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Underrepresentation of African American Female Community College Presidents in the United States

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Nicole Tanner

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Walden University
2019

Abstract

Underrepresentation of African American Female Community College Presidents in the

United States

by

Nicole Tanner

MPA, Keller Graduate School, 2013

BS, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2009

Dissertation Submitted in Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Administration

Walden University

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Abstract

African American women are significantly underrepresented in the role of community college presidents in the United States. Insufficient research has been conducted related to the reason behind the underrepresentation of African American female community college presidents in this nation, warranting an investigation that led to this study. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of 7 current and former African American women who are, or have held, the community college presidency role to gain an in depth understanding as to why, from their perspective, an underrepresentation of African American female community college presidents exists in the United States. Critical race theory is the theoretical foundation that guided this phenomenological qualitative study. Semistructured interviews were conducted to collect data. The data were interpreted using phenomenological analysis. This study found that African American female community college presidents identified several barriers that lead to their underrepresentation. Race and gender were the most influential factors noted. Gender bias was evident in that women are not expected to hold the presidency position. The respondents noted that the U.S. society still has elements of white supremacy where people of color are not trusted with certain leadership positions. These sources of bias have limited access to the college presidency, leading to their lack of representation in the role. The findings of this study can assist leaders and policymakers in formulating and implementing appropriate strategies and policies to end or minimize the disparities of Black women leading US community colleges.

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Dedication

The most heartfelt dedication for this work is to my family. I feel so privileged to have had you all stand with me on the journey to complete this dissertation and standing with me throughout my life. My siblings, nieces, and nephews, who taught me grace under fire, and how to use my strengths to overcome obstacles; and who brought out the, "fight" in me and taught me how to stand my ground while believing the impossible, possible. To my father, Wayne Tanner. Forever, the apple of your eye, you taught me to be well-rounded as a girl, woman, and professional, from your guidance on love, respect, and confidence. You were not always there to hold my hand, but you have always had my back. Because of you, I know my worth, and I will never settle for less. I love you, daddy. To my mother, Glennie Pickett, thank you for modeling faith in GOD, love of family, and belief in self. There has never been a day in my life that I haven't felt your love, and support. Thank you for standing in on my behalf, being my intercessor, praying for me when I didn't pray for myself. You are the richness of my soul, and because of you, I strive. I want you to know that I see you mom; I see the love in your eyes when I walk in the room, the pain on your face when I hurt, the joy of your heart when I laugh. I see you; I adore you; I am you, and I love you mommy. To my beautiful and loving children. My mini-me, Nekia and my right-hand man, Otis. You are both an amazing, anointed gift from God. I learn life's best lessons from you every day. Because of you, I am stronger, better, and more fulfilled than I could have ever imagined. God gave me the best when he gave the two of you to me. I love you to the moon and back. Continue to seek Him first, and everything else will follow. Tiger, thank you so much for always

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Historically, discrimination against women has existed in a number of settings, including higher education. Discrimination in higher education is more prevalent among African American women, compared with White women, due not only to sexism but racism as well. The challenges that Black women face include but are not limited to increased marginalization compared with White women, gender discrimination, a limited number of role models to inspire new women leaders, isolation, and alienation, among other factors (Hannum et al., 2015). The challenges faced could be the driving force that has limited a large number of African American women from the chief executive officer (CEO) role in community colleges. Nonetheless, some African American women have broken the glass ceiling and taken the top seat of higher education (Worthey, 2016). However, despite some success in reaching community college presidency, the number of Black women in the role is still relatively low. According to the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), (2016), 7% of AACC member institutions are led by African American presidents. Of the 7% of African American presidents, approximately 37% were female and 62% male.

Although researchers continuously report that African American women are qualified and prepared for the president role within community colleges, the data illuminate slow growth of their advancement into the role and supports the urgent need for additional research studies on this phenomenon. Women of color attaining top leadership positions in institutions of higher education will help to close the gap of racial

and gender inequalities in institutions of higher education (Bates, 2007). The data showing race and sex-based disparities can be discouraging to African American women interested in ascending to community college presidency, possibly losing their desire to pursue the role.

The lack of Black women in the top seat of community colleges limits the institution's access to diverse perspectives, including the resourcefulness and originality of Black women's experiences (Llopis, 2012). The hiring of Black women into the role of community college presidency because of their race or sex was not my aim in this study. However, instead, my goal was to understand the African American female community college presidents' perceptions of their limited visibility in the role. In exploring African American women's perceptions regarding their lived experiences as community college presidents add to the existing gap in knowledge on the lack of African American female community college presidents in this nation and provides knowledge that benefits and guides other women pursuing this role.

Chapter 1 documents the problem and purpose of the study, as well as present the research question and methodology that guides the study. Also included in Chapter 1 is an overview of the theoretical framework that reinforces the research and the nature of the study. In addition, I identify definitions, assumptions, limitations, the scope, and delimitations of the study. In the final section of this chapter, I present the significance of this research study while revealing how the study contributes to social change.

Background

Public policy has been defined by scholars in a number of different ways. Faudi (2013) defined the term *public policy* as a system or approach used to enforce government action plans with the primary intention of solving a predefined problem affecting the public through the adoption of a well-laid mechanism. According to Suarez et al. (2011), *public policy* is a series of action plans that the government takes through the associated ministries to eliminate a specific problem that affects either the minority or majority of the citizens. Additionally, the term is defined as a combination of plans of action or deliberate inactions that government chooses to implement based on the what, why, how, and where the perceived existing problem occurs (Dunn, 2015).

The aforementioned definitions all describe government involvement to act or not to act on an existing problem. The implementation of public policy often results in changes in behavior, motivation, freedom, and rights. Public policy brings in the attention of many groups; from the majority to minority elites, government officials to faith groups, political influence on economic influence, and more, all under the collective umbrella of policymakers and stakeholders. With regard to this research, I address public policy by exploring the underrepresentation of African American women in the role of community college president within the United States. Addressing public policy on the underrepresentation of African American female community college presidents could, in fact, help to increase access to community college presidency.

I reviewed academic literature on the underrepresentation of African American women community college presidents. From the review of a number of articles, I

determined that a gap in literature exists regarding what factors cause a limit number of Black women to ascend to the CEO role of president in community colleges. Exploring the lived experiences of African American female community college presidents helped to fill the gap in literature on their underrepresentation in the role. Information that I obtained from the participants of this study, African American women community college presidents, may assist other Black women in overcoming obstacles and challenges to achieve high levels of leadership, such as the presidency, as well as provide information to leaders and policy-makers who can use it to address this issue.

Problem Statement

A disparity of African American female community college presidents in this nation exists, with minimal literature available to assist with the knowledge of barriers from the black female's perspective to provide a better understanding of why this phenomenon continues to exist. Knowledge of the lived experiences, perceptions, and views from the standpoint of African American female community college CEOs may be instrumental in helping more Black women to ascend to the top seat of postsecondary colleges.

Women of color are achieving the same education and credentials as White women, yet leadership representation between these two groups show significant disparities (Mader et al., 2016). These differences continue in higher education leadership. In this qualitative phenomenological study, I sought to explore the problem related to the gap in understanding the underrepresentation of African American female community college presidents in the United States. African American women are

underrepresented in the president role in community colleges within the United States (ACE, 2012). The proportion of women as a whole who are leading colleges was only 26%, with African American women holding steady at approximately one-third (Education Advisory Board, 2015). According to Cook (2012), no change has occurred in the demographic composition of college presidents since 1986. Moreover, the proportion of presidents who are ethnic and racial minorities declined by 1% between 2006 and 2011 (from 14% to 13%) (Cook, 2012).

Many scholars have reported on a number of issues relating to the African American women concerning their influence, challenges, education, leadership, and performance, among other topics (Ibarra, Ely, & Kolb, 2013; Linden, 2012). Nonetheless, throughout the studies, the perception and uniqueness of their leadership in community college presidency have remained silent within the scholarly articles. Scholars have shown the existing underrepresentation of African American women in the role of presidency of community colleges within the United States. For instance, a study conducted by ACE (2016) showed that 36% of minorities (men and women) lead postsecondary institutions with only a mere 5% being women of color. Arguing by the proportion of African American women in the colleges alone, it can be reasoned that indeed the number of the same individuals who will display outstanding character, later on, to be emulated and be the basis of inspiration for others especially in the role of presidency of community college will undoubtedly be minimal. Cook (2012) found that no significant change in the face and composition of presidents in the college community, implying that even though qualified African American women for the role of presidency

of community college abound, the fact that those positions are already filled, and changes merely occur, validates their underrepresentation.

According to a report by Stone (2012) in the American Council on Education (ACE), a gradual decline in the number of women (all-inclusive of whites) who held the presidency positions across the colleges in the United States is occurring. Although approximately 33% of women held a presidency position in 2011, 5 years later, the percentage has dropped to 30%. Based on the number justification and reasoning with the widespread occurrence of race discrimination, the African American women counterparts face a more difficult challenge, thus verifying their underrepresentation in the community colleges.

Although a significant disparity of African American women in the CEO role within community colleges in the United States exists, many scholarly articles have reported on the expected overrepresentation of minorities in the low status and peripheral job positions within those same schools. Such peripheral roles tend to limit their influence to illegitimate leadership with utterly feeble or no involvement in decision making and authority as compared with the influence that they would have if they held the president role.

The lived experiences of African American women help guide their decisions regarding their career trajectories; the nature of their lived experiences, ultimately, determine whether these women pursue positions of a higher level (Davis, 2012). A gap in the existing literature related to the lack of African American women in the top leadership role in community colleges within the United States during the last 10 years

and researchers have indicated the need for more qualitative studies on African American women's lived experiences when pursuing CEO roles (Bowles, 2012; Catalyst, 2013; Davis, 2012; Hancock, 2012).

I sought to determine the reason behind the disparity in leadership representation with special consideration to public policy in the case of African American women's general underrepresentation in the community college presidential positions within the United States. The findings of this study provide understanding as to why the disparity exists and hopefully provide solutions to the problem of African American women being disproportionally underrepresented in community college presidency within the United States.

Purpose of the Study

My purpose in this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of African American female community college presidents within the United States. According to Clark-Holland (2014), the arguable reason that continues to make African American women susceptible to underrepresentation is that they have always been overlooked for their involvement in top leadership positions. However, there has been a rebuttal concerning the issue of the overlooking among African American women as being a result of the stereotyped assumptions, which arguably are based on racial and gender biases. As to whether the two opposing viewpoints are valid, this research paid considerable attention to the comprehension of the critical considerations that could be agents for the lack of African American women leaders in community college presidential positions and qualitatively bring out a legitimate argument for which the

quest of understanding can be based. A clear understanding of the existing problem was possible through the knowledge of critical analysis of empirical situations with the intention of providing help in getting the real picture of the prevailing problem.

With the statistics in the preceding sections and recent studies on the subject matter providing a visible image of the underrepresented African American women in various leadership roles indicate that this is a serious problem and worth investigating in an in-depth manner. The significant disparities make it important to understand why such trends exist.

Research Questions

In this phenomenological study, I focused on the underrepresentation of Black female community college presidents in this nation. The primary research question was, Why do current and former female African American community college presidents believe African American women are underrepresented in the role of community college president in the United States?

Theoretical Framework

During the research review process, I examined several theories to assert the issues surrounding the plight of African American women seeking executive leadership roles in higher education. Most of the theories were general and did not consider the multiple identities of Black women. For this study, I employed the Critical race theory (CRT) (Bell, 2000) to examine the experiences of African American female community college presidents. Using this approach provided a multidimensional perspective of African American leaders within higher education.

The CRT is the significant supposition that is founded on various social and economic theories (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Specifically, because African American women are perceived to belong to a low social class, discrimination may also be argued to be influenced by the socioeconomic status (Wolfe & Dilworth, 2015). The CRT speaks to the concern surrounding racism and racial inequalities. In this study, I explored the lived experiences of African American female community college presidents of this nation, showing its correlation with race and gender. Captured through the lived experiences of African American female community college presidents, are their voices as they recount their perceptions, beliefs, and understanding. The direct knowledge obtained assisted in drawing conclusions associated with the underrepresentation of African American female community college presidents by critically examining the role of race and gender based on their experiences.

Nature of the Study

The nature of this research study was to explore in detail the lived experiences of African American female community college presidents; factors relating their overall underrepresentation; and creeds on race, gender, and any other barriers limiting their advancement to the postsecondary college's presidency role.

Through this study, I explored the lived experiences of past and present African American female community college presidents in this nation to understand what they believed to be the cause of the underrepresentation of Black female presidents. I selected a qualitative phenomenological research design for this study as it was best suited to answer the listed research questions. A qualitative research method provides an in-depth

exploration of a particular phenomenon. Although the level of subjectivity in qualitative studies are usually higher than in quantitative and mixed-method studies, it was imperative that this research was qualitative to obtain a detailed description of the phenomenon from the very people who have experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).

In this study, I expand the body of knowledge related to African American female community college president by exploring the lived experiences of Black women in the community college presidential role from all over the United States. The choice to use a qualitative methodology was based on the fact that numerous realities may exist regarding the disparity of African American female community college presidents. A phenomenological design was a logical choice because both the researcher and participant can provide meaning for the data collected (Larkin et al., 2011). The phenomenological design provided the opportunity to interview a limited number of participants in detail. The phenomenological study will allow the researcher to provide the meaning of the phenomenon based on the reality of the subject (Smith et al., 2012).

Definitions of Terms

The following are the definitions of the terms and concepts used in this work:

African American women/*Black women*: Female American citizens who happen to be of African descent at least partially. At times within this work, the term *Black woman*, which also has the same meaning is interchangeably applied.

Chief executive officer (*CEO*): The highest-ranking executive leader in an organization, higher education for this study (Heathfield, n.d.).

Community college or technical colleges: A 2-year school that offers reasonably priced higher education (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Vaughn, 2000).

Discrimination: The denial of opportunities, equal rights, and treatments to a specific group of individuals, say, Black women, due to prejudice.

Epistemology: Refers to systems of information that are centered on people's lived experiences (Bernal, 2013; Ladson-Billing, 2000).

Glass ceiling: This term is used in this work to mean the impenetrable barriers that exist in the upper levels of management; specifically, those that focus on limiting the women from advancing to the executive positions (Northouse, 2013).

Higher education: Education beyond high school, 2-year institutions that award postsecondary level degrees including certificates, technical diplomas, and associates degrees.

Marginalization: The term refers to a social process that isolates confines or relegates a specific group of people,say lower class individuals, from the higher and important social standings as well as powerful positions.

Minority: A term that refers to an individual with little influence or less power and control, if any, over his or her own life as compared to the majority. Subordinate is interchangeably used to refer to the same within this work.

Peripheral position: These are illegitimate powerless positions serving the minorities or any other underrepresented student groups.

Phenomenology: A qualitative research design used by researchers to capture the real meaning of human experiences surrounding an identified phenomenon (Moustakes,

1994).

Retention: The capability of a minority individual to remain in a top administrative position despite the opposition and obstacles faced within the position.

Senior-level Position: A term used to address a person holding the administrative community college office with a major role in management and decision making within the college. The term can be used interchangeably with such terms as president, vice president, dean, and or chancellor.

Assumptions

The problem of African American female underrepresentation in the top seat of community colleges in this nation is rather prevalent and has existed for an extended period. Therefore, in the research, various assumptions made, are mainly projected toward a better understanding of the overall phenomenon. As such, the common aspect of assumption is based on a person's epistemology beliefs. In fact, from this concept, it is evident that some epistemological assumptions happen to underpin the overall research and presentation of the narrative. As a result of this influence, the made assumptions included thinking that society is yet to come to terms with gender equality. I make this assumption based on the realization that the African American women acted as housewives and did not have a say in the social processes. This being a major assumption, it failed to consider the fact that White women are also female, but their say and presence in the college presidency is not only seen but also felt. The assumption was typically focused on making sure that it gave the chance to analyze the problem from a stereotyped point of approach. As such, the conviction that the overall evaluation process

would be in a position to see issues from a deeper point of view; specifically, one that is embraced by Whites.

Scope and Delimitations

In this phenomenological study, I explored the lived experiences of African American women and their journey to community college president within the United States. Deeply respecting women who have obtained the top seat within community colleges, my intent in this research was not to uncover the challenges women specifically face that may reduce the number of them achieving college presidency. Instead, my purpose was to understand better the factors that cause only a limited number of African American women to ascend to community college presidency, but that is irrelevant in respect to increasing their presence at the top leadership role.

Participants of this research met a specific criterion, namely that they are African American women who have achieved the role of community college presidents. Qualitative research allows a small selection of participants that can illuminate the phenomenon under investigation (Miles, Huberman, Saldana, 2013). With the understanding that this study resists generalization to other populations and contexts, my focus was on the perspective of past and present African American female community college presidents. Due to the minimal amount of research regarding the topic of the underrepresentation of African American female community college presidents in the United States, future studies on African American women who ascend to community college presidency can focus on policies to help increase the number of Black women ascending to the role.

African American women remain behind in the presidential leadership role of higher education. The disparity of Black women presidents is seen in colleges and universities across the nation. However, in this study, I did not address the disparities of African American women leading in higher education specifically but focused on community colleges within the United States. The focus on community colleges was not only based on the fact that these institutions were of higher education level but also because they have been subjected to insufficient information. As a result, if they can give a clear illustration of the existing relationship, then they can help work out strategies to have an inclusive college presidency platform (Geiger & Jordan, 2014).

The 2-year institutions are facing a tsunami of leadership transitions giving way to a number of presidential opportunities. This study could provide a path for public policy to address the issue of the underrepresentation of African American community college presidents, allowing more Black women to take part in the upcoming opportunities.

Limitations

The basic limitations of this research were the sample size as well as a compilation of results. The limitations in this process attributed to the fact that a need to eliminate the possibility of generalization exist and this made every research vital as any other. Also, because my focus was to analyze African American female community college presidents, the hardship in this evaluation was that the number of individuals in these institutions compared to other higher education institutions was small and may fail to capture the exact situation. Another source of limitation was typical of this problem, and this was finding Black women in college leadership. Statistics in the proceeding

section provide a picture of the limited number of African American women in community college presidential positions, and this made their accessibility even harder. However, this limitation was not purely a holdup because it identifies as a source of evidence that shows the African American women underrepresentation. The only sure approach to mitigate these limitations is to make sure the chosen participants are capable of representing the actual situation without any form of inconveniences. The undeniable fact about this approach is that finding experiences with African American women should not be constrained and undiluted.

Significance of the Study

The study is of significance, given my purpose is to provide information to leaders and policy-makers to help them better understand the challenges African American women face in seeking the role of community college presidency. This information fills a gap in literature that ideally may lead to policy changes to address the underrepresentation of African American women in leadership roles. Historically a large gap has existed in regard to women leadership in general (Cook, 2012; Rhoads & Valadez, 2016). In particular, according to the research, the existing gap is apparent with the fact that African American women have been overlooked and underrepresented in college leadership, in particular, higher education presidency for a long time. There can never be policy formulation and reforms through the implementations of policies to address a serious issue without first conducting an in-depth understanding and analysis of the situation, which is the underrepresentation of Black women in chief administrative roles in U.S. community colleges.

The findings of this study address an existing gap in the body of knowledge about the specificity of its mandates. Although much work is already in the literature concerning the general underrepresentation of African American women in various workforce leadership (Jones et al., 2015; Terry, 2013; West, 2017), insufficient information is available on the scarcity of the specified groups within the community college presidency positions in the United States. The findings essentially add value and extend information to the existing body of knowledge on the general African American female underrepresentation through narrowing the gap further.

Finally, better job performance, common goal achievements, and moving forward together is always better when the entire system is motivated (Wolfe & Dilworth, 2015). One way of motivating the entire workforce is to reward the best performer without leaving a specific group of employees behind. Failure to do so by the administration will inject a skewed social and economic development into the system, social delinquency, and social unrest resulting in poor job execution and delayed goal achievement. It is through the findings of this study that some of the presumed stereotypes can be eliminated making the African American women to equally work hard to championship for their merit appointment rather than just being around assuming that the system can never select them. In this study, I sought to provide information that may help address issues that may lead to an open, just, fair, and merit-based appointment into the presidency positions within the U.S. community colleges.

Summary

Scholars have tried to analyze significant misrepresentation among minorities in the role of college or university leadership. Since 1986, insignificant increases have occurred in the number of Black women ascending to community college presidency. The underrepresentation issue has, as a result, been addressed accordingly, with various authors suggesting the strategies they consider appropriate. The clear fact is that the strategies have not worked because Black female underrepresentation remains to be an issue. The one factor that is believed to cause this diminishing is the stereotyped social approach toward women. Compared with men, women are disproportionately diminished as they account for a relatively small percentage. However, in comparison with White women, African American women are lagging behind because their numbers are diminutive.

In Chapter 1, I provided an introduction of the phenomenological study focusing on the problem of the underrepresentation of African American women in the president role within community colleges in the United States, despite having the education and qualifications for the role. Insight into African American women was rendered through a combination of background information and definition of terms. In this chapter, I revealed the purpose and nature of the study, as well as the assumptions and limitations. Chapter 1 also revealed the primary research question as well as the theoretical framework and the significance of the study. In Chapter 2, I report what is known from the literature about the theoretical framework used as a foundation for the study as well as current literature related to the president role within 2-year colleges.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

African American women continue to be underrepresented in the top leadership positions in U.S. community colleges. My purpose in this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of African American female community college presidents within the United States. In this chapter, I will provide a brief synopsis of current literature, an overview of the literature search strategy employed, and an in-depth examination of the theoretical framework. In addition, I will include an exploration of the gap in literature on the underrepresentation of African American female community college presidents.

In this qualitative phenomenological study, I executed an examination on the reasons for the lack of appointments of African American female community college presidents as compared with other groups in the United States. The underrepresentation of African American women among community college presidents within the United States is an issue of major concern to Black women aspiring to advance their career in American academies. The review provides the most current knowledge, based on the work of other scholars, concerning the topic of the study. To present a well-detailed I reviewed, information from scholarly articles, books, and case studies, regarding the subject of the study. Some of the issues addressed in this study include the overview of the underrepresentation of women in top college leadership positions and the barriers that women encounter in the process of acquiring college president positions. Also examined were the policies necessary to solve the problem concerning Black women not acquiring

president positions in postsecondary institutions. In this qualitative study, I used an empirical investigation to explore why African American women in academe are not ascending to these positions despite having the necessary qualifications.

Synopsis

This chapter begins with an in-depth presentation of the theoretical framework that is rooted in sociological and psychological theories and acts as the background of the study. I researched CRT, along with other socialization theories that document the possible reasons African American women have been pushed to the periphery in the academic leadership. In this chapter, I provide an overview of the history of the underrepresentation of African American women in the top seat of higher education's postsecondary schools, as well as the changes during the last few decades that have continued to challenge Black women's pursuit of these top positions.

Literature Search Strategy

In this study, I conducted a comprehensive search to gather relevant resources to study the reasons African American women remain underrepresented in the top positions in U.S. community colleges. While conducting this research, I kept in mind, this concept and Walden University's mission of positive social change. Key search terms that I used in this research included the following: *African American female in academy, community college leadership, racialism in college, women college president, female leadership in higher education, Black female college presidents, glass ceiling, and critical race theory, women of color and college leadership,* and *minority female college leadership.*

A number of databases were utilized to obtain literature, including ProQuest, SAGE Premier, Google Scholar, Academic Leadership, Higher Education, Higher Education Policy, Higher Education Quarterly, and Diversity.

Inclusion. This study includes peer-reviewed articles, published in the last 10 years and accessible as the full article and which have worldwide publications. The published and peer-reviewed material used included studies that have African American women in the academy as participants. Further, included are studies that have the following social and psychological factors: racial discrimination, ethnic profiling, isolation, job discrimination based on race, and gender inequality.

Exclusion. I excluded case studies focusing on White women and any other White-based study not addressing discrimination of Black women in U.S institutions. Also excluded are all non-peer-reviewed studies and unpublished reports. Studies that did not focus on African American women in higher education were excluded as were studies focusing on African American men.

The search of the databases for the underrepresentation of African American women in the position of community college president did not yield a substantial number of articles. Through the review process, it was concluded that the shortage of studies will be supplemented with studies focusing on African American women in the academy. The significance of the selected studies and their contribution to the development of this study was also evaluated.

Theoretical Framework

During the research review process, several theories were examined that might serve as a framework for the issues surrounding the plight of African American women leaders in higher education. Most of the theories were general and did not consider the multiple identities of Black women. For this study, the critical race theoretical framework was employed to examine the experiences of African American female community college presidents. Using the CRT approach provides a multidimensional perspective of African American leaders within higher education.

The CRT represents concern surrounding racism and racial discrimination. In this study, I explore the experiences of African American female community college presidents and its correlation with race and gender. I Explored the lived experiences of a selected group of past and present African American female community college presidents and captured their voices, recounting their perceptions of barriers. The CRT framework assists in drawing conclusions associated with the absence of African American women in top leadership positions by critically examining the role of race based on their experiences.

The role of the African American women in the United States academies has not received much attention. Their role has been underestimated for a number of years when compared to that of White people. Racial and ethnic boundaries have prevented women from equaling their White male counterparts in leadership, especially Black women. The factors that influence the underrepresentation of Black women in institutional leadership of educational sectors of the United States need to be investigated. (Ho & Hallman,

2016). The following theories are used to explain why African American women are underrepresented at the top executive seat in the institutions of higher learning.

Critical Race Theory

The CRT was developed in the 1970s by social theorists to analyze how racism was used in subordinating the role of people of color (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). African American scholars reviewing societal norms related to oppression provided the basis for CRT despite roots emanating from racism (Ladson-Billings, 1999). In education, CRT has become an important tool for reviewing societal shortcomings. The components of CRT are a) a central focus on racism and race; b) an overt challenge to supremacy discourse; c) a commitment to social justice; d) recognition of experiential bases of disadvantaged people, and e) a complex disciplinary viewpoint (Harper, Patton & Wooden, 2009). CRT themes advanced by theorists maintain that racism and race are unescapable within society (Ladson-Billings, 1999). CRT challenges the claim advanced by an education system that they are objective, race and gender neutral, meritocracy, provide equal opportunity, and being color and gender blind (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). CRT theorists are devoted to social justice through annihilation of racism and the advancement of equitable educational structures. CRT theorists value the experiences of Black Africans such as traditional narrative, biographies, storytelling, and personal and familial histories (Cole, M., 2009). As a multidisciplinary concept, CRT applies a variety of methodologies and engages different scholars in the study of significant cultural, social, and historical contexts within research.

CRT theorists have shown that racism is prevalent in every aspect of life, psychologically, culturally, and legally (Matsuda et al, 1993). First-person accounts, counter storytelling, and narratives are inherent with the CRT doctrine, and the CRT's central construct is racism. CRT tenets illuminate Whiteness as property and White privilege. CRT has established a correlation between race and academic attainment of Black women. CRT theorists have detailed how racism and sexism have affected their accomplishments. According to CRT, African American women will face challenges trying to excel in executive leadership positions due to their lack of "intellectual property" and "Whiteness" that the White gatekeepers guard with overt oppressive measures (Mcintosh, 2012). Several scholars have acknowledged that White privilege and White property existed, even though they have received a flurry of criticism from White and Black activists (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). They have gone on to explain that White property and White privilege co-exist because they are the same (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Under this section, the paper will use the CRT to show contributions from different scholars who used the theory to explain why African American women lag behind in leadership positions of postsecondary institutions. According to Ryan and Siebens (2012), inequality in American society has remained to be more pronounced than before. They argue that people of Black color are lagging behind in education than their fellow White people. Bischoff and Reardon (2014) add that African Americans cannot compete with the Whites regarding affluence. They argue that the White race is more affluent than the Black race and this is attributable to limited access to formal education

within the State. Mullings (2014) claim that the limited access to government contracts have resulted in African American people, especially women, to have lower levels of income, meaning they lead very miserable lives. As such, the differences between the White race and the minority groups had significant implications such as being the source of deviance in society. Bischoff and Reardon (2014) suggest that disparities in economic, social, and political aspects of life are the highways to limited opportunities to education, health centers, and other institutions in society. Bischoff and Reardon (2014) add that being born in an affluent background means having broader access to quality education in comparison with those coming from lower class families. Additionally, it is advantageous to be raised in a wealthy family as this means one will have more access to quality medical care services than the one who is born in lower class families (Bischoff & Reardon, 2014).

The law of CRT focuses on marginalized groups in society. As such, it tries to put forward claims that the persistence of racial gaps in society is the causes of the divisions that prevail in society (Huggins, 2012). The theory address issues that are brought about by the discrepancies in the economic, demographic, as well as the changes in the policy-making. These differences result in accelerated conditions of living in oppression due to many unmet needs is why the CRT purposes to lobby with the oppressed to bridge the gap between and across all social workers. More so, CRT operates on the principle of challenging environments of injustices on behalf of the oppressed groups. The aggregated effect of the race-based social stratification in society that results in social injustices on the Black race and is a primary factor to the escalation of racial discrimination (Howard

& Navarro, 2016). Thus, the CRT is crucial in looking deep into the social gap introduced by the multicultural approach in evaluating the intensity of the inequalities of people from different origins. During this research, some of the weaknesses of the multicultural approach in addressing inequalities of races and social justice were review. Also evaluated is the relevance of the multicultural approach to the social work education.

Application of Multicultural Approach and Critical Race Theory in Social Education

The idea of the multicultural approach has been at the veil of social education for a number of years. The multicultural approach permits an individual to realize many of the influences that happen in his or her life (Rocco, Bernier & Bowman, 2014). The approach appreciates the fact that one's life is influenced by various factors such as principles, viewpoints, customs, and feelings. In the olden days, the multicultural approach identified as a racial and ethnic-based approach. However, the mindset changed during the Civil Rights Movement efforts that were taking place in the 1960's and 70's. The Civil Rights Movement was being directed towards the elimination of oppression and ways of making the world a better place. According to Rocco, Bernier, and Bowman (2014), the Multicultural approach has been extended to include religion, politics and other broader aspects of multiculturalism. The CRT joins to make sure that people of the Black race participate in contributing ideas about how they think things should be done as well as views of the world that helps to foster good relationships with one another. However, if not well developed, such ideas can become a blocking stone towards creating a safer environment for everyone (Kolivoski et al., 2014).

A study conducted by Dickinson (2015) revealed inequalities of all kinds of racial boundaries. He noted that when compared with the fellow White people, Black people lag behind by 27.4% regarding economic status. Regarding income generation, Dickinson (2015) adds that African American women are also behind their fellow White people. Thus, Dickinson (2015) argue that the average income level of the Black families was estimated to rotate around 320 U.S dollars relative to an overwhelming 546 U.S dollars of the White income generation. Ryan and Siebens (2012) assert that the number of African American graduates in the educational sector on a pro-rata basis is 19% relative to 30% of the White graduates. Moreover, Karpowitz et al (2015) claim that the rate of incarceration for Black people is relatively higher than that of the White people. The difference is brought about by wealth disparities and other social parameters of measuring racial inequality (Rocco, Bernier & Bowman, 2014).

However, the multicultural approach fails to address questions regarding the escalated issues of the social injustices and racism practices in the learning institutions thereby not adequately equipping African American women with insight about the procedure of breaking the incumbent views held by White people (Carter & Peters, n.d.). Such potholes are emanating from the fact that the current multicultural approach usually focuses on personal beliefs and attitudes regarding racism and ethnicity. Much focus on the multicultural approach goes to the development of the person and not changing the institutional racism (Jean-Marie & Tickles, 2017). As such, the African American child must broadly shout out their views in their small world of oppression so that they can spearhead the establishment of a united society. As a result, such a practice can go far in

decimating the differences regarding racial disparities between the African American woman and other marginalized groups. Remarkably, due to lack of access to adequate educational facilities, Blacks and especially women establish a particular culture that displays certain characteristics that are very different from those of the Whites (Rocco, Bernier & Bowman, 2014). Therefore, appropriate intervention programs and policies need to be sought to close the gap in racial inequality and justice.

In a study done by Santamaría (2014) regarding multicultural approach in social education found that since it does not target the institutional racism, it tends to have self-destructive effects on the individuals in the society. Hence, this facet of the multicultural approach needs to be reviewed to determine the loopholes for amendments to adequately address the challenge of racial disparities within the American society and more so, to the African American woman.

CRT recognizes the fact that the only time grievances of minority groups can be heard is when their ideological viewpoints are in line with those of the majority White people. In other words, the interests of the minority groups can only be attended to once the Whites serve their self-interests first. The fifth proposition of the CRT is that it stands to spearhead the voicing of the racially segregated groups with the recognition that they seem to have been suppressed by the dominant groups in the society (Howard & Navarro, 2016). The CRT recognizes the different ways through which the minority groups are oppressed and creeps in to shape the social lives of the oppressed by looking into such attributes of racial discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, the status of the residents, religion, gender, and social hierarchy as well as ethnicity.

The relevance of the integration of the CRT into the Multicultural approach has been fruitful in a number of ways and especially while encouraging the African American women and their position in these United States of America. The six tenets of the CRT are compatible with a social work situation in the American environment. The future of the CRT approach is on helping people within their social context. Proponents of the CRT recognize the fact that racial discrimination is one of the facets that can have detrimental effects on the social lives of the affected population (Cole, 2017). CRT centralizes the entire process of racism as the key factors of oppressing people, especially African American women. The theory recognizes that African American women do not have adequate access to employment and educational opportunities and comes in to air their grievances so they can be more effective as they turn over their social lives (Rocco, Bernier & Bowman, 2014). Remarkably, African American women have the potential to promote social justice for all, once given the opportunity to lead the rights of the less fortunate members of society. Proponents of CRT argue that promotion of justice within societies is the first step towards establishing a society, which treats everyone equally.

The Underrepresentation of Women in the Community College President in the United States

The history of African American women in the role of college president can be traced back to 1904 when Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune founded the Daytona Normal and Industrial Institute in Daytona, Florida. Dr. Bethune served as president at what is now known as Bethune-Cookman College for over twenty years. An African American woman ascending to college presidency during the Jim Crow era is an incredible

accomplishment, but one could only imagine the challenges and obstacles Dr. Bethune experienced.

Over the years, racial disintegration has been a challenge in many sectors of our social entanglement including working places, learning institutions, and politics. In the United States, the issue of racial conflict has been there since time immemorial. Many politicians have spearheaded attempts to dismantle that attitude so that all may live equally and ensure everyone has equal space with the others. A number of African American women have fallen victim to racial disintegration in the United States, especially in learning institutions (Bowen & Bok, 2016).

The majority of the Black race in this nation, especially women in leadership roles have to undergo difficulties and overcome various barriers as they serve in executive leadership roles. African America women that serve in these roles face a number of hardships due to not being valued, leaving their grievances underserved, unlike those of their fellow White men (Karpowitz, 2014).

The number of African American women holding college president roles has remained low across all of the United States. There exists a severe racial and gender gap in the college presidential appointments (Dunn, Gerlach & Hyle, 2014). Cook and Glass, (2014) researched women in executive leadership positions to find that in the United States, Black women remain underrepresented in the senior leadership positions in different sectors. Gill and Jones (2013) support this argument by saying that in most higher learning institutions in the United States, women are struggling to acquire more top positions within the postsecondary institutions. Although women are finding it hard

to become the president of community colleges, Black women are most affected by the

current situation. Davis and Maldonado (2015) point out that in community colleges in

the United States, African American women experience racism and discrimination, which

has been a core factor to their underrepresentation in colleges as presidents or top leaders.

Black women are earning professional degrees for entry into top leadership roles in

higher learning institutions, yet they continue to face isolation, and systematic prejudice,

which is, in turn, the cause of their failure to acquire president positions in postsecondary

institutions Davis and Maldonado (2015). Cain (2015) expresses that in the United States

Black women working in community colleges are mostly subjected to the sexism form of

discrimination in which the prejudice is influencing the manner in which women are

being promoted to top executive positions in colleges and universities.

Factors Making Women to Encounter Underrepresentation in the United States

Male Chauvinism

Women in this nation contribute to the largest number of the population in the

educational workforce. As such, it is with much expectation that they are expected to take

the highest leadership positions within these institutions. According to Finnan et al.

(2015), women make up to three-quarters of the total number of teachers in public

schools. However, their representation at the superintendent positions remains very low.

Finnan et al, (2015) claim that top positions are distributed unfairly amongst women of

different races with the Whites scooping a whole 18% as opposed to Black women who

take only 1% in the top leadership. Unanimously, women have a high potential to lead in

the senior positions just like their male counterparts in higher education were it not for

their underrepresentation in academic leadership. Alinia (2015) argues that the limited number of women in top positions have been subdued by the men who reduce their chances of advancing into senior leadership of colleges and universities. Thus, this is the reason as to why men outdo women in the administration of educational institutions. According to ACE (2012), women only contributed to roughly 26% in the leadership of colleges and universities.

Ethnicity

Ethnicity is a factor that hardens the chances of women to acquire a leadership position in the United States. Kolivoski et al. (2014) argue that leadership is segregated majorly by skin color in the sense that Black women assume the greatest percentage of administrative work in various school faculties that are predominantly Black based. On the other hand, colleges and universities that are historically White are run and administered by the White women and men.

Factors Hindering African American Women in Leadership

Lack of Encouragement

Constant encouragement for women is found to contribute towards success upon which African American women climb to a senior position in Higher Education. These are women who believe they can deliver what they have within their capabilities once elected as leaders. Encouragement for African American women to lead community colleges require those very same institutions to develop leadership programs that aim at strengthening their leadership ascension. Educational systems should introduce a solid commitment while providing leadership preparation programs that reflect the needs of

African American women as well as providing support in their quest for attaining

leadership (Gasman, 2013). Nevertheless, the establishment of leadership programs does

not guarantee an increased representation of African American women in higher

education. Instead, African American women should be sensitized to the growth

opportunities available in the academic institutions so that they can build their leadership

skills in advance. Mentors and advocates are key players in encouraging women towards

the full realization of the high calling of educational leadership while safeguarding the

integrity and dignity of the institutional standards. Loubert (2012) reveals that many

African American women do not get an equal share of opportunities or support from their

respective organizations. As cited by Loubert (2012), whenever African American

women lack access to mentors in comparison to White men and women, they are likely

not to enjoy the same rewards regarding job promotions and pay increment. According to

the Democratic Task Force, supportive environments can enhance a multicultural

workforce in the United States and extend the competitiveness of African American

women in the world economy.

Structural positions of particular groups within society respond differently to

stimuli regarding work assignments, managerial promotion, and performance ratings

(DiTomaso, 2014). According to DiTomaso (2014), the native White Americans are

deemed to have a competitive ability than fellow African Americans and therefore, able

to have greater accessibility to pleasant work experience. Contrary, African American

women get unfavorable assessments in research activities that should warrant vertical

movement career-wise. Consequently, this has adverse effects on Black women who are immigrants to the United States.

In the same light of encouragement, Irby (2014) seconds the fact that lack of mentoring is one of the constraints that make African American women lack the upward mobility in education institutions. Kirk (2012) explores the legal systems within the education sector and asserts that the Civil Rights Movement should focus their energy on bridging the gap between the different racial groups in America. Diem and Carpenter (2013) argue that with appropriate support systems that cater to the rights of the African American women, real transformation can take place about career ascent and leadership. In addition, various departments of educational institutions could benefit from the wealth of skills and qualities of African American women. (Walton, Smith & Wallace, 2017). A major challenge African American women face is the lack of encouragement and supportive environment. According to Walton, Smith, and Wallace (2017), African Americans women in higher education can bring on board quality leadership with new perspectives.

Racism

Racism in this nation has extended into post-secondary institutions. Bowen and Bok (2016) ascertain that despite a college education, African American women still get a lower salary than their fellow Whites. The two scholars also affirm that when compared with men, African American women still earn less. Consequently, this makes African American women lag behind even regarding personal development making it hard for them to have competitive advantage vying for the top executive positions.

Johnson and Thomas (2012) assert that negativity is what is killing the African American supremacy in their professional development to the top positions. Supportive and administrative skills in organizations consume most of the skills and abilities of African American women, instead of helping them secure leadership positions (Johnson & Thomas, 2012). Bischoff and Reardon (2014) articulate that despite all the efforts African American women put in search of mentors who enhance their proactive nature in institutions, they are still seen as uncompetitive.

Glass Ceiling/Concrete Ceiling

A number of barriers that prevent African American women from advancement into leadership positions in higher education have created an invisible glass ceiling which has proved hard to break. The term *glass ceiling* refers to a "ceiling" that is blocking someone to advance upwards, and "glass" is something transparent, which means the constraints are not immediately apparent and are unofficial policy.

The term "*glass ceiling*" describes the invisible barriers encountered by professional women as they approach top executive levels. The glass ceiling was used to describe the unbreakable barriers women face when trying to rise on the corporate ladder. Studies show that women do not see the "glass ceiling" when they are starting their careers, but it becomes visible when they face difficulties climbing to the top hierarchy. The concept of "glass ceiling" was first used in 1998 in the book, negotiating the Glass Ceiling to describe the experiences of female workers in universities. The "glass ceiling" concept shows that despite women having the appropriate credentials and being more

than capable of presiding institutions of higher education, they are marginalized in presidential roles.

The glass ceiling effect is prevalent at every step of the university career ladder (Farmer, 2016). The percentage of women students in all American colleges exceeds that of men; however, women constitute about a third of the faculty. Studies indicate that the majority of colleges and universities in the United States are presided by White males while the number of colleges under African American women presidents is insignificant. According to Davis and Maldonado (2015), clustered in education, home economics, nursing, and continuing education are all women deans. A general belief is that a glass ceiling is a barrier that has prevented women from climbing the ladder of academic success.

"Glass ceiling" is a barrier that blocks women from advancing in their professionals; however, African American women encounter the glass ceiling and a myriad of other issues when compared to White women. African American women encounter the "concrete ceiling", which acts as a barrier to advancement in their professions and making it difficult for them to coexist with systems working against them. The issue of the glass ceiling has been progressively increasing in the arena of higher education. Parity for female representatives at the president level of post-secondary institutions despite their attempts to break the barriers hindering them from achieving such positions. Though the number of women presidents has increased more than double from the 1990s to 2006 from 10% to 23%, the rate of growth in the number of African American female presidents in the United States continues to lag behind. This

is a manifestation of the slow change in higher education institutions while expanding the opportunities for African American women. The attitudinal and institutional biases are some of the common methods that escalate the aspect of glass ceiling against women of color, thereby excluding them from attaining a higher level of leadership positions.

Under the individual perspective, Davis and Maldonado (2015) assert that there exists a big difference in the way men and women think in the decision-making process of leadership. For instance, he argues that women may be found contemplating their concern and basing on the context of the matter at hand. Their male counterparts, however, make moral choices basing on impersonal rules, which are guided by fairness and equality to all people (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). The perceived differences between Whites and African American women create stereotypes that hard press the expression of women at higher ranks within the educational institutions. The dual role of women in taking care of the children and performing home duties as perceived by society also constrains them to their small world. Men in many societies are valued more than women because of the misconception that women cannot deliver quality leadership while at the same, time they are shouldered with other institutional duties. It is more likely for women to engage in means of conciliation other than a confrontation like men, which means that women can enhance more connectedness and networking.

Davis and Maldonado 2015) argue that some cultural perspectives such as culture and ideology as well as policies are also key players in explaining women's limited access to ascend to high positions of power in higher educational institutions. Most of the modern organizations are acting under the pretense of gender-neutrality; however, some

of their traditional practices create a form that put men at the forefront (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Most societies are patriarchal, and whenever African American women obtain an appointment to power; they first concentrate on how they can dismantle these patriarchal societies. In patriarchal societies, women work for no pay and usually obtain opportunities at the lowest positions. Nevertheless, cultural perspectives can be used to facilitate the upward movement of African American women. Education incorporates some of the societal determinants for influencing the ascension of the Black women in U.S. colleges.

In light of structural perspective, Davis and Maldonado (2015) suggest that organizational structures are a major factor to African American women ascending to senior positions of power. In his view, Davis and Maldonado (2015) claim that the major role of organizations should be to rearrange old structural functions and incorporate modernity into the system whereby everybody will participate. An authoritative nature of modern organizations has dismantled every dream of potential African Americans who want to rise to power. Furthermore, bureaucratic systems within organizations seem to crumble any potential organizational benefits to women.

Gender Discrimination

According to Farmer (2016), very few African American women hold top leadership roles in United States colleges and universities. Race and gender discrimination are a common barrier stopping African American women from getting an equal chance in the selection and appointment process; this happens despite having laws preventing discrimination (Cook & Glass, 2014). There is a severe underrepresentation of

Black women in the top leadership position of president within colleges, and their

capability to overpower the barrier is hampered by systemic racism that has ensured they

remain underrepresented. The few African American women who manage to reach the

top ranks of academies face a lot of stress because of sexism and pervasive psychological

assaults. The proportion of Black women in academy administration is negligible and

lags far behind that of Black male as well as that of Whites. African American women

who manage to ascend to executive leadership positions in academies faces unique

challenges as they attempt to maintain the status quo. They face challenges such as an

attack on their ethnic identity, gender, race, and intelligence. African American women

perceived as aggressive or assertive, are then pigeonholed as bossy, mad, or angry.

Additionally, the African American woman who is easy going or docile is labeled as

lacking education/ experience and incompetent.

Gatekeeping

Studies show that women often face sex discrimination, which is harder to prove.

Most universities hire women who are not likely to rock the boat. These women once

hired never get opportunities to ascend to the top governing bodies of the higher

education institutions. These women are hired to help the faculties achieve gender

equation and affirmative action in the workplace. The argument that a scarcity of

qualified African American women and other minority groups is an effective gatekeeping

technique being used to deny women top jobs in higher education institutions (Davis &

Maldonado, 2015).

Institutional/Organization Barriers

African American women encounter many barriers to promotion in higher education organizations. Some of the barriers identified include power within the system, lack of professional development, hiring and promotion practices, perceptions of peers and administrators, lack of information, family issues, and the "old boy network."

The contributing reasons a limited number of African American women in president roles of post-secondary institutions exist is due to the existence of institutional barriers. These barriers prohibit African American women from the advancement of the presidency role of these educational institutions. Workplace discrimination takes different forms such as lack of mentors, lack of job advancement opportunities, and challenges of being the only female worker stereotype. The amount of family responsibilities placed upon women, and the amount of emphasis individual women place on the family is a critical factor in a woman's career advancement. Women who choose to pursue career advancement and leadership positions have put more emphasis on work than family affairs. Women face challenges of having to choose between career advancement and spending quality time with the family. Several organizational cultural studies have revealed that the challenges of organizational, family and interpersonal barriers to career advancement are faced more by women than men. Among the primary barriers to women advancement, include male hierarchies, gender discrimination, and non-existence of informal networks to aid women in career advancement. Women carry dual responsibilities because they have to be homemakers and at the same time, allocate extra time in the workplace.

Lack of Mentorship

According to Gill and Jones (2013), women are less likely to find mentorship or support from other women as they pursue career advancements as men would. This phenomenon is common in almost all sectors of the economy. Despite many women earning doctorate degrees and having the desire to advance their academic career, lack of mentorship has halted their dreams of leading the universities. Black women in academia feel frustrated because once they are employed, they are kept busy with tasks that do not give them access to funding, contribute to their tenure, or give them high-performance evaluations. They are assigned service-related tasks such as mentoring students or serving on various committees, which do not increase the chances of being promoted within the academy. Currently, a trend of outsourcing exists where positions of the president in academies are filled through consulting firms from outside the academy. This practice is a major source of discouragement and discriminates against African American women in the academies who qualify but are not given the opportunity to advance their career.

Lack of Networking

African American women in academic institutions lack formal and informal social networks, which could assist them in advancing their academic careers. Male clubs are common, but women members are likely to lack recognition and lose out to male members where opportunities are available. Women lack support from their colleagues in higher administrative positions, as the following phrase testifies, "we don't hire the competition."

Board/Trustee Relationships

Most of the boards running the universities and colleges are filled with white men. Those same white men hold a mindset that acts as a barrier to African American women achieving positions of power. Dunn, Gerlach, and Hyle (2014) show that boards tend to favor selected candidates whom they believe fit the male-dominated environment. Board members compiled of mostly older white men are not accustomed to working with African American women that elevate to top positions of power in their colleges and universities.

Family Responsibilities

Women, in general, carry heavier family responsibilities than men do when it comes to exercising family responsibilities (Cook & Glass, 2014). College administration involves a number of obligations that are time-consuming and stress provoking, especially when family responsibilities are added. The family dynamic act as a barrier to women achieving top positions because family responsibility and college administrative duties tend to conflict with each other. Many job opportunities related to college and university administration requires relocation, which acts as a barrier to women with family responsibilities. Women (both White and African American) are asked during interviews if they are willing to relocate once they get the job; this question is rarely asked men during interviews.

Myths

The absence of women in the top decision-making organizations of higher education institutions has resulted in the creation of various myths trying to explain the

problem. Women face various barriers, obstacles, and myths that are not common to men. Many myths about women are still working against the advancement of female administrators, that include, emotionality of females, resentment among men working with women, the inability of women to discipline men, and spineless.

Breaking Barriers to Women Advancement in Higher Education

Scholars have suggested several ways, which women can break the barriers that are stopping them from achieving top positions in academia (Gill & Jones, 2013). Women should become curious scholars who understand the mission of the institution they serve. They must understand the importance of work ethics, leadership style, have self-confidence, and sense of self-worth. Other strategies women are asked to use include finding a mentor, developing the right attitudes, and becoming proactive.

The process of breaking the chains of bondage from the underrepresentation of African American women in top educational institutions have been found to join together all the forms of oppression and intimidation at achieving leadership positions. Some of these mechanisms include critical actors, critical structures, and critical junctures (Paustian-Underdahl, 2014). According to the critical actor's mechanism, women can influence society's policies and their corresponding outcomes. However, research shows that increment of the number of women into the top leadership alone cannot be the only source of expected improvements in the women welfare (Paustian-Underdahl, 2014). An additional number of women can result in more bills regarding their welfare. This is to mean that the quota imposed regarding the number of women that should be elected into the leadership positions do not necessarily result in more efficient female representatives

into those positions. As a result, the process through which women representatives are elected determines how effective they can be in various positions. Legitimacy is the key to effective leadership since this will give the very best and competitive leaders who deserve the top executive positions (Stamarski & Hing, 2015). This is so because the proxy representatives only remain politically marginalized with little influence over issues relating to gender inequality and racism. However, if this leadership is gained through life experiences and multiple social identities as well as adherence to particular political parties and religious doctrines, women can have much say towards shaping their best interests (Gunn, 2016).

Among other things, the appointment of women into leadership is reliant on other related to individual features such as one's career development path and preferences regarding ideas amongst others. Above all, to break the walls of oppression and increase women representation, women need to be financed properly like their men counterparts. Financial, as well as socio-political capital, is key to women acquiring political power. Such provision of resources would help women to concentrate on the challenge's adamant along their political path (Dickinson, 2015). Similarly, the critical structure of a given country presents some elements, which have a great influence on the position of women into leadership, and this, in turn, determines how effective women can be during the policy-making process. The best part of the critical structure in influencing women leadership in the African American society entails the nature of governance and that of the political mainstream. In essence, the extent of accountability mechanisms the government applies determines how far women can go up the ladder in leadership.

Critical junctures are another crucial mechanism in breaking loose the barriers that lay in front of African American women in the United States. The various attributes of critical junctures such as peace regulation and advocating for democracy as well as participating in the creation of the new constitution established an essential opportunity for women to increases their chances in the political realm. It is during such processes that the monopoly of political power is devolved to the common citizen and the creation of equal opportunities for all. More so, other mechanisms that ensure a full representation of is through the incorporation of national laws that safeguard the political rights of women such that they are universal to everybody. Above all, women are supposed to be part and parcel of the various discussions held regarding the electoral processes and subsequent reforms.

Gap in the Literature

In this study, I sought to reduce the gap in existing literature related to the lack of African American women in the top leadership role of community colleges within the United States. Most of the studies on administrators in the higher education institution study the management in the generalizing approach such that it became difficult to differentiate between academy administration and managing academy as a business entity. Despite a large number of administrators in the United States higher education institutions, few types of research have been a focus on them. Data associated with the advancement of African Americans in the United States workforce are available; however, not much data associated senior-level positions in higher education are available. Numerous studies have explored a range of variables that are related to the

advancement of Black women, such as a study on the influence of a person and situational factors on a person's career advancement. A significant literature gap is found in the phenomena under study.

Summary

In the literature review, I examined the historical perspectives of African American women in community colleges and their lack of representation at the presidential. The literature revealed that many African American women, particularly those in the institution of higher learning are experiencing gender and race inequality. Also confirmed in the literature review is that qualified African American women are facing barriers in their advancement to the top echelon position of the instructional administration. Additionally, African American women in academy are facing barriers to career advancement such as unfair promotion practices, pay disparity, and lack of mentorship. The literature shows that gender inequality is persistent in the higher education institutions, and it manifests itself by the small number of African American women in the senior administrative level.

African American women have the essential qualifications to ascend to the top college administrative position, but barriers exist to stop their advancement. Higher institutions of learning exhibit a cool and chilly climate towards African American women, which leave them feeling isolated, stereotyped, and lacking support from their peer. African American women are not encouraged or supported to pursue the advanced top college leadership job opportunities. Internal barriers such as workplace discrimination, lack of mentors, and lack of job advancement opportunities, prohibit the

Black woman from ascending to the senior level of college authority. The major barriers

identified in the advancement of African American women in academia are gender

discrimination, lack of informal networks to support career advancement, and male

hierarchies.

The current study adds to the needed literature in the field of African American

female lack of inclusion in the management of the institutions of higher learning. The

study will fill the existing gap in the literature by providing open and candid narratives on

this nation's underrepresentation of African American female community college

president. Chapter 3 describes the data gathering methodology that will be used to collect

data for the study, as well as the strategies to analyze the data collected.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

Research studies on African American female community college presidents have yet to address why African American women in the United States continue to fall behind in leading community colleges. My purpose in this qualitative study was to investigate why African American females are lagging behind white women and men in the ascension to the top seat in postsecondary schools despite having the necessary qualifications. My aim in this chapter was to present the appropriate methodology, rationale, and design for the study, which is conducive to a clear structure that ensures the objective of the study is achieved. Also disclosed in this chapter is my role as the researcher, participants, data collection, data analysis, and trustworthiness.

Research Design and Rationale

The primary research question for this qualitative study was: Why do past and present African American female community college presidents believe African American women are underrepresented in the role of community college president in the United States? The central concept of this study is the lack of African American women community college presidents in the United States. Through the lived experiences of past and present African American female community college presidents, a better understanding of their underrepresentation can be revealed.

The research tradition selected for this qualitative study was hermeneutics phenomenology. Phenomenology is an inductive qualitative research tradition rooted in the philosophical traditions of Husserl and Heidegger (Reiner, 2012). Husserl believed

that phenomenology was related to consciousness and was based on the meaning of one's experience. Entrusting in the theory of knowledge known as epistemology, Husserl was pegged with the critical question: What do we know as a person, leading to his development of descriptive phenomenology, where every day conscious experiences are described, and preconceived notions are set aside. Heidegger, a student of Husserl, rejected epistemology and adopted the science of being known as ontology. Heidegger contends that human existence is a more fundamental notion than human consciousness and human knowledge (Reiner, 2012). Extending the philosophy of interpretation known as hermeneutics, Heidegger developed interpretive phenomenology, where he focused on the concept of being in the world rather than knowing the world. Hermeneutics seeks meanings that are embedded in everyday occurrences leading Heidegger to the critical question: What is being? Interpretive phenomenology is used when the meaning of a phenomenon is being sought. Descriptive phenomenology is used when the phenomenon is being described (Reiner, 2012).

The research strategy was influenced by the study's epistemological consideration as well as the need to close the gap existing between the theory and the research implied. According to Creswell (2013), quantitative research and qualitative research strategies are different; quantitative research employs a deductive approach while qualitative research employs an inductive approach. Qualitative and quantitative research as methods of research takes different approaches in epistemological positions. For instance, quantitative research takes a scientific approach or positivism position, that is based on the fact that objective knowledge comes from direct observation or experience. The

qualitative approach adopts an interpretive perspective and grips a positivistic approach when a researcher wants to understand meanings or interpret phenomena. The choice of the design is based on the study's research questions. The motivation behind the research design is to facilitate the data collection process, which the researcher uses to answer study questions in a clear and definite manner. This study sought to examine why African American women are underrepresented at the top executive level in the institutions of higher education in the United States. The objective of this study was to explore the occurrence of a phenomenon in its natural setting, allowing a qualitative method as being best suited for this study.

Confirming qualitative research to be the best method for this study, I then selected a phenomenological design to collect data and obtain the desired knowledge. Phenomenology research can be described as the science of experiences or phenomena (Brinkmann, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2017). Additionally, Klenke (2016) posits that a phenomenologist highlights the subjective parts of people's behavior by trying to dwell into the conceptual world of the participants. A phenomenologist tries to understand the meaning their subjects derive from their daily experiences. From a phenomenologist's standpoint, a person interprets daily experiences from what meaning they hold about them. According to Creswell and Poth (2017), phenomenology explains individuals' experiences of a phenomenon. Apart from trying to make explicit the implicit meaning of a person's experience, a phenomenology approach focuses on individuals' living experiences through descriptive data which it draws out how a person construct the world by describing the perceptions. In a phenomenological study such as the current study, the

perception has constituted the basic source of knowledge by describing what and how the participants experienced the problem in discussion. Phenomenology study has helped to unveil participants' lived experiences of being African American female facing racial and workplace discrimination.

This study utilized an interpretive theoretical perspective, which refers to a study in which the researcher intends to understand how participants make meaning of a phenomenon. Klenke (2016) explains that an interpretive paradigm is one in which a researcher attempts to comprehend the social world from the natural environment from the individual experience perspective; this explains why the researcher is interested in subjective worldviews. According to studies, an interpretive tradition is a method of studying life that gets meaning as part of human action where the inquirer has uncovered that meaning. The interpretive and constructionist approached to share a common view that all social reality is constructed by social actors. Therefore, these approaches require the users to concentrate on interaction, that is, focus on how people act rewards others and the objects in their environment. The approaches also require the user to focus on the meaning attached to the objects in the environment. This study chose to venture into the environment of the subjects under the study and avoided commencing with a conceived notion of the outcome.

According to Eriksson and Kovalainen (2015), a qualitative research method is suitable because the objective of the study is to explore the occurrence of a phenomenon in its natural setting. The research design appropriate for this study is a qualitative phenomenological design. The use of a phenomenological design helps the researcher to

gain more insight into African American women in the top leadership of colleges' feelings and perceptions towards the barriers that have prevented Black women in academia to rise to the topmost positions beside many of them having the right qualifications.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher of this study acted as the chief tool for data collection and the eventual analysis. In this research, my responsibility involved developing a relationship with participants and maintaining ethical behavior throughout in order to create trust with participants. Qualitative research is based on fairness, balancing, and maintaining the researcher's trustworthiness and credibility.

Disclosing the researcher's positionality to the participants is an important process because it reflects on self as a researcher who takes a position as the "human instrument." As an African American woman working in a college as an administrator, I have witnessed disparities between men and women in colleges involving promotions, salary, equality, and motivation/encouragement. Although these disparities are not documented as institutional policies or procedures, they have appeared as invisible criteria that African American women must navigate as they strive to achieve their full potential as administrators. As I look at the demographics of top administrators at our community colleges, I discovered that the number of African American females were negligible as compared to White women or Black men. This reality caused me to choose to explore the reason behind this phenomenon and seek to find a solution.

Ethics in research is a continuous process, which guides data collection, analysis, and reporting. I obtained institutional permission to carry out the research after the IRB approved the research proposal. The participants were allowed to review the informed consent document, ask questions about the document, and sign it after having a full understanding of the element in the informed consent document. The participants were duly informed of their right to answer or skip any question, and that they had a right to stop the interview at any point and to withdraw from the research if they felt they did not wish to continue for any reason. I provided each of the participants a pseudonym, so they could remain anonymous, and protect their identity.

Methodology

Participants

The sample for this study was purposefully selected with a careful understanding of aspects of the participant's experiences. The selection of potential candidates was drawn from a specific criterion. To be selected for the study, each potential participant had to be African American, female and a current and or past community college president within the US. Potential candidates that met the criterion were invited to participate in the study via e-mail invitation. Candidates responded to the email invite with an "I consent" to participate in the study. Those participants received confirmation and a guarantee that all information obtained would remain confidential. The information would only be used for the purpose of the study.

Setting

The interviews of this study were conducted by phone with African American women of two-year community colleges in the United States, classified in different categories by the Carnegie Classification as associates public and private (Hazelkorn, 2013). The targeted population is African American female in the president role with the two-year community college in the United States. Utilizing multiple institutions to interview seven African American females presiding over institutions of higher education strengthened the study by gaining enough insight into the problem of underrepresentation of African American female presidents in community colleges in the United States.

Qualitative studies, in general, contain a smaller sample size. This was true of qualitative phenomenological studies as well. The in-depth interviews and the amount of information obtained from one participant dictated a smaller sample size. The intensity of the study justified using a sample size of six to twelve. Smith et al. (2012) had recommended that novice researchers use a sample size of not more than six. Based on previous similar work studying African American college presidents, saturation would likely be reached around six to eight subjects (Smith et al., 2012).

Employing a purposive sampling helped to identify the research participants (Ritchie et al., 2013; Robinson, 2014). A purposive sampling also allows a researcher to make a subjective selection in efforts of obtaining a sample that appears representative of the population. The sample of the current study was obtained from a range of the spectrum representing various regions of the country in efforts of getting a sample that is more representative. The use of the range allowed for a greater narrative and insight into

the participants' experiences. The criterion used when considering the individuals to be considered for the study was African American women, who are currently or in the past were a community college president in the United States. The participants were drawn from post-secondary institutions in both the private and public sectors. The African American female holding the role of community college president was identified from various professional organizations. A total of seven African American female community college presidents provided consent to participate in the interview. Telephone interviews were used to collect data. I also obtained permission to use recording devices to effectively capture the participants' views.

Instrumentation

Interviews were an instrument of choice for this study. The use of interviews was cost effective, but also, assisted in enhancing the reliability of date when they are designed to accommodate many standardized questions. Four interview questions were used as the main instrument to guide the interviewing process after being examined for content validity. I administered interview questions to participants via telephone. The interview questions were developed to extract as much personal view as possible, making the study effective.

Audiotape

Using audiotape to capture qualitative data ensures descriptive validity. It also allowed the interviewer to concentrate and avoid missing out on details as well as helped the researcher to refer back to the interview if and when necessary. In this study, I used interview audio recording equipment to make the process easy to transfer the recorded

interview from recorders to the computer while maintaining high audio quality.

Interview Protocol

An interview protocol was utilized to outline the format while conducting the interviews. Including use of the interview protocol constructed an inquiry-based conversation that elicited useful data that ensured interview questions aligned with the research questions. The interview protocol also helped to remind the interviewer to transmit vital information to the interviewee, such as restating the purpose of the interview, how the information will be handled, and addressing confidentiality issues.

Data Collection

Primary and secondary data are the main sources of research data in both qualitative and quantitative studies. Primary data is gathered using various methods of collecting data such as interviews, observation method, projective techniques, and case studies. One of the advantages associated with primary data is the uniqueness and ability to produce first-hand data. On the other hand, the secondary data is also useful in research and is obtained from relevant textbooks, research articles, and internet sources. Secondary data is more advantageous because it is easily accessible; for instance, the researcher can retrieve electronic data specifically to address the research question. The primary data collection method was the main source of data for this study.

For this study, I utilized a phenomenological design to help better understand why African American female community college presidents are underrepresented in the US. Primary data was collected from participants with the use of semi-structured interviews. A general interview guide approach was utilized to design the interview in order to

formulate questions related to the issues being discussed and allow flexibility when presenting the questions, as well as making the adaptable in each participant interview. A semi-structured interview enabled structure rigidity because they are in between the standardized and unstandardized interviews. This data collection preferred because it is deemed the most suitable method for this study. Semi-structured interviews were interactive, flexible, allowed a deeper understanding of issues, and allow greater exploration of the issues.

GoToMeeting software recorded and transcribed data collected during each semi structured interview and verified by the interviewee. The data collected during each semi-structured interview was recorded with the use of GoToMeeting, transcribed by the researcher and verified by the interviewee. Having the interviewee verify the transcription ensured the accuracy of the transcripts and added credibility to the study (Groenwald, 2004; Roberts, 2013). Each participant verified their individual transcript and verified without any required changes. Once all verifications were received, the data was reviewed in search of common themes (Barnham, 2015; Groenwald, 2004; Singh, 2015; Smith et al., 2012). As themes began to emerge from the data, quotes were utilized to support the themes (Groenwald, 2014; Singh, 2015; Smith et al., 2012).

I interviewed past and present African American female community college presidents in the United States. Allowing the current and past presidents to be included in the interviews allowed a broader scope of the investigation. During the process of sample selection, I employed purposive sampling. This ensured that those included in the

sample met all the conditions stipulated in the selection criteria. For this study, I utilized a sample size comprising of seven interviewees.

The interviews were carried out by way of telephone, making accessibility easier. The interviewer made interview arrangement with the participants who are all present and past African American female presidents of community colleges. I conducted interviews at times agreed upon between me and the participants.

\individual participants and the researcher. Phone interviews were used for all participants. The following interview questions were developed and used to effectively collect data:

1. Please tell me about your journey in becoming a president of a community college within the United States?

2. What challenges or barriers did you face on your journey to becoming a community college's president?

3. Based on your experiences, what factors have contributed to the underrepresentation of African American female community college presidents in the United States?

4. Is there anything else you would like to tell me related to the topic of factors that have contributed to the underrepresentation of African American female community college presidents in the United States?"

Follow-up

The researcher was prepared to arrange for follow-up interviews to seek clarity where such a need arose. However, the need did not present itself. Nevertheless, I

developed and included procedures for follow-up interviews, notifying the participant

about the follow-up interview; emailing the interviewee and scheduling an interview;

once the participant agreed to participate in a follow-up interview, agree on the venue. A

follow-up interview is easier to conduct because the interviewee is already familiar with

the type and the objective of the research. However, an interview protocol was used to

ensure interview questions were aligned with the research questions and were available

for use during the follow-up interview.

Data Analysis

Data analysis began with the data collection process (Groenwald, 2004; Singh,

2015). The researcher sought to understand the lived experiences of the participants

(Barnham, 2015; Groenwald, 2004; Singh, 2015; Smith et al., 2012). During the note

taking process, the researcher was careful not to interject personal bias but stayed true to

the lived experiences of the participants. When reviewing the transcripts, verified by the

participant as accurate, based on the interview, the researcher surveyed the data for

general themes in each transcript. Once this process was completed the activity of

identifying themes and subthemes across transcripts occurred. I organized themes and

subthemes into chart formation in preparation for translating the data into a narrative

format (Groenwald, 2004; Singh, 2015).

An interpretative phenomenological approach was utilized for the data analysis

strategy following six steps outlined by experts in the field of interpretive

phenomenological analysis. The six steps are: (1) reading and re-reading the data

collected; (2) initial noting; (3) developing emergent themes; (4) searching for

connections across emergent themes; (5) moving to the next participant's transcript; and (6) looking for patterns across all the transcripts (Smith et al., 2012). In step one, the researcher read and reread the information to become self-absorbed in the data, and to identify conflicts or new information that was shared by each interviewee. This immersion allowed the researcher to obtain a deeper understanding of the participants lived experience. Making notes in the margin (step two) functioned as a reminder of the understanding the researcher had regarding the information obtained. Steps one and two made the findings of step three easier to distinguish. Themes were identified based on common phrases, ideas, or concepts, or by content area, depending on interviewees lived experiences. Additionally, frequently described lived experiences led to specific and common themes. In step four, the researcher began to connect the themes to create a standard and clearer picture and understanding of the participants' reality regarding cyberbullying. During step five the researcher repeated step one through four. At step six, the researcher compared common themes among all participants.

Issues of Trustworthiness

This qualitative study addressed the issue of trustworthiness by examining the credibility, dependability, and transferability of the findings. According to Creswell (2013), trustworthiness is reliability and validity that relate to the procedures a researcher follows to guarantee consistency and accuracy of the methods and analysis. This study-maintained quality and reliability of data by paying attention to the fit of the questions, method, and data. A specific way of checking the data and the method such as checking

the reliability of coding was employed (Anney, 2014). I ensured the accountability of every step in the analysis as a way of mitigating personal bias.

External Validity

Employing a thick description in a qualitative study deals with the issue of external validity (Brinkmann, 2014). A thick, transparent, and contextualized analysis of participants' experiences was provided, allowing the audience to determine whether the findings are transferable. The use of participants from across the nation data collection helped to increase the range of situations by users of the study.

Internal Validity

In this study, I utilized a number of strategies in efforts of strengthening internal validity, such as triangulation, peer review or debriefing, and member checks (Creswell 2013).

Triangulation

Multiple sources of data or the use of different methods to confirm the findings involve the use of triangulation (Hussein, 2015). Papadimitriou, Ivankova, and Hurtado (2014) identified four types of triangulation, which are listed as follows: multiple investigators, multiple sources of data, multiple theories, and multiple methods to confirm study's findings. In this research, I accomplished triangulation by keeping field notes and a journal throughout the whole process, using it to supplement the main data source during the analysis of the data.

Member Check

Member check was used to determine the accuracy of the study's findings. The

transcribed data and its interpretation were provided to the participants for verification, accuracy, and confirmation of the data (Anney, 2014). The participants reviewed the interview transcripts and edited the data where it is deemed necessary.

Peer Review or Debriefing

Peer reviewing is a common strategy for ensuring internal validity where peers read and comment on the research findings before publication (Anney, 2014). In a normal circumstance, peer examination involves requesting a colleague to pass through the raw data and assess whether the findings in alignment with the data. I utilized two doctoral colleagues as peer reviewers of the current study.

Audit trail

A detailed account of the methods the researcher has used in the whole process is known as an audit trail. Maintaining an audit trail is vital because it is a tool future researcher can use in order to understand how the study was designed and conducted. An audit trail shows major decisions points and detailed account of methods and procedures employed during the study. A detailed journal was maintained and served as the audit trail for the current study; the journal described the data collection procedures, the categorization process, and decision-making process during the entire study.

Ethical Procedures

Ethical issues are critical when conducting a qualitative study. Ethical rules, though unwritten, require the researcher to apply common courtesy. The ethical issues associated with this qualitative study included confidentiality of information, the anonymity of participants, and informed consent. I provided participants with information

sheets, which predetermined the purpose of the study and the limit of their engagement. At my request, participants voluntarily provided email consent to participate. The researcher communicated the objective of collecting data from participants and guarantee confidentiality and anonymity protection of personal data obtained from participants. The researcher thanked the participants and promised to avail copies of the transcript and the research findings.

I sought permission from the university before embarking on this research. Data collection began upon IRB approval and confirmation from the university that all the required standards were met.

Upon approval of the research proposal, the necessary recruitment materials to assist in data collection were prepared. The researcher prepared the participant communication document, which contained the title of the study, and introduction letter. The letter introduced the participants to the kind of study being undertaken, as well as the duration of the interviews. Also addressed in the letter was the researcher's intention to use audio recording equipment for facilitating easier transcribing and analysis. I prepared and sent a recruitment e-mail message to all the African American female presidents identified. This e-mail message invited them to participate in the study as well as asking them to raise any question concerning the research. The participants received the "Informed Consent Document," which stipulated that upon signing it, the participant agreed to the terms listed in the document. I also prepared an e-mail titled "confirmation of scheduled interview," which contain the interview questions and instructions on how to treat the interview questions such as not answering any uncomfortable question. The

other document that the researcher prepared was the interview protocol that was used to guide the interview. Upon the completion of interviews, I utilized a member-checking document, which contained an attached transcript from participant interviews.

Summary

In summary, this chapter documented the philosophical approach in which this phenomenological study was chosen to support a positivistic approach. The selected qualitative research method provides the importance of this methodology in achieving the objective of the study. The use of a phenomenological approach has influenced the way data is to be collected and analyzed. The positionality has been disclosed to let the readers know the study's stand on the issue of the disparity of African American female community college presidents in the United States. The interview questions used in the data collection process have been described, and their effectiveness in data collection explained in detail. The interview questions were designed with the stated research questions in mind. Participants selected were past and present African American female presidents of community colleges in the United States. The researcher utilized the interview method as the most appropriate approach to gathering data from participants. The process of analyzing data involved content analysis and open coding. The issue of data reliability, trustworthiness, and validity was documented as well as the different strategies used to strengthen the internal validity such as triangulation, peer review, and member checks. The researcher ensured the study's reliability by keeping an audit trail, maintaining a detailed journal. The report shows that an elaborate ethical procedure is maintained throughout the study.

Chapter 4: Data Collection, Analysis, Trustworthiness, Results

Introduction

In this chapter, I present the findings of this study and addresses the research questions. I collected data from a sample of seven past and present African American female community college presidents in the United States using qualitative methods, including semistructured interviews, and audio recordings. Chapter 4 begins with a review of the setting and demographics, which contextualizes the findings. The chapter also provides the process of data collection, evidence of trustworthiness, leading to the disclosure of the results. My purpose in this study was to explore the lived experiences of African American female community college presidents within the United States as it relates to their general underrepresentation in the presidency role. My focus was to better understand the reasons behind the underrepresentation of African American female community college presidents in the United States. The primary research question guiding this study:

1. Why do female African American community college presidents believe African American women are underrepresented in the role of community college presidents in the United States?

Setting

A number of colleges and universities across the country are progressing toward leadership diversity. Nevertheless, the top leadership role in community colleges continues to look homogeneous. The ACE, 2017 College President found that the average president continues to be a white male in his early 60s. Older white men continue to

dominant presidency roles across organizational industries, including higher education and it is important to acknowledge the historical setting and facts surrounding the lived experienced African American women who have ascended to the presidency in community colleges to understand the results of this study. Racism and sexism are products of history and culture and exist in many organizations (Stainback & Tomaskovic-Devey, 2012). African American women are forced to face the hurdles of racism and sexism, leaving them underrepresented in leadership, specifically in the role of community college president in this nation.

At the time of the study, the respondents who agreed to be interviewed were all ready to be part of the study. No issues arose preventing the respondents from participating in the study. However, instances of participants having to reschedule their interviews did occur due to scheduling conflicts. Overall, no significant personal or organization factors were identified that hindered the respondents from participating in the research study

Demographics

The participants for this study were female African Americans who currently or in the past, held a presidency role within community colleges in the United States. Each participant had to be a past or present community college president within the United States.

Using the online professional network LinkedIn, I identified 30 women who met the following criteria were identified and invited to participate in the study:

- African American female.

- A past or present community college president in the United States.

Upon meeting the requirements, the 30 potential candidates were invited to participate in the study. The candidates were invited by email (Appendix A) and asked to respond "I consent" approving their participation in the study. Participants who did not return the "I consent" email within 5 days received two additional requests asking that they review the informed consent form and reply to the email with "I consent". Of the 30 female African American community college presidents identified, three declined to participate, 18 did not respond, and 2 were excluded once it was determined that their role was that of a divisional campus president and not an actual community college president. Ultimately, 7 of the respondents provided their consent, becoming participants of this study.

Data Collection

Using purposeful sampling, data was collected through in-depth semi structured interviews from the seven consenting participants. Pseudonyms were created to maintain the identity and confidentiality of each participant (see Table 1). GoToMeeting high definition video conferencing software was used to conduct telephone interviews. Participants were asked open-ended interview questions (Appendix C). Depending on which question was asked, some of the participants' responses contributed a minimal amount of information about their experiences while other participants' responses went beyond the scope of this study. Although some of the replies did not precisely reference the question presented, overall, some of the inessential material provided an additional perspective. Each interview lasted between 30 minutes to 1 hour, depending on the length of the responses the participants gave to the open-ended questions. The interviews

concluded when participants' responses reached the point of saturation, or no new

perceptions or experiences appeared. Throughout the data collection process, nothing

unusual or unexpected happened. All participants fully and willingly participated in the

study. The recruitment and data collection process took place on August 28, 2018,

through October 15, 2018. All data collected for this study, I saved on both a personal

computer and an external USB drive as an encrypted file.

Table 1

Participant's Education Level and Years of Experience

Names (Pseudonyms)	Years of experience as community college president	Education level
AAFP1	4	Masters
AAFP2	3	Doctorate
AAFP3	3	Doctorate
AAFP4	1	Doctorate
AAFP5	3	Doctorate
AAFP6	2	Doctorate
AAFP7	7	Doctorate

Data Analysis

The GoToMeeting software automatically created a transcription of each

interview. The time required for the transcript review varied from 2 to 3 hours. The

process of member checking began after each interview and before data analysis. I sent

each participant a copy of their individual responses for verification. All participants

verified their responses as accurate, and no changes were required. Upon the completion

of the data transcription, verification, and data labeled with the appropriate pseudonym,

the data analysis phase began. Transcripts were organized in chart formation, based on each interview question and examined for specific themes around the research questions (Groenwald, 2004; Smith et al., 2012). Microsoft Excel was used to organize, sort, and track the frequency of themes from the transcripts. Through data analysis, themes began to form, describing participants reality. Each research question functioned as a guide to examine the lived experiences of the African American female community college presidents within the US. More than a couple of significant themes emerged from the participant's responses. I employed the process of data analysis with the use of IPA. All six steps of IPA were used: (1) Reading and re-reading; (2) Initial noting; (3) Developing emergent themes; (4) Searching for connections across emergent themes; (5) Moving to the next participant's transcript; (6) Looking for patterns across transcripts (Smith et al., 2012).

The participant's responses revealed their perception of various factors that contribute to the overall underrepresentation of Black female community college presidents in the US. Interviews with the participants created dialogues, revealing shared experiences and significant factors that contributed to their underrepresentation in the role of president in community colleges.

Evidence of Trustworthiness and Credibility

Credibility

Credibility is a process that stresses checking, questioning, and theorizing correspondence from the research findings and the real world (Kvale, 1989). To ensure the credibility of this research study, the process of member checking was done

(Groenwald 2004; Singh, 2015). Each participant received a completed transcription of their interview for confirmation of accuracy. I employed the process of member checking to not only have the participants review the analyzed data but also to have participants verify and confirm that their lived experiences were captured during the interviews. Glaser and Strauss (2014) noted that the relationships between saturation and sample size occurred after collecting the current information of all participants, and no additional insight into the phenomenon investigated. This data consisted of the intimate memories of the African American women participants' experiences. An assumption was that the experiences of the participants would be different; however, their responses concerning their experiences were all quite similar. Participants were very open and direct in sharing their stories, allowing the credibility of the research to be established.

Transferability

A second significant means of ensuring trustworthiness for this study was transferability. According to Creswell (2012), threats to external validity present themselves when incorrect conclusions are drawn from sample data to other individuals, settings, and current or previous situations. To avoid the threats of external validity, the findings of this study are transferable to other studies and journal articles. Themes revealed in this research study are valuable, and further analysis should take place concerning the possible transferability in areas involving the race and sex of African American women in leadership.

Dependability

The approach to data collection for this study was followed as outlined in Chapter 3, allowing for accuracy and consistency in the study's research process. The data collection methodology was clear, detailed, and easy to replicate. The data collected provided a rich description of the phenomenon under study. Interview protocols were used to confirm the start of each interview in the same manner. However, the interviews were semi structured, affording the flow of the data and to reduce bias. The results were documented in consensus with the outlined approach. The last step in affirming trustworthiness was confirmability.

Confirmability

Confirmability is imperative to each research effort to determine whether or not the findings are representative of the participants. Having the supporting documentation on hand, interview transcripts, and field notes were a reference point to ensure my findings were from the data collected, and not my thoughts. All data collected through semi-structured interviews and audio recordings were secured on a personal computer drive and a USB drive.

Themes and supporting quotes from the interview transcripts were identified in remaining in alignment with each research question. To validate the voice of the participants, numerous quotations were added to propel participant's views while illuminating the importance of the issues. The study results are presented in the following section.

Results

Several themes derived from the responses provided by the individual participant interviews. Themes that emerged from the data are documented in response to each research question. The primary research question was posed to understand the underrepresentation of African American women in the presidency role in U.S. community colleges. Responses to the sub-questions were captured from the context of the interviews. Emerging themes derived from the interview questions included race and gender, family, lack of representation or exposure, mentors/family support, professional development, male dominance, career track/education, and college systems and boards. **The primary research question is:**

RQ1: "Why do current and former female African American community college presidents believe African American women are underrepresented in the role of community college presidents in the United States?"

This question sought understanding of the underrepresentation of African American female community college presidents in the US, through the lived experiences of African American community college presidents. The participants discussed the underrepresentation of African American female community college presidents as seen through their lens. Primary themes that surfaced from the data collected and assisted in the responses to the research questions included race and gender, politics, and family.

Theme 1: Double Jeopardy of Race and Gender

Racism and Sexism was a common theme expressed by all participants. A clear consensus was felt among the participants that indicated that because of being female and

Black American, they continuously are placed at the bottom of organizational pyramids despite their merit. Participants stated,

"Look at what happened to Hillary Clinton now whether you like her or not the nation was not ready for a female, but they accepted a Black male President Barack Obama. It was more about her being a female there anything else. The nation was not ready for a female president; even female did not vote for her. They were just not ready for it. There are more women in this nation, so if Hillary had the female support, we could have put her in office, but we didn't" (AAFP1).

"Women as a whole are the minority within the male-dominated industry of higher education, placing African American women as a subset of women minorities (AAFP2)".

"…the white male is chosen first, then the Black male, if organizations are still in need, they will go with the white female, leaving the Black woman as the last option (AAFP3)".

"The dominant culture of leadership in post-secondary institutions is the white male and the white male continues to be self-perpetuating; advancing others that look like them (AAFP4)".

"When a decision is needed in regard to the advancement of a woman, white men seem to have a higher level of comfort with Caucasian women than African American women, leading to fewer advancement opportunities for African American women. Receiving fewer advancement opportunities to leadership, specifically community college president, further limits their visibility (AAFP5)".

 "That's one other challenge I face or just probably some of the everyday challenges of being you know, African American in these United States and institutes in predominantly white institutions of higher education, and I don't mean institutions. I do not consider predominantly white institutions when the students are predominantly white, I am talking about when the power structures are predominately white. When the faculty is predominantly white. So when you're navigating in those institutions are those systems that are you know, where the power structure is predominately white you deal with some of the same things that you deal with just being Black in these United States you deal with issues around stereotype you deal with assumptions and biases you deal with, you know, straight out racism and prejudices (AAFP7)".

 "You know, we live in these United States and you know, the reality is that you know, whether we like it or not, you know, white supremacy is a universal construct. And so there are just certain assumptions about you that you know that that people will have no even the nicest people and the people who would not consider themselves racist because people have deficit perspectives or because they, you know, they're socializing these United States where you know, which is founded on white supremacy, then they'll be assumptions about what you can and can't do what you're qualified to do what you're not or as my mother would say how you have to be 10 times better (AAFP7)" .

Because of biases related to race and sex, some participants observed that they do not fit the image of what Board of Trustees and College Systems thinks a leader should

look like, denying African American women positions as community college president. White men, women, as well as Black men, are judged on their skills and abilities, while African American women are being judged more on negative biases and perceptions, rather than merit.

> "there are those that as far as the presidency often don't look like what the Board of Trustees believe the President should look like. For example, there are a lot of women who wear their hair natural there. That is not what the board think a president looks like (AAFP3)".

> "So I'll say again that boards are not hiring women who are more ethnic-looking because you will very seldom see a woman who has dreadlocks in her hair that is a president or sister locks but as the president or I'm a say that while they were interviewing to become a president, they didn't have those things. So most of the time we camouflage maybe put a wig or we change how we look in order to go to the interview (AAFW3)".

> "There are still plenty of biases from the way we wear our hair the way we dress, you know, I have to think about that. I'm natural and just made that decision may be the last three years, but I wear my hair straight. I wore my hair straight to the interview; you know what I mean? So, you still have to kind of think about that. You conform to the environment to get the job without sacrifice. I wear my hair straight a lot. So that's not like an abnormal thing. But I do think that there are biases when they see that female really dressed up with the high heels on with all

that makeup on and all that hair. They place them in a box before they're given the opportunity (AAFP4)".

"A lot of women who wear sister locks who aspire to these positions are not ascending to the presidency. Boards are overlooking them; they are not hiring these women that look like that because that's too ethnic to Afrocentric (AAFP6)".

Theme 2: Lack of Exposure or Representation of Black Female College Presidents

Scarce representation of African American women in the role of community college president in the US is a major reason behind their underrepresentation in the community college presidency. Participants believe African American women are not strategic or intentional in their quest to the role of community college president because many are not aware of the position or it even being an option until later in their careers if at all. Older white men are the primary figures seen in the role, leaving African American women discouraged to inquire or aspire to the role. Participants responses expressed the need for African American women to become exposed to the community college presidency role early in their career. Having early exposure would allow the women to be strategic and intentional in their journey to a college presidency.

"I think that the underrepresentation of Black women college presidents are likely because the role may not be seen as an option for our students. When you are exposed to things then you know about them and then you can make plans to become whatever you are exposed to. Many of our students want to become doctors or nurses and that is because they have experience with nurses and they

know what a nurse is and when you tell them about let's say, surgical technician, they are like what I don't know about that because they've not been exposed to it. And I think that maybe the situation for African American women in college presidencies, you're not exposed to it. We have not been exposed to many African American women who are college presidents even if we work at colleges. It's likely that a president is not an African American female. And so, you may not see that as a viable career option for you. And so I think that that would probably be one of the reasons I'm sure there are a variety of other reasons, but it may be just lack of exposure and not even though they hadn't even thought about it and that was the case for me (AAFP2)".

"The absence of African American women at the CEO level influences the perceptions of African American women who would like to pursue these positions. "I think are substantial. I think that when people of color see other people of color in executive management positions it has an impact on their perception what they could also achieve, of the color position I was the only Black person period (AAFP7)".

For participants, the absence of African American women in higher education leadership positions was described as normal.

"Being the only person of color at the table is nothing new for me. It is very unfortunate, but nothing new (AAFP3)".

"I am often the only Black person in the room, and I am often the only Black female in leadership, it has been that way my whole career. I am over it (AAFP4)".

Theme 3: Family Responsibilities

Advancing to community college presidency often require African American women to relocate, applying to college systems that are progressive and intentional in diversity. Four of the 7 participants expressed the belief that the requirement to relocate diminishes the number of African American women pursuing college presidency.

"…for many African American women faced with the decision to relocate, you got kids in school, they're doing sports, you got a husband that is you know working in the local area and your opportunity is at an institution out of the area; You've got to make a decision. Are you moving your whole family (AAFP2)"?

"They're not always able or willing to travel to the next position personally. I had two small kids and the thought of leaving to go to another state or moving my family if they are the primary caregivers, it limits their ability to move from the institution that they are currently in to get those skills and experiences. So, I think just overall women tend to find themselves as being the family caretaker the being the mom or the person that's pulling it all together. And so, they're not as mobile as I think our male counterparts tend to be (AAFP4)".

"for me personally was and I've gotten a couple of offers I would have had to relocate I did not want to do that either because my family is based in New Jersey and I got a couple of offers to apply for president in these places. And in fact, I

applied for a presidency in Florida once and I was a finalist, but I withdrew

because I didn't want to leave my family (AAFP6)".

Additionally, participants felt the time commitment required for the president role

diminishes time available for family members.

"You may have to move around to get that, but it's difficult when you have

children. It is not surprising that you have fewer women who are CEO, not

surprising at all. Why should it be a surprise, because we have children, we have

to take care of the family. That is our job (AAFP6)".

RQ2: "Tell me about your journey becoming a president of a community college

within the United States".

Theme 4: Education and Career Track

Education was a consistent theme for these women as they ascended to a

community college presidency. Six of the 7 participants have a doctorate in areas

ranging from Higher Education to Nursing (See Table 1). A common theme noted was

the career path taken prior to becoming president. Six of the seven participants served as

college faculty members prior to becoming a president of a community college. Three of

the participants were Vice Presidents within a community college, two were associate

vice presidents, one was a provost, and one participant was a faculty member prior to her

presidency role. The career paths seen in this study confirms findings in a study done

by Wessel and Keim (1994).

Table 2

Career Path

	Faculty	Dean	Assoc/Asst VP	Provost	President
AAFP1	X	X	X		X
AAFP2	X	X	X		X
AAFP3		X	X		X
AAFP4	X				X
AAFP5	X	X	X		X
AAFP6		X	X	X	X
AAFP7	X	X	X		X

Theme 5: Professional Development

During the interviews, each individual participant identified taking part in some form of professional development, and each agreed that professional development is a great opportunity, especially for those looking to advance in their career.

"Kaleidoscope is an excellent leadership academy for minority women interested in ascending to a presidency role (AAFP1)".

"I hadn't even thought about being a college president at all, but I got an opportunity to attend a Leadership Institute Kaleidoscope for women of color and they were all president, and this is 1997. And so, when I attended Kaleidoscope Just to be honest with you. I don't even know what Kaleidoscope was about. It was just a professional development opportunity at when I was a faculty member and there were other Black women with whom I worked and admired, that said they were going and that this will be great for me. I was new to teaching and didn't really know anything about. So just getting an opportunity to go to Kaleidoscope is where I saw all of these women of color and they were president

and that's the first time I even thought about it and then I saw they seem to be just like me no, nothing spectacular about their backgrounds that would prepare them for it. They just were presidents. And so that's what piqued my interest and I guess you could say the rest is history (AAFP2)".

Theme 6: Original Career Goal was not that of College Presidency

All seven participants articulated their college presidency was more of fate and not part of their original career goals. Two of the participants expressed their drive to be in higher education leadership, but not specifically as college president. Five participants stated they were comfortable in the roles they held prior to becoming a college president. The opportunities came by way of mentors, encouraging them to apply, peers continuously saying they would be great as a president or recruiting agencies contacted them and piquing their interest. The participants expressed their belief that if African American women become strategic in their journey to Community College Presidency, their representation would increase.

Theme 7: Support of a Mentor

The participants expressed the importance of having mentors in their lives on their journey to the presidency. The participants described their mentors as being both male and female, but not one participant revealed having an African American female mentor. All seven participants agreed that a lack of African American female mentors exists within higher education leadership. At least two participants went so far as to say, "Without the assistance of their mentor, they do not believe they would have obtained the

presidency role". They believe the help of the mentors were necessary to overcome some of the barriers and challenges they face as Black women.

"Having a mentor helped me to see where my gaps were where my strengths were because honestly, I would play you know, downplay my abilities and have had a mentor, someone, with whom you can chat and confer things. They help you to see know you have more than you think you have. Yeah, so that's been that's been tremendously helpful for me. I think I would have probably had more pitfalls because I didn't have the benefit of having people to help me (AAFP2)".

"I was fortunate that I had a male president who was not just a mentor but became more of a sponsor. He created a position for me… I had to interview just like everyone else, but that position was like the key point to get me at a higher level and to see more of the breadth of the institution than just from my role (AAFP3)".

"Both of the mentors I talked about were white there weren't Black because it wasn't a Black women president. So I'm thinking there was no one to ask to mentor me that look like me so they have to get outside of their race and even gender white males still very much good old boys network, but if you get into it, they can help you and it's not against not a brown-nosing. It's not asking you to change your personality. It's not asking you to sacrifice your integrity or ethics. I would never do that, but based on me going to in the community event or wanting to do something that was outside of my job as sucking up or you know, just all the

negativity that comes around and I'm like, I'm just trying to build my network

(AAFP4)

"I hate to use the word stuck but being in that director position and not knowing

what to do next or where to go next. That was a frustrating time for me and again

had it not been for my mentor creating a new position. I'm not I'm certain I just

don't believe I would be where I am now (AAFW5)".

 "When I said there were people who were grooming me these are people who

were higher than I was, or the president would say…would you chair this. So,

they were giving me things to do and they were sort of like mentoring me, but we

didn't call it that (AAFP6)".

Each of the participants explained their personal efforts of providing mentoring

relationships and giving back to others.

Theme 8: Family Support

The participants gave credit to the values of family support and their friends.

These strong ties helped to assist them on their pathway to the community college

presidency. The family of these participants helped them to continue their journey to the

presidency. Husbands supported the participants by commuting, providing household

care, taking care of family, including cooking, and childcare. One participant confirmed,

without the support of her husband, she would not have been able to accept a presidency

position.

"Yeah, I can tell you that now that would have been a deal-breaker had my

husband not been supportive and you know very much a partner in helping me do

what I needed to do had he been the opposite, you know resentful and all that just

it wouldn't have happened. I'm thankful that he's not he's been very supportive

(AAFP2).

"I will tell you I may have made it to the presidency without the mentors and the

Leadership Institute, but I would not have made it to the presidency without a

supportive family (AAFP3)".

RQ3: "What challenges or barriers did you face on your journey to becoming a community college president"?

Theme 9: Racism and Sexism

Community Colleges across the country boast of diversity and equal opportunity,

yet African American women continue to encounter challenges of being a female and

African American. Of the seven participants, 3 described some of the challenges that they

faced due to being a woman of color. Being a woman of color is a constant challenge that

brings on biases, stereotypes. Researchers have proven that stereotypes thrive when little

information about individuals is known beyond social-group categorical data (Kanter,

1977). Of the findings in the analysis, the most prevalent themes that emerged among all

participants during analysis was race and gender.

"As a Black woman in America, you have to stay three steps ahead of others

(AAFP1)".

"Us as Black women can work harder and smarter, and still get overlooked for

advancement opportunities in leadership (AAFP7)".

Theme 10: Good Ole Boy Network

Participants in this study described higher education as a male dominant sector where the good ole boy networks are profound. Academia leadership is the majority of men and those same men presumed the roles to be for men only. The traditional career trajectory in higher education that typically leads to a college presidency is a male dominant track. Systematically creating a disadvantage for women, more so African American women as men higher men.

College boards and systems make the ultimate decision when hiring for the college presidency role. The predominance of White males who sit on the boards is seen as a major barrier for African American women. Harvey (1999) defined the good ole boys' network as a network primarily composed of White males who control the institutional system of power.

The mindset of these very same boards polluted with male dominance is considered a barrier to women achieving positions of power as they tend to favor candidates most like themselves (Ebbers, Gallisath, Rockel & Coyan, 2000). Additionally, Basinger (2001) noted that board members are not comfortable working with African American women who attempts or has achieved a position of power.

"There is a need for more women of color to be president, but there is more of a need for the Board of Trustees who hire the president has to understand the people that they need to hire. The boards don't think they understand the types of people that they need to hire to do the work that needs to be done in higher education specifically (AAFP1).

"Until those boards begin to address their own biases and hiring then we will

continue to have few women of color few men of color in these positions and

those boards are they just not ready for strong Black women (AAFW3).

"sometimes even the boards with the greatest intentions may feel uncomfortable

because they've never considered an African American woman before (AAFP4)".

"…if you have board members who for whatever reason have something in their

head about it, you know, have a preconceived notion about a minority if they had

that in their head. That could potentially be a barrier, but it was not a barrier for

me (AAFP6)".

Theme 11: Family Responsibilities

Women hold family responsibilities and commitments. College presidency

involves long hours and extensive work. Adding the two dynamics together can be very

stressful. The participants expressed feelings of guilt when working long hours away

from their families. Data indicated that African American women are often forced to

choose between their family and their careers.

RQ4: "Based on your experience, what factors do you believe have contributed to

the underrepresentation of African American female community college presidents

in the United States"?

Participant's responses expressed the continuous existence of racism and sexism,

structural barrier, family and the lack of representation greatly contribute to the disparity

of Black women in the role of community college presidency in the United States. These

women are armed with the same knowledge, credentials, and abilities as white women

and men, but still today, in 2019 they continue to experience racism and sexism as they navigate through the male dominant industry of higher education. These experiences create a domino effect that significantly affects the underrepresentation of African American women in the presidency role of community colleges.

Summary

In Chapter 4, the results of the study identified themes related to the underrepresentation of African American female community college presidents in this nation. Seven African American female community college presidents shared personal insights into what their experiences, beliefs, and perceptions are to the underrepresentation of Black women in the top leadership position in community colleges. Race and gender were primary themes relating to the underrepresentation of African American female community college presidents in the US. The continued existence of racism and sexism experienced by women of color add up to more problems or barriers than for their White female, Black male or White male counterparts. As an ethnic female minority, they perceive that their race and their gender corresponded with them having all the required credentials on paper, but not looking like the boards believe a president should look like. Race and gender could possibly be a domino effect that leads to the lack of exposure or representation of African American women in the president role of community colleges. Race and gender issues are directly related to the underrepresentation of Black women in the role. This, in turn, effects the minimal visibility of women of color in the role.

       Also, family responsibilities such as relocating from one place to another as a major reason explaining the underrepresentation of these women in president positions. The amount of time women dedicate to their families is also a major factor explaining the underrepresentation of these women in president positions. Race and gender, lack of exposure, and family, emerge as core factors that contribute to the underrepresentation as women have more family roles compared to their male counterparts who seemingly occupy these positions. It is clear from the research that the journey to becoming a community college president has included professional development, higher education, and the support of mentors and family. Racism, sexism, and family responsibilities are major barriers to becoming college presidents among African American women. Politics, especially among the college systems and boards, is the other major challenge facing these women. These results were specific to the research questions used for the study and were used for the development of Chapter 5 of this dissertation, which mainly involves the analysis and interpretation of the research findings.

Chapter 5: Findings, Recommendations, Implications

Introduction

My purpose in this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of African American female community college presidents within the United States to obtain a better understanding of the phenomenon of their underrepresentation. The nature of this research study was to explore and gain an in-depth understanding of the underrepresentation of African American female community college presidents. The research design best suited and employed to answer the research questions for this study was a qualitative phenomenological research design. Thus, the findings from this study are based on interviews with seven African American female community college presidents in the United States. Based on the analysis of these women who have obtained the role of community college president in the United States found that barriers exist that may provoke deterrents to advancement. Various factors have been shown to explain the underrepresentation of African American women in community college presidency positions, including race and gender, family responsibilities, and the lack of exposure and representation.

Interpretation of the Findings

Why African American Are Underrepresented in the Role of Community College President in the United States

I conducted this study by interviewing seven African American female community college presidents. The results of the interview provided in-depth and poignant information. All of the women expressed factors relating to their confirmed

underrepresentation in the role of a community college president in this nation. African American women are not well represented in community college presidency positions compared with their white female and male counterparts. The study revealed why African American women are underrepresented in the community college presidency role, which explains their bleak presence. Family responsibilities and the minimal representation of Black women in the presidency role are biases fueled by racism and sexism that continue to negatively affect the advancement of African American women in the top leadership position in community colleges around the nation. These biases shown toward African American women have been a major factor in explaining their underrepresentation. Bias in this context can be explored in different contexts. First, gender bias is where women are not expected to hold the presidency position. This source of bias is fueled by the fact that society is mainly male-dominated. Second, bias may also be examined on ethnic or racial lines. The respondents note that the U.S. society still has elements of white supremacy where people of color are not trusted with certain leadership positions. These sources of bias have limited access to the college presidency, leading to their lack of representation in the role. The findings of race and gender, family and the lack of Black female representation are in line with other scholars who have reported on factors related to the underrepresentation of African American women in college presidency positions (Cook, 2012; Cook & Glass, 2014; Davis & Maldanado, 2015, Gill and Jones, 2013).

Race and gender are a common barrier stopping African American women from getting an equal chance in the selection and appointment process; despite having laws preventing discrimination (Cook & Glass, 2014). Black women are as equally qualified

for entry into top leadership roles in higher learning institutions, yet they continue to face isolation, and systematic prejudice, which is, in turn, the cause of their failure to acquire presidential positions in postsecondary institutions. Davis and Maldonado (2015) stated that racism and discrimination have been a core factor to the underrepresentation in community colleges as presidents of Black women within community colleges. Cain (2015) expressed that in the United States, Black women working in community colleges are mostly subjected to the sexism form of discrimination in which the prejudice is influencing the manner in which women are being promoted to top executive positions in colleges and universities.

The finding of family responsibilities is in line with previous work found in the literature review. This research has also shown that these women are constrained by family factors whereby in the presence of a presidency position, they are forced to choose between relocating because of the job or remaining with the families. In most of the cases, as has been proved by this study, the majority of these women often choose to remain with their families. Women, in general, carry heavier family responsibilities than men do when it comes to exercising family responsibilities (Cook & Glass, 2014). This mindset highlights a form of sexism where women are expected to take care of their families and are consistent with the study's literature review.

The finding of the lack of representation in the role was not only consistent with the literature review but also extends the knowledge. According to Farmer (2016), few African American women hold top leadership roles in United States colleges and universities. The minimal visibility of Black female college presidents directly affects the

decision of up and coming African American leaders to aspire to the presidency role. The position begins to look out of reach and or impossible to achieve. A number of African American women have fallen victim to racial disintegration in the United States, especially in learning institutions (Bowen & Bok, 2016). With community college presidency seeming out of reach, a number of possible candidates are removed from even attempting to strive for the role, giving way to the underrepresentation.

The journey of a president of a community college

The study has shown that the journey of becoming the college president for the African American women has not been easy due to these women have been forced to compromise and deal with a lot of challenges along the way. In a study to examine the career pathways or journey to becoming college presidents among African American women, Harris (2005) found that majority of the African American women were more likely to take on the education path in their journey to becoming presidents of the colleges. Specifically, this research found that all but one of the presidents who participated in this study were holders of a doctorate, suggesting the fact that their journey to becoming presidents is largely supported by the fact that they are very learned and qualified for the presidency position. ACE (2012) and King and Gomez (2008) revealed that the majority of college presidents had a terminal degree.

Each of the seven participants began their journey in higher education as faculty members. From the faculty positions, they were able to migrate to coordinators, directors' deans, and vice presidents. However, the most prevalent positions held before moving

into the presidency was vice-president/associate vice-president for both academic and student affairs.

The study has also shown the importance of mentors and family support as these women ascend to the community college presidency. Each of the participants of the study provided similar sentiments of mentors, and mentoring relationships being an important aspect of their journey. Mentors proved to be a supportive resource for many of the participants as they helped to guide the participants 'as leaders. Smith and Crawford (2007) indicated mentors were an appropriate way to facilitate career advancement. Similarly, Gooch (2009) revealed that mentoring and mentoring relationships proved to be influential in supporting African American community college presidents. Mentors proved to be valuable in their journey to leadership. These women were mentored and knew the importance of giving back by mentoring others. Smith and Crawford (2007) revealed that mentoring is an institutional tool that could help retain, recruit, and advance women. The majority of the participants had good mentoring relationships

Challenges African American Women Face

The study has shown that female African American college presidents face various challenges in their position as college leaders. Among the noteworthy challenges, include race, gender, good ole boys, and family. In most of the cases, these challenges have been a major obstacle for these women and their career paths. Other scholars have also agreed that African American women often face various challenges that prevent them from ascending to community college presidency. According to Beckwith, Carter & Peters (2016), African American women in leadership roles have to struggle with identity

issues related to their racial background. In most of the cases, these women are often dismissed or devalued at work. This has explained the fact that African American women in presidential roles are a rare occurrence (Sotello, 2007).

According to a study by Bates (2007), African American women seeking presidential roles in higher education have had to live with the challenges of racism, and sexism, among other challenges. Both these articles and this research study have established a common trend; African American women faced tough challenges in their presidential positions. However, whether these challenges differ significantly from their male or white counterparts is a subject for further research.

Factors contributing to the underrepresentation of African American female community college presidents

This study has shown a number of factors that contribute to the underrepresentation of African American women in college presidency positions, including but not limited to race and gender, politics, lack of representation, and family. Many other studies have reported similar factors in addition to other new and unique reasons. Jackson & Harris (2007) developed several themes to explain the underrepresentation including the glass or concrete ceiling concept, myths about these women, relationship with the board (politics), family responsibilities, and organizational barriers. Notably, several similarities between these factors and those reported in this study. This study found that a significant male-dominated stereotype towards African American women among board members and college systems that prevent these women from accessing leadership positions in community colleges. Jackson and Harris (2007)

call these concepts myths. As noted by the two researchers, there many myths or stereotypes behind African American women that affecting their desire or ability to become college presidents.

Similar to this study, these authors also note the influence of societal gender norms and a historically patriarchal society where women are supposedly expected to assume the role of a family caretaker. In most of the cases, these norms force women to choose careers that align with their family responsibilities. Men, on the other hand, are expected to choose careers that include long work hours and not involve taking care of children.

Limitations of the Study

As with most research, this research study has some limitations. One of the limitations of this study involves the small number of African American women community college presidents in the United States. The paucity of Black women in these roles contributed to the limited perspective of their continued underrepresentation of president within higher education. Due to the low percentage of African American women, each participant was vital to the success of this study. The participants for this study were limited to the location of the United States and selectively limited by race and gender. The limited representation only provided a snapshot of the experiences of African American women community college presidents. Thirty women that met the study's criteria were identified on LinkedIn, but only seven responded "I consent", to participate. This was a limitation because the resulting data was not as comprehensive as was expected by the researcher.

Another limitation of the study relates to the research design. The study used a qualitative research design, which means that the study was only able to generate information related to gaining a deeper understanding of the research questions. This was a limitation because then it becomes problematic for the findings of this research to be generalized to a wider population.

Recommendations for Future Research

The development of policies that will advocate and increase opportunities for African American women that are based on merit and no other social, organizational or structural factors is one of my recommendations for future research. Policies of this nature would provide more opportunities for Black women to ascend to leadership roles, especially community college president, forcing the male dominated power structures of higher education to change to their recruiting and hiring policies. Major components needed to create successful policies would address diversity, mentoring, racism, and sexism, to name a few.

Representation of African American women in presidency positions in colleges can be improved through diversity education and awareness. Through research, education, and awareness, it can be shown that African American can become successful college presidents. The bias and stereotype towards African American women with regards to their ability to hold leadership positions in colleges are partly driven by the fact that society has created this notion among people. With proper education and awareness among school administrators, society and the community, this notion may change. Although this recommendation will yield long term benefits, it will help all people realize

that these women can be college leaders. Changing the minds of people requires a lot of effort, time, and dedication. Research should be conducted to document the experiences of African American women in presidency positions and disseminated to the people, through publications, workshops, and seminars that advocate for gender and racial equality. This way, chances are high that the minds of people may be convinced over time that African American women can make good college presidents.

Mentorship for African American women who are already in leadership positions can help increase the representation of African American women as college presidents. An urgent need for African American leaders to offer mentorship to young women aspiring to become future presidents. According to Gamble & Tuner (2015), African American women mentoring other Black women has a significant positive effect in promoting the success of these women in leadership positions in institutions of higher education.

In addition, race and gender should be further explored for a deeper understanding of those issues in institutions of higher education. Perhaps, other gains from such research could provide strategies for future leaders to overcome the challenge related to issues of race and gender, helping policymakers identify and attack the problem. As stated earlier, little research has been conducted on African American community college presidents in the United States. Previous researchers only have explored African-American college and university presidents in the presidency and their leadership styles, but not specific to community colleges within the United States. A study of this nature

would provide additional research to African American women who aspire to be community college presidents.

Implications

The findings of this dissertation have direct implications for African American women, especially those aspiring to become community college presidents. The study has shown that women have great potential when it comes to becoming leaders and presidents of community colleges. However, to overcome the barriers and challenges to becoming college presidents, policymakers need to be aggressively proactive in addressing the barriers and inequities Black women face while seeking the college presidency position.

The implications of positive social change within this study include the ability to enhance awareness among the field of higher education, and the lack of women of color in campus presidency roles. Such awareness may, in turn, help to increase the number of African American women college presidents and foster a more conducive environment to women of color into these roles. Change is about building community and changing the mindset and behaviors of the people in communities. African American women in community college presidency positions may contribute to society based on their lived experiences.

This study supported the premise that CRT would provide a multi-dimensional perspective of African American women leaders of higher education. The CRT "recognizes the complex ways that race intersects with gender, class, and ethnicity" (Hill, 2009) as well as provides the characteristics needed to tell the personal accounts of the

lived experiences, to expose discrimination, oppression, and racial inequalities (Alexander-Floyd, 2010; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Each of the participants conveyed personal experiences and or knowledge of racism and sexism while ascending to community college presidency during the interviews. In this study, CRT was used as a lens to help explore potential challenges experienced by African American women aspiring for to community college presidency. A correlation between CRT and the findings of this study exist with respect to the social constructs of race and gender. CRT posits race and gender as central elements (Solorzano, 1998). Gender and color were factors found to be deterrents and yielding challenges for Black women in higher education leadership. CRT was instrumental in gaining an understanding of the complex roles of sexism, racism, and interrelated concepts, in the lived experiences of African American female community college president's career development. The presence, if any, of barriers to advancement, were also explored. Findings of race and gender implications and inequality issues were indicated. The intersectionality of gender and race-based factors were central themes identified in this study. Even today, in the year 2019, there continues to be a racial divide in this nation

The use of CRT helped guide this research effort and recommend organizations use CRT as noted by Hiraldo (2010), when "references are needed and when striving to become more inclusive through changes in diversity initiatives, the infrastructure of institutions, and analysis of hostile environments". Although CRT was initially used in education (Hiraldo, 2010), the tenets of CRT may be used to determine the presence of racial inequality in different contexts for future studies

It is clear from this study that certain factors explain the underrepresentation of African American women in the community college presidency. As has also been shown in this research, most of these factors tend to be universal because almost the same factors are reported in other studies. Race and gender have been a major force preventing women from accessing leadership positions in community colleges. The inability to relocate from one place to the other when a job vacancy is available has been cited as one of the issues explaining the underrepresentation of African American women in presidency position in community colleges. This is mainly the case because many women often prioritize their families over the job. The journey to becoming a community college president is not as easy as has been shown in the research. One requires a lot of commitment, focus, and dedication, coupled with the ability to overcome the barriers faced in becoming a community college president. The lack of representation is a major challenge facing African American women in the journey of becoming a college president. It is evident that the underrepresentation of African American women's leadership positions can be explained by personal factors as well as structural factors that are out of control for these women. A key message from the research is that underrepresentation of African American women in presidency position is something that can be changed when the system develops policies to promote equity among everyone and when these positions become accessible to all African American woman.

Conclusion

My purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of African American women community college presidents in this nation to have a better

understanding of their underrepresentation in the role. Findings from the rich descriptions provided through the seven participants' experiences/perceptions provide insight useful for other African American women embarking on community college presidency. It is clear from this study that certain factors explain the underrepresentation of African American women in the community college presidency. This study provides a clear depiction of the plight African American women face on their journey to community college president, providing a greater understanding of their underrepresentation in the role. Also revealed in this research, most of these factors tend to be universal because almost all the same factors have been reported in other studies. The study identifies and confirms race and gender as being a primary factor to the underrepresentation of Black women in the president role of community colleges. Being Black and female is viewed as an added subset to the second-class citizen. With race and gender causing such a significant effect on the Black women ascending to leadership positions, specifically community college presidency, the visibility of Black women in the role continues to remain minimal. The minimal visibility then creates a lack of exposure or representation that affects the likelihood of rising Black women to even aspire to the college presidency role. Family issues such as the inability to relocate from one place to the other when a job vacancy is available is cited as one of the issues explaining the underrepresentation of African American women in presidency position in community colleges. This is mainly the case because many women often prioritize their families over the job. The journey to becoming a community college president is not as easy as has been shown in the research. One requires a lot of commitment, focus, and dedication, coupled with the

ability to overcome the barriers faced in becoming a community college president. Obtaining a doctoral degree and coupling that with professional development was seen as an effective path in this study. The support of mentors and family is a huge influence that increases the advancement of African American women in the journey of becoming a college president. It is evident that the underrepresentation of African American women's leadership position can be explained by personal factors as well as structural factors that are out of control for these women. A key message from the research is that underrepresentation of African American women in community college presidency position is something that can be improved when the system develops policies to promote equity among everyone and when these positions become accessible to every African American woman. Statistics show that African American females are slowly making strides to the role of the community college president. Nevertheless, underrepresentation is evident. The increased visibility of Black female community college president has the capacity to influence the interest, motivation, and goals of other Black women, increasing the opportunity of closing the disparity gap. As more African American women navigate the intersectional barriers of race and gender, they build, dreams, hopes, and aspiration for future women and minorities become president.

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Appendix A: Informed Consent—Invitation to Participate in Study

African American Female Community college Presidents

Nicole Tanner, Researcher and Doctoral Student at Walden University

I am doing a research to understand the lack of African American Community college presidents within the United States through the lived experiences of current and past college presidents.

The risk of this study is similar to discomfort you might encounter in everyday situations where you have answering questions during a conversation. Your participation can help others to better understand the disparity exist as well as create public policy to help increase the number of Black women in top leadership of higher education.

If you are 18 or older, I would be grateful for your participation in this Study.

If you are interested, please send a note to the researcher, Nicole Tanner via e-mail to confirm your interest to participate.

Participation is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time.

Participants will receive a Consent Form as an e-mail attachment.

Participation is voluntary, and you may stop at any time.

All volunteers will sign and send the Consent to Participate Form via e-mail to

An e-mail confirming receipt of the signed Consent to Participate Form will then be sent to all volunteers.

All participants will be asked to take part in an audiotaped telephone interview last in approximately 30 minutes and consisting of four open-ended questions. Interviews will be conducted at your convenience.

You will also be asked to review the results upon completion of the analysis. This is expected to take approximately 30-45 minutes, and you have the right to refuse.

The results of the study may be published. However, no names or personal information will be used in the study or shared. All information will be kept confidential and disposed of after 5 years.

Sincerely,

Nicole Tanner

Doctoral Student

Walden University

Appendix B: Confidentiality Agreement

CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

Name of Signer:

During the course of my activity in collecting data for this research: "The Underrepresentation of African American Female Community College Presidents within the United States" I will have access to information, which is confidential and should not be disclosed. I acknowledge that the information must remain confidential, and that improper disclosure of confidential information can be damaging to the participant.

By signing this Confidentiality agreement, I acknowledge and agree that:

1. I will not disclose or discuss any confidential information with others, including friends or family.
2. I will not in any way divulge, copy, release, sell, loan, alter or destroy any confidential information except as properly authorized.
3. I will not discuss confidential information where others can overhear the conversation. I understand that it is not acceptable to discuss confidential information even if the participant's name is not used.
4. I will not make any unauthorized transmissions, inquiries, modification or purging of confidential information.
5. I agree that my obligations under this agreement will continue after termination of the job that I will perform.
6. I understand that violation of this agreement will have legal implications.
7. I will only access or use systems or devices I'm officially authorized to access, and I will not demonstrate the operation or function of systems or devices to unauthorized individuals.

Signing this document, I acknowledge that I have read the agreement and I agree to

comply with all the terms and conditions stated above.

Signature: **Date:**

Appendix C: Interview Protocol and Questions

Date _____ Time _____

Location _____

Interviewer: Nicole Tanner

Interviewee _____

Informed consent form signed? _____

Notes to interviewee:

Thank you in advance for your participation. As the researcher, I strongly believe your

input will be valuable to this study. I will make every effort to ensure that confidentiality

of your participation and your identity is protected.

Approximate length of interview: 30-45 minutes

Methods of disseminating results:

Transcripts of the interviews will be emailed to you for review. Once the research is

complete, the study findings will be provided to you.

Interview Protocol:

1. Take descriptive notes during the interviews and take reflective notes after the interviews.

2. Ask participants if they want to share any additional thoughts after their interviews.

3. Remind participants that their identity and information will be kept confidential.

4. Remind participants that they will have an opportunity to review the transcript of their tape

   interview.

5. Thank the participant for participating in the study.

Interview Questions:

1. Please tell me about your journey in becoming a president of a community college within the United States.

2. What challenges or barriers did you face on your journey to becoming a community college's president?

3. Based on your experience, what factors do you believe have contributed to the underrepresentation of African American female community college presidents in the United States?

4. Is there anything else you would like to tell me related to the topic of factors that have contributed to the general absence of African American female community college presidents in the United States?"