarily support themselves as well as each other so it's really important. If someone was moving to sit in my shoes to really trust and find who their people are, because that can make a difference in a good day and a bad day not take everything personally because every situation is not necessarily a jab.

Sunshine’s statement places importance on having people that a person trusts as a mentor or a part of their support system. Much like Sunshine, Jade also stated that she used a support system made of up people outside of her institutions well as her family and

friends tied with having a strong spiritual faith. Parallel to Jade, Shay also stated that her spiritual faith helped to guide her through her journey at her institution. Shay expressed *“If it wasn't for the Lord, I promise you it's some days where I wanted to quit and walk out. But it's like no, not yet, not yet.”* In addition to her spiritual faith, Shay considers her classmates from her cohort as a good support system as well, a professor she worked closely with and her favorite aunt who works in higher education.

Parallel to the women mentioned above, Kimberly expressed that she benefitted from a support system of Black leaders on her campus. Kimberly stated:

in my current role, we have a support system of other Black female leaders on campus, and we get together in a social setting. So, it's nothing formal. But we get together socially to kind of talk about our experiences. And you know what's going on in our individual departments.

Kimberly's experience with support systems was not limited to her on-campus support system but she also utilizes people externally. Her external support systems assist her with navigating her experiences by sharing their personal experiences about where they have been how they got there, and what worked well for them and what did not work for them. She then takes that information and applies it to her current situation. Kimberly stated, *“I've learned that this is not a unique experience that I have, and it's kinda is what it is, but I would say that having that network does make me feel supported and not alone”*. Kimberly understands the value of her support systems and gains as much knowledge and wisdom from the groups as she can.

Like many of the women, Aaliyah used people outside the institution for her support system like her sorority sisters. However, one interesting thing that Aaliyah said was that she used the people whom she worked with in her department as support as well.

So, I will say that at the first PWI institution. I think I always consider myself lucky to have the support system that I had. I worked in a really good department that I have heard a lot of other people do not have access to and I was fortunate enough to work with people at that point in time that believed in me and supported me.

Aaliyah understood that not all women have been fortunate enough to work in a department where they were supported and that many women often look for such departments to work for. She also credits an employee resource group as part of her support system as well. Like Aaliyah, Betty also utilized a campus resource group on campus as her support system. Betty described the group as women with the majority of them being African-American other women from different ethnicities were also a part of that group. Betty indicated that it was good to have the group available and to be able to talk openly about shared experiences, along with professional development opportunities and mentorship opportunities as well. Betty shared that this group is an amazing experience for her.

Channel has a somewhat different experience than the other women mentioned above. Channel explained that she does not have a support system on campus. Channel did say that there are people on campus that she feels comfortable with to run ideas by and to help her navigate solutions, but she does not consider them her support system.

Channel does identify that she has a formal support system outside of her institution that is made up of her family as well as groups of women who share similar interests. Additionally, Channel stated that the pandemic helped her to create more of a formal support system. Channel stated, *“During the pandemic. I joined this group called Fabulous Female Fundraisers, it is a group of Black women from across the country who work at various institutions doing this kind of work.”* Channel joining this group demonstrates her desire to gain more knowledge and skills in that field, as previously mentioned this is a desire of hers that her supervisors were not giving her. This is a good example of going out and seeking the support that she desired and needed.

Similar, to Channel, Claire believes that support systems work and that women should use them, but she also stated:

I think that we have to be bold and courageous to actually go get these systems even when they are individuals who do not look like us. That's key. A lot of people I've encountered always talk about what their support system looks like, and making sure that it is diversified.

Claire believed that getting buy-in from people who are not part of your ethnicity could allow you to gain different perspectives of leadership and give different tips and strategies on how to navigate your career journey. Additionally, Claire believed that having someone who sits at the actual table to support could be beneficial in your career journey. Much like Claire, Stacey also believed in having a diverse support system.

Stacey stated:

I've used support systems and I've had mentors and a sponsor and I try to use a diverse type of mentor and or sponsor. So male, White female, Black female, etc. I tried to make sure that my support system was diverse and it always didn't have to be someone who was an executive or leader it could have been someone who was a subordinate.

Part of Stacey's support system included subordinates. I thought that was interesting when she stated that so I asked her how she utilized them and she responded accordingly:

So why a subordinate? Because at one point, I was a subordinate, and I thought I was able to offer more at a higher level. And so, as I am in a leadership role now, I try to look back at individuals who may be a supporter to see what avenues and or techniques they may want to do, and what they may offer as well. just because you're at a higher level it doesn't mean you can't get something from someone that's a subordinate or younger, you know, because they're looking from a different lens. And so, when you get that information and take information from the executive, you can mesh and make the make a better you in my mind.

Stacey's response showed that looking at all of the people that you come in contact with has an impact on how you navigate your journey. Her statement shows you can always learn and you can always improve or make things better. All the women interviewed gave high regard to support systems and affirmed that they were useful. The women were also very vocal in stating that institutions could do a better job of supporting African-American women in a variety of ways. This leads to the final theme of needing to increase support.

Theme Six- The Need to Increase Support

Finally, the last theme developed as the women said that institutions should increase the support of African-American women through a variety of different options. The women mentioned a variety of ideas such as job shadowing programs, leadership development, and increasing support to affinity groups that support marginalized women as a way to promote, maintain, and retain African-American women.

Melissa, who described herself as having many failed attempts at advancing at a PWI stated:

I absolutely think that something needs to be set in place by the institution. I think they should have hands-on experiences with different positions and higher-up positions I think it has to be ingrained into the institution to have those types of workshops academies and things like that. Institutions should be responsible for supporting those employee resource groups as far as like financially and I think that should be the institution's responsibility to push that area of support a little more than they do.

From her failed attempts to advance, Melissa had very opinioned ideas to help women who may also face those failed attempts to advance. Much like Melissa, Aaliyah, and Stacey, both felt that PWIs need to recognize the talent that they already have in-house. As previously mentioned Stacey commented that a lot of time, institutions are looking for new ideas and believe that those ideas could only come from outside the institution, when in reality they are overlooking their staff who are already there. It was important to emphasize Stacey's comment again because many of the women who participated also

insinuated the same opinion. At the time of this interview, Aaliyah was the only woman in the study who had recently left her institution because she was not able to gain the advancement that she desired. Additionally, Aaliyah also believed that having support groups was another way that institutions could support African-American women.

In reflecting on ways that institutions could support African-American women, Cherrie talked about job shadowing programs. Cherrie believes that women who want to advance or try different career paths could benefit from these types of programs. Cherrie stated:

people want promotion and advancement, and they may not have all of the qualifications it would be really a good program to match some of your shining stars to people that they could maybe shadow for those areas that they may need some work on being able to have someone to kind of help you along is a great way of helping people to advance.

Cherrie's example gives women an opportunity and ability to advance if they so desire.

Following that same line of thinking, Channel also felt that institutions could do a better job supporting African-American women. Channel thought that the support should begin at the very beginning of employment during the onboarding process as well as a leadership development tracking program. She believed that this would increase African-American women's opportunities to advance. Similar to Channel's idea Kai also believes that institutions should look at professional development programs, but that they should look at their organization as well. Kai stated, "*Institutions should really take the time to look at organizational structure, organizational culture, policies, procedures, and so*

forth, that are oppressive but also reinforce various environments that are not inclusive or supportive, or can be toxic to Black women.” Kai’s statement calls for action from institutions to reevaluate what they are currently doing to recognize growth opportunities. Kimberly also felt that institutions should reevaluate what they are doing and stated that institutions should:

actually, execute the programs that they have talked about and support these groups on campus by being more intentional with the data and information that they gather to help to make women, Black women in particular feel more included on campus.

Kimberly’s statement indicates that institutions have good programs but the programs have not been implemented, and if implemented it could be beneficial to Black women.

Marlana felt that institutions could do more to support Black women but it should be based on what is needed. Her idea included a physical space, where groups could gather to have meetings or talk to one another for additional support. Marlana also suggested that institutions need to create space and creating space would be defined as having some regular ongoing space, physical place, event programming something for people to participate in. Marlana stated:

I do think institutionally, there should be some support, whatever that looks like needed, even if it's just a place where people could seek funding. If there's a place that people could physically meet that removes barriers and stress and attention to those that's my thoughts, so it will be whether there's a space that groups could

sign up to use to have meetings or to talk, or to me. that removes the barrier to stress.

Marlana's perspective points out that there is a lack of spaces, safe spaces for African American women to deal with stress, find support, and overall things dedicated to their needs.

Sage's biggest concern with institutions was holding them accountable for their words and their statements. If they were committed to something then have the institutions follow through on those commitments, which included understanding who their employees were and meeting their needs. Sage suggested that institutions need to address the concerns of African-American females as follows:

Recognition is genuine recognition, which means you would have to get to know them. You would have to get a know us. You also need to understand what we're doing. I heard someone say their supervisor has been their surprise for 7 years and doesn't know what they do. That's a problem. And then accountability. Accountability is a big one. I see a lot of people not doing their jobs that make way more money than me. I'm filling in for them fixing their mistakes because I'm part of the process, and I don't want it to look bad on me, because I'm the next person in line ...follow the DEI practices and the plan we've spent so much time creating.

Sage's perspective observed institutions having a lack of recognition for African-American women and a lack of accountability for those who hold supervisory roles. Furthermore, Sage's statement signaled that there is a lack of commitment to DEI

practices, similar to the findings that I discussed in Chapter Two. Institutions have DEI practices but they have yet to either implement them or follow them. Kimberly also had a similar viewpoint regarding policies she stated:

I think like, there's a lot of conversation about supporting these groups on campus. Right? And so, if the conversation just stays in the room and nothing elevates and nothing happens. then it doesn't make people want to participate in those conversations. Right? So, I think that institutions can take it a step further like, yes, it's great to have these committees in these workshops and these initiatives and these strategic plans that have all these great buzzwords. But if you're not going to elevate it and actually execute it, it's just kind of lost.

Kimberly's viewpoint indicates that she has seen or experienced institutions having policies or conversations about DEI but they have failed at implementation and being committed to those policies. A lack of commitment in her perspective does not make people want to continue to be a part of those conversations, because they have a lack of faith that anything will come from it. Both Stacey and Melissa also expressed that institutions should have solid plans and enforce those plans.

Having worked at three PWIs and one considered a Big Ten university Claire has had a variety of different experiences. Her observations are comparable to all of the women. She stated that:

In order for institutions to thrive they must advocate, and they must do what's necessary to keep those folks Black and female so that the institution can be at its top because clearly if you don't have them at the table in terms of decisions with

thoughts you're not going to come up with the best and the most thought-out opportunities and outcomes. And so, institutions need to make sure that they can tap into individuals early on, grab them, and make sure that they are supporting them so they can be then part of the overall systems and that they are being retained.

Claire was very clear and concise on what institutions should do to retain African-American women, and that was to be an advocate for them support them through their career journey, and keep them at the table which means listening to them. Furthermore, Claire's statement indicated that this should be done early on so as not to lose the women but as an additional way to retain them.

Overall, all the women who participated in my research study expressed the need and the value of institutions supporting Black women when it pertains to their career advancement. Either by job shadowing programs, looking at them for new opportunities that may arise where they could be trained instead of looking at outside candidates or simply being committed to the DEI policies that they have put in place. The women urged for action, acknowledgment, and recognition.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study aimed to explore and investigate the lived experiences of African-American women who have sought and continue to seek career advancement at a PWI in the Midwest. The goal of the study was to clearly understand what the lived experiences of the study participants looked like from their perspectives. Utilizing a phenomenological approach, I collected data that used a qualitative methodology that included two virtual focus groups with seven women and 14 one-on-one virtual interviews all of which employed open-ended semi-structured questions. I then analyzed the data inductively using a multi-step coding process. This chapter will summarize the emergent themes identified, the implications of the findings, limitations, directions for future research, and conclusions.

The results and conclusions are presented as they relate to Black Feminist Thought (BFT) and Critical Race Theory (CRT). BFT concentrates on the viewpoints and perspectives of Black women and also acknowledges that African-American women as a group have experiences and perspectives that are different from those in the world who are not Black and female. Whereas CRT allows counter-storytelling to be used to analyze the climate in higher education that the women have experienced and ultimately assists the study participants in using their voices to tell their narratives, which includes their experiences as a marginalized community at a PWI. The summary will be organized by the six emergent themes developed from the data.

Summary and Implications of Findings

Theme One-Working Harder and Doing More

Throughout the virtual one-on-one interviews and focus groups, it was made very clear to me as the researcher, that the women believed that they had to work harder and do more work than their White counterparts to be recognized, acknowledged, or considered for a promotion or advancement. This sentiment was heard at various times throughout the process of the interviews. Working harder and doing more meant that the women felt they had to do more work than others which meant oftentimes they would take on additional responsibilities without additional pay. It also meant that there were no opportunities for women to make a mistake. The women felt that if a mistake were made they would not have been given grace like some of their White counterparts could receive. The stories presented to me gave a clear picture that the women were not being treated fairly and this caused them to be frustrated across the board. Although the stories were all different, the end of their story was the same. They felt they had to do more to be successful, to get ahead. The frustration felt also made the women more resilient in their efforts, their efforts to be successful, and their efforts to show their worth and their talent.

Theme one is directly related to the literature findings on racism and sexism. As I discussed in Chapter Two the literature revealed that African-American women felt that there were issues and experiences of racism and sexism and cited that as a reason for their struggles with their advancement according to Ramey (1995). The term racism is defined as a form of bias or preconception that members of a particular racial group have unique and distinctive characteristics and that these differences cause members of that specific

racial group to be classified as inferior to others as defined by the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2023). Racism can result in people being treated differently, directly or indirectly, based on others' assumptions and feelings. Similar to racism, sexism is a system of cultural beliefs that one sex is inferior to the other; therefore, the other sex is considered both more valuable and exceptional as described by Ramey (1995). Similarly working harder and having to do more work because you are Black and or a woman or both is a form of racism and sexism. There were at least 10 women that I interviewed who specifically stated that they had experienced some form of racism and sexism during their time at a PWI. The women expressed that while doing more work and working harder felt as though it was because they identified as African-American or a woman or the combination of the two.

Theme Two- Lack of Acknowledgment and Overlooked

The second theme in my findings was the lack of acknowledgment and being overlooked. This theme indicates that African-American women from this study believed they were not properly acknowledged and were often overlooked when it came to promotions and advancement. In some cases, being overlooked could have happened because the women did not overly express that they wanted, desired, or were interested in promotional opportunities. The women expressed that they were often not acknowledged for work performed beyond the general scope of their regular job duties. The lack of acknowledgment painted a clear picture of women feeling abused and taken advantage of, and a lack of consideration from their supervisors. Over time these types of feelings could lead to the women feeling stressed, unappreciated, depressed, and hopeless. When

listening to the stories that were shared with me, the women were very expressive about their feelings and how working in this type of environment affects them in their personal lives and professional lives.

Furthermore, the lack of acknowledgment may have occurred because of a lack of compassion or the fact that others often took for granted the work that the women performed. Another viewpoint of why the African-American women may have experienced being overlooked and unacknowledged could be they were not using their voices to speak up and say what they were feeling and doing. During the interview process, the women often spoke of not being able to speak up because of the fear of how they would be perceived (i.e. aggressive, defensive, or angry Black women). I believe the fear of perception was also a contributing factor to their lack of acknowledgment and being overlooked. If they were brave enough to speak up without fear then maybe they could have spoken up and been acknowledged.

Theme two is directly related to the literature findings on racism and sexism. First, racism can result in people being treated differently, directly or indirectly, based on others' assumptions and feelings as summarized by Ramey (1995). Similar to racism, sexism is a system of cultural beliefs that one sex is inferior to the other; therefore, the other sex is considered both more valuable and exceptional as Ramey (1995) described and discussed in Chapter Two.

After reviewing the data and learning that the women felt overlooked, and not even considered they often believed that it was in fact because they were African-American and a woman. Furthermore, many of the women felt the lack of

acknowledgment came from being in a male-dominated industry which can be considered as sexism. Over and over again during the interview process, the women would describe how they would alter their persona because of their feelings and experiences of sexism and racism. Being treated differently based on your race and or gender is a form of racism and sexism. The act of lack of acknowledgment and being overlooked due to race or gender is what the women in this study described in detail during the interviews.

Theme Three- Lack of Transparency to Be Authentic Self

The third emergent theme that I uncovered was the lack of transparency in being your authentic self. Theme three means that the women talked about having to tone down their approach in conversations, showing up to meetings in ways to make others comfortable, not being able to express their passion without being judged or being called the angry Black woman, defensive or challenging. The women I interviewed explained that while their White counterparts were afforded to display their passion they were often criticized and judged. It is my opinion that the women wanted to be successful in their career endeavors and felt and or believed that the only way to make that happen was to change how they would show up at their current institution. From their responses and lived experiences, they had to tone down their passion, they had to rephrase words and their thoughts when in meetings to be heard and not judged negatively.

As I reflect on this theme, it is disheartening that a woman would have to silence her thoughts for fear of being thought of as angry, defensive, challenging, or not easy to work with. It is very discouraging to me as a professional to see other women suffering in silence when they are talented and have thoughts, ideas, and opinions that could make an

impact. It makes me wonder will the biases ever end. To hear the women, talk about changing who they are to gain respect and to be present in a room, reminded me of how African-Americans were treated during slavery time. During that time African-Americans were treated like they were not an American citizen.

Theme three is not directly related to the literature findings. It does not have any implications for lack of commitment to diversity or lack of support and mentoring it is however slightly connected to the findings of racism and sexism. Again, as discussed in Chapter Two Ramey (1995) summarized that racism and sexism are based on being treated differently built solely on your race and gender, and the theme of lack of transparency to being authentic self is centered on the women trying to avoid being judged on their race and gender. The women have developed tactics and strategies to try to avoid the experiences of racism and sexism. However, the women in my study were continuing to develop ways to handle how to be their authentic selves and be accepted.

Theme Four- Lack of Respect

Theme four is a lack of respect toward African-American women who are in professional spaces at a PWI. The lack of respect as a theme is meant to understand how the women in this study felt they were treated with respect or a lack thereof by their counterparts at a PWI. The women revealed that their lived experiences included their counterparts not believing that they could hold more senior-level positions, not accepting that they had or posed an authoritative role at their institution, challenging their presence or existence at meetings, and misinterpreting their comments intentionally.

The theme of lack of respect means that African-American women's counterparts have not fully accepted them in their roles. It means that their counterparts often challenged them or questioned them in all aspects of their position duties and responsibilities. One reason this may be happening is because their counterparts are unfamiliar with working with diverse groups of people and lack the experience of working with people from diverse backgrounds.

Theme four can be indirectly related to the findings from the literature on institutions having a lack of commitment to diversity. The research revealed that although most institutions have policies and procedures focused on diversity equity and inclusion they fail to enforce them or ensure that proper procedures have taken place. Furthermore, the literature that I reviewed and discussed in Chapter Two, criticized institutions for not creating an environment where marginalized employees were retained, especially African-American women as outlined by Davis (2009). Part of this issue includes how to work with and respect people from diverse backgrounds. The lack of commitment to DEI also continues to create barriers for African-American women to be successful in advancement at PWIs. The more that institutions embrace having a diverse workforce, the more people have the experience and opportunity to work with people who are not like them. This diverse workforce creates a culture that can understand African-American women, which in turn can increase the opportunity to respect them when they arrive in different spaces.

Theme Five- Utilization of Support Systems

Using a support system is theme five in my research. Every woman who participated in my research stated that they used a support system to help them navigate their career path at a PWI. The women had many types of support systems, that ranged from co-workers, sorority sisters, family members, friends, church members, executives, and subordinates, including people from outside of higher education and God. The women felt very strongly that they leaned on these support systems, sought advice and guidance when times were hard and good, learned from them, and respected them. Their support system was there no matter what and showed up for a variety of events and never judged them. All of the women in this study highly recommend creating a system to help in navigating the career journey and getting to the next level of career attainment.

Understanding that working in a space that may be uncomfortable, that may not be diverse and accepting of African-American women and how to handle and maneuver through tough situations were a few of the reasons the women used support systems. Additionally, it was a good way to have people in their corner who understood what they wanted and what they may or may not have been experiencing.

The use of support systems directly relates to the literature findings on the lack of mentoring and support for African-American women. Davis (2009) stated that one barrier to the success of African-American women is not acquiring a mentor. The women in my study all used a support system that contained a mentor. Not only did the women in my research study have mentors and a support system, but the women used them to the best of their abilities. They are often seeking career advice, how to understand the issues they

were faced with, networking opportunities, and other topics not directly related to their career advancement. As stated in Chapter Two research has proven that mentoring has been extensively utilized and exercised throughout many organizations as a respected and valuable tool for retaining and promoting employees and being beneficial as an avenue to career success.

Furthermore, researcher Davis (2009) stated that “it is believed that African American women who have a mentor are more likely to be promoted” (Davis, 2009, p. 55). While all the women in my study expressed the desire to be promoted and advance I can truly say that they are on the right path to their goals by having and using their support system that contains a mentor.

Theme Six- The Need to Increase Support

Throughout the interviews, many of the women expressed the need for institutions to have programs that would assist them in achieving their goals. They talked about the need for leadership development programs, embracing job shadowing opportunities that would allow women to shadow others in positions that they hoped to obtain one day, become advocates for African-American women, support, implement, and enforce DEI practices and policies, and developing programs that would support African-American women's career trajectory and ultimately retain them instead of losing them.

The women in my study expressed that institutions often would not look at the potential or the talent that they had in-house but instead would seek talent from outside of the institution ultimately overlooking and not considering the good candidates internally. Moreover, the women felt that if the institutions had professional development programs

many African-American women could be retained and have the ability and opportunity to advance their careers at these institutions. Theme six also supports these women's opinions that institutions are lacking in the support of assisting African-American women in their career advancement opportunities, and again being overlooked for promotions.

One reason this situation may be happening is that not enough women are speaking up and telling their stories. If the women who are having these experiences are not telling their stories then there can be no actional items to happen. Another reason it is happening is because leadership has yet to acknowledge that there is something wrong with the system at hand. Theme six is related to the literature that revealed that institutions are lacking in their commitment to diversity equity and inclusion policies. In Chapter Two I discussed the literature surrounding this topic that although most institutions have policies and procedures focused on diversity equity and inclusion they lack to enforce them or ensure that proper procedures have taken place. Furthermore, Davis (2009), criticized institutions for not creating an environment where marginalized employees were retained, especially African-American women. Additionally, the research revealed that overall research participants were not impressed nor did they believe that their institutions were committed to diversity and that their efforts were lackluster as summarized by Davis and Maldonado (2015). That exact sentiment was also expressed by the women who participated in my research study. There needs to be a change and the change must start at the top and work its way down.

Limitations

During this study, I have identified two limitations that stood out as I analyzed the data. I designed this study to allow African-American women to have a platform to talk about their lived experiences as they sought and continue to seek career advancement and opportunities at PWI. During the interviews, many women discussed the stereotype of the Angry Black Woman. Perry (2021) stated that this “stereotype seeks to restrain their expression of anger by negatively labeling it as ill-tempered, hostile or overly aggressive” (p. 12). As I interviewed the women many used the term Angry Black Woman as they believed many of their colleagues pictured or perceived them as that. However, the women did not say that being perceived as angry Black women was a reason behind their lack of advancement or promotion at a PWI. I, as the researcher, could have explored this topic of the Angry Black Woman further to investigate if the women who mentioned it felt or believed this was a reason behind not gaining advancement at a PWI.

The second limitation that could have been addressed was pay disparities. There were quite a few women I interviewed who talked about how there were instances of pay disparities that they experienced directly or indirectly. Kochhar (2023) described pay disparities as “the difference between the earnings of men and women” (para. 1). Furthermore, Kochhar (2023) stated that pay disparities have seen little movement over the last two decades. The women who were interviewed talked about holding similar roles to their White counterparts but often did not have similar salaries, and were paid much less. The subject of pay disparities could have also been discussed further to

understand if it was related to their career advancement at a PWI. Questioning exactly how the topic of pay disparities affected them as they sought career advancement.

Directions for Future Research

This study was envisioned to gain the perspectives and viewpoints of African-American women who sought career advancement at a PWI in the Midwest. It was not intended to be used for generalization purposes across the population of all African-American women who worked at a PWI. It was, however, planned to assist other scholars who may in the future look at similar questions and who may use similar theoretical methodologies. The objective of this study was to explore, examine, and understand the lived experiences of African-American women who sought career advancement at a PWI in the Midwest. Additional studies that examine the same population and subject should address whether or not to include women of color. Looking at all marginalized populations could allow for a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. Allowing other marginalized populations to participate would expand the phenomenon to gauge if African-American women are being isolated or if all marginalized populations are having the same experiences at a PWI.

However, expanding the population would also call for a different methodology. I would suggest that a mixed-method approach be taken, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine the phenomenon. I would first create a survey that spans not only the Midwest but the entire United States and then select at least 10 women to participate in a virtual one-on-one interview from those responses. By expanding my research to additional areas outside the Midwest, I would get a bigger picture of whether

the phenomenon is only happening in the Midwest or if it is happening at other PWIs outside of the Midwest.

The other area for future research would be to examine a predetermined number of African-American women who were interested in advancement at a PWI either in the Midwest or the United States and follow them through their process of searching for advancement over a longer period. Participants in the study were at various points in their career and their career advancement journey. Completing a longitudinal study over multiple months or years could assist researchers in gaining a better understanding of how African-American women are experiencing the entire process. A longitudinal study could also assist in addressing issues of equity and inclusion to improve opportunities for women of color at predominately White institutions.

Finally, I would recommend investigating how working at PWI affects the mental well-being of African-American women who struggle with career advancement. I would suggest looking at how it affects them both personally and professionally to be treated differently from your colleagues. I would suggest looking at the factors that play a significant role in how they function and how they handle stressful situations both at home and at work and if they are directly tied to their career advancement.

Conclusions

This study described the lived experiences of 21 African-American women who sought and continue to seek career advancement opportunities at a PWI in the Midwest. Examining the experiences and factors that played a part in their success or lack thereof in advancing informs university and college leaders of the importance of understanding

the experiences that the women who participated in this study have stated impacted their careers at various institutions. Through my research, it became obvious to me that African-American women were struggling to gain advancement opportunities at a PWI. Researchers, Gamble and Turner (2015) stated that the very organizations that should be best equipped and willing to meet the challenge of diversity, colleges, and universities, seem least able to rise to the occasion.

For the participants in this study, it was evident that they believed they had the skills, talent, education, and abilities to advance at PWI. It was also evident that the participants believed that although they had everything needed to advance at a PWI, those institutions were not ready for them to advance nor did they present themselves as ready to do what is needed to assist the women in advancing.

The findings suggested that African-American women have resilience, they do not give up, they are talented and know their worth and they continue to seek career advancement no matter how many doors are shut to them. The women were very confident that they had the skills and talents needed, but it was the institutions that lacked the consideration of them for open opportunities. African-American women continue to use a support system to help them navigate their journey in academia.

Based on the findings, for institutions that are truly committed to supporting African-American women, I have the following recommendations. First, develop a plan that will support all rhetoric, goals, and policies that are focused on Diversity Equity, and Inclusion. Create a plan that begins at the time of onboarding and follow each person as they develop in their role including monitoring their performance reviews. Create

opportunities for African-American women to explore and investigate other career paths within the institution. One last recommendation would be to listen to the women and take them seriously if they bring attention to being treated differently or unfairly in any way. Creating a safe space for open dialogue and working together with them could potentially create a more equitable space for everyone.

APPENDIX A
IRB APPROVAL INFO



Institutional Review Board

Date: June 19, 2023

Study #: IRB-FY2023-300

Study Title: Hidden Leaders

Submission Type: Initial

IRB Decision: Exempt

Research Team:

Theawiana Bracewell

Julia Smith

Based on applicable federal regulations, the above referenced study has been determined to be Exempt, with the following categories:

Category 2.(ii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation; or

Letter and Consent Document:

This letter along with the IRB approved (date-stamped) consent document can be found in Cayuse in the Submission Details page under Letters and Attachments, respectively. Please make sure to use the most recent IRB approved version of the consent form in consenting participants.

Permission from Research Sites:

Please note the following:

- This IRB exemption determination letter means that this research has met one or more of the federal criteria for exemption per 45 CFR 46.104- Exempt Research.
- Before the research is initiated, permission to conduct research at a given site must be obtained from all research locations listed in the IRB submission. You must keep copies of all such permission letters for your files.
- It is the responsibility of each researcher to follow all applicable policies and procedures of any outside institution where the research will be conducted.

APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT

INFORMATION SHEET

EXEMPT RESEARCH

Hidden Leaders: A Phenomenological Research Study that Examined the Journey of Resilient African American Women Who Pursued and Continue to Pursue Advancement at a PWI

Introduction

You are being asked to be in a research study that is being done by Theawiana (Theo) Bracewell under the direction of Dr. Julia Smith, Professor, Organizational Leadership in the School of Education and Human Services, the faculty advisor for this project.

Your decision to participate in this study is voluntary. You can choose to stop your participation at any time or skip any part of the study if you are not comfortable. Your decision will not affect your present or future relationship with Oakland University, the researcher, the department of Organizational Leadership. If you are a student or employee at Oakland University, your decision about participation will not affect your grades or employment status.

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this research study is to gain a richer understanding of the experiences of African American women who pursue career advancement at predominately White institutions (PWI), and what specific factors attribute to their ability to successfully or unsuccessfully advance their career at a PWI.

Who can participate in this study?

You are being asked to participate in the study because you identify as an African-American woman who has sought career advancement at a PWI.

What do I have to do?

You will be asked to complete a preliminary online survey of demographic information that should take less than 10 minutes.

Then you will be asked if you are willing to be in either a one-on-one interview or focus group with 2-3 additional African American women each lasting at least 1 hour or less via the Zoom platform and recorded. If you opt to participate, you will be asked to provide contact information and complete an online pre-interview survey.

The interviews and focus group recordings are being recorded to ensure accuracy of statements. If you participate in the either the focus group or a one-on-one interview you will be asked to review the transcript from the recording, to ensure that the information is accurate and that there is no information included that could reveal your identity, this process should last no longer than 3 hours.

Where will this study take place?

Participants will be able to complete the online survey at a time and place that you choose. The one-on-one interviews and the focus group will take place online via the Zoom platform.

Are there any risks to me?

For this study, the potential risks are minimal. This study poses no more than minimal risk because it asks participants to talk about their past career experiences and how they may have impacted their lives. As the researcher of this study, every effort will be taken to ensure that all data yielded from this study remains protected and confidential. The recordings will be deleted after you have verified their accuracy and the study is completed.

If you agree to take part in this research study, you will be asked to complete the survey online at a time and place of your choosing. After completing the study, you will be redirected to a SECOND, SEPARATE survey. This survey will ask for your name, email address, your contact information will be used for follow-up participation in either the one-on-one or focus group participation.

Only first names should be used during the interview or focus group. No group member should tell anyone outside the group anything that was said during the group session. However, we cannot guarantee that any information discussed in the group will be kept private.

Are there any benefits to me?

Although there may be no direct benefits to you, however, the results of this study may benefit others in the future.

Will I receive anything for participating?

You will not receive anything for participating in this study.

What if I want to stop participating in this study?

If you want to stop participating in this study, please contact the researcher at tnenglis@oakland.edu. If you want to stop participating, close your browser before clicking 'submit.' If the survey is submitted, it will not be possible to withdraw your data from the study." If you wish to stop your participation after submitting the survey, please contact the researchers.

The researcher may stop your participation in this study at any time without your consent. If the researcher deems you no longer are providing information that is being asked of you, your participation will be stopped and you will be notified via your preferred contact method, the communication method selected by the participant.

Who do I contact if I have questions about this study?

Theawiana (Theo) Bracewell, tnenglis@oakland.edu, 248-420-8133 the student researcher.

Dr. Julia Smith, Professor, Organizational Leadership in the School of Education and Human Services, the faculty advisor for this project. j15smith@oakland.edu, 248-370-3082.

For questions regarding your rights as a participant in human subject research, you may contact the Oakland University Institutional Review Board, 248-370-4898.

APPENDIX C
RECRUITMENT EMAIL

RESEARCH RECRUITMENT SCRIPT/ADVERTISEMENT

I am Theawiana (Theo) Bracewell under the direction of Dr. Julia Smith, Professor in the Organizational Leadership Dept. at Oakland University, the faculty advisor for this project. I am conducting a research study to investigate the lived experiences of African-American women seeking career advancement at PWIs.

I am recruiting individuals who are African American and female and who are currently working at a PWI or who have worked at PWI within the last 5 years and have sought a career advancement at PWI to take a preliminary questionnaire (10 minutes), pre-interview survey (10 minutes), and participate in either a focus group or a one on one interview (1 hour or less) if invited to do so. The research will take approximately 90 days from beginning to end.

Your participation in this study is voluntary.

The research will take place online in a location that you deem appropriate and would provide privacy for answering questions.

If you wish to participate in the study or have any questions about the research. please contact me at tnenglis@oakland.edu or via phone at 248.420.8133 or my faculty adviser Dr. Julia Smith at j15smith@oakland.edu

APPENDIX D
QUESTIONNAIRE

QUESTIONNAIRE

Hidden Leaders: A Phenomenological Research Study that Examined the Journey of Resilient African American Women Who Pursued and Continue to Pursue Advancement at a PWI

Please identify the group (s) you feel closest to your ethnicity (mark as many as applies)

Black/African American

Biracial

Other (please list)

Age in years

Highest Degree Earned

Associate Degree

Bachelor Degree

Coursework beyond Bachelor's but no additional degree earned

Master's Degree

Coursework beyond Masters but no additional degree earned

Post-Masters Certificate

Terminal Degree (EdD, PhD, JD, MD)

Are you currently employed at a Predominately White Institution?

Yes

No

If you answered no to the question above, how long has it been since you worked at a Predominately White Institution?

Number of Years employed in higher education (this includes working at various institutions, but does not include student employment)

Current Position Type

Clerical

Administrative Professional (directors, coordinators etc.)

Academic Administration (Also considered to be a member of faculty)

Executive/Senior Level Leadership (Vice President)

Others not affiliated with Higher Education

Over the past 5 years please select any of the following activities that you have engaged in Please select all that apply at your current/other institution

Statement	Current Institution		Another Institution	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Explored employment opportunities				
Looked for new employment				
Applied for /career advancement/or a promotion				
Interviewed for a new position				
Accepted a new position				

Think about yourself as an African-American woman seeking career advancement in higher education. Mark the response that best describes your response to each statement.

Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I am certain I have the skills and abilities to advance in higher education					
I have been overlooked for positions even though I have the same skills as my White counterparts.					
I have to be overqualified before applying to positions because I identify as African-American					
Continuing my career growth in higher education is important to me					
My chances for a successful career in higher education are based on my highest level of education					
I often hesitate to apply for positions because I am African American or a woman of color					
The hiring process does not support African-American Women					
I believe I have to be					

over-qualified for a position to be considered					
I have been overlooked for positions that I have applied for because I identify as African-American					
There are many opportunities available for me in higher education as an African American woman					
There is still much work to be done to ensure that African-American women are considered for various positions in higher education					

To further explore this topic would you be willing to participate in an interview or focus group?

- Yes, I am willing to participate in a one-on-one interview
- Yes, I am willing to participate in a focus group with 3-4 other women
- I am open to either opportunity
- No, I am not interested in participating in either a one-on-one interview or a focus group
- Please provide your name and contact information

APPENDIX E
PRE-INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Pre-Interview Questions

If you are uninterested in participating in an interview or focus group please close your browser.

Q1 I am willing to participate in the following activity

- ☐ One on One Interview via Zoom (1)
- ☐ Focus Group with 2-3 other women via Zoom (2)

Q2 Please provide your name

Q3 Please provide your contact information

Q4 Tell me about your career path in higher education. How did you start, and how did you get your current position? What are your plans for the future?

Q5 How has your educational background played a role in your advancement?

Q6 How would you describe your experience as it relates to seeking advancement, particularly at a PWI?

APPENDIX F
INTERVIEW/FOCUS GROUP SCRIPT

Interview Script

Hidden Leaders: A Phenomenological Research Study that examines the journal of resilient African American women who pursued and continue to pursue advancement at a PWI (Predominately White Institution)

Introduction

Hello, my name is Theawiana (Theo) Bracewell and I am currently a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership program at Oakland University. I am currently conducting a research study in which I seek to examine the lived experiences of African American women who seek advancement at predominately White institutions (PWI) and what factors influence their pursuit of career advancement. You have been selected to participate in my study based on your answers to the pre-interview survey. Before I begin asking questions regarding my research, I need to ask for your consent.

Introduction

You are being asked to be in a research study that is being done by Theawiana (Theo) Bracewell under the direction of Dr. Julia Smith, Professor, Organizational Leadership in the School of Education and Human Services, the faculty advisor for this project.

Your decision to participate in this study is voluntary. You can choose to stop your participation at any time or skip any part of the study if you are not comfortable. Your decision will not affect your present or future relationship with Oakland University, the researcher, the department of Organizational Leadership. If you are a student or employee at Oakland University, your decision about participation will not affect your grades or employment status.

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this research study is to gain a richer understanding of the experiences of African American women who pursue career advancement at predominately White institutions (PWI), and what specific factors attribute to their ability to successfully or unsuccessfully advance their career at a PWI.

Who can participate in this study?

You are being asked to participate in the study because you identify as an African-American woman who has sought career advancement at a PWI.

What do I have to do?

You will be asked to complete a preliminary online survey of demographic information that should take less than 10 minutes. Then you will be asked if you are willing to be in either a one-on-one interview or focus group with 2-3 additional African American women each lasting at least 1 hour or less via the Zoom platform and recorded. If you opt to participate, you will be asked to provide contact information and complete an online pre-interview survey. The interviews and focus group recordings are being recorded to

ensure accuracy of statements. If you participate in either the focus group or a one-on-one interview you will be asked to review the transcript from the recording, to ensure that the information is accurate and that there is no information included that could reveal your identity, this process should last no longer than 3 hours.

Where will this study take place?

Participants will be able to complete the online survey at a time and place that you choose. The one-on-one interview and the focus group will take place online via the Zoom platform.

Are there any risks to me?

For this study, the potential risks are minimal. This study poses no more than minimal risk because it asks participants to talk about their past career experiences and how they may have impacted their lives. As the researcher of this study, every effort will be taken to ensure that all data yielded from this study remains protected and confidential. The recordings will be deleted after you have verified their accuracy and the study is completed.

If you agree to take part in this research study, you will be asked to complete the survey online at a time and place of your choosing. After completing the study, you will be redirected to a SECOND, SEPARATE survey. This survey will ask for your name, email address, your contact information will be used for follow-up participation in either one-on-one or focus group participation.

Only first names should be used during the interview or focus group. No group member should tell anyone outside the group anything that was said during the group session. However, we cannot guarantee that any information discussed in the group will be kept private.

Are there any benefits to me?

Although there may be no direct benefits to you, however, the results of this study may benefit others in the future.

Will I receive anything for participating?

You will not receive anything for participating in this study.

What if I want to stop participating in this study?

If you want to stop participating in this study, please contact the researcher at tnenglis@oakland.edu. If you want to stop participating, close your browser before clicking 'submit.' If the survey is submitted, it will not be possible to withdraw your data from the study." If you wish to stop your participation after submitting the survey, please contact the researchers.

The researcher may stop your participation in this study at any time without your consent. If the researcher deems you no longer are providing information that is being asked of you, your participation will be stopped and you will be notified via your preferred contact method, the communication method selected by the participant.

Who do I contact if I have questions about this study?

Theawiana (Theo) Bracewell, tnenglis@oakland.edu, 248-420-8133 the student researcher.

Dr. Julia Smith, Professor, Organizational Leadership in the School of Education and Human Services, the faculty advisor for this project. j15smith@oakland.edu, 248-370-3082.

For questions regarding your rights as a participant in human subject research, you may contact the Oakland University Institutional Review Board, 248-370-4898.

Consent Statement for Voluntary Participation

This statement is intended to establish voluntary consent for participation in a study being conducted by me, Theawiana (Theo) Bracewell, a doctoral candidate under the direction of Dr. Julia Smith in the department of Educational Leadership in the School of Education and Human Services at Oakland University. The purpose of this study is to gain a richer understanding of the experiences of African American women who pursue career advancement at predominately White institutions (PWI), and what specific factors attribute to their ability to successfully or unsuccessfully advance their career at a PWI. Participation in this study will require completion of a pre-interview survey, which you have already completed. An initial interview, and or participation in a focus group interview that will consist of 2-3 African American women. The length of the interviews may vary and will be scheduled at your convenience and not to exceed 1 hour. All information gathered from this project will be held in the strictest confidence and will only be seen by the researcher and her dissertation committee. The records of this study will be kept private. Any kind of report made public will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be kept in a locked file. Agreeing to allow the use of information for the purpose of completing this research project is completely voluntary. Participants may choose to withdraw from participation at any time. If you have questions about this project, please contact Theawiana (Theo) Bracewell at tnenglis@oakland.edu

At this time, if you agree to the conditions of the interview/focus group please state your first and last name and that you consent to participate in this research study.

Pause and let each person consent to the interview process

Now that I have your consent, thank you for your willingness to participate in my research. To get started I would like to take a few moments for you to introduce yourself to the others that are on the call and please be reminded that the information in this session is strictly confidential.

Before we begin with the main questions let's start by getting to know each other. If you don't mind please share your first name only and what type of position you hold or held

in higher education and how long have you have been in your current position. Name one of your goals for your future as it relates to your career in higher education? What motivates you?

Pause to allow introductions if conducting a focus group

Thank you for sharing that information with me/group. Now for the questions for why we are here today.

During the Interview and focus group the following questions will be asked:

4. How would you describe your lived experiences at a PWI?
5. Tell me about your experiences being both female and Black at a PWI.
 - a. If there were any issues how would you categorize them?
 - b. Are there instances where you saw disparities among yourself or your peers?
 - c. Did you have a support system that you used? What did that support system look like?
 - d. Do you have any recommendations for institutions?
 - e. Do you have any recommendations for women who will one day be in your shoes?
6. Would you like to share any additional information regarding your lived experiences at a PWI? How about your career path and how you got to where you are today?

Thank you for your time and participation today. I appreciate you being open and honest with me and sharing your story. I will review the transcript from today's interview and I will be sending it to you via email for your review. I ask that you take some time to review it make corrections to your portion as you see fit and return it to me.

If you have any questions or concerns don't hesitate to let me know so that I may address them accordingly.

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