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WOMEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION ADMINISTRATIVE ROLES**

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THE ROLE OF MENTORSHIP IN THE ADVANCEMENT OF BLACK WOMEN IN
HIGHER EDUCATION ADMINISTRATIVE ROLES

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

to the faculty of the

DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATIVE AND INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

of

THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

at

ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY

New York

by

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Date Submitted November 10, 2022

Date Approved January 23, 2022

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ABSTRACT

THE ROLE OF MENTORSHIP IN THE ADVANCEMENT OF BLACK WOMEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION ADMINISTRATIVE ROLES

Kimberly Colclough

Literature has suggested that mentorship is one of the most influential components of career advancement. However, for Black women in higher education administrative roles, mentorship also serves to garner community and support. This research study focuses on the lived experiences of Black women administrators in higher education institutions, the obstacles they face in pursuit of support and career advancement, and how they benefited from a relationship with a mentor. This descriptive phenomenological qualitative study was implemented by conducting in-depth interviews with a small sample of (6) six African American women administrators from various higher education institutions located in the Northeast, West Coast, and Midwest regions of the United States.

This phenomenological qualitative study was conducted to understand and describe the lived experiences mentorship for a select group of Black women leaders in higher education, using Black feminist thought as the theoretical framework. A purposive sample of six Black women leaders in higher education participated in in-depth interviews that were video recorded through Cisco Webex. The collected data were transcribed and used to construct seven major themes and through the processes of using initial coding, in vivo coding, and descriptive coding. The major themes included the mentor's contributions, organic connections, relational experiences, and dual role. The findings from this study

indicate that for this select group of Black women mentorship played a pivotal role in the advancement of their professional and leadership development, but not without challenges.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my mother, Mrs. Beverly Colclough you are the strongest and most resilient woman that I have ever known. You have always loved, supported, and encouraged me to persevere even in the face of adversity. I love you and I am proud to be your daughter.

To my late father, Mr. Michael Colclough, you are missed! May you continue to rest in peace.

To my late grandmother, Mrs. Maggie L. Simmons aka “Nana”, you were the epitome of strength, courage, and wisdom. I thank you for all that you instilled in me, your legacy lives on and I know that you would be extremely proud of me. I love you and I am proud to be your granddaughter.

To my late Uncle, Larry Humphreys aka “Uncle Bubo”, thank you for love and support throughout my childhood. Your memory lives on, and you are missed.

To my sister, Adriane Yvonne Colclough, thank you for your unending support. I may not always verbally acknowledge it, but I appreciate you more than you know. I love you and thanks for being my big sister.

To my nieces and nephew, Jasmine, Justine, and Jayson, I hope that you all continue to reach for the stars and pursue your heart’s desire. The world is yours! I love you all.

Last, but certainly not least to my son, Kevin. Thank you for understanding the many sacrifices that were made throughout this journey. I could not have done this without your love, support, daily encouragement, and of course our good laughs. You make me proud daily. It is an honor to be your mother. I love you!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to first acknowledge God, for without your grace and mercy I would not be in any sense and on any level, you are my strength and everything that I am. Thank you to my ancestors who were slaves and not given the opportunities to educate themselves, this is for you! Thank you for your courage, if not for you, where would I be? To the Black women in higher education who blazed the trail before me, I say thank you! To Dr. Patricia Hill Collins, author and scholar and thank you for creating a blueprint for empowering Black women, through your research and writings on Black feminist thought, you are appreciated!

To my 3-bar crew- Dr. Gil, Dr. Sanchez-Guzman, and Dr. Robinson thank you for ALWAYS being a source of support and encouragement throughout my journey. I appreciate you and your friendship! To my SJU- BMCC cohort members, it has been such a memorable journey with you all. You all have made this experience a memorable one and I thank and appreciate you all so much. I truly wish you all continued success! To my friends, family, and colleagues, thank you for your encouragement and support throughout my journey. To Sista friend, Sasha, your unwavering support, encouragement, and prayers throughout my journey have meant the world to me. Thank you for being the epitome of a friend. I look forward to calling you “Dr. Sasha Bent” in due time.

To Dr. Veronie Lawrence aka “Dr. Vee”, thank you, thank you, thank you! Your support and reassurance throughout my educational journey have given me the opportunity to grow as both a scholar, and a Black woman. You have been a blessing to me, and I want you to know how much I appreciate you. I did it!

A huge thank you to my doctoral committee whose insight helped to enrich my study, Dr. James Coviello, Dr. Catherine DiMartino, and Dr. Ceceilia Parnter. Dr. Coviello, as my chair, your guidance, structure, flexibility, and expeditious feedback really helped me gain the perspective I needed to meet my goals and complete this journey. To my six amazing, brilliant, brave, and resilient participants, thank you for your time, openness, vulnerability and for sharing your stories I am grateful for the opportunity to gift your inspiring voices through this research, to know you and to share our common bond. To all the other Black women who came before me, whose shoulders I not only stand on, but that hold me up every day, I am thankful and grateful.

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CHAPTER 1

Mentoring relationships involve rich interpersonal interactions guided by someone (i.e., a mentor) who is usually in a position of power and wisdom and can effectively guide the path of a person (i.e., a mentee) seeking growth and learning opportunities (Humberd & Rouse, 2016; Kutchner & Kleschick, 2016). Although it does not guarantee success, promotion, or progression, there is strong evidence supporting mentorship as an essential component for an individual's growth and development, especially when mentors and mentees are matched on similar characteristics, such as race and gender (Gardner et al., 2014; Kutchner & Kleschick, 2016). However, according to Beckwith et al. (2016), Black women seeking leadership positions often lack influential mentors based on similarities such as race and gender, which contributes to the shortage of Black women in executive positions, particularly in higher education.

As stated by Johnson and Ridley (2018), mentoring correlates with many personal and career outcomes, such as promotions, increased salaries, upward mobility, enhanced professionalism, increased job satisfaction, peer acceptance, reduced work anxiety, lower turnover rates, improved creativity, and healthier collaborative efforts; these advantages are beneficial for mentees, mentors, and organizations. Although it does not guarantee success, promotion, or progression, the evidence supporting mentorship has been cited as an essential component for an individual's growth and development, especially when mentors and mentees are matched on similar characteristics, such as race and gender (Gardner et al., 2014; Kutchner & Kleschick, 2016).

Additionally, mentoring relationships have been a vital component of many women's professional career advancement and have received a great deal of attention in

the research field, especially for those who have been able to secure a mentor based on similarities, such as race and gender (Searby et al., 2015). According to Hague and Okpala (2017), it is beneficial for Black women to identify prospective mentors as those who currently serve or have served as higher education administrators. The shortage of mentoring has been cited as a crucial reason for women's lack of advancement in leadership (Beckwith et al., 2016; Bynum, 2015; Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Dunn et al., 2014). It is important to examine the role of mentorship in the advancement of Black women higher education administrative roles to understand these relationships and their impact on the mentees better.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand and describe the role of mentorship in the advancement for a select group of Black women leaders in higher education. Black women who have been able to reach an administrative position in higher education leadership and have utilized mentorship and have valuable insight for other aspiring Black women leaders in higher education who are possibly faced with similar challenges. Black feminist thought was used to frame my inquiry by examining the lived experiences of Black women leaders in higher education and the role of mentorship in navigating the challenges and barriers that are associated with being a Black woman within the academy.

Theoretical Framework

The primary theory that guided this research is that of Patricia Hill Collins "Black Feminist Thought" (Collins, 1990). This theory is of relevance to the subject because of Collins' outline of the specific way in which Black women in academic spaces have been

marginalized. Howard-Hamilton (2003) argued that finding and applying appropriate theoretical frameworks for African American women is challenging because many theories are general and do not consider multiple identities and roles.

Black feminist thought is a standpoint grounded in the experiences of Black women's everyday struggles (Alinia, 2015). According to Alinia (2015), Black feminist thought exposes the way that domination is organized and operates in various domains of power. It also shows the path of struggle and to empowerment, while at the same time highlighting the challenges and difficulties in combating intersecting oppression, since the multi-positionality of social agents, on the one hand, and the simultaneity of multiple and intersecting sites of oppression, on the other, make the relationship between domination and resistance highly complex (Alinia, 2015). An assortment of embarrassments and humiliations Black women face has been examined in the context of higher education (Grant & Ghee, 2015). Therefore, Black feminist thought is relevant to the examination of Black women leaders in higher education and the role of mentorship in the advancement of Black women in administrative roles.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is to advance the existing body of knowledge in the field of education on cultural and diversity issues, and career advancement for Black women in the academy. Previous research has demonstrated these issues are problematic for Black faculty (Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003); however, minimal research has focused solely on the role of mentorship for Black women as it relates to the advancement of their careers, as well as the struggle that Black women administrators face as professionals in higher education institutions.

The literature suggests that in studying the experiences of women of color in high-ranking positions in the academy, it is essential to understand the roles of gender bias and the prominence of racism. Women within higher education personnel are categorized in two components: 1) being competent, meaning they possess masculinity, or 2) too feminine, which creates a larger need to reevaluate the oppressed structure within higher education (De Welde, 2017).

Black women have created a presence in higher education (Penny & Gaillard, 2006), but there continues to be a small representation of Black women leaders in higher education (Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Jordon, 2014; Miles, 2012; Wright & Salinas, 2017) compared to White men and women and Black men. Much of the more current research addresses significant barriers, such as the lack of mentorship based on gender and race faced by Black women leaders in higher education, as well as successful strategies, such as leadership programs, employed by Black women in higher education leadership (Beckwith et al., 2016; Davis, 2009; Gardner et al., 2014; Lim et al., 2015). However, there is a lack of research exploring the role of mentorship in the advancement of the careers of Black women in higher education administrative leadership roles.

Connection with Social Justice and/or Vincentian Mission in Education

In keeping with St. John's University's mission to "provide excellent education for all people" this research will contribute to the pathways that are needed to increase the representation of Black women in higher education (St. John's University Vincentian Mission, 2022). This research will also provide higher education institutions with the research-based steps that can be utilized to increase retention among Black women

administrators as well as increased awareness during their hiring practices, thereby supporting students from diverse backgrounds and perspectives.

Research Design

The methodology for this research was driven by the purpose of the study and the research question. There are various research methods, and each has a different approach to the collection and analysis of empirical evidence (Yin, 2013). A quantitative research method is used by researchers examining the numerical interpretation and manipulation of observations for describing and explaining phenomena. The goal of quantitative research is to determine the relationship between an independent variable and a dependent variable in a population. Quantitative research designs are either descriptive (determines relationships between variables) or experimental (determines causality). Quantitative researchers use empirical and descriptive statements or definite statements to explain what is occurring in real-life situations. Mixed-methods research involves a purposeful mixing of methods in data collection, data analysis, and interpretation. The use of mixed methods expands the understanding of the connections and the contradictions between the qualitative and quantitative data. This methodology is useful when a researcher is trying to obtain quantitative results and qualitative conclusions. However, applying mixed methods to a smaller scale study, such as this one, can add to the complexity of conducting research and require more resources.

Qualitative research is used to examine the meaning behind a phenomenon; qualitative researchers focus on the events that transpire and on outcomes of those events from the perspectives of those involved (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Qualitative researchers study items in their natural settings—the environment or setting where

individuals experience the phenomena under study. Qualitative research is conducted to provide complex descriptions of how people experience specific issues and to provide information about behaviors, beliefs, opinions, emotions, and relationships of research subjects (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). I have determined that a phenomenological qualitative approach, which conducts in-depth interviews with individuals who have directly experienced the phenomenon of interest, also known as lived experiences (Patton, 2015), will best serve the purpose of this study.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this phenomenological study exploring the role of mentorship in the advancement of Black women in higher education administrative roles:

RQ 1: How do Black women administrators access and develop effective relationships with career mentors?

RQ 2: What specific types of mentoring experiences assisted these women in attaining their career goals?

RQ 3: How do mentoring relationships help these women navigate issues salient to experiences of Black women in leadership?

Definitions of Key Terms

For this study, the following definitions are provided to assist the reader in understanding their use and application. The terms and their subsequent definitions noted below are an indication of the lens through which the researcher intends to structure the literature reviewed, data collected, and findings discussed.

Barriers: Unintentional biases and outmoded institutional structures that are hindering the access and advancement of women (Shalala et al., 2006).

Black women: American women of African descent or any American woman who identifies as being of African descent; used interchangeably with African American women due to other researchers use (Grant & Ghee, 2015; Seo & Hinton, 2009).

4 Year Higher Education Institutions: Four-year institutions tend to have a broad range of instructional programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels. (Characteristics of Degree-Granting Postsecondary Institutions, 2020)

Higher education leadership: Positions that are a pinnacle within two and four-year institutions used interchangeably with top-level positions (i.e., chancellor, vice or associate chancellor, president, provost and vice president, and dean; (Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Jordon, 2014; Miles, 2012; Wright & Salinas, 2017).

Mentor: Crawford and Smith (2005) define a mentor as “one who is further along in an educational career than you are, perhaps in administration, and counseled you and looks out for your career” (p. 60).

Summary and Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 begins by asserting the problem statement. The introduction of the study further discusses the purpose, research questions, methods, and relevance/significance This chapter also introduced the guiding theory of Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 1990). Chapter 2 provides a literature review that supports the importance of role of mentorship in the advancement of African American women in higher education administrative roles. Chapter 3 provides the methodology of the study.

CHAPTER 2

Chapter 1 provided the problem statement, background of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions, methods, and relevance and significance of the study.

Guiding theories and an organization of the study close the chapter. Chapter 2 provides an overview of literature. The literature review for this study will be focused on the importance of mentorship for Black women in higher education administrative roles.

Review of the Literature

Being that there is no formal, unified definition of mentorship in the existing literature, several definitions are provided as they each hinge on the existence of a reciprocal relationship for personal and professional development. Valverde (2011) defines mentorship as a well-known process in higher education by which a “protégé learns important behaviors and attitudes from the mentor” (p. 69). Blackwood and Brown-Welty (2011) utilize Kram’s (1985) definition of mentorship as referring to “a more experienced senior individual that offers support and feedback in the career of a less experienced, junior member of an organization” (p. 111). Mentoring relationships consists of two parts: the mentor who “facilitates the relationship and process in a climate conducive to learning” and the protégé who “assumes a degree of responsibility” (Jones & Dufor, 2012).

According to Johnson and Ridley (2018), mentoring correlates with many personal and career outcomes, such as promotions, increased salaries, upward mobility, enhanced professionalism, increased job satisfaction, peer acceptance, reduced work anxiety, lower turnover rates, improved creativity, and healthier collaborative efforts advantages are beneficial for mentees, mentors, and organizations. Mentorships can be

obtained through both formal (programmatic) and informal (relational) means with mentor race and/or gender being insignificant (Blackwood & Brown-Welty, 2005).

Mentoring Characteristics, Behaviors, and Practices

Mentees tend to prefer proven characteristics, such as the same race and gender, when selecting a mentor (Gardner et al., 2014). However, Hardcastle (1988) concluded some time ago that mentees are also attracted to mentors who are honest, wise, caring, and dedicated to their professions. Additionally, high expectations, sponsorship, and having a sense of humor were also attractive characteristics for mentees (Hardcastle, 1988). Penny and Gaillard (2006) opined that mentees should look for mentors who have the ability to identify their strengths and weaknesses, while Shea (1994) stated that mentors should be able to encourage and motivate them to: (a) develop professionally; (b) be available, especially when a mentee is in need; (c) be supportive and transparent; (d) be able to maintain consistent contact; (e) show mentees new approaches; (f) listen with empathy; (g) deliberately build a relationship; (h) be informative and aware of existing or emerging opportunities; and (i) be reflective and willing to disclose their own experiences. Mentors, to ensure a productive relationship, can also seek mentees who are: (a) willing to listen, learn, and grow; (b) realistic in their expectations; (c) open to feedback; (d) attentive to the plan; (e) willing to communicate openly; and (f) able to recognize mutual respect, trust, and committed to their own development (Shea, 1994).

Penny and Gaillard (2006) stated:

One of the most important aspects of a good mentoring relationship is to meet on a regular basis—at least once a month. Mentors and mentees cannot develop a good relationship if they don't get to know each other. Therefore,

they should take and make time to meet. The mentor will know when the mentoring relationship should come to a close based on the progress of the mentee. (p. 196)

Penny and Gaillard (2006) continued to explain how mentees need to have a plan and should always be prepared for mentoring meetings because “it is frustrating for the mentor to ask the mentee what she thinks and hear her say, ‘I don’t know’” (p. 196). In return, mentors should identify developmental needs and provide proper guidance in those areas, but most of all, the greatest characteristic, behavior, and practice of a successful mentoring relationship is trust (Penny & Gaillard, 2006). Chan et al. (2015) echoed the findings of the past literature presented by Hardcastle (1988), Penny and Gaillard (2006), and Shea (1994), and were able to categorize these characteristics and behaviors into individual, relationship, and institutional/professional/societal dimensions and concluded that the functions within each dimension are reciprocated behaviors in mentoring relationships.

Chan et al.’s (2015) dimensions, functions, and mentor practices.

Additionally, Johnson and Ridley (2018) highlighted many of the same approaches and characteristics presented in the table, including: (a) accessibility; (b) spend time with mentees; (c) identify mentees’ talents and strengths; (d) listen thoughtfully; (e) recognize and affirm dreams and aspirations; (f) model excellence and expectations; (g) instill confidence; (h) speak highly of one another; (i) guide, direct, and provide opportunities; (j) be open to discussing and exploring mentee concerns and difficulties; (k) validate mentees’ experiences; (l) provide exposure and promote visibility; (m) challenge mentees with demanding assignments, but avoid demands

that exceed their performance capabilities; (n) nurture creativity; (o) address public perceptions; (p) model humility and be personable; (q) respect and safeguard privacy; (r) practice cultural humility; (s) define boundaries; (t) carefully consider the match; (u) schedule periodic reviews and evaluations; (v) appreciate and honor gender differences; (w) provide sponsorship; (x) shape new behaviors; (y) capitalize on teachable moments; (z) embrace humor; (aa) be dependable; (bb) establish measurable goals; (cc) be trustworthy; and (dd) accept endings.

In addition to the behaviors and practices presented, many mentees secure more than one mentor to experience all that mentorship has to offer. Having multiple mentors has been proven to provide a wide range of development opportunities and support for mentees who desire guidance as they climb the leadership ladder (Brown, 2005; Curtin et al., 2016; Evans & Cokley, 2008; Scanlon, 1997). Over two decades ago Scanlon (1997) concluded that women who had several mentors experienced extreme value in attaining their goals. Almost 20 years later Commodore et al. (2016) echoed that conclusion by asserting that having a variety of mentors with diverse backgrounds are beneficial for the mentoring experience. Mentees should select mentors at their current institution to help navigate and understand their policies, as well as other institutions and different organizations, so that they are knowledgeable based on a variety of unique circumstances (Commodore et al., 2016).

Benefits of Mentoring for Women

There is considerable evidence to support that mentoring benefits women in their career aspirations. Ballenger (2010) found that women higher education leaders who were engaged in mentoring relationships as a protégé (to either a man or woman mentor)

experienced significant career advancement. This repeated notion throughout the literature on mentoring may be a testament to the combination of functions and services that the mentor provides to their protégé. As a result of the mentoring relationship, the protégé is able to receive counseling, coaching, acceptance, and friendship and the psychosocial functions that mentors provided added value to both the personal and professional lives of their protégés (Kram, 1985).

The mentoring relationship not only yields positive results for the protégé, but also for the mentor, through diversity, intrinsic, and organizational outcomes (Ragins, 1997). In terms of intrinsic outcomes, the mentor may (a) gain a sense of satisfaction and fulfillment because of contributing to growth and development of a younger administrator; (b) become rejuvenated in their own job and career as a result of the “youthful and creative energy of their protégés” (Ragins, 1997, p. 509); and (c) receive peer and organizational recognition as a result of the success of their protégé(s). It is believed that the combination of diversity and intrinsic outcomes for the mentor may lead to organizational outcomes as “the mentor may essentially receive a boost to his or her own career that may lead to improved job performance, and heightened job and career satisfaction” (Ragins, 1997).

Women Mentoring Women

Women who are mentored by other women refer to their mentoring relationship as that of a mother and daughter (Patton & Harper, 2003). According to Patton and Harper (2003), “These maternal mentoring relationships consisted of nurturing, care, concern, worry, and honesty” (p. 71). Female mentors are valuable assets and can serve as role models, regardless of race, and understand the value of a work-life balance.

Facilitative, collaborative, emotional intelligence, and nurturance agree with females who seek mentors who are motivating and inspirational, hence, the female leadership style (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010).

However, women mentoring women can lead to negative outcomes due to stereotypes that perpetuate female rivalry, including jealousy, fear, holding higher standards, resentment, and limited space in the workplace for another female leader (Kiner, 2020). In addition, there tends to be a lack of female representation in leadership positions who can guide the path of aspiring female leaders (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Parker & Kram, 1993). Due to this barrier, many women seek peer mentoring and turn to family, friends, and women in different professions for support, guidance, and advice (Dunn et al., 2014). Blake-Beard et al. (2011) posited that many researchers have found that female mentees enjoy female mentors more than male mentors due to the extent of emotional support received, greater comfort in family-work advice, and their experience in handling challenging situations as a female leader.

Cross-Race and Cross-Gender Mentoring

Studies have recognized the role mentorship has in women's career advancement (Bartman, 2015; Crawford & Smith, 2005; Fries-Britt & Snider, 2015; Palmer & Johnson-Bailey, 2008). Yet, there is still a need to explore the role of mentorship for Black women since some Black women are unsuccessful when searching for a mentor based on proven characteristics, such as same race and same gender (Gardner et al., 2014; Kutchner & Kleschick, 2016). Blake-Beard (1999) stated, "The emergence of studies of gender and mentorship has been particularly important as this research provides a necessary challenge to the traditional male-focused studies that characterize the

mentoring literature” (p. 21). Studies of mentorship continue to apply standardized and unrelatable data (Scott, 1989) that tends to refer largely to White men and women (Ragins & McFarlin, 1990), which fails to identify racial differences as a critical component for prospective research attempts (Ragins, 1999). Blake-Beard (1999) asserted, “The literature on gender and mentoring is characterized by an implicit assumption that the experiences of White women represent the experiences of all women” (p. 22), thus, the importance of utilizing intersectionality.

Cox and Nkomo (1991) examined Black Master of Business Administration graduates (MBAs; men and women) and White female MBAs accessibility to mentoring relationships in comparison to White male counterparts and emphasized that minimum data exists about qualified mentors and individuals of different race and gender groups. Cox and Nkomo (1991) found that Black men and women had less access to mentors and no significant difference in mentor assistance between White men and women.

Black Women and Mentorship

Jackson and Flowers posit mentoring as being critical to the success of Black women administrators at predominantly White institutions as it aids in retention (as cited in Jones & Dufor, 2012), increases knowledge of organizational culture pursuant to career advancement, and reduces barriers to advancement. Hinton et al. note the critical role of mentoring for Black women is for career advancement, its well-researched history of being effective for assisting minoritized populations and women in the academy, and it is providing of “much needed advice, assistance, and guidance as well as feedback and direction toward one’s goals” (as cited in Howard-Hamilton & Patitu, 2012, p. 90). Howard-Hamilton & Patitu (2012) argue African American women are truly benefitted

by formal mentoring programs, especially if the mentor is “in a high-level position” (p. 90) and they must receive this type of “formal mentoring from their colleagues in the academy to be successful and move forward in their careers” (p. 92).

Research strongly suggests shows that “a lack of mentorship or sponsorship can stand in the way of promotion” (Allen, Jacobson & Lomotey, 1995, p. 411). Black women, however, face a “double bind”—a dual race and gender bias—when seeking mentors from the traditional “old boy network” (Allen et al., 1995, p. 411). The benefits of a mentoring relationship for women cannot be disputed, and the research shows that “a lack of mentorship or sponsorship can stand in the way of promotion” (Allen, Jacobson & Lomotey, 1995, p. 411).

Using a qualitative approach, Gardner, Barrett, & Pearson (2014) interviewed Black student affairs administrators who work at predominantly White institutions (PWIs) about their lived experiences and factors that enabled and inhibited their career success. Among other factors, mentoring relationships--regardless of the gender or race of the mentor--served as an enabler to their career success. Moss’s (2014) dissertation explored the role of mentoring and career advancement for Black women mid-level community college administrators. From the study, Moss found that Black women mid-level administrators preferred informal mentoring relationships as opposed to formal mentoring relationships, and for them neither gender nor race of the mentor were factors of importance.

Black Women and Mentorship in Higher Education

Prior studies identified the multiple systems of oppression such as racism and sexism which created obstacles for black women administrators (Davis & Maldonado,

2015; West, 2015). According to Nichols and Tanksley (2004), Black women in the academy must be “smarter”, “work harder”, and be more articulate in their efforts to combat racism and sexism” (p. 178).

McClinton & Dawkins (2012) assert the constant battling of multiple acts of discrimination and isolation has led to women leaders having to develop coping mechanisms, such as adopting a dry sense of humor. Additionally, Black women must learn to navigate the politics of institutional terrains, practicing differential consciousness (Sandavol, 1991) to create strategic alliances for not only progression but survival as well. As an unspoken skillset, differential consciousness allows for Black women to function “within, yet beyond, the demands of dominant ideology” (Sandavol, 2000, p.44) in the academy, which is generally represented by the thoughts of White males.

Myers maintains that mentoring is pivotal to the professional achievement of Black women (Jones & Dufor, 2012), and “supports the career development of Black administrators and increases positive socialization experiences in institutional cultures” (Jones & Dufor, 2012). Finding mentors has proven to be a problematic area for African American women in higher education institutions. Women and especially women of color, are more likely to be isolated, without mentors or a network of support, and are less able to secure the guidance needed when facing challenging circumstances (Haslam & Ryan, 2008).

Crawford and Smith (2005) conducted a study of seven Black female senior-level higher education administrators across New York State, which included research on the ability of mentoring to ease the strain felt by Black women in high-level

positions. The findings concluded that none of the participants in the study were able to identify a person in their professional career who fit the identified definition of a mentor. The inability to gain access to informal networks of influence offer insights as to why few women of color advance to higher levels; career advancement is often connected to these networks (Mehra, Kilduff, & Bass, 1998). Collins (2000) argues that Black women have difficulties in owning a framework that represents shared and varied experiences, which include a lack of access to social capital and political power.

Boyas, Wind, and Kang (2012) maintain that social capital centers on the creation of relationships which allows for the promotion of collaboration, with support being the foundation of the idea. Social capital can include access to “support, information, knowledge or material resources” (Eriksson et al., 2010, p. 6) and can be time consuming to develop (Brien & Smallman, 2011). A mentoring relationship can offer encouragement, acceptance, and friendship which can lead to success (Eagly & Carli, 2007) and can serve as a tool that prevents or lessens the challenges experienced by Black female administrators.

It is important to note that literature on leadership in general and among Black women often focuses on individual strategies rather than institutional strategies to counter gendered racism. For instance, in their study of leadership among Black women, Davis & Maldonado (2015) found that participants “who demonstrated resilience, integrity, intrapersonal characteristics, and social skills were more likely to climb the career ladder within their respective organizations, with the support of a mentor and/or sponsor” (p. 60). In Dunbar and Kinnersley’s (2011) study the

researchers addressed the mentoring experience of female higher education administrators.

Their quantitative study surveyed 239 female higher education leaders from a variety of institutions. Over half, or 64% of the participants in their study had a mentor, 54% had mentors of the same gender, while 46% had male mentors. Additionally, the majority, and or 89% of the participants had mentors of the same race. The findings of their study concluded that while there were no differences in the functions provided by male mentors, “women believed that a female mentor is important and had an impact on the effectiveness of the mentoring relationship” (Dunbar & Kinnersley, 2011, p. 21) Finding a mentor is difficult for Black women administrators, and they often seek alternative sources of support or non- academic mentors (Patton, 2009) whether through formal or informal opportunities.

Using a qualitative approach, Choates (2012) sought to understand how Black women obtained leadership positions within higher education. Through narrative inquiry, the study aimed to uncover how the influence of mentors impacted the participants’ career paths, as well as how race and gender manifested in their career paths (Choates, 2012). Choates found that the women rose to the level of senior administration because of early preparation in their careers, gaining as much experience as possible in many different functional areas, volunteering or serving on community boards to obtain additional experience, taking on additional assignments, shadowing others in higher positions, and “obtaining a doctorate for credibility purposes” (Choates, 2012, p. 125).

The participants expressed those mentors impacted their career paths by offering support, encouragement, and advice during their journey to leadership, as well as by providing them with opportunities to develop and gain skills that would be beneficial to them in leadership roles. While the women did convey the importance of mentoring and its impact on their careers, they did note that there was a lack of Black women to serve as mentors (Choates, 2012).

Racial Realism

Race has played a significant historical role in American society, but race has not always been a concept as it currently is in the United States. Smedley (2005) noted a shift from cultural attributes to the concept of race. In a sense, race was primarily made an issue of the topic through literature and practice. By the Revolutionary era, race was widely used, and the differences had solidified as a reference for social categories of Indians, Blacks, and Whites (Smedley & Smedley, 2005, p. 19). Race became a new concept guiding how society should be categorized and structured in many aspects. This is seen in addition to slavery as a form of control.

Thus, making race concepts a constructed response to the measures and tactics that Europeans used to further their political, economic, and social growth (Barnard, 2015). This development of racial identity caused a hierarchal system based on physical attributes and what was referred to by DuBois (1897) as "the differences of color, hair, and bone" (p. 816), was detrimental to White expansion and their justification for how they treated people of color.

Looking back in history, Black people's mistreatment is a direct influence of a country that wanted to solidify and accept the mistreatment of people of color. Hooks

(1990) stated that the notion that cultural criticism by Black folks must either be confined to the question of positive or negative representation or function in a self-serving manner must be continually challenged. The history of Black people in the United States and their mission for the right and opportunity to obtain an education, voting rights, equal pay, and housing opportunities depict racism's realism (hooks, 1990) .

The Black Identity

The term 'Black' is used in relation to African diaspora (those of the Caribbean and African descent), including mixed heritage, who often find themselves a minority in society (Maynard, 2018). Erikson (1968) described “identity as being what the “I” reflects on when contemplating the body, the personality, and the roles to which it is attached” (p. 217). As discussed by Kincaid (1969), the dominant white majority identity defines the Black community's identity and existence, and the illusion of superiority has depended on its belief in Black inferiority. Mbembe (2017) stated that blackness has become an assigned identity by the oppressors to relegate Black people from Africa to become the subaltern, the marginalized with a voice, the item to be traded for profit.

Due to having to live a life defined by identity, it is often found that Black women play a different role when in the presence of their counterparts. This concept of playing a role or altering themselves avoids fitting the criteria of many stereotypes faced by Black women. Landy (1993) suggested that playing roles comes from one's need to assert oneself.

Imposter Syndrome

Clance and Imes (1978) described the imposter syndrome as feeling like an academic or professional fraud. Clance and Imes (1978) stated that women who suffer

from imposter syndrome do not experience an internal sense of success despite their earned degrees. According to Collins et al. (2020), “I would proclaim that one consequence of imposter syndrome and stereotype threat for women of color is feeling as if they are living a double life, and not wholly true or belonging to either” (p. 4). Imposter syndrome causes women of color in higher education environments to feel as though it is unnatural for them to perform at the levels that they do, through a feeling of self-discouragement as if they are doing something wrong when they are just displaying their true abilities.

Collins et al. (2020) explained that eliminating stereotype threat and imposter syndrome is an impossible task as a human factor in pursuing scholarship. Clance and Imes (1978) stated that there are four different types of behaviors performed by women who exhibit imposter syndrome. They are as follows: (a) diligence and hard work- driven (b) a sense of phoniness (c) the use of charm and perceptiveness to win superiors' approval (d) dodging being confident or conscious of society's rejection. Women who display imposter syndrome tend to work harder than their counterparts and, in turn, may suffer from burnout or loss of interest in their positions. Bravata et al. (2020) highlighted that imposter syndrome is widespread among ethnic minorities.

Glass and Concrete Ceilings

Barnes (2017) identified the concrete ceiling as a metaphor and represented the degree of difficulty that many Black women face when attempting to conquer the challenges of becoming a leader. The term “glass ceiling” was first used by Loden (n.d.) in 1978 during a discussion panel. Women have been struggling with a “glass ceiling” for many years as they advance into leadership roles that tend to be considered dominated by

men. This happens often because a traditional leadership model assumes that a good leader must essentially be masculine (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). There has been an acknowledgment of the federal government's glass ceiling concept, as they have recognized the presence of the effects that disallows the advancement of women and people of color in the workplace (AHE report, 2009).

Morrison and von Glinow (1990) stated that minority women face a "glass ceiling" or barrier that has restricted their progression to obtain senior-level roles in organizations throughout American society that are not encountered by White men and other groups. In turn, Gaskell and Willinsky (1995) speak about the glass ceiling concept betraying American's most cherished principles; unseen, yet unreachable, barriers that keep minorities and females from rising the corporate ladder, regardless of their qualifications and abilities.

Denying that there are indeed glass and concrete ceilings. Barnes (2017) identified the concrete ceiling as a metaphor and represented the degree of difficulty that many Black women face when attempting to conquer the challenges of becoming a leader. The term "glass ceiling" was first used by Loden (n.d.) in 1978 during a discussion panel. ignores a shortage of minority women in senior-level leadership positions.

As time has progressed, improvements have been made in the barriers related to these ceilings, but these barriers still are causing harm in areas that need to be addressed. Black women have experienced restrictions by these invisible barriers for the glass ceiling during their journeys towards leadership advancement (Branche, 2014). These barriers are pay gap discrepancies, with men seen as having higher salaries than women

at all hierarchical levels in organizations and being disproportionately represented in senior-level leadership positions. Schwartz (1989) described the glass ceiling as a barrier to women's leadership, which occurs when counterproductive layers of influence are met with management strata pervaded by unconscious perceptions, stereotypes, and expectations of men.

Black female executives' limited progress in academia and business can be attributed to a glass ceiling (Davis, 2012). Davis and Maldonado (2015) identified that organizations are ignorant of the glass ceiling's harmful effects. This is also the case for many higher education institutions not understanding the consequences of the glass ceilings that may not be intentionally in place. The glass ceiling is a barrier seen as a factor in the difficulty that Black women face when attempting to obtain senior-level leadership roles in higher education. Being a Black woman can be seen as problematic in higher education and breaking through barriers such as the glass ceiling can be seen as impossible

Intersectionality

Within Black feminist thought is intersectionality, the connection of gender, class, and race, which was introduced by Kimberlè Crenshaw (Moradi & Grzanka, 2017). Crenshaw (1989) introduced this term over 30 years ago “to describe how Black women’s experiences of the unique combination of racism and sexism were obscured by treating race and sex discrimination as separate matters in U.S. law and in feminist and antiracist activism” (Moradi & Grzanka, 2017, p. 502) In a recent interview with Steinmetz (2020) of *TIME* magazine, Crenshaw clarified the following regarding intersectionality and its modern-day use of the term:

These days, I start with what it's not, because there has been distortion. It's not identity politics on steroids. It is not a mechanism to turn White men into the new pariahs. It's basically a lens, a prism, for seeing the way in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other. We tend to talk about race inequality as separate from inequality based on gender, class, sexuality, or immigrant status. What's often missing is how some people are subject to all of these, and the experience is not just the sum of its parts. (p. 82).

In her interview with Steinmetz (2020), Crenshaw continued to advocate for the fact that “intersectionality is simply about how certain aspects of who you are will increase your access to the good things or your exposure to the bad things in life” (p. 82).

Intersectionality is generally used as an analytic tool to address discriminatory barriers faced by marginalized individuals (Collins & Bilge, 2016). According to Stitt and Happel-Parkins (2019), “When intersectionality is ignored, researchers discount the experiences of individuals who may be affected by more than one of these categories, thereby silencing their voice by not understanding the nuanced ways that different identity categories influence lived experiences” (p. 63).

By ignoring the intersection of race, class, and gender, generally, Black women have had to choose between one of the categories they want to primarily identify with because society has crucified those who have stood before the masses and demanded to be known as both Black and female (Stitt & Happel-Parkins, 2019).

By forcing Black women to stand in this crossroad and choose, many Black women continue to experience oppression and miss opportunities due to the lack of

understanding of how race, class, and gender overlap (Lewis et al., 2017). As it relates to mentoring, intersectionality can provide insight into how race and gender effect mentors' identities and how they mentor mentees (Mondisa, 2014).

The advances of Black Feminist Thought and intersectionality have disclosed Black women's distinctive experiences of exclusion, oppression, resistance, discrimination, and empowerment between self, society, and social structures (Alinia, 2015; Grant & Ghee, 2015; Moradi & Grzanka, 2017). Black feminist thought explores the intersection of social identities and how Black women examine their lived experiences while eliminating stereotypes and biases that create barriers associated with oppression (Grant, 2012). Research has shown that Black women do not experience race, class, gender independently, but that these categories are interwoven and act as one barrier that has suppressed Black women's ability to break through (Crenshaw, 1989; Grant, 2012) the glass ceiling (Davis & Maldonado, 2015).

Sexism and Intersectionality in Higher Education

Women who have experienced sexism in the workplace have reported more negative job perceptions and poorer health outcomes than women who have not had those experiences (Manuel et al., 2017). These negative experiences can be detrimental to the growth of a woman's career projection and cause fear that would keep them in positions in which they have outgrown out of fear-based on past experiences. Sexism relates negatively to women's mental health and job satisfaction, according to Ruben et al. (2017), and women who have been exposed to sexism internalize it, undermining their own job performance (Koch et al., 2014).

Women of color in higher education tend to experience the intersection of racism and sexism, resulting in increased marginalization and isolation (Ahmed, 2012; Sule, 2011; Turner et al., 2011). Based on the definition by Edwards (1997), sexism is the overt or covert practice of discrimination against an individual based on gender-related differences. As pinpointed by Bourabain (2021), academia is profiled as the institution of knowledge, rationality, and truth reached through merit, however, critical scholars have identified it as an inequality regime. It is also seen that the White male body was and is still considered to be the knowledge holder in many academic settings (Puwar, 2004).

History of Black Women in Higher Education

Historically, Black women have suffered the most in roles such as student, faculty, and leader regarding higher education and have not always received the equity and opportunity it offers. Although Mary Jane Patterson, the first Black woman to overcome barriers in higher education, earned her college degree in 1862 (Baumann, 2010), it would take another 25 years before a wave of notable Black women broke the barrier and reached this pinnacle (Perkins, 1998).

Black women earning a college degree occurred in northern regions of the U.S. at women's seminaries, such as Seven Sisters colleges; however, these institutions were not aware of their incoming students' ethnicity until after they arrived (Perkins, 1998, 2015). The reason for Black women attending Seven Sisters colleges stems from the struggle of a political and human rights era for Black people (Perkins, 1998). Although several cases, such as *Murray v. University of Maryland* (1936), *Missouri ex rel. Gaines v. Canada* (1938), and *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), contributed to the

desegregation of schools, it did not end the segregation among individuals (Perkins, 1998).

The Black women, such as Harriett Alleyne Rice, Alberta Scoot, Otelia Cromwell, Hortense Parker, Jessie Fauset, Anita Florence Hemmings, and Zora Neale Hurston, who were able to complete their higher education degrees at the Seven Sisters colleges, did not do so without suffering. According to Perkins (1998), discrimination in housing was a constant problem for Black female students at every Seven Sisters institution, even when finally granted the opportunity to live on campus. However, these women remained steadfast, graduated, and were able to be set apart from other Black women during their time as “it gave them the freedom, exposure, and opportunity to prove themselves intellectually on the same basis as Whites and opened a wider range of careers, including medicine, science, and law” (Perkins, 1998, p. 108).

Representation of Black women professionals in higher education is largely seen in Historically Black Colleges and Universities (Bartman, 2015). However, “the exact number and percentage” (Harley, 2008, p. 20) of Black women professionals in predominantly white institutions (PWIs) continues to vary depending on the source and data collection year, and PWIs continue to hire the first Black women in their history (Harley, 2008). For example, Tracey L. Meares joined Yale Law School as the first Black woman to ever join their faculty in 2007 (Harley, 2008).

Black women are continuously striving to be granted positions, such as a faculty member, at PWIs, but are often looked upon as the “maids of academe” (Harley, 2008, p. 20) by placing Black women in roles that can mark the box for diversity requirement checklists. According to Henderson et al. (2010), Black women in higher

education are often given diversity-related tasks and fill the role of being the voice of the minority viewpoints on committees, which result in additional duties, known as the “dirty work,” that are not taken on by most of their White colleagues.

Walkington (2017) echoed this notion by stating that Black women faculty are expected to mentor Black students more than their White and male colleagues, which leads to overextension and exhaustion due to the imbalanced ratio of Black women faculty to Black students; this demand impacts their ability to complete their tenure requirements in a prompt manner. In other words, since there are more Black students on campus than Black women faculty, Black women faculty must simultaneously complete all other required tasks and uphold the responsibility of having a higher number of mentees compared to their male counterparts and White colleagues.

Leadership for Black women in higher education can be traced back to 1903 when Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune became the founding president of Daytona Normal and Industrial Institute for Negro Girls, later known as Bethune-Cookman College and was the only Black female president until 1955 (Jackson & Harris, 2005). In 1956, higher education officially received their second Black female college president as Dr. Willa Beatrice Player was appointed president of Bennett College for Women (Jackson & Harris, 2005). However, it was not until 28 years later that a Black woman would become a college president. In 1984, Dr. Yvonne Taylor was appointed as the new president at Wilberforce College in Ohio. Although these appointments were not an equal representation of higher education leadership, Black women continued to make slow but steady strides in attaining college presidency positions.

From 1974 to 1992, the following women reached the pinnacle in higher education by earning a presidency position and at the specified institution: Dr. Mable McLean, Barber-Scotia College; Dr. Johnetta Betsch Cole, Spelman College; Dr. Gloria Dean Randle Scott, Bennett College for Women; and Dr. Niara Sudarkasa, Lincoln University (Jackson & Harris, 2005). However, in 1978, Dr. Jewel Plummer Cobb became the first female to reach the final candidacy round for the president of Spelman College but was not appointed to the position (Jackson & Harris, 2005). This created much-needed dialogue because the position went to a Black male and the community, alumnae, faculty, staff, and student body desired a Black female to be appointed at the all-female institution (Jackson & Harris, 2005).

In addition to the Black women who have left historical marks as college presidents, Lucy Diggs Slowe also broke barriers by being the first Black woman dean at Howard University in Washington, D.C. (Perkins, 1990, 1996, 2015). Slowe became an advocate for career advancement and strongly believed that Black women played a vital role in leadership, which led to the formation of two significant organizations for the promotion of Black women with a college education: the National Association of College Women (NACW) in 1910 and the National Association of Women's Deans and Advisors of Colored Schools (NAWDACS) in 1929 (Perkins, 1990). Through these organizations, Slowe was able to create opportunities for Black women to be able to develop the skills and knowledge needed for leadership opportunities (Rasheed, 2012).

Barriers and Challenges of Black Women in Higher Education

The challenge for Black women in attaining a leadership position for Black women may not stem from being incapable or unqualified, but rather from the attitudinal

barriers present within the mindset of chief administrators (Palmer & Johnson-Bailey, 2008). Gasman et al. (2015) unveiled an encounter between Amy Gutmann, a White woman and the president of the University of Pennsylvania, and a group of distinguished Black faculty that challenged her academic administrator hiring record and the lack of attentiveness to diversity. Gutmann, in an attempt to justify the matter, made a claim about the lack of qualified individuals to fill these positions (Gasman et al., 2015).

Gasman et al. (2015) stated the following:

Quite often, the word qualified is used as a euphemism, which allows people to ignore the need for diversity and thus discriminate in hiring. To understand the way qualified is used more fully, consider the phrase ‘the neighborhood is changing.’ At this point in American history, most educated people understand that this phrase is a euphemism for ‘too many Black people [or other people of color] are moving into the neighborhood.’ Oftentimes, the word qualified does not actually pertain to qualifications but instead to fit, with upper-level administrators assessing candidates on the likelihood that they will be pleasant in social situations and hold similar intellectual and cultural views. (pp. 1–2)

Black women are more likely to experience this type of discrimination based on race, gender, social class, and prejudgments (Davis, 2009) even though they are as educationally qualified for these leadership positions in higher education. Gasman et al. (2015) indicated that earning an advanced degree is customary for fulfilling executive positions in higher education, yet, despite a substantial increase in the number of Black women with advanced degrees, they remain marginalized in higher education leadership.

Another challenge Black women in higher education face are the historical stereotypes, such as the Mammy-sapphire continuum of existence (Henderson et al., 2010; Walkington, 2017); being labeled as incompetent, intellectually inferior, and hostile (Hall et al., 2012); barriers, such as lack of privilege compared to their White counterparts (Henderson et al., 2010; Shields, 2012); and the distinct realities that differ for Black women, which are difficult for them to overcome. Due to these stereotypes and barriers, Black women are limited to administrative assistant positions and lower-level leadership positions (Blake-Beard, 1999), such as managers and directors, and are still underrepresented in mid- to upper-level leadership positions, in comparison to Black men (Davis & Maldonado, 2015).

These stereotypes and barriers have led to Black women being limited to administrative assistant positions and lower-level leadership positions (Blake-Beard, 1999), such as managers and directors, and are still underrepresented in mid- to upper-level leadership positions, in comparison to Black men (Davis & Maldonado, 2015).

Later, “Sapphire” was added to Mammy’s label because of Black women being identified as welfare queens, matriarchs, angry, threatening, and unintelligent (Henderson et al., 2010). Placing emphasis on welfare queens and unintelligence, Black women have been carrying these historical, yet negative, images since the 19th century (Harley, 2008; Henderson et al., 2010). These images do not present Black women as being intellectual and competent enough to advance (Henderson et al., 2010). Rather, they present Black women as fillers for less valued positions in higher education (Henderson et al., 2010).

Due to constant navigation of “isms,” scholars noted that Black women administrators experience isolation, institutional opposition, devaluation, alienation, and tokenization, which have resulted in the lack of recruiting and retention of Black women in these leadership positions (Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Lloyd -Jones, 2009; Logan & Dudley, 2019; Mosley, 1980; Stanley, 2009; West, 2015; Wolfe & Dilworth, 2015).

Organizational Leadership Programs

Black women have faced barriers and challenges that have caused many hardships that are beyond their control; however, these hardships did not stop their will and determination to succeed and gain higher positions. Some Black women have been able to achieve leadership positions by enhancing their skills through organizational leadership development programs. Gardner et al. (2014) recommended additional studies are needed to encourage higher education institutions to find ways to be more inclusive, welcoming, and actively engaged in multicultural diversity efforts by implementing leadership development programs, where mentorship is integrated, with respect to minorities.

The implementation of organizational leadership programs with mentoring components, specifically for Black women, is pivotal in their professional and leadership development path (Gardner et al., 2014). Ensuring such opportunities are available can serve as a bridge for reducing discrimination and enhancing Black women’s chances of obtaining a leadership position (Davis, 2009; Evans & Cokley, 2008; Lim et al., 2015; Palmer & Johnson-Bailey, 2008; Patton & Harper, 2003). It is important to note that organizational leadership development programs with combined mentoring opportunities

committed to the progression of minority women are more necessary than ever to tackle the obstacles facing today's institutions of higher learning (Teague & Bobby, 2014).

What helps create important networking and mentorship opportunities often can be found through organizational leadership development programs (Gardner et al., 2014). Existing literature implies that informally developed mentoring relationships are more effective than formally assigned relationships (Ragins & Cotton, 1999b). Organizations can increase opportunities for informal mentorship to take place by collecting a pool of prospective mentors and mentees, then connecting these individuals through trainings, specifically those that focus on diversity issues and best practices for diversified mentoring (Ragins & Cotton, 1999a).

Organizational leadership development programs designed to meet the needs of Black women leaders are essential to specifically address the challenges Black women face in being able to secure a mentor, which in return can increase their visibility in higher education leadership. White (2014) opined, "The greatest need and challenge for women's leadership development—as in higher education itself—is access. Particularly acute is the need for organizational leadership development for women faculty and administrators of color and those serving minorities and first-generation college students" (p. 92). According to Davis (2009), institutions can advance their mission and diversity and inclusion policies by devoting significant resources to closing the mentoring gap and constructing leadership programs.

Sulpizio (2014) stated at the Women's Leadership Academy in the Department of Leadership Studies at the University of San Diego, inclusive programs have been created

to advance women leaders through pioneering approaches, such as mentor pairing based on career goals rather than humanistic characteristics to leadership development.

Sulpizio (2014) continued by revealing that the programs are based on sampling research from different disciplines and businesses. As the programs continue to grow, program developers have been able to adjust the programs based on more current and applicable research, which continues to be exclusively created for women in higher education leadership or aspiring to be in higher education leadership (Sulpizio, 2014). Institutions can benefit from the approach that the University of San Diego has taken by constructing organizational leadership development programs with respect to Black women and creating content based on lived experiences, leadership identity and theory, networking and mentoring, and forward-thinking practices that are most relevant and useful for them.

Literature has confirmed that organizational leadership development programs, including mentoring, are essential to increasing career advancement. According to Kutchner and Kleschick (2016), mentoring is a powerful source and analytical process in career and personal growth. Mentorship empowers a more qualified individual to transfer knowledge, formally or informally, which can benefit both the mentor and the mentee by sharing new perspectives on various ideas (Kutchner & Kleschick, 2016; Palmer & Johnson-Bailey, 2008).

Theoretical Framework

Black Feminist Theory

Black Feminist theory focuses on the oppression of women. Through feminist theory, women can understand some of the struggles of oppression existing in

organizations (Eisenstein, 2004). However, Black Feminist Theory focuses on the oppression of Black women and argues sexism, class oppression, and racism are inextricably bound together (Collins, 2004). Black feminist thought is a standpoint grounded in the experiences of Black women's everyday struggles (Alinia, 2015). According to Alinia (2015), Black feminist thought exposes the way that domination is organized and operates in various domains of power. It also shows the path of struggle and to empowerment, while at the same time highlighting the challenges and difficulties in combating intersecting oppression, since the multi positionality of social agents, on the one hand, and the simultaneity of multiple and intersecting sites of oppression, on the other, make the relationship between domination and resistance highly complex. (pp. 2334–2335) Therefore, Black feminist theory is relevant to the examination of Black women leaders in higher education and the role of mentorship in the advancement of their careers, as it aligns with the goal of allowing Black women administrators to share their lived experiences and reveal their truth.

Black women in academia are continuously expressing their significance and value as educated and qualified individuals but are still faced with selecting the voice and stance they will demonstrate once heard and accepted (Grant & Ghee, 2015).

Collins (2000) explored six distinguishing features that characterize Black feminist thought that may provide the common ground that is so sorely needed both among African American women and all those who may be a part of a marginalized group. The six distinguishing features of Black feminist thought posited by Collins (2000) include:

1. Regardless of where Black women reside, they experience intersecting oppressions that produces similar results.
2. Black feminist thought appears from a strain connecting encounters and beliefs; however, not all Black women share and interpret their lived experiences in the same manner.
3. “Black feminist thought concerns the connections between U.S. Black women’s experiences as a heterogeneous collectivity and any ensuring group knowledge or standpoint” (p. 29).
4. Black feminist thought promotes the vital contributions of Black women intellectuals; “Black women intellectuals are neither all academics nor found primarily in the Black middle class but are those who contribute to Black feminist thought as a critical social theory” (Collins, 2000, p. 14) and are able to create and provide a platform for Black women’s experiences to be revealed.
5. Black feminist thought focuses on the significance of change; “as social conditions change, so must the knowledge and practices designed to resist them” (Collins, 2000, p. 39).
6. Black feminist thought concerns its relationship to other projects to promote equity that are not solely concerned with Black women or Black women issues.

Black feminist thought as a critical social theory brings an awareness of intersectionality and examines experiences and contributions to empowering Black women, especially Black women leaders in higher education.

Summary of Chapter 2

Although research does show that many Black women have overcome these challenges, a deeper examination of this phenomenon will allow Black women leaders in higher education to share their lived experiences. A further review of the literature will identify the areas of research peripheral to the research topic, highlighting the need for additional study on Black women administrators' lived experiences and mentoring relationships. In addition to the literature review, the theoretical framework, Black Feminist Thought, was discussed in further detail.

The next chapter, Chapter Three: Methodology outlines the methodological approach utilized in this study to capture the lived experiences of Black women and what role mentorship played in the advancement of their careers in higher education administration.

CHAPTER 3

In support of this phenomenological study of a select group of Black women administrators who have utilized mentorship relationships in their higher education careers, the previous chapter explored available research literature that provided insight into Black feminist thought, Black women in higher education, organizational leadership programs, and mentorship. This chapter identifies the study's research questions, research design, population, setting, data collection and analysis, sample, trustworthiness and reliability, assumptions, limitations, and ethical considerations.

Research Design

Qualitative research is a well-known mode of inquiry for social sciences and applied fields, including education (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Through qualitative research, researchers gain an in-depth understanding, have firsthand experience with participants, to record information as it occurs, allow challenging topics to be explored in confidence, obtain the language and words of participants through documents, gather historical information, control over the line of questioning, maintain flexibility, and make notable observations (Creswell, 2013). Another strength of qualitative research is validity and the ability to determine the accuracy of findings based on the perspective of researchers, participants, or readers (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Miller, 2000). Additionally, qualitative research can be inexpensive compared to quantitative research that can allow more time with participants and the creation of rapport, connectedness, and respect (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Qualitative studies not only contribute to existing literature, but they also describe experiences, themes, and stories for marginalized groups by investigating a significant

phenomenon that leads to an in-depth analysis and understanding (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A number of authors have conveyed characteristics of qualitative research, including collecting data in a natural setting for participants, utilizing key activities such as observing behaviors, studying documents, gathering multiple forms of data, inductive and deductive data analysis, comprehending participants' meaning and value about the problem or issue, approaching the research as an evolving design, being reflective as a researcher and understanding personal contributions and analyses, and accurately reporting multiple perspectives and the central idea (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Hatch, 2002; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). These researchers do not focus on theory or ambiguity. In quantitative research, investigators collect numerical data; therefore, the analysis of the data transpires using mathematically based methods. I deemed this methodology unsuitable for this study. In contrast, the qualitative method provides an exploratory aspect not available with a quantitative approach.

Qualitative studies are exploratory, allowing researchers to make meaning of individual experiences (Harkiolakis, 2017) with phenomena (Landrum & Garza, 2015). The key objectives of social research are to find patterns or themes, to establish new outcomes, and to identify gaps in the existing body of knowledge and theory to explain human behavior. Qualitative studies are a uniquely suited approach to uncovering the unexpected and exploring new avenues (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). There are several widely used qualitative methods, including grounded theory, ethnography, case study, and phenomenology. Grounded theory is used to look at many participants to generate a general explanation or to develop a theory. Case studies provide an in-depth look at one test subject; the aim is to provide an analysis of the context and process that illuminate

the theoretical issues under investigation. According to Yin (2013), case study research is one of the most challenging forms of social research endeavors, which aims to answer the how or why in a phenomenon.

This phenomenological study follows the qualitative research traditions because it is used to understand participants' experiences. The goal of phenomenology is to describe the meaning of what was experienced and how it was experienced (Neubauer et al., 2019). In phenomenology, evidence derives from "first-person reports of life experiences" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 84). "The researcher has a personal interest in whatever he or she seeks to know; the researcher is intimately connected with the phenomenon" (p. 59). Husserl (1970) initiated the method of phenomenological reduction to eliminate the influence of external factors; Husserl posited that scientific knowledge is founded on the unbiased description of a phenomenon. According to Moustakas (1994), Husserl believed that understanding is derived from the ideal essential structures of one's consciousness. Empirical phenomenology requires a return to experience to obtain a comprehensive description, which provides the foundation for reflective analysis that embodies the essence of a participant's experience.

A researcher is responsible for determining the underlying structures of experience by interpreting the experience based on a participant's account of the phenomenon (van Manen, 2017). The objective of this research is to determine what the experience means to individuals who had the experience and provide a detailed description of it. Through phenomenological research methodology, I endeavored to describe, understand, and interpret the meanings of lived experiences of Black female

leaders. Phenomenology provides an in-depth knowledge of the individual phenomena; and data that is rich from the experiences of the study participants (Moran, 2019).

Phenomenology is a method that crosses philosophical traditions and styles and is applied to any form of philosophical inquiry (Simmons & Hackett, 2016). Van Manen (2017) described phenomenology as a science of examples. Phenomenology provides an ontology of real and ideal objects from which to situate understanding (Trace, 2017). According to van Manen (2017), the lived experience resides in the data of phenomenological research. Phenomenology involves the careful, unprejudiced description of conscious, lived experiences according to the manner they were experienced by the study participants (Moran, 2019). Van Manen believed that it is ill-served to objectify the term *data* when discussing phenomenology, as this method is concerned with the meaning and meaningfulness of the experience and not the data itself. “Phenomenology aims to attain the eidetic and original meaning of a phenomenon” (van Manen, 2017, p. 811).

The appropriate research design for this research study is transcendental phenomenology, which utilizes the epoche process to dismiss judgment, biases, preconceived ideas and concepts, and discount past experiences and understandings to clearly study the phenomena (Martirano, 2016). The epoche is the first step in coming to know things as they are, free of prejudgment and preconceptions (Moustakas, 1994). Transcendental phenomenologists are interested in studying the lived experiences of research participants and the meaning they give to these experiences. A researcher utilizes phenomenological reduction to discover the essence of the meanings, principles, or structures at the center of a phenomenon as it is practiced and experienced in the

present (Moustakas, 1994; Neubauer et al., 2019). The study participants provided detailed accounts of their lived experiences as Black women in higher education administrative roles and how mentorship advanced their careers.

Once the researcher understands the strengths and characteristics of qualitative research, Creswell, and Poth (2018) stated that the design and process for qualitative studies are formed by the approach the researcher implements since there is no prearranged structure. I have determined that a phenomenological qualitative approach, which conducts in-depth interviews with individuals who have directly experienced the phenomenon of interest, also known as lived experiences (Patton, 2015), will best serve the purpose of this study. Mapp (2008) emphasized that phenomenology searches for meanings and essences of lived experiences and finds descriptions through first-person accounts during one-on-one interviews. Phenomenological research allows for the use of interpersonal interviews to ask open-ended questions and probe for in-depth responses about participants' lived experiences, perceptions, barriers, and knowledge.

Wilson and Washington (2007) highlighted how phenomenology is a suitable and comprehensive approach for conducting research with African American women. Data derived from phenomenological research provides understanding and meaning that is rich, thorough, and allows the researcher to view the experience from African American women's perspective (Wilson & Washington, 2007). The intent of this research is to collect data regarding the lived experiences of Black women administrators and the role of mentorship in the advancement of their careers. It is therefore appropriate to use phenomenology research since the participants in this study

According to Moustakas (1994), when choosing to conduct a phenomenological study, researchers must first overcome the challenge of selecting a topic and question that has not only social meaning but also personal significance. Due to the insufficient representation of Black women in higher education leadership and the effectiveness of mentorship regarding career advancement mentorship holds social meaning in terms of examining a viable option for Black women who may be seeking leadership roles, as well as personal significance being that I am a Black women in higher education, who is completing my doctoral degree, with the hopes of fulfilling the educational requirements for most leadership positions in higher education. My experience with mentorship has been impactful in that they have played an enormous role in both my career and educational achievements.

After a topic and research question has been constructed, researchers to examine the types of phenomenology that will benefit the study and production of valuable results in which the interpretive process will yield significance based on participants' lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994). The type of phenomenology that served this study best was Moustakas' (1994) interpretation of Edmund Husserl's transcendental or psychological phenomenology.

Moustakas (1994) stated, "Husserl's transcendental phenomenology is intimately bound up in the concept of intentionality," which refers to being cognizant and mindful to participants' lived experiences and the ability to "recognize that self and the world are inseparable components of meaning" (p. 27). Another key concept of transcendental phenomenology is intuition, which "is essential in describing whatever presents itself, whatever is actually given" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 31). Additionally, Moustakas (1994)

asserted that all objects, including participants, must have an experience with the phenomena because the knowledge of it resides within self and can be “discovered through reflection on subjective acts and their objective correlates” (p .44). Creswell and Poth (2018) opined that this type of phenomenology focuses more on narratives disclosed by participants and less on the analyses of the researcher.

With this idea in mind, I recognize that it is imperative for phenomenological researchers to refrain from incorporating their experiences and to approach the phenomenon with a fresh perspective, which is known as epoche or bracketing (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A phenomenological researcher must recognize and reject any personal experiences and biases relating to the phenomenon of the study and remain objective to allow the essences of participants’ lived experiences to emerge.

A large part of my attraction to this research was personal experiences both lived and seen as I have witnessed many Black women's challenging experiences in higher education. As a Black woman in higher education who is extrinsically motivated to research the role of mentorship in the advancement of Black women in higher education leadership roles, it was important that I not allow my personal experiences to overshadow the experiences of the participants.

Therefore, the use of transcendental phenomenology, which, according to Moustakas (1994), is when everything is freshly observed as if it were the first time, was crucial for the authenticity of the interview process and the analysis of the results. I believe I successfully bracketed my views and willfully embraced the experiences of these other Black women in higher education leadership by actively and attentively

listening to inquire about their lived experiences so that my personal experiences did not become part of their narratives.

Research Questions

Data collection and analysis provided the details for answering the following research questions:

RQ 1: How do Black women administrators access and develop effective relationships with career mentors?

RQ 2: What specific types of mentoring experiences assisted these women in attaining their career goals?

RQ 3: How do mentoring relationships help these women navigate issues salient to experiences of Black women in leadership?

Methods and Procedures

Participants and Setting

The criteria for key participants, Black women in higher education administrative roles who a) currently work in four-year institutions in the USA, serving in positions of Dean, Vice President, President, Provost, Chancellor, or Vice Chancellor and b) have experience in a mentoring relationship that helped advance their careers. According to Ivankova (2015), to promptly address a sensible problem within a professional setting, researchers are allowed to use a small number of participants that are limited to an identified group. Patton (2015) asserted there are no specific rules when determining an appropriate sample size in qualitative research, but it can best be determined by the following: time allotted, available resources, and study objectives. Sampling strategies

for phenomenological studies should ensure that all participants have experienced the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Purposeful sampling, which selects participants based on certain criteria and is “information rich” (Schreier, 2018), was used during the process. As stated by Schreier (2018), information rich depend on the topic, research study, and the overall goal that the researcher wishes to accomplish. My topic, study, and goals have led me to access information -rich participants. However, the small number of Black women in leadership positions means that gaining access to a larger sample size was impractical.

Additionally, in phenomenological research, scholars believe that studies should have at minimum three participants (Englander, 2012) and focus more on quality than the quantity of the sample size and detailed account of each participant’s experience (Smith et al., 2009). To collect an adequate amount of rich participant data to understand the essence of this phenomenon, I therefore determined that the ideal sample size for a study of this nature to be between six and eight participants.

I initially conducted outreach to a total of 12 of possible participants However, several were overwhelmed with their busy schedules, and the stresses of the Covid-19 pandemic and were unable to commit to participating in the study. Also, some possible participants failed to return their signed consent form and did not respond after several attempts to contact them. I was finally able to recruit 6 participants and the data they were able to provide was great that it was rich with information.

These participants were recruited through recommendations and prior connections or relationships with Black women in higher education leadership. For a phenomenological study, participants may or may not be located at a single site, but more

importantly, participants need to have all experienced the phenomenon and be able and willing to accurately explore and express their lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Additionally, Creswell and Poth (2018) stated that when the characteristics of the participants are more diverse, the more challenging it would be for the researcher to discover mutual experiences, themes, and the general essence of the phenomenon.

Table 1

Demographics of Participants

Participant's Assigned Pseudonym	Leadership Level	Type of Institution	Highest Level of Attained Education	Carnegie Classification	Years of Experience
Cleo	Associate Dean	Private	Doctorate	R1	9 years
Mya	Vice President of Student Affairs and Enrollment	Public	Doctorate	Baccalaureate/ Diverse Fields	20 plus years
Melanie	Program Manager	Public	Master's	M1 Master's Colleges and Universities	6 years
Josee	Assistant Vice Provost	Private	Master's	R1	25 years
Emilia	Director of Student Center	Public	Master's	R2	20 years
Ellie- May	Associate Vice President for Student health and wellbeing	Public	Doctorate	R1	20 years

Participants' Profiles

Participant profiles were developed based on responses gathered from the introductory question at the beginning of each interview, as well as the structural descriptions generated for each participant as part of the phenomenological reduction process (Moustakas, 1994). Each participant was assigned a pseudonym by which they will be addressed throughout the study to help ensure their privacy and confidentiality.

Table 2 displays participants' demographics followed by profiles, which validate the conditions for meeting the criteria for participation in this study. What follows is a brief description of where they work, their current positions, and a brief snapshot of their views on mentorship.

Cleo

Cleo has been in higher education in higher education administration for 15 years, nine of which spent at her current institution where she is associate dean of the school of medicine, where she oversees all of student affairs, which encompasses financial aid, the registrar's office, learning strategies, the office of student wellness, student life international visiting students, advising and operations for all medical school students. Her school is a private R1 institution, meaning it is a doctoral-granting institution that meets benchmarks for very high research activity (The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, 2020).

As a first-generation student who has had the guidance and support of mentors throughout her academic and professional career, she is well aware of the importance of mentorship and she is passionate about supporting first generation students at her institution.

Ellie May

Ellie May's current role is that of Associate Vice President of Health and Wellness at a public R1 institution with a population of 28,000 students, where she has been for 2 years. She has 20 years' experience in higher education where she has vast expertise in the areas of public health administration and education, wellness, peer education and leadership development. She serves on the Board of Directors for

American College Health Association and as an Aspire Mentor. In National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) she is the co-chair for the Wellness and Health Promotion Knowledge Community, Peer Education Advisory Board and the Fraternity & Sorority Life Health, Safety, and Well-being Working Group.

She “loves teaching” and is also an adjunct faculty member in an online public health program. In her current role Ellie May supports student life’s counseling and consultation services, department of recreational reports, student health services and student wellness center. What attracted her to a career in higher education was her experience as a first-generation college student born to teenage parents, she shared that going to college was her “out” and that “being able to find mentors very early on in her freshman year” helped her to make it this far in her career.

Emilia

Emilia’s career in higher education began as a part-time work study student where students earn money to help pay education expenses in the office of admissions. Her next position was a college assistant, where she was responsible for responsible for administrative, clerical, and research work (*The City University of New York* 2018). While in this role she completed her bachelor's degree and was then offered a full-time position at the institution.

She later became the associate manager of the student transfer center where she was responsible for all communication for prospective transfer students, oversaw the departmental budget, supervised full time and part time staff. She transitioned to her current role at a R2 school with a population of 14,277 students overall. R2 schools are

doctoral-granting institutions that meet benchmarks for high research activity (The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, 2020).

In her role as dean of the student testing and advisement center she plays a vital role in the onboarding process to ensure academic success during the incoming student's journey. Regarding her experience with mentorship “mentorship was key, it was vital. I don't think I would be where I'm at if it wasn't for my mentors throughout my 20 years at this institution starting as a student and now being a part of the administration was all due to strong mentorship throughout the years.” Emilia is also considering pursuing a doctoral degree in higher education leadership.

Josee

Josee has an extensive career in higher education, she began her career in higher education as an academic advisor where she helped students evaluate and realize their educational and career options. She later transitioned to assistant vice provost for graduate education where she planned, led, and implemented key academic initiatives across campus. In her current role, Josee is assistant vice provost in the office of the graduate education, as well as the director of a graduate diversity fellowship program at an R1 university. In her role as the director of the diversity fellow program where advanced doctoral are prepared for academic careers and whose presence will help diversify the professoriate.

Josee stated that her mentor “took me under her wing and taught me a lot about the institution, about the faculty, about the importance of building networks and establishing relationships.” Josee believes that it is important to build relationships with people that you work with, and to find community.

Melanie

Melanie is assistant dean of academic program management in the graduate school at a public urban M1 baccalaureate institution with a student population of 2,533. M1 baccalaureate institutions are master's colleges and universities and are considered larger programs. In her role as the assistant dean of academic program management she is responsible for recruitment, strategic partnerships, student achievement, engagement, and program development. In addition to being as well as a doctoral student, mom, wife, entrepreneur, and community advocate. She is currently pursuing her doctoral degree in community-based leadership. Melanie's first experience with mentoring was in junior high school. She also attributes mentoring to her current success, as she stated, "I've always been in some, either formal or informal mentorship program".

Mya

Mya's career in higher education began in 1996 where she started in counseling and mental health counseling later transitioned to the role of Dean of Enrollment. She later transitioned to her current role as Vice President of Student affairs, at a public 4-year Baccalaureate college with a student population of 8,511. Mya stated that her current institution not only has a Black woman as their president, but the council who supports her is comprised of Latina and Black women. She says that "work is a fascinating place." She was the only participant that had a White male as a mentor, and she stated that "in their role as my mentor, I have found that White men have given me the license to do what I have to do."

Data Collection Procedures

Approval for data collection from the St. Johns University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) was granted in March 2022 (see Appendix A). Shortly thereafter, I began soliciting participation in this study, based on social networking and recommendations. Attrition occurred early on in confirming and scheduling participants as consent forms were not signed and returned in a timely manner. However, attrition did not affect the results of this study due to the need of between six and eight participants. The "information rich" (Schreier, 2018) data was collected from the six participants. Prior to the scheduled interview, electronic informed consent forms were sent, signed, and returned to the researcher using St. John's University email. Each participant was also given a copy of the signed consent form. All data, including consent forms, were then saved on a password protected computer.

Any questions regarding the informed consent form and nature of the study were welcomed at the beginning of each scheduled interview to reaffirm their voluntary participation, anonymity, confidentiality, reduction of stress, and understanding of data collection procedures. Participants were encouraged to respond openly with any concerns. A total of 14 semi-structured, open-ended questions (see Appendix B) were designed to elicit participants' lived experiences with the phenomenon. Interviews were conducted between April 11, 2022, and June 16, 2022.

Interviews provide researchers an opportunity to understand how participants decode their lived experiences and are essential when behavior cannot be observed, especially when examining past events (Merriam, 2009). To elicit the description of the lived experiences, phenomenological interviews are moderately unstructured and open-

ended, and may be conducted by one or two interview questions (Roulston, 2010). Video interviews, based on all participants' preference and approval, was used to collect and digitally record the data.

Each interview was scheduled to last up to one hour to ensure questions were answered thoroughly; most of the interviews lasted between 40 and 45 minutes. At the end of each interview, participants expressed their appreciation for the questions asked and their anticipated interest in the results of the study. While analyzing the data and constructing themes from the participants' responses, it was essential that I provide pseudonyms when reporting the data, as protection of the participants should include researchers masking their participants names early to avoid the presence of identifiable information in the analysis files (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data Analysis Method

Initial coding is an open-ended approach to coding in which the researcher codes for their "first impression" words or phrases; it's an opportunity for the researcher to begin to deeply reflect on the contents of the data, break it down into discrete parts, and examine them for similarities and differences (Patton, 2015). Typically, phenomenological practice of *bracketing* or *epoche* can be appropriately coupled with this method (Patton, 2015), which can also make use of other coding methods, such as in vivo coding or process coding. In vivo coding when a code is taken verbatim directly from the data and placed in quotation marks and is particularly well suited for extracting and highlighting indigenous terms or jargon (Ivankova, 2015).

In several areas throughout the findings, I highlighted instances where my experiences diverged and converged from that of the participants. This is important

because this allowed me the opportunity to be in community with the participants yet separate my own experiences. In doing so, I discerned patterns in the participant's world views. I created memos during the interviews with each participant, which serves as an integral part of the interview process. According to Saldana (2015), qualitative research is inherently reflexive, as the researcher can delve deeper into their topic, and it is imperative that they are able to chronicle their own thought process.

The themes were created through a process of coding, condensing the codes, and presented in the results section (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Rubin and Rubin (2012) stated that coding involves thoroughly categorizing concepts, themes, events, and topical markers so that the researchers can easily retrieve and assess all the data that discusses the same subject across all interviews. Initial, in vivo, and descriptive coding were used to analyze the interviews, "extracting general and unique themes from all of the interviews and making a composite summary" (Groenewald, 2004, p. 50).

The six participant transcripts were reviewed multiple times to ensure that I obtained a full understanding of the contents of the documents and to conduct cursory manual coding of the data. The initial coding from the thorough review of the data was generated as a starting point for the data coding process. Additional codes were created as I re-examined the data from the verbatim transcripts. Using Dedoose software, a line-by-line review of each transcript was conducted. The coding structure included single words (Vivo codes) based on the participant's own words as well as short phrases (Saldana, 2013). The identified codes were re-examined for duplications. Duplicate codes and codes with similar meanings were merged to create themes.

The themes were formed based on common ideas, words, and reoccurring language from the participant data. Moustakas' modified seven-step van Kaam process was used to analyze the data, which requires the use of bracketing and imaginative variation to view the data in a unique way, unobstructed by preconceived ideas notions regarding the phenomenon. Imaginative variation was used to identify and synthesize the structural details and essence of the experience and transforming them into a structural description (Moustakas, 1994).

The structural meanings of the individual textural descriptions developed during the transcendental-phenomenological reduction process. The purpose of a transcendental phenomenological study is to provide meaning regarding the study participant's experience with the phenomenon. Moustakas (1994) described the noema and noesis. The noesis is the "act of perceiving, feeling, thinking, remembering, or judging... which is embedded with meaning that is concealed and hidden from consciousness" (p. 69).

In essence, it is the way the phenomenon is experienced. According to Moustakas, the meaning of the experience must be drawn out. The noema is perceptual meaning as it is viewed by the participant. The noesis and noema work collectively to bring meaning or intentional collectiveness to the phenomenon. The data analysis process began by engaging in the epoche process (Moustakas, 1994) to understand the data from the participant's experiences free from personal bias and prejudgments and removing all the assumptive detritus that attached me to the phenomenon. Through epoche, it becomes apparent that one's own experiences are barriers to pure objectivity.

According to Butler (2016), the ability of the researcher to look past their own experiences is fundamentally important to the phenomenological process. Through

epoche, I reflected on my experience and perceptions with the phenomenon and consciously set aside suppositions, perceptions, bias, “a clearing of the mind” to disconnect from any application of memories of the phenomenon being studied (Moustakas, 1994.) I then bracketed my own preconceptions to gather the participant’s experiences, feelings, and perceptions through the data collected.

All data collected was valuable in providing descriptive themes and providing meaning to the phenomenon. The first step in the transcendental phenomenological data analysis, using the modified van Kaam method, is to identify and list every expression relative to the experience (Moustakas, 1994). As part of the initial phase of the data analysis, I coded the collected data and identified participant statements relevant to the research question, significant statements from participants were highlighted from participant transcript responses and equal value to all the participants’ statements. Each horizon of the participant’s interview added meaning and provided a clear depiction of the phenomenon under study.

The process of reduction and elimination involved identifying and eliminating statements that did not provide elements for understanding the lived experience. Moustakas (1994) provided the following two strategies for determining invariant constituents: (a) Does the statement contain a moment of the experience necessary for understanding the phenomenon? (b) Is it possible to abstract or label it?

Any items that do not meet the mentioned requirements were eliminated? The horizons that met these requirements then became known as the invariant constituents of the experience for each of the participants. The reduction process ensured that invariant participant statements that speak to the horizon of the lived experience remained

(Moustakas, 1994). The reduction and elimination help separate the invariant constituents of the experience from redundant and supplementary information. During the data analysis process, cases that did not align with the majority findings were categorized and listed as discrepant cases. These discrepant cases were discussed thoroughly and analyzed for conclusions to contribute to the overall findings of the research study.

As part of the theme development process, I explored the statements from the verbatim transcripts of all 15 participants and data that made it through the reduction process to explore the meanings of the participant's lived experience. Based on the results of the coding, the participants' responses were categorized into themes. I aimed to extract and understand the complexity of the meanings in the data rather than measure the frequency of its occurrence. The analysis begins with data that is textual and aims to organize meanings in the data into patterns and, finally, themes to understand the phenomenon in a new light to make invisible aspects of the experience visible (Sundler et al., 2019).

As the themes began to form, I verified the themes against the participant data to ensure that themes gave a true representative of the participant's experience. The invariant constituents were clustered into twenty themes. The themes were further delineated into several categories: mentoring, barriers, challenges, support, Black woman, leadership. I examined the list of participant statements to elicit the essence of its meaning within the holistic context. From the invariant constituents, phenomenological reflection and imaginative variation were used as described by Moustakas (1994) to construct a thematic portrayal of the participant's experience and the factors that influenced the leadership journey for these women.

Trustworthiness of the Design

The trustworthiness and goodness of qualitative studies should be considered not only by its design competency but also by the specified plan for how the researcher will ethically acquire and analyze the topic and its results (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). As stated by Marshall and Rossman (2016), “Researchers must think beyond being careful about procedural matters and documentation for the protection of human subjects” (p. 50). Also, researchers should aim to reveal data that are transparent so that other researchers and readers can determine what is a statement of the interviewee and what is interpreted by the researcher (Flick, 2011). To carry out Flick’s notion, it was necessary that I fully understood the objective of the study and the insight I was trying to provide regarding the phenomenon; this study must be credible, valid, and rewarding to increase its trustworthiness and authenticity.

To establish trustworthiness, I committed to having an explicit focus on participants’ lived experiences with the phenomenon, rather than a commitment that focused on social injustices Black women experience within the higher education leadership system, which are in part due to political and dominant structures that are present (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). To determine content reliability, interview questions were evaluated and approved by my former dissertation chair.

Throughout the interview process, I probed participants for clarity on points that needed additional information or support. At the conclusion of each interview, participants were asked if they would like a copy of their interview transcript to review for accuracy. Informed consent forms were provided through St. John’s University email in which participants reviewed the form and completed the signing process, after the

signed consent was received it was then stored on a password file on password protected laptop. As stated by Flick (2011), “The reliability of the whole research process can be developed by its reflexive documentation” (p. 16). The reality of the researched phenomenon is ever-changing, which will result in multiple practicalities when researched.

Additionally, as the primary analytic tool, I must bracket my own experiences, prior knowledge, and assumptions. Lauterbach (2018) kept a journal throughout the stages of data collection and analysis, which helped identify personal interpretations of participants’ lived experiences that reflected prior understanding rather than the information from the interviews and the experiences discussed. I deem this approach to be useful as I build trustworthiness throughout my research and also kept a journal as the researcher.

Research Ethics

The three fundamental principles of human ethical research are respect, beneficence, and justice. “Human research scientists are guided by the ethical principles on research on human participants” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 109). Researchers must protect research participants by avoiding harm to them; and should always consider how they are going to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of their study participants (Dooly et al., 2017; Resnik, 2019).

The role of the researcher is to ensure that participants experience no harm due to their involvement in this study. Participants in this study were treated ethically and allowed to react to the recorded data. I adequately informed participants of the intent and purpose of the study, and clear agreements were established. The following ethical procedures were

followed for this research study to ensure the confidentiality and privacy of all participants in the study.

- The proper protocol for submitting for and receiving approval from the St. John's University Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct this study was followed according to research standards.
- Participants were made aware of the purpose of this research study. Each participant completed an informed consent explaining the research study, expectations, and their rights. Participants were also informed of their right to decline to participate in this study
- Participants were informed that any time during the interview process, they could elect to stop an interview and discontinue participation in the study.
- During the process of member checking, there was potential, during the participant's review of the transcripts or synthesized data, to trigger feelings of distress or anxiety (Birt et al., 2016).
- Each participant was given a pseudonym in place of their real name to protect their identity and ensure privacy.

Researchers must ensure that the identities of the study participants remain anonymous and that their privacy and confidentiality are not compromised, even after the conclusion of the study (Resnik, 2019). It is the responsibility of the researcher to remain ethical when interpreting the results of the study. Researchers should not over-interpret or misinterpret the data and represent the possible conclusions as closely as possible (Dooly et al., 2017).

It is equally important for a researcher to refrain from coercion and undue influence, which interferes with the participant's ability to make a properly informed choice. (Geldenhuis, 2019), wrote that the quality of informed consent in humanistic and transpersonal research brings into focus the trust involved in the intimate interaction between researcher and participant. Documentation also provides a monitoring tool to demonstrate to external reviewers, colleagues, and the IRB, that the correct steps in informed consent are appropriately handled (Geldenhuis, 2019).

Researcher Role

In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary data gathering instrument. As such, "the researcher's role is to present questions to participants that can elicit detailed, subjective responses" (Scherzer, 2015). Conscious efforts will be made to self-monitor verbal and non-verbal responses, specifically when the researcher agrees with a comment from a participant. Additionally, the researcher will pay careful attention to tone to minimize fluctuation in voice and physical changes in facial expressions and bodily movements throughout the interviews for consistency. Also, since I self-identify with the sample group and had shared experiences with the participants, I will intentionally exclude their experiences and emotions for content analysis of the transcripts from the qualitative interviews. Utilizing suggestions by Cope (2014). I sought to maintain credibility, authenticity, and confirmability (as noted in Polit & Beck, 2012; Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Examining and reflecting on the researcher's role is especially important in a phenomenological study, since, as mentioned earlier in the section on *epoche*, that I do not allow my firsthand experiences effect my views of the participants experiences. I

have experienced much of what the participants shared during their interviews. It was imperative that I did not allow first-hand experiences to overpower the experiences of the participants.

For instance, I have personally experienced feeling unsupported and having my authority questioned by others within the institution. Additionally, I have had powerful mentoring experiences that positioned me in rooms and spaces that I would never think I would belong in. I have also spoken with others about their experiences and mentored them by creating safe unbiased spaces for them to share their experiences and to also support them. Despite my personal experiences, I believe that I successfully bracketed and set aside my views and willfully embraced the experiences of my participants by actively and attentively listening to their lived experiences with “fresh eyes and views” so that my firsthand experiences did not become part of their narratives.

Chapter Summary

Qualitative research methodologies provide mechanisms to study complex phenomena. The key objectives of the study were to arrive at patterns or themes, to establish new outcomes, and identify gaps in the existing body of knowledge and theory to explain the role of mentorship in the advancement of Black women in administrative roles.

As the researcher, I set aside biases and preconceived assumptions about experiences, feelings, and responses to situations. The goal was to determine what the experience meant for the participants’ who had the experience and to provide a comprehensive description of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). The phenomenal

experience becomes more clarified and expanded in meaning as the phenomena are considered and reconsidered during the reflective process (Moustakas,1994).

It was my intent to obtain rich data from the selected participant until data saturation was achieved. I identified themes or patterns regarding how the study participants experience the phenomena. I also ensured that the privacy and confidentiality of the study participants were maintained and protected the rights of the study participants. Chapter 4 is a discussion of the results of the study.

CHAPTER 4

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand and describe the lived experiences of Black women in higher education administrative roles and the role of mentorship in the advancement of their careers. Purposeful sampling was used to select between six and eight Black women in higher education administrative roles. Six Black women serving in leadership roles in higher education agreed to participate in this study by completing in-depth interviews. All interviews were conducted through Cisco WebEx, a web video conferencing platform. Semi-structured interview questions consisting of 14 open-ended questions were created to assist in eliciting the participants' lived experiences related to mentorship. The incorporation of direct quotations gave weight to participants' experiences with mentorship; each participant was assigned a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality.

To aid in the understanding of the role of mentorship in the advancement of Black women in higher education leadership, the following section will present the findings of this study by first revealing overarching themes, including subthemes, that emerged through the analysis of the data. In-depth descriptions with significant statements from participants will be included to help illustrate their lived experiences with this phenomenon. The study's six participants (see Table 2) were encouraged to discuss their experiences with mentors and the ways these relationships assisted in to attain their career goals, navigating issues salient to Black women in leadership, and how those mentoring relationships were formed, to deepen the understanding of the phenomenon. Table 3 provides the demographic characteristics and the total number of the mentors that each participant discussed in their interview. Chapter 4 presents the results of this study,

including overarching and subthemes, supported by significant statements from the in-depth interviews. This will result in research questions being answered followed by a discussion of the study's major findings in Chapter 5.

Findings

Accessing and Developing Mentoring Relationships

Many participants indicated that mentors have helped them get through difficult times or uncertainty by offering advice or help through uncomfortable situations.

Participants also mentioned how crucial access and development of their relationships with their mentors has been for their career and personal development. Based on coding using participant responses from the semi structured interviews, the following themes emerged: (a) trust and rapport, (b) frequent and convenient meetings, (c) organic connections.

Trust and Rapport. Participants cited trust as a foundational aspect of a successful mentoring relationship. It is often linked to openness, mutual reliance and respect, as well as the willingness to be vulnerable in some way. Without trust, relationships become tense, and people become self-protective. In order to gain access to a mentor, creating a foundation of trust and rapport was key. As an example, Josee's relationship with her mentor developed when she began her career in higher education as an academic advisor. Trust and rapport with her mentor were gained when it was shared that they both had graduated from the same college for their undergraduate degrees. This created a connection of familiarity that allowed their relationship to blossom. Josee emphasized how an "effective mentoring relationship cannot experience a harmonious

connection if trust is not at the core.” She also shared a moment when she did not feel supported in her office, she mentioned how she felt “out of place”.

She continued with sharing how her ideas in her department meetings were “ignored or doubted by my colleagues”. Josee’s mentor shared a personal story with her about his lack of confidence early in his career and how his colleagues “doubted him and his ideas” and continued to share how he would go home and feel “depleted”.

He did not have a mentor to share things with, she said instead he would share everything with his wife. In that very moment I saw him become vulnerable and allowed me to trust him as a person, both professionally and personally, a lot more.” My mentor always appears to have it all together, it was surreal seeing him so vulnerable and open with me.”

Mya shared an instance in which the trust between her and her mentor trust was tested and strengthened. She shared the story of one of her close family friends who was an employee at another institution that her mentor was affiliated with. This close family friend had gotten into some legal trouble and was arrested. According to Mya, her mentor gave her the “liberty of disclosing the situation and outcome privately by pulling me to the side and not in an executive meeting where he had every right to do so.” After this instance, her mentor gained from her a high level of trust because “she not only handled it privately but shielded that situation from becoming campus gossip, and protected my reputation, knowing that I was affiliated with that individual.” She added, “I appreciated her level of understanding and I think it allowed me to trust her as a person. I think having that relationship with her helped me have those honest conversations.” Trust and honest conversations between mentor and mentee are crucial and involve openness to

vulnerability and the belief in the reliability and benevolence of the other (Tschannen-Moran, 2014).

Melissa echoed the importance of having open and honest conversations to build trust and rapport with her mentor by stating, “You can’t have a mentor and be the mentee and not be willing to tell them what’s on your mind.” Emilia is transparent in her conversations with her mentors and felt a sense of acceptance only once her mentor established “whatever is said in this space stays with us and you can say whatever comes to mind” but also demonstrated it in her actions by not judging her based on what she might be sharing. However, she did stress that it took time to build trust and rapport with her mentor due a large age difference. Emilia is the only participant with a mentor with a large age difference. Johnson (1991) notes that when societal norms, in terms of power distribution, are in conflict, the lines of communication become blurred, causing both mentor and mentee to grapple with their own sense of autonomy.

Ellie May recalled a campus visit she took with her mentor from an institution where they were both previously employed, but how they “literally could not walk the campus because everybody who saw him wanted to stop and hug him and talk to him.” She continued by saying “he made that much of an impact and he still maintains relationships with folks from that campus, and that says a lot about his character, and how well respected he is.” This experience helped her to trust her mentor, given how she observed how others had appreciated him. Each participant revealed an instance in which transparency, trust, rapport, and personality was demonstrated and carried out by their mentor. Though their experiences differed in the particulars of how trust was established,

each participant experienced the phenomenon and came to this place using often similar explanations.

Frequent and Convenient Meetings. Four participants noted that being in regular contact was important to maintain the mentor-mentee relationship. Despite this importance, some discussed the difficulty in making time to meet. Three participants however shared a dual professional role with their mentor, whether it was as a direct supervisor or as a former colleague. These participants stated how this role made meetings with their mentors more frequent and convenient, which in turn contributed to accessing and developing relationships with their mentors. For example, Josee's mentor served in a dual role of her direct supervisor, as well as being a fellow alumnus of the same college. When asked about how frequently she would meet with her mentor, she stated:

He took a lot of extra time with me he always allows me to come in early so that he and I could meet before the department got going. In those moments, I could share whatever I was needing extra help with, or he would share things with me that I needed to know as a future leader. He was so open and willing to invest that extra time. He also saw beyond what I was seeing at the time and increased my confidence as aspired to transition to a new institution and role.

Josee mentioned that they would even "catch up and gossip" on their former college news sometimes, a phenomenon that helped further build the trust and rapport in their mentor and mentee relationship.

Melanie and Mya shared that since their mentors were also their colleagues, they frequently found themselves engaging in mentoring discussions as casual

conversation occurred in the workplace. Mya revealed this experience with her mentor when she stated, “It’s almost like I had a mentoring moment daily, which I probably wouldn’t have gotten had he been in a leadership role.” Participants engaged in frequent and convenient meetings both formally and informally with their mentors and received “nuggets” and “useful pointers” that aided their success as leaders and contributed to a trusting mentoring relationship.

Organic Connections. Another overarching theme that emerged from the interview data was most participants’ experience with mentoring relationships evolving organically rather than through more formal means. Many of the participants said that these organic connections were vital to their professional development, though it should be noted that some felt the method of connecting was not as important. Emilia shared that when the mentoring relationship with her mentor formed, she was her direct supervisor and they had already worked closely together. She noticed “mentoring moments happening” and was conscious about not forcing it. She went on to state “it was important for me to know that she was willing to mentor me, and she did that through her actions, but I also allowed it to happen without much effort on my part.” Melanie stated how the relationship with her mentor formed organically, stating that “she took me under their wing, and we formed a budding relationship.”

Making connections organically—rather than being matched with someone unfamiliar through, for instance, a formal mentoring program—seemed to allow for greater openness and comfort and avoided instances where personalities clashed. Each participant highlighted the importance of their organic connections with their mentors, and how these organic connections not only humanized their mentors but helped

strengthen their ability to trust and communicate with them. These organic connections were influenced sharing similarities of Black women who have also navigated comparable obstacles. They could also feel a sense of vulnerability later on, which would likely be difficult in a formal, workshop-based mentoring program.

Types of Professionally Beneficial Mentoring Experiences

Mentoring experiences often transpire in two forms, formally and informally. When asked about their mentoring experiences, each participant reflected that they were more informal. Several participants revealed that due to the lack of formal mentoring programs or support on campus for Black women in administrative roles, they created their own community with other Black women on campus. Based on participant responses, the following themes emerged: (a) informal peer mentoring, (b) instilling a vision and outlook, (c) access and opportunities, (d) career and skill guidance, and (e) increasing networking and exposure.

Informal Peer Mentoring. Academia is rooted in a culture of individualism. Faculty members are required to public academic work in order to succeed in their career. This process is often described as “publish or perish,” whereby faculty members must regularly conduct and publish their research or else they would face non-renewal of their contracts and eventual denial of tenure. Black women’s mentoring relationships with each other provided an opportunity for them to receive career and psychosocial support even within unsupportive, individualistic environments through peer-to-peer mentoring. For instance, in describing her experience with informal, peer mentoring, Josee stated that “it’s scheduling coffees or going on a walk or having lunch or those kinds of things.” She also shared her experience as being the only Black woman in her department and

hearing of the passing of Prince Rogers Nelson, who was an African American singer-songwriter, music producer, and actor (Eames, 2021), saying, “I didn't have anybody to talk to about Prince dying. I was really upset but they were all like, "Oh, that?" I'm like, "Oh, that !!?"” Josee mentioned how she felt as though her colleague’s response dismissed her feelings of grief, sadness, and shocked while highlighting her feelings of isolation as the only Black woman within her department. She indicated that she had to “leave my office in order to really build relationship and community with other Black folks on campus.” She was able to build that community only through initiating contact with her peers and creating an opportunity to connect with them.

Instilling a Vision and Outlook . Most participants emphasized their mentor’s ability to instill in them a clear vision and outlook regarding their potential career path and trajectory. For one participant, Ellie, it was evident that she would reach the pinnacle of her profession and become a college president. However, this was the exception. The other five participants all spoke about how a mentor saw something in them that they necessarily did not see in themselves. Melanie, Josee, and Emily described their mentor’s contributions as “seeing something special” where their mentors saw great potential for growth and opportunities for them. Cleo and Melanie both shared how their mentors pushed them to think bigger and to reach for upper-level, senior administrative positions. Melanie stated, “As I started off in higher education and got my first leadership position in enrollment management, I thought I’d made it and [there] wasn’t much else to shoot for. My mentor saw and thought otherwise.” Cleo echoed a similar experience by stating:

My mentor knew a lot of things that I didn’t know, and she still does. She knew politics of the college, had been faculty before, she’d been on the

student services side and the academic side. She's been very instrumental in the positions I've held. She taught me to consider myself as a leader even before getting my first leadership position. So, it's like she kind of knew where I was going to go. She's had experiences at other colleges and has worked with presidents, vice-chancellors, and chancellors so she's had that exposure and a seat at the table to know it's possible. She's given me so much to consider as I still figure out what I want to be when I grow up (laughs).

The participants' mentors were able to instill a vision and positive outlook by guiding their mentees with feedback while also instilling confidence in their leadership abilities.

Related to the theme of outlook, one participant mentioned the importance of having a mentoring relationship that provided and encouraged access to opportunities a major contributing factor to her career advancement. Conversely, a few participants expressed frustration with access, saying they were not encouraged or offered opportunities to advance their careers or knowledge base and often felt they were not provided the same opportunities given to their counterparts. Some reported they felt driven to success in reaction to the lack of opportunities granted to them.

Mya shared how her mentor encouraged her to pursue a terminal degree while still maintaining her fulltime position and being a mom. She stated:

My mentor at the time knew that [not having a terminal degree] was holding me back from career advancement. I was a mother of an elementary school student at the time and the thought of pursuing a terminal degree was nonexistent. I just

couldn't see how that would work; my time was already limited. I confided in my mentor extensively. We were able to agree on a schedule that allowed me the opportunity to attend classes, and later begin my dissertation process. Ironically, as soon as my title changed to Dr., I magically had the experience for the position, and that was laughable to me.

Mya went on to say that in those moments she was grateful for the encouragement of her mentor, because she was "stubborn and getting in my own way" when it came to returning to school.

Career and Skill Guidance. All participants were able to vividly recall their mentors at some point providing advocacy and guidance. Cleo was adamant when stating, "A lot of times your mentors don't have to be directly in the career you're in because guidance and leadership seem to have the same process in how one develops and matures, based on my experience." Ellie alluded to the idea that mentors should not only have a vision for their mentees but also be willing to guide them down their career path.

For instance, Josee disclosed that her mentor recognized that there were areas where he could not help in, such as gaining more confidence in public speaking skills, which she shared that she had "struggled with public speaking since high school because I am extremely shy." Her mentor sought out training programs on campus where Josee could gain public speaking skills and experience. Josee mentioned that one training program focused on honing leaders' managerial skills. A requirement that made Josee uncomfortable was that each guest to formally introduce themselves to everyone in the space by standing on the stage and speaking into a microphone. She went on to say how uncomfortable she was but also mentioned that she was glad that her mentor afforded her

the opportunity to participate in the training program. She was able to network, face her fear of public speaking, and develop her managerial skills. Since the training was so valuable, she plans on referring a few women on campus to the program because she feels as though their careers could also benefit from them attending.

Cleo expressed a similar sentiment about her mentor, saying “I really think she was able to be my front mirror because I was stuck being in my rearview mirror, because although I can show strength in some areas, my mentors see where I need improvement and pushes me forward”. When asked how her mentor pushed her forward, she stated “she never makes anything demanding but will always provide a suggestion or persuade me step out of my comfort zone” to enhance my chances of achieving the career goals that I have set for myself.

Sponsorship. According to Ibarra et al. (2010), sponsorship is the willingness of mentors or individuals who are in a position of influence to advocate on behalf of the mentee for increased resources and recognition. The participants whose mentor also served as a direct supervisor often interchangeably used the words “sponsor” and “invest” when discussing how their mentors opened opportunities for them. This language was often not metaphorical – it reflected the mentors’ willingness and action to financially sponsor or invest in their mentees’ careers. They did so by paying for membership, program, and conference fees or by investing their time serving as a professional reference and advocate in order to advance in their careers.

Mya shared her experiences with her mentor and the alignment of mentorship and sponsorship:

Often, we think that there's a huge difference between mentorship and sponsorship and there's not. I have to say, equally as important, and in some cases more important, is sponsorship. A mentor is guiding you where you are, and a sponsor is introducing you, throwing your name out there, putting their name on yours for recommendations, and inviting you into networks so that you can get to where you want to be. Why have someone who is willing to guide you but not willing to advocate for you? And so, I think I've been very fortunate and blessed to have mentors that have.

She went on to share how the of sponsorship played a role in her experience, relaying a conversation she had with her mentor:

[My mentor said] "You're going to get a call and you're going to say yes. And you're just going to do it." And so, in her sponsorship role, she was able to say to someone, "Mya can do that role." And then in the mentorship role, she flipped it back to me and was like, "You're going to do that role. Because you're being given an opportunity to learn in a semi-safe space with another mentor-type supervisor who can guide you."

Ellie May mentioned how, for her, sponsorship can be as simple as someone recommending you at a given moment, even when you might not necessarily be prepared for that opportunity.

A few participants revealed the amount of support received and their mentors' willingness to invest in them was paramount to their personal and career development. Cleo shared that her mentor encourages her to "keep your resume updated even if you love your job because you never know when I might tell you about a job opportunity."

She also shared that her former dissertation chair who has now transitioned to the role of mentor, consistently invests in her personal and professional growth so much so, that she invited Cleo to participate in the hooding ceremony for the current doctoral students in her former program.

Increasing Networking and Exposure. One of the important professional experiences for women in higher education is networking. Through increasing professional connections and exposure to others, networking allows for increased visibility and identification of potential collaborators within a field of expertise, which is helpful for professionals to advance in their careers. For instance, when Ellie May was discussing how her mentor sponsored her, she immediately transitioned into how her mentor also involved her in networking and other opportunities to expose her to the organization and the larger field. She stated:

I was pushed and forced in a good way to network my mentor and I attended the same conference I decided to attend late due to scheduling conflict. When I told my mentor that I was able to attend she immediately said “Oh, you’re coming and you’re sitting at my table in the front with all the big names that are here we’ve got to get your name known so that as you advance in your career you will already have access to the movers and shakers.”

By increasing Ellie May’s exposure at a conference, she increased the opportunity for her to expand her professional network. Ellie May explained, saying “Now mind you, I hadn’t said a word about advancing in my career but I liked the feeling I felt in that moment and I was intrigued and inspired. She knew that this networking opportunity would be an excellent opportunity for me to rub elbows in a non-academic setting.” In

addition, Melanie stated that her mentor puts her in “places and spaces that have produced positive outcomes and have connected me with individuals along the way that has increased my network.” Mya shared that mentor helped her get “out of her comfort zone” by encouraging her to network and be more visible on campus, in meetings, and during various off-campus networking events.

Cleo discussed how having access to mentorship exposed her to different leadership styles and qualities of people in general. It was beneficial for her to experience the perspective of various mentors throughout her professional career, as well as throughout her time in graduate school to better understand how people navigate different circumstances. She stated: “As I think about exposure to my mentors throughout the years, it has given me a larger perspective on how to lead, how to work, how to interpret and process working in higher education, especially in a leadership role.” This mentorship was important since women in higher education leadership roles often face limited access to established professional networks due to gender bias. In describing their lived experiences, each participant revealed the influence of their mentor’s contributions and how their vision, guidance, sponsorship, networking, and informal mentoring experiences helped advanced their careers or developed their leadership skills.

Mentoring and Overcoming Barriers for Black Women Leaders

The previous themes dealt with mentoring experiences that led to the pursuit and achievement of professional goals. However, several participants also reported experiences are salient to Black women in leadership roles and the mentoring and guidance they received to help them overcome these barriers. All six (6) participants were able to vividly recall their mentors at some point providing this kind of guidance and

advocacy. For instance, Emilia shared that “the relationship with my mentor was vital, especially regarding the trials and tribulations that I faced when it came to gender roles and the glass ceiling, especially being a Black woman.” Similarly, Josee shared how her mentor supported her and shared her experience “my first time stepping foot on campus was when I interviewed. She really took me under her wing and taught me a lot about the institution, about the faculty, about the importance of building networks and establishing and navigating relationships.” Cleo described her mentor as a huge advocate, and she stated, “she not only helped me find my voice but has stood in the gap and has been a voice for me.” “Standing in the gap” is a biblical reference used to suggest that someone to expose oneself for the protection of someone else (Henderson, 2022).

Based on an analysis of the participants' responses, the following themes emerged: (a) Overcoming Imposter Syndrome, (b) Sharing Faith, (c) Isolation, (d) Microaggressions, (e) the Angry Black Woman, (f) the Questioning of Expertise (g) Change Agent.

Overcoming Imposter Syndrome. Imposter syndrome is a feeling that occurs when someone doubts that their skills and accomplishments make them qualified for their position and therefore questions whether they belong. Black women are more susceptible to imposter syndrome due to the lack of Black women in similar positions of leadership or who share similar backgrounds. These negative feelings, regardless of gender or race within the academy, can result in Black women internalizing racist experiences, causing them to struggle. Several participants shared their personal experiences with imposter syndrome while at their current institutions. Ellie May, who had only recently become aware of the term imposter syndrome after joining her institution just a few years prior,

expressed that she “constantly feels pressured to be the best, resulting in exhaustion as [she] chases an unattainable goal of perfection.” Cleo also shared that “imposter syndrome is real, and it creeps up in the most interesting ways.” It was found that a few of the women who expressed a sense of imposter syndrome developed those feelings through the treatment given to them by their peers or counterparts.

For instance, some participants reported being viewed as aggressive, angry, and stand-offish when confronting opposing viewpoints from their colleagues. When attending meetings, many felt that they had to “impersonate,” or pretend to be someone they are not, to dispel the myths of Black women, in order to be heard. Cleo shared that she “I developed tools of friendships with other Black colleagues to be able to mitigate the imposter syndrome when it creeps up [...]” Cleo also mentioned how integral her mentor was in helping her acknowledge that imposter syndrome does exist, but not to let those feelings deter her from continuing to pursue her goals.

Mya shared her experiences with imposter syndrome and stated that she attributed her decision not to use the title “feelings of imposter syndrome”. Mya found this helpful in overcoming her bouts of imposter syndrome. She also mentioned that she believed it would cause people to have expectations of her she was not sure she could live up to. Melanie recalls “being the only Black girl/woman, or very few” in spaces she felt she did not belong on campus, therefore making her feel uncomfortable and further increasing her feelings of imposter syndrome. Melanie also expressed that “while [she] feels she has come a long way with [her] self-confidence, [she] knows the work will be ongoing.” Josee expressed having seen many colleagues “who did not have the best academic records” advance to leadership positions while some who had

consistently achieved success were overlooked for these same opportunities. This added to her sense of imposter syndrome by failing to acknowledge the achieved success of the Black women who were more qualified for these positions.

Participants revealed how their mentors' ability to be transparent when discussing imposter syndrome, and their willingness to acknowledge their mentees feelings, helped provide the support and guidance that was needed to persevere.

Sharing Faith. I should note that this was one of several findings that I did not find surprising, given my experience with this phenomenon as a Black woman who also has a strong foundation of faith. However, I wanted to ensure that this study focuses on the experience of the participants and not my own (Moustakas, 1994). Two participants discussed how they overcame challenges and barriers in their way, and for them this was through prayer and faith. Collins' (2000) Black feminist thought also included a perspective from Cannon (1985), who wrote about Black feminist consciousness that gave insight into how Black women use faith and spirituality as a source of support, "It was biblical faith grounded in the prophetic tradition," that helped Black women "devise strategies and tactics to make Black people less susceptible to the indignities and proscriptions of an oppressive white social order" (p. 35). When speaking about overcoming challenges and barriers, one participant stated, "I talked about my faith with my mentor because we both grew up with a strong connection to church and our faith. I drew upon what I was grounded in before I even know what it was, what my faith in God was." Three of the participants explicitly stated the importance of their Christian faith before being asked. For instance, Melanie acknowledged the role of religion in her life when she stated, "I feel like I had been placed in different places and spaces over the

years by God to do good work.” Throughout the interview Melanie also referred to her church and the values and morals that have been instilled in her from childhood.

Similarly, when elaborating about her personal belief system, Mya recalled that it “comes from my upbringing a part of my faith. I am Christian by choice so [it is] an extension of my responsibility and Christian duty.” Ellie May shared that as an African American woman “soft skills . . . to do with personality or how you handle yourself, I learned that through church, [by] not putting the pressure on myself to always be at my best, but to ask Jesus to help me.” She refers to her work as her “ministry”. Emilia did not directly mention Christianity, religion, or spirituality but made references to biblical concepts. When discussing her career, Emilia described giving back to others as her “reasonable service.” In addition, she shared, “I like to look at the administrative piece as my testimony.” Emilia mentioned “testimony” three times in her interview. Another participant indicated that prayer assists with things that are not within their control, saying: “I pray a lot because some things you learn that are just not in your control get out of your control quickly, and sometimes you just have to sit and listen.” The term “sit and listen” in this statement refers to the guidance provided by God based on the situation being prayed for.

Isolation. Black women Feeling isolated, as well as living up to the expectation to fulfill the current job responsibilities while experiencing this type of discourtesy, while feeling has served as a survival mechanism for the researcher within the workplace. Feelings of isolation were shared by all 6 participants and connects to the theoretical framework Black feminist thought’s “interlocking nature of race, gender, and class oppression.” Collins (1986) explains this in the way that Black women contend with

oppression both universally and privately, as they are bound by their interlocking identities and internal battles with tokenism and isolation. All of the participants shared how there were moments whereas Black women they felt isolated and lacked a sense of community within their institution. When asked how their mentors helped navigate those moments, Josee very candidly shared a personal experience of feeling isolated at her institution. In this experience, she said “there was a noose found on campus about a month ago. It was the third one in three or four years. When I got the email, nobody in my office was talking about it.” She continued: “I didn't have any community in my office. So I'm texting my friends, I'm on Facebook talking to friends about it. I didn't have that community within my office.” She also contacted her mentor to share her experience because as she stated, “I really didn't know what to think at that moment”. She met her mentor in the parking lot and “immediately started to cry”.

I asked if her mentor offered any words of support during their time in the parking lot. She said “No, we were both silent, we just stood in silence, in shock.” I continued to ask her how that moment of complete silence made her feel, and she said, “There was not much to say, I was visibly shaken at the mere thought that someone, maybe even a student here, would do such a hurtful and mean thing.” She went on to mention how her mentor sat in silence with her and allowed her the “space and time” to cry.

Microaggressions. As current leaders in higher education, each participant is required to remain professional, regardless of adversity encountered within the workplace. The choice to remain steadfast, calm, and respectful while feeling discomfort caused by racial microaggressions can be taxing. Any individual can experience

microaggressions; however, microaggressions towards women of color, Black women specifically, can be perceived much differently than women of other races and ethnicity, such as White, Asian, or Latina women, based on negative stereotypes and prejudice (Forrest-Bank & Jenson, 2015; Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008).

Three out of the six participants shared specific experiences with microaggression on their campuses. Melanie shared her experience with microaggressions while working in the alumni relations office. Although hesitant because of past negative interactions with alumni, her boss encouraged her to attend an alumni networking event. She stated “I remember sitting at a table and one of the women said to me, she said, ‘Oh, what's your name?’” After Melanie shared her last name with the woman at the table, the woman stated, “Is that the rich [last name] or the poor [last name]?” She continued: “I also remember her choking on her chicken bone because the director, who was married to a woman of color who happened to be at the event, came, then he kissed his wife. You could see the disgust in that woman’s face. I was uncomfortable for her.”

Ellie shared there are still some departments where they may be only Black woman. She stated that her institution has a reputation “of taking advantage of their biggest and brightest, especially those of color.” She continued by stating that there is a “lack of consistency in addressing issues and concerns still happen.” She mentioned that it can “be a challenge to come to a place where you don't feel supported, you don't feel affirmed.” Josee shared that, after having several conversations with the administrative assistant of her department about how inappropriate it was to ask about her hairstyles, she still took upon herself to comment on her hair again by stating, "Oh, your braids are gone." Josee stated, “I was hurt, honestly.” Regarding the comments made on her hair,

she said, “I have been told that my hair styles are nice,” but also “why do I continue to change my look?” She said has also been asked, “How often do you wash your hair, like you do wash your hair right?” Both participants shared that their mentors have served as “sounding boards” and “safe spaces” by meeting with them and allowing them to discuss their feelings and to provide encouragement. In this instance, the mentors helped navigate issues salient to Black women in leadership by being a source of support and comfort in their time of discomfort. Through the lens of Black feminist thought, Collins (2000) expresses the informal shared ideas among Black women that they experience on a daily basis around issues of how they should style their hair. This is yet another hurdle that Black women must contend with by simply living their normal lives.

The Angry Black Woman. I should mention that this was yet another finding that, given my lack of prior exposure to this phenomenon, were quite unexpected. But I wanted to make sure that this study prioritizes the participants' experiences rather than my own (Moustakas, 1994).

Yet another barrier that Black women in higher education leadership face is the feeling of inadequacy based on treatment from colleagues. This could include being labeled as an “angry Black woman” when they disagree with decisions or express an opinion. Black feminist thought’s second theme of the interlocking nature of race, gender, and class oppression exists in the intrinsic contexts of stereotypes and the intersections of race/ethnicity and gender (Collins, 2000). This apparent description of a clearly stated stereotype can damage the careers of Black women and mislabel their passion. When conducting the interviews, it was relayed by two of the participants that things such as walking into a meeting without a smile, expressing concern about a topic,

or even using hand gestures while talking could be taken as signs of anger or aggression. Ellie May shared that in her experience:

I found that I had a Caucasian co-worker who would jump up in meetings, yell and scream at people, slam her hands down on the desk, and they said, “Oh, well, that's just Amy.” I do not raise my voice. I'm generally happy. I tell people how I feel. I'm direct. But when I was aggressive, I was literally called a bull in a China shop.

Ellie May mentioned briefly that she really was offended by the “bull in a China shop” comment but revealed that she leaned in on her faith to understand that things around her are sometimes out of her control, which is also a theme that was discussed at length earlier in this research.

One participant stated that being considered an angry Black woman was a barrier, but found comfort in sharing her experiences with her mentor, who is also a Black woman. Her mentor purchased a small notebook for her and told her to “scribble or draw flowers” and to just “keep yourself focused on that notebook”. She mentioned that her mentors background was in art therapy. She realized that her mentor was using a form of therapy to help her navigate the perception of the angry Black woman.

The Questioning of Expertise. I should point out that given my lack of prior exposure to this phenomenon, this was one of several findings that I should remark were quite surprising. However, I wanted to make sure that the participants' experiences were given more weight in this study than my own (Moustakas, 1994). Another recurring theme emerged among all six participants in this study. It indicated that even though they had a seat at the table, they were not taken seriously and often would make suggestions

that were overlooked. Collins (2000) noted one important component that contributes to the enduring silence between Black women, and within Black feminist thought, it rests in the lack of access to positions of power in U.S. institutions for Black women. The women indicated that they would have to prove themselves worthy of making decisions and at times found themselves being questioned regarding their level of experience or expertise. This action left the women with a sense of not feeling worthy or not wanted in the spaces they earned. For instance, Cleo shared:

When they hire you [Black women], and then you say so, here is what you did wrong, and here is what I suggest. Here is what we—here are these policies that need to change, here are all these misconceptions, sometimes folks resent that and really what they meant was we were all about diversity, but not if it meant we had to change.

In dealing with a question of her expertise, Melanie mentioned “you have as much knowledge as anyone else many times, and you may not be taken as seriously as someone.” Ellie May similarly shared that “there is also a sense that you must show that you are fully capable of handling your position.”

Cleo mentioned that their mentor asked her how she planned on addressing the push-back she received from her colleagues. She said that she asked her mentor if this was a “teachable moment” because she was clearly upset. Her mentor’s initial response of asking her how she planned on addressing the push-back, although frustrating, was in fact a teachable moment for her. She said that she learned in that moment that she has to become comfortable with asserting herself at the onset of any issue. In her view, the longer that she would wait to address the issue, the more frustrated she would become.

Cleo continued, “I always feel like I must outwork everyone in the room, and it can be exhausting at times.” She also shared a moment with a White male colleague:

We were in a meeting, and I asked a question. It was not a silly question, but he used this opportunity to test my knowledge in a meeting. I held my own, but I thought, okay, is this really happening to me?! I never saw him do that to anybody else, but he did it to me.

Cleo said she realized in that moment that, in the past, she had ignored the push-back that she received, and she did in fact hold animosity towards her colleague.

Emilia enthusiastically discussed how grateful she was for her mentor and “the guidance and support of providing insight on how to navigate predominantly White spaces on campus by encouraging me to enter those spaces with confidence and would always be sure to reassure me that “you are more than capable and should proudly hold your head up high when you enter any room”, she went on to say that those words are “etched in her brain” now, and leave her feeling a lot more comfortable in predominantly White spaces. Emilia also mentioned that “being a Black woman in a leadership role, I was always second-guessed, whether by my staff or by male administrators,” and how her mentor was able to provide support.

Change Agents. Of the six women who participated in this study, four respondents identified that their career advancement was influenced by the need to see change. Some indicated that they did not see other women who looked like them in certain places; others identified poor leadership as an influence to obtain senior-level leadership to influence change. Though there were very different reasons they felt a change was needed, change was a driving force in their careers.

In being a changed agent, Emilia shared that she was encouraged by “watching horrible leadership. She continued to state that this “has been my motivator; I am not saying I am the best leader.” She ended with saying that although she still has some learning to do, she hopes that she can be “can improve with time” as she continues to “grow” in her leadership skills and abilities.

Mya said that she “want to be a part of changing the policy and procedures to help students have a good quality and nondiscriminatory college experience.” She went on to state that she does what needs to be done “to ensure that I remain at a career level where somebody will respect me as a change agent at the table.” Similarly, Ellie May mentioned that by “watching horrible leadership” was the “main reasons why I want make sure that I am a part of the change that occurs within my role”. The participants shared that they considered their mentors to be change agents in that they were working to improve career advancement opportunities and assist them in navigating negative experiences. Their mentors also provided them with the support and encouragement to pursue leadership opportunities where they would be afforded the chance to become the change agents that they hope to be.

Summary

Chapter 4 has described the findings from questions and responses from all six participants’ interviews. Based on the responses from the participants, I aimed to provide a better understanding of the lived experiences of Black women administrators and the role of mentorship in the advancement of their careers. As an extension of the responses, I also aimed to shed light on the challenges and barriers faced by Black women in leadership positions and how these mentoring relationships helped them navigate these

challenges. The following chapter will present the discussion as it relates to the three research questions, past literature, and theoretical framework, as well as recommendations.

CHAPTER 5

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study is to examine the role that mentorship played in the advancement of Black women who currently hold administrative roles. In this study, I examined the mentorship experiences of six Black women who hold administrative roles in higher education. The overall findings of this study are consistent with what is known about mentorship and that mentorship is a useful career tool that is used to promote growth (Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Johnson & Ridley, 2018; Penny & Gaillard, 2006; Shea, 1994), enhance leadership skills (Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Hill & Wheat, 2017; Kutchner & Kleschick, 2016), and is especially important for career advancement (Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Gardner et al., 2014; Tran, 2014). The results show that these women overcame many challenges and obstacles in their leadership journey with the support of their mentors and relied on their adaptability to overcome challenges and become successful leaders. The narratives shared by the study participants illustrate how Black women can benefit from mentors who support and guide their mentees as they navigate obstacles and develop and grow as leaders. From the analysis of the data from the one-on-one semi-structured interviews, the following themes emerged: trust and rapport, frequent and convenient meetings, organic connections, sponsorship, network and exposure, advocate and guide, willingness to invest, financial guidance, imposter syndrome, faith, isolation, microaggressions, pushback and change agents.

Chapter 5 includes interpretations of the results, based on participants' responses, as they relate to the three research questions and to past literature. In addition, this chapter will address the relationship between findings and the theoretical framework, as well as recommendations for current practice and further research.

Implications of Findings

Research Question 1

This study's first research question sought to examine how Black women administrators developed effective relationships with career mentors. Literature suggests that mentorship is one of the most crucial and influential components of career advancement (Kutchner & Kleschick, 2016). Though there is no consensus on the definition of mentoring because it is frequently conflated with advising, numerous scholars have described the roles of mentors and benefits to mentees or protégées (Fletcher & Mullen, 2012; Hansman, 2001; Knight & Trowler, 1999; Mullen, 2000) and the provision of career and psychosocial support as one works towards a goal (Hu, Thomas, & Lance, 2008). My findings highlight the overall importance of mentorship as a tool to develop leaders, foster community to address isolation, and generate confidence.

This study found that, when accessing and developing effective relationships, trust and rapport are critical components of effective mentoring relationships. Participants stated how “the importance of building and gaining trust” with their mentor was “crucial for the relationship to grow.” Penny and Gaillard (2006) stated, “Mentors and mentees cannot develop a good relationship if they don't get to know each other” (p. 196) and that “above all, the most important element of a successful mentoring relationship is trust” (p. 196). As more and more meetings took place, whether they were formal or informal, participants increased the trust they had with their mentors, which contributed to the relationship growing.

All participants found their mentors to care about and be invested in their leadership development and professional success. Participants in this study developed effective career

relationships that were formed in their workplaces. The participants also described how their mentors' guidance, advocacy, and sponsorship benefitted their careers with network and exposure opportunities that either involved attending a program, conference, or institute.

Curtin et al. (2016) reported that career or instrumental mentoring, defined as focusing on the skills and knowledge that are crucial for effective work performance; sponsorship, defined as active advocacy and provides open access to professional networks; and expressive or psychosocial mentoring, which provides emotional support and encourage, have all been proven to be associated with increased self-efficacy and positive career outcomes. Several participants revealed that it was necessary for both the mentees and mentors to be honest with one another to have an effective and trustworthy relationship.

All participants stated how frequent and consistent meetings with their mentors increased the rapport, which was an essential component of the mentoring relationship growing and blossoming (Chan et al., 2015; Penny & Gaillard, 2006; Shea, 1994). Throughout each interview, participants revealed actions and routines that were, at times, initiated and carried out by their mentors. Ghosh (2014) concluded that a shared understanding must be developed, and frequent interactions must take place to minimize misconceptions regarding the mentorship relationship. Participants highlighted the frequency and convenience of having access to their mentors inside and outside of the workplace, which created beneficial formal and informal meetings.

Additionally, participants looked for their mentors to prove themselves, first by addressing some workplace challenges and also by sharing vulnerable information about

themselves. However, once it was established that the mentoring relationship was a safe haven, followed by supported actions on behalf of their mentors, participants revealed that trust became the foundation of their mentoring relationship growing. Penny and Gaillard (2006) also echoed this notion by stating, “Mentors and mentees should not betray confidences. When the mentor tells the mentee something [and vice versa], she should remember that it is for her ears only, and not for distribution” (p. 196).

Another overarching theme that emerged from the interview data was each participant’s experience with at least one of their mentoring relationships evolving organically rather than through more formal means. For those participants in this study, they acknowledged that mentorship relationships were initiated out of both experience and need, and that their relationships occurred organically and were informal. Participants also highlighted how their connections with their mentors beyond the professional setting not only humanized their mentors but also helped strengthen their ability to trust and communicate more openly, as well as afforded the opportunity to discover their mentors’ pleasing personality. When asked how these organic relationships were built, participants reported, “Time. It just takes time”, which Penny and Gaillard (2006) stated is part of the process when developing a sustaining organic mentoring relationship. Overall, these participants revealed that, as Black women in higher education leadership roles, they sought meaningful mentoring relationships based on trust and rapport, frequent and convenient meetings, and the organic connections fostered with their mentors.

Research Question 2

This study’s second research question sought to examine the types of mentoring experiences that assisted these women in their career goals. This study found that regarding

their potential career path and trajectory informal mentoring relationships served as a model to support professional development (Du Preez, Steenkamp, & Baard, 2013). Additional benefits of informal peer mentoring are that individuals are likely to have access to more peers than leadership and, with the lack of hierarchical dimensions, the development of relationships are easier to achieve (Kram & Isabella, 1985).

Having a lack of access to opportunities for advancement was a reoccurring theme presented by the participants. This aligns with Morrison and von Glinow (1990), who developed the theoretical concept of the glass ceiling. They referred to it as "a set of impediments and barriers" that prevents women and persons of color from advancing in their careers within an organization (Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009). A participant stated that she experienced a lack of opportunity because there were so few Black women included in the applicant pool, she said that it was easy to forget about the Black women on campus. That was common, until her mentor, who was put on the hiring committee, was able to provide names and resumes of Black women on campus and added them to the applicant pool. Taub and McEwen (2006) referenced the field of higher education as "hidden," where potential professionals needed to be engaged in a pursuit of discovery by their current professionals.

Murray (2016) highlighted that scholarship on successful mentorship programs for minority groups has been limited. Farrow (2008) touched on the fact that much of the literature suggests that there is a lack of mentorship for minority women which subsequently results in fewer opportunities and substantive career movement into top leadership roles. The findings from study provides evidence that mentorship is essential for Black women seeking senior-level leadership positions in higher education and that Black

women would benefit from mentoring options for professional career growth at institutions of higher education.

All of the participants described how their mentors' guidance, advocacy, and sponsorship benefitted their careers with network and exposure opportunities that either involved attending a program, conference, or institute. This is supported by Curtin et al. (2016) who state that career or instrumental mentoring. This kind of mentoring is defined as focusing on skills and knowledge that are crucial for effective work performance; sponsorship, defined as active advocacy and provides open access to professional networks; and expressive or psychosocial mentoring, which provides emotional support and encouragement – all of which have been proven to be associated with increased self-efficacy and positive career outcomes.

Several participants recognized the capital that their mentors brought to the relationship including their connections to people and opportunities. Almost all the participants shared that they have been invited to serve on committees, attend events and functions, as well as participate in important meetings in which their mentor had influence. For many of the participants, these invitations resulted in an increased network, knowledge, or a job opportunity that benefitted their careers. The participants shared how each of their mentors had a vision regarding their career trajectories and saw fit to assure those visions became realities by providing opportunities for career development. Their mentors invited them or created ways for the participants to earn a “seat at the table” to help them progress in their careers. This connects with existing literature that suggests supportive mentoring relationships help to successfully guide mentees through strategic pathways that yield social capital and other benefits such as networks, visibility, inclusion, job satisfaction, and

pay increases (Bova, 1998; Crawford & Smith, 2005; Hill & Wheat, 2017; Johnson & Ridley, 2018). Additionally, all participants found their mentors to be helpful in connecting them to career development resources when they found themselves unable to help the participants in the ways they needed. This finding echoes Kent et al.'s (2015) conclusion that found mentorship to be valuable for mentees based on the ability to establish networks, secure resources, increase knowledge, and navigate challenges.

Research Question 3

This study's final research question sought to examine how mentoring relationships helped these women navigate issues salient to Black women in leadership. This study found that mentoring relationships helped Black women leaders break through barriers and navigate issues salient to Black women.

Imposter syndrome causes women of color in higher education environments to feel as though it is unnatural for them to perform at the levels that they do, through a feeling of self-discouragement, as if they are doing something "wrong" when they are simply utilizing their actual abilities. Although the women identified a sense of this feeling that they did not belong, they also knew they had worked hard to obtain their positions. This study found that the women who expressed a sense of imposter syndrome developed those feelings through the treatment given to them by their peers or counterparts.

However, having the ability to break through barriers and challenges did not eliminate the mental self-doubt based on the obstacles put in the way of many women within their career progression. Participants revealed how their mentors' ability to be transparent when discussing imposter syndrome, their willingness to acknowledge their mentees feelings, and affirm them, helped provide the support and guidance that was

needed to persevere. This finding was connected to Ridley (2008) who posited that “mentors should normalize their mentees imposter feelings, affirm, and share their own experiences with imposter syndrome.” Additionally, women who display imposter syndrome tend to work harder than their counterparts and, in turn, may suffer from burnout or loss of interest in their positions.

Feelings of isolation among the Black women in higher education in this study were common. Living up to high expectations to fulfill their current job responsibilities while experiencing various types of discourtesy forced participants to adopt survival mechanisms within the workplace. The participants shared how there were moments where, as Black women, they felt isolated and lacked a sense of community within their institution. They shared that their mentor’s ability to provide a safe space for them to share their feelings in those moments allowed for them to feel a sense of support. These findings align with McGlowan-Fellow and Thomas (2004) and Zellers et al. (2008), who found that mentors provide emotional support to normalize the cultural stresses of the career success of Black women and may alleviate isolation and alienation that is felt in early career experiences. To succeed, Black women draw on their strengths to communicate effectively, exceed performance expectations, build relationships, connect with supportive networks and mentorships (Beckwith et al., 2016). This finding is supported by the research in that developing professional support, received guidance, role-modeling, developmental advice, and instrumental career advocacy from mentors and sponsors was pivotal for Black women’s achievement (Smith et al., 2019). A mentee’s internal growth can also be empowered to understand where their superpower lies and capitalize on their strengths and abilities, which can ultimately increase their social and emotional capacity inclusive of

self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision-making, and relationship skills (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2015).

The participants also very candidly shared their experiences with microaggressions in the workplace. Microaggressions are best defined as "the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership" (Sue et al., 2007a). Their mentors were able to provide safe spaces and act as sounding boards who helped to navigate their feelings in that moment. Mentors can also encourage mentees to find their life's path and develop an unwavering belief that they can achieve whatever they set out to do (DuBois & Karcher, 2014). These gains can be the result of connections and resources gained through the mentor or from newfound confidence awakening within themselves (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2015; DuBois & Karcher, 2014).

This study found that through these powerful mentoring relationships, mentees are encouraged to love that which makes them different and be proud of what makes them unique. By learning to nurture all of the parts that make up their inner essence, mentees are encouraged to embrace their "superpower." This was a significant revelation from the women of this study—the idea that Black women have a superpower waiting to be nurtured and exercised. The role of the mentors is to encourage discovery, introspection, authenticity, and self-awareness to build their capacity toward self-actualization (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2015; Johnson & Wiener, 2017). The mentors took to heart that each mentee runs a different race and comes with varying levels of social capital, emotional capacity, and resilience. As they continued to

pour into their mentees, they were also strengthened. It forced them to maintain passion for supporting their mentee in whatever capacity that may have been needed at any time. Meeting people where they are and how they are is the ultimate level of acceptance which allows them to envision a new realm of mentoring that embraces unity, community, and transformative relationships.

Alignment with the Black Feminist Theory Framework

Using Black feminist thought as the theoretical framework, this phenomenological study was conducted to understand and describe the lived experiences of the role of mentorship in the advancement of Black women in higher education administrative roles. Interpreted via Black feminist thought, the findings of this study are confirmatory of existing research related to the experiences of African American women in higher education (Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Patitu & Hinton, 2003). The tenets of Black feminist thought used for data analysis spoke specifically to Black woman identity. The lived experience of Black female leaders in higher education in this study and their experiences with racial microaggression were aligned with the focus of Black feminist theory, which centralizes and validates the intersectional dimensions of both race and gender based on the different experiences of Black women (Collins, 1991).

The Black feminist theory consists of four themes based on the experiences of Black women. The first theme is the lived experience as a criterion of meaning or the knowledge gained by Black women regarding their unique experiences (Collins, 1991). The second theme of Black feminist theory is the use of dialogue or establishing important bonds and relationships where contentious or oppressive situations are present (Collins,

1991). The participants are primarily employed in predominantly White spaces, therefore, there is limited opportunity to converse with another Black colleague.

Black or African American women have developed distinctive interpretations of a Black woman's oppression, where there is an underlying understanding of possible shared experiences (Tong, 2019). These types of shared experiences among the participants allowed them to remain in a silo, because opportunities to comfortably share their experiences with another Black colleague are limited. The overall concern of each participant regarding this support was the lack of diversity within their institution which resulted in a lack of understanding of the impact caused by racial microaggressions. Compared to peers within their institution, the perspective and experiences of Black women are unique and support is often unavailable for multiple reasons. The participants shared that the lack of Black female representatives within the senior administration level in particular could be a partial reason of why support is unavailable within the workplace and why their mentors' support is key to their success.

Limitations

Limitations are beyond the control of researchers and have the potential to affect the generalizability of the results. These limitations could be time constraints placed on the interviewer by the interviewee, a lack of elaboration in interview responses, and misinterpretation of interviewees' responses. One major limitation throughout the interview process was a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, where all interviews had to take place via video conferencing. This possibly limited the ability to interview participants in what they considered a natural setting for them, as well as caused distractions for participants including interruptions from family, pets, neighbors, and unidentified external

noises which may have resulted in misunderstanding the participants responses. Additionally, some interviews were interrupted due to lost and slow internet connections. Though interviews reconvened once a connection was re-established, this limitation possibly interfered with participants' initial thoughts and answers. In addition, slow internet connections caused the video interview to be pixelated or proceeded with delayed audio. Participants were asked to repeat information when this occurred; however, it is impossible to determine if the initial thoughts, again, were shared accurately. This may have resulted in responses that were not initially made by the participant.

A limitation of this study was that it did not include different contextual sites that might have added to the understanding of the phenomena under study. This could be, for instance, Black women in administrative roles in Historically Black Colleges and University's (HBCU's) and Black women in community colleges. Additionally, though the data collected came from Black women in the Northeast, Midwest and West Coast, I did not examine factors that influence women in Southern region of the United States. Overall, time and access were limitations in this study. If given the time and access, I would have been able to interview more participants, including those from more varied sites. Another limitation of this study was that it only focused on a small sample of Black women. Being a qualitative study, this study cannot be generalized to represent the experiences of the population of all Black women in higher education. However, in qualitative studies sample sizes can be smaller to support the depth of analysis. Despite these limitations, I was able to explore the phenomena and attain a rich set of findings.

Additionally, a potential limitation in this study's design was researcher bias or a tendency to see in the data outcomes that were anticipated (Pigott & Valentine 2017). I

made every effort to protect the data from undue influence inherent to my own bias, assumptions, motivations, and influences based on my racial and gendered lens. In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary data gathering instrument. As such, “the researcher’s role is to present questions to participants that can elicit detailed, subjective responses” (Scherzer, 2015). Conscious efforts were made to self-monitor verbal and non-verbal responses, specifically when the researcher agrees with a comment from a participant. Through epoche, I reflected on my experience and perceptions with the phenomenon and consciously set aside suppositions, perceptions, bias, “a clearing of the mind” to disconnect from any application of memories of the phenomenon being studied (Moustakas, 1994.) I then bracketed my own preconceptions to gather the participant’s experiences, feelings, and perceptions through the data collected.

Recommendations for Future Practice

This qualitative, transcendental phenomenological study used semi structured interview questions to explore the role of mentorship in the advancement of Black women in higher education administrative roles. This research helps to reveal how Black women attain top administrative positions in higher education while often having to endure challenges to their success. According to Davis (2016), Black women’s underrepresentation in administrative leadership positions can be attributed to social barriers and organizational structures. Yet, with the support and guidance of mentors, they will continue to achieve despite the obstacles set before them. Identification of these mentoring relationships may offer strategies to help Black women attain success to promote succession and sustainability for women currently holding higher education leadership roles.

This study also provides higher education institutions with important lessons on how to increase retention among Black women administrators as well as improve awareness in their hiring processes. Empowerment in leadership begins with more formal sponsorship programs and better-individualized development programs to help Black women and other marginalized groups find their paths to success. For instance, higher education institutions should develop mentorship programs that allow employees to be matched with mentors who have gained access to the positions in which the mentee is seeking to obtain. This study highlighted the importance of support systems, including sponsorship, to enrich professional development and is key to Black women's career trajectory. Oikelome (2017) noted that mentorship, seizing opportunities, leadership development, and understanding institutional fit are essential approaches for women aspiring to a leadership role. Mentorship, both formal and informal, is the most common strategy for navigating the pipeline. Oikelome (2017) affirmed that mentors are essential in providing encouragement, advice, insight, guidance, and, in some instances, sponsorship. The study indicates that higher education institutions must provide formal mentoring opportunities to bridge the gap of Black women's underrepresentation in top leadership roles.

The study found that, without the support and encouragement of their mentors, Black women do not readily have access to influential persons in their institutions who can aid them in attaining the knowledge and skills needed to ascend into administrative roles. Relationships with mentors create support for Black women who often feel isolated or excluded from critical social networks within the institutions. The following recommendations aim to enable professional progression for Black women and

underrepresented subgroups in leadership. First, institutions should develop policies for cultural competence with precise measurements and deliverable outcomes, such as increased diversity in leadership recruitment. Second, institutions should create mentorship pipeline programs that include peer mentoring and team aspiring leaders with senior administrative leaders. Third, institutions should provide opportunities for Black women leaders to share their experiences with other women as part of a women-centered professional development program.

As stated previously, mentoring relationships take time to develop, and as such, institutions and Black women in particular can also look to develop and implement mentoring relationships within their respective departments. These mentor-mentee relationships could be between administrators who already know each other and also see each other regularly. In addition, higher education institutions must adopt a change in their hiring policies and practices. These policies should be more inclusive and provide greater support and opportunities for the growth and development of Black women. For instance, institutions might benefit from the approach that the University of San Diego (Sulpizio, 2014) has taken by constructing organizational leadership development programs with respect to Black women and create content based on lived experiences, leadership identity and theory, networking and mentoring, and forward-thinking practices that are most relevant and useful for them.

Also, moving forward higher education institutions should look to implement cross cultural and cross-gender mentoring to change organizational culture, improve communication, increase knowledge of other cultures, increased team building, and enhanced career development. Lastly, institutions should look to create an accessible space

to share the counter narrative of African American women in administrative roles, similar to the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators' (NASPA) African American Knowledge Community (AAKC). The "AAKC increases members' awareness of, knowledge about, and appreciation for issues unique to African American professionals, through sharing information on research, campus issues, and mentoring" (NASPA, n.d.-c). As a safe space for African American professionals in the field, the AAKC could serve as a central location for both written stories and podcasts. A second AAKC could serve as a central location for both written stories and podcasts. Institutions can also look to related professional organizations such as the American Educational Research Association and Association for the Study of Higher Education for access to existing mentoring programs as well as networking opportunities for Black women in administrative roles.

Overall, institutional leaders should re-examine their strategic plans and focus on formulating and aligning goals, objectives, and actions steps for highlighting the diversity and inclusion initiatives for both the faculty and staff of institutions. Higher education institutions should consider supporting the development and implementation of mentorship programs by allocating funds for professional development that is geared towards building a supportive networking community for Black women on campus. In addition, institutions should look to regularly collect data to gain insight on the issues that are salient to Black women on campus. This data could be used in the implementation of future events as well as provide personal insight into the issues most salient to support Black women's career advancement.

Recommendations for Future Research

At first glance, the results of this phenomenological study are like those of prior studies. However, they are unique in combining the lived experiences of a select group of Black women in higher education administrative roles and the role of mentorship in the advancement of their careers. This study contributes to the literature in that it not only examines mentorship broadly defined but also Black women's experiences with mentorship and career advancement. Current research on mentoring is more limited in the understanding and application of mentorship for Black women in higher education leadership (Bartman, 2015; Penny & Gaillard, 2006), which was addressed by this study. Given the critical need to not only diversify top administrative positions in higher education but also connect with its diverse student population, additional studies should focus on examining both the lived experiences of diverse mentees and mentors.

As this study only focused on utilizing Black women in academia, future studies can examine lived experiences of Black women leaders in government, business, and medical sectors, as well as K-12 education, to expand the literature that focuses on Black women leaders the role of mentorship in the advancement of their careers. Their experiences can also provide rich data about their mentoring experiences, selection and identification of mentors, and features and characteristics deemed beneficial or detrimental to their careers and the mentoring relationship. Based on the results from this study, future research can build upon the findings with a large quantitative study to test, and possibly confirm, what has been presented here.

Additionally, it might be useful to examine the lived experiences of Black women who have been able to secure another Black woman as a mentor, regardless of the

organization. Examining the role of mentoring relationships amongst Black women as both mentor and mentee can unveil the advantages, including but not limited to, having a better understanding of their struggles and issues as Black women (Davidson & Foster, 2001; Gamble & Turner, 2015).

I also recommend that future research that examines the lived experiences of Black female college students (e.g., undergraduate, and graduate students) and their experiences with mentorship. This will add to the much-needed literature that highlights the nature of mentorship that occurs outside of sororities, family and church members, and friends (Crawford & Smith, 2005), while seeking a college degree. Bartman (2015) called for such a study, stating that although Black female students have achieved success academically, their success has overshadowed the crucial need for effective mentorship approaches that are designed to promote their continued development and achievement in all aspects of their higher education experience and beyond.

Conclusion

This transcendental phenomenological study aimed to explore the role of mentorship in the advancement of Black women in higher education leadership roles. I interviewed six Black women who currently hold administrative positions in higher education institutions. The interviews were regarding role of their mentorship experiences in their career advancement and how those mentoring relationships helped them navigate issues salient to Black women. This study's participants represented a pool of successful and motivated leaders from some of the best institutions of higher learning. They, along with their mentors, were dedicated to influencing positive change and determined to support one another towards reaching their ultimate leadership goals. The women in this

study openly acknowledged and discussed the challenges they encountered along their journey and how mentorship was a valuable tool in their career development.

The participants stressed the importance of having a mentor who is open, honest, transparent, trustworthy, personable, supportive, and willing to invest time; with the ability to guide, advocate, and sponsor; and provide network and exposure opportunities. Understanding mentoring experiences for Black women and how these mentoring relationships help navigate issues salient to Black women provides an understanding of the impact a mentor has in their mentees' advancement in higher education leadership.

It is my hope that this study will help enlighten institutions of higher education of the persistence of issues with racial undertones that resonate within the academy. As a Black woman in higher education, I can bear witness to the importance of mentoring relationships. Having had several throughout my career, I am aware of the benefits as well as the need. It is my hope that with the help of this study, issues that are salient to Black women in all leadership roles, not just institutions of higher education, are brought to the forefront where concrete changes can be made. It will take some time, but it is possible.

APPENDIX A LETTER OF CONSENT



Letter of Consent

Title of Research Project: The role of mentorship in the advancement of Black women in higher education administrative roles

Researcher: Kimberly Colclough

Institution: St. John's University, Queens, New York

Introduction:

You are invited to participate in a study that will explore the role of mentorship in the advancement of Black women in higher education administrative roles. I am a doctoral candidate at St. John's University School of Education, my faculty sponsor is Randall Clemens, Ph.D., School of Education. The study will be conducted by Kimberly Colclough, a current doctoral candidate at St. John's University. As part of the study the researcher will be interviewing Black women who currently hold administrative roles in various higher education institutions. The purpose of this study is to explore the role of mentorship in the advancement of Black women in administrative roles. If you agree to participate in the study, you will be asked to participate in an individual interview. The interview will consist of a series of short open-ended questions provided by the researcher. The session should take approximately 35- 40 minutes and will be audio or video taped using a digital conferencing platform (Zoom) at a designated date and time.

Possible risks or benefits:

There are no perceived risks involved with participation in this study beyond that of everyday life. However, I will be asking you to give up some of your valuable time. Your participation in this study will provide higher education institutions with research-based steps that can be used to increase retention among Black women administrators as well increased awareness in their hiring processes. If you choose to participate, you may withdraw at any time without explanation or penalty.

Confidentiality:

Your identity as a participant will remain confidential. Your name and the name of your institution will not be disclosed in any form, transcripts, data analysis, or research findings. Pseudonyms will be utilized, and this consent form is the only document

identifying you as a participant. This consent form will be stored securely by the researcher and data will be destroyed at the end of the study.

If you are interested in securing a copy of the results, contact the principal researcher. If you have any questions about the purpose of this research study, you may contact the principal researcher at kimberly.colclough17@my.stjohns.edu or the researchers' committee chair James Coviello, Ph. D., at coviellj@stjohns.edu.

There is no penalty for refusal to participate and the subject may discontinue participation at any time.

For questions about your rights as a research participant you may contact the principal researcher Kimberly Colclough at 347-756-8971 or kimberly.colclough@my.stjohns.edu, University Institutional Review Board, St. John's University, Dr. Raymond DiGuiseppe, Chair digisuer@stjohns.edu 718-990-1995 or Marie Nitopi, IRB Coordinator, nitopim@stjohns.edu 718-990-1440, you may also contact the researcher's committee chair James Coviello Ph.D., at 718- 990-2578 or coviellj@stjohns.edu.

Agreement to participate

Your signature acknowledges receipt of a copy of the consent form as well as your willingness to participate.

Printed Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

Printed Name of Researcher

Signature of Researcher

Dat

APPENDIX B INTERVIEW QUESTIONS



The role of mentorship in the advancement of Black women in higher education administrative roles

1. What role if any has mentoring played in your career?
2. What situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences as an African American woman in your position?
3. What have been the greatest challenges you have faced as an African American female higher education administrator.
4. What is the most significant influence your gender and your race has had on you as an African American female administrator?
5. Describe the culture at your current institution and what it is like for you, as an African American female administrator?
6. As an African American administrator, please share a time when you felt your authority was challenged and how you dealt with or resolved the issue?
7. What have been the greatest challenges you have faced as an African American female higher education administrator? What coping strategies do you utilize in your position?
8. Where do you see Black women in higher education in the next decade?
9. What perceived institutional barriers, policies, or informal practices, contribute to the under-representation of African American women in higher education administration?
10. Do you view yourself as a role model for other Black women?
11. Based upon your experiences, what advice would you give to African American women leaders considering a career in higher education?

12. What are your greatest successes, personally and professionally?
13. What has been your most rewarding experience in your career?
14. What are your future goals?

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