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**African American Females in Senior-Level Executive Roles Navigating  
Predominately White Institutions: Experiences, Challenges and  
Strategies for Success**

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Strategies for Success**

**by**

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## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Rosie Smith. Thank you for your sacrifice, encouragement and support throughout my educational journey.

In addition, this dissertation is dedicated to the twelve phenomenal women that participated in the study. Thank you for sharing your experiences with me.

Finally, this dissertation is dedicated to the African American women who paved the way for me to be successful at a predominately white institution. I am proud to be part of your legacy.

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**African American Females in Senior-Level Executive Roles  
Navigating Predominately White Institutions: Experiences, Challenges  
and Strategies for Success**

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2013

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The purpose of this study was to determine the experiences, challenges and strategies for success of African American female senior-level executives at predominately white institutions (PWIs). This qualitative study used a phenomenological perspective to address the research questions, as phenomenology was uniquely suited to capture participants lived experiences (Guido, Chávez, & Lincoln, 2010; Perl & Noldon, 2000). The conceptual framework for the study was based on the theoretical concepts of black feminist theory, biculturalism and intersectionality. The combination of these theories was uniquely appropriate for researching the lived experiences of African American women (Barrett, Cervero, & Johnson-Bailey, 2003; Collins, 2000; Du Bois & Edwards, 2007). Black feminist theory addressed the lived experiences of African American women (Collins, 2000); intersectionality highlighted the oppression of African American women (Collins, 2000) and biculturalism explained how African American women adapt to be successful (Barrett, et al., 2003). The findings for this study of African American female senior-level executives at predominately white institutions

include: regarding experiences (1) relationships and connection were essential; (2) strategic and political savvy were vital; (3) one must have an awareness of your perception; (4) higher education was an isolating place; (5) racism and sexism were still prevalent; and (6) work/life balance was a myth; regarding identities (7) creation of a professional identity as the primary identity at PWI; (8) race and gender as prominent identities; and (9) personal persona purposely protected from PWI; and regarding strategies to cope with challenges and celebrate successes (10) know yourself and focus on your goals; (11) identify something to ground you outside of the PWIs; (12) invest in your success through academic and professional preparation; and (13) advance to uplift others.

## Table of Contents

List of Tables .....	xiv
List of Figures .....	xvi
Chapter One – Context of the Study .....	1
Introduction .....	1
Statement of the Problem .....	3
Purpose of the Study .....	10
Research Questions .....	11
Brief Overview of Methodology .....	11
Definition of Terms .....	13
Delimitations and Limitations .....	16
Assumptions .....	17
Significance of the Study .....	17
Summary of the Chapter .....	18
Chapter Two – Literature Review .....	19
Introduction .....	19
African American Female Senior-level Executives at Predominately White Institutions of Higher Education .....	19
Before World War II (Pre-1945) .....	20
Post World War II (1945 – 1999) .....	22
African American Females Entering Higher Education Administration at PWIs .....	24
Chilling Effect of Bakke on Higher Education .....	30
Current Status (2000 - present) .....	35

Re-visiting the Literature – The Need for a Study of the Experiences of African American Female Senior-level Executives at Predominately White Institutions .....	39
Conceptual Framework for this Study .....	41
Black Feminist Theory.....	42
Womanism.....	43
Biculturalism.....	44
Intersectionality.....	46
Summary of the Chapter .....	48
Chapter Three – Design and Methodology.....	50
Introduction.....	50
Research Method and Design .....	51
Phenomenological Approach.....	52
Giving Voice to African American Females. ....	53
Insider versus Outsider Phenomenon.....	53
Research Design.....	54
Implications of Oral History.....	54
Description of the Population and Sample.....	56
Data Collection Instruments .....	60
Interview Protocol.....	60
Documents .....	61
Role of the Researcher .....	61
Relationship to the Topic.....	62
Relationship to the Participants.....	63
Data Collection Procedures.....	63
Research Approvals .....	64
Data Collection .....	64
Curriculum Vitae or Resume.....	64

Interviews.....	64
Part One.....	65
Part Two.....	65
Member Checking and Follow-up.....	66
Data Analysis Procedures.....	67
Descriptive Statistics.....	67
Coding Procedure.....	67
Open Coding.....	68
Coding Based on Conceptual Framework.....	69
Black Feminist Theory.....	70
Intersectionality.....	70
Biculturalism.....	70
Quality Measures.....	71
Use of Technology.....	71
Calendar of Research Activities.....	72
Summary of the Chapter.....	73
Chapter Four – Data Analysis and Findings.....	74
Introduction.....	74
Implementation of the Research Study.....	75
Participant Profiles.....	76
Addison Michael.....	77
Amelia William.....	77
Ava Jack.....	77
Charlotte James.....	78
Emily Aiden.....	78
Emma Noah.....	78
Isabella Jacob.....	79
Lily Carter.....	79

Madison Lucas.....	79
Mia Jackson.....	79
Olivia Ethan.....	80
Sophia Mason.....	80
Institutional Profiles.....	82
Midwest Public.....	82
Northeast College.....	82
Northeast Public.....	83
South One Public.....	83
South Two Public.....	83
South Three Public.....	84
West College.....	84
Findings Based on Coding Procedure.....	85
Synopsis of Open Coding Procedure.....	86
Synopsis of Conceptual Framework Coding Procedure.....	86
Data Analysis for Research Question #1.....	87
Finding #1 - Relationships and connections were essential.....	91
Allies.....	91
Mentors.....	94
Partnerships.....	96
Finding #2 - Strategic and political savvy were vital.....	97
Finding #3 - One must have an awareness of your perception.....	100
Finding #4 - Higher education was an isolating place.....	103
Finding #5 - Racism and sexism were still prevalent.....	106
Finding #6 - Work/life balance was a myth.....	108
Black Feminist Theory.....	110
Knowledge through Wisdom.....	111
Personal Accountability.....	111
Data Analysis for Research Question #2:.....	113

Finding # 7 - Creation of a professional identity as the primary identity at PWI .....	115
Finding #8 - Gender and Race as prominent identities .....	117
Gender.....	117
Race.....	119
Finding #9 - Personal persona purposely protected from PWI.....	119
Intersectionality.....	121
Data Analysis for Research Question #3: .....	124
Finding #10 - Know yourself and focus on your goals.....	126
Finding #11 - Identify something to ground you outside the PWIs...128	
Finding # 12 - Invest in your success through academic and professional preparation. ....	129
Finding # 13 - Advance to uplift others. ....	131
African American women helping each other. ....	131
Advancement for the Greater Good. ....	132
Biculturalism.....	133
Summary of the Chapter .....	136
Chapter Five – Discussion and Recommendations.....	138
Introduction.....	138
Statement of the Problem, Research Questions and Method.....	139
Discussion of Findings.....	144
Findings for Research Question #1 .....	144
Findings for Research Question #2.....	150
Findings for Research Question #3.....	152
Findings Related to the Conceptual Framework.....	154
Findings Related to the Literature.....	159
Enhancements to the Literature .....	161
Positive connotation of biculturalism. ....	162
Focus on diversity regardless of job responsibility.....	162

Salience of gender over race .....	163
Lack of precise career planning .....	164
Limitations .....	164
Significance.....	165
Recommendations for Practice .....	166
For Institutions .....	166
For African American Female Senior–Level Executives .....	168
For African American Female College Students .....	170
For Professional Organizations.....	171
Future Research .....	172
Conclusion .....	173
Summary of the Chapter .....	176
Appendix A – Final Request for Participation.....	178
Appendix B - Website Rating Form .....	179
Appendix C - Informed Consent.....	181
Appendix D - Interview Protocol.....	183
References.....	185

## List of Tables

Table 1.1	
<i>Executive, Administrative and Managerial Professionals employed at U.S. institutions of in Higher Education as of Fall 1999 and Fall 2009</i> .....	5
Table 3.1	
<i>A priori coding based on the Research Study Conceptual Framework</i> .....	69
Table 3.2	
<i>Timeline of Research Activities</i> .....	72
Table 4.1	
<i>Research Study Participant Demographic Information</i> .....	81
Table 4.2	
<i>Description of predominately white institutions where study participants were employed as of Fall 2012</i> .....	85
Table 4.3	
<i>Findings for Research Question # 1</i> .....	88
Table 4.4	
<i>A priori coding based on the Research Study Conceptual Framework – Black Feminist Theory</i> .....	110
Table 4.5	
<i>Findings for Research Question # 2</i> .....	115
Table 4.6	
<i>A priori coding based on the Research Study Conceptual Framework - Intersectionality</i> .....	122

Table 4.7	
<i>Findings for Research Question # 3</i> .....	126
Table 4.8	
<i>A priori coding based on the Research Study Conceptual Framework - Biculturalism</i> .....	134
Table 5.1	
<i>Finding related to the Research Questions for the Study</i> .....	145

## List of Figures

Figure 2.1. Conceptual Framework for the Study of Black Feminist Theory, Biculturalism and Intersectionality .....	44
Figure 5.1 Conceptual Framework for the Study of Black Feminist Theory, Biculturalism and Intersectionality .....	143
Figure 5.2 Revised Conceptual Framework for the Study.....	155

## **Chapter One – Context of the Study**

### **Introduction**

Prior studies indicated that despite achieving high levels of educational success and advancing to senior positions within academia, African American females continue to be outliers in higher education (Bailey, 2010; Farmer, 1993; Gregory, 1999; Moses, 1989; Ramey, 1995). These women struggle with being highly educated and navigating the organizational structure of the institution (Howard-Vital, 1989; Lloyd-Jones, 2009). Early investigations by Constance M. Carroll (1982), current Chancellor of the San Diego Community College District, regarding the experiences of African American females in higher education concluded that:

There is no more isolated subgroup in academe than Black women. They have neither race nor sex in common with White males who dominate the decision making stratum of academe; Black males in academe at least share with the White males their predominance over women. (p. 118)

Others suggested that African American women experience unique challenges with respect to racism, sexism, isolation, distrust and tokenism in academia (Carroll, 1982; Mosley, 1980; Zamani, 2003). The presence of African American females was necessary to maintain an inclusive and diverse academic environment. With the changing demographics of the United States from a White majority to a minority majority, the appeal from the business and corporate sectors for a well-educated workforce and the need for our students to be global citizens, academic leaders must institute policies and

practices that support diversity at all levels, including academic administrators. As Johnnetta Cole (1990), past president of Spelman College, notes:

An enormously destructive myth exists – that excellence in education is impossible if there was diversity. I am convinced that excellence in education is only possible if there was diversity among the students, faculty and staff who make up the academic community....We must include all of us in the curriculum of our colleges and universities or we threaten true excellence. Either we learn to deal with diversity or we are unified in our destruction. (p. 5)

Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor articulated the benefits of diversity in higher education while writing the majority opinion in the *Grutter v. Bollinger* (2003) ruling. Justice O'Connor explained that:

Diversity promotes learning outcomes and better prepares students for an increasingly diverse workforce, for society, and for the legal profession. Major American businesses have made clear that the skills needed in today's increasingly global marketplace can only be developed through exposure to widely diverse people, cultures, ideas, and viewpoints. (p. 330)

As diversity was central to the educational mission of higher education (Hurtado, 2007), it was important to explore the challenges that under-represented populations might face in academia in order to develop solutions to encourage their participation in higher education at all levels including administration. Although several researchers have focused on the experiences of African American female administrators in higher education, there were few recent studies to determine if the experiences of these women

have changed given the change in the demographics and legal climate in academia (C. Brown, 1997). Moreover, there were also very few studies that focus specifically on African American female senior-level executives in administration at predominately white institutions (PWIs). This study focuses on an exploration of African American females in senior-level executive positions in higher education, specifically deans, provosts, vice-presidents and president track positions at PWIs, to examine their experiences, challenges and strategies for success.

In this chapter, I provide the context for the research study including the statement of the problem regarding African American senior-level executives at PWIs, the purpose of the study and the research questions. The chapter continues with a brief overview of the methodology, a definition of key terms used in the study, the delimitations and limitations of the research, critical assumptions I made while conducting the study, the significance of the study and a summary of this chapter.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Education was considered the great equalizer through which anyone had an opportunity to be successful (Hurtado, 2007; Lloyd-Jones, 2009). Implied in this ideal was the duty of academia to provide equal access and opportunity for people from ethnically diverse populations to all areas of higher education. Magda Lewis (1990), professor and coordinator of the Social Justice and Education Group at Queen's University in Ontario, Canada purported that:

Educational systems reflect the values and practices of the larger society. If the larger society is sexist, racist, and based on economic, cultural, and historical

inequalities, it is unrealistic to expect education systems to be devoid of these inequities. The basic assumption of [this] analysis is that Black females in the academy are imprisoned in a dysfunctional paradigm. (p. 467)

Despite key legal decisions in the 1960s and 1970s such as affirmative action legislation supplementing the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and women's rights legislation as well as accelerated recruitment efforts of African American women in academia, their numbers were still small (Alfred, 2001; Farmer, 1993; Jackson, 2004b; Mosley, 1980; Wilson, 1989). Kellis E. Parker (1986), former professor at Columbia Law School and consultant to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) Legal Defense and Education Fund, purported that:

Racial integration had been given preferential treatment in the expressive realm while racial segregation had been given preferential treatment in the symbolic realm. Thus one finds institutions that have none or only one Black faculty member, a handful of Black administrators spread in insignificant ways throughout the university, and a few Black students... [T]heir failure to move beyond their token numbers broadcasts their symbolic preference for racial segregation. (p. 763)

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (see Table 1.1), in Fall 2009 there were 230,579 higher education executive, administrative and managerial professionals of which 13,394 (5.8%) were African American women (U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics, 2010).

Table 1.1

*Executive, Administrative and Managerial Professionals employed at U.S. institutions of in Higher Education as of Fall 1999 and Fall 2009*

Description	Fall 1999		Fall 2009	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Total Executive, Administrative and Managerial Professionals	159,888		230,579	
Women	76,205	46.7	123,687	53.6
African American Women	7,807	4.9	13,394	5.8

This percentage was slightly higher than in Fall of 1999 when there were 159,888 higher education executive, administrative, and managerial professionals of which 7,807 (4.9%) were Black (U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics, 2001). This number was low given that in 2009, African American females represented 6.8% of the U.S. population and 8.8% of the fall undergraduate enrollment (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Researchers have found that African American female professionals working in higher education experience an insider/outsider phenomenon (Aronson & Swanson, 1991; Collins, 1986; Lorde & Clarke, 2007). This phenomenon referred to an experience of being physically allowed to enter a place, but to not be recognized in the space. Black poet and feminist scholar Audre Lorde (2007) explained this phenomenon by saying, “Traditionally, in American society, it was members of oppressed, objectified groups who were expected to stretch out and bridge the gap between the actualities of our loves and the consciousness of our oppressor” (p. 114). This phenomenon was also used to describe the experiences of domestics in southern plantation homes. Although they

occupied the private spaces of the white plantation owners, they were allowed entrance for the purpose of serving rather than to be included as a member of the space.

Therefore, they were in the space, but did not enjoy the privileges of being in the space.

Applying this analogy to higher education, although African American female senior-level executives have access to the institution, they were not comfortable or accepted in the environment. Patricia Hill Collins (2000), Distinguished Professor of Sociology at the University of Maryland, College Park, stated:

Black women with academic credentials who seek to exert the authority that our status grants us to propose new knowledge claims about African American women face pressures to use our authority to help legitimate a system that devalues and excludes the majority of Black women. When an outsider group – in this case African American women – recognizes that the insider group – namely, elite White men – requires special privileges from the larger society, those in power must find ways of keeping the outsiders out and at the same time having them acknowledge the legitimacy of this procedure. Accepting a few safe outsiders addresses this [legitimate] problem. (p. 272)

As a result, Black women experienced isolation, discrimination due to racism and sexism, and a lack of support in career development as compared to their male and White colleagues (K. Allen, Jacobson, & Lomotey, 1995; Carroll, 1982; Collins, 2000; DuCille, 1994; Etter-Lewis, 1991a; Fleming, 1984; J. James & Farmer, 1993; Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 1996; Loder, 2005; Lorde & Clarke, 2007; Moses, 1989; Mosley, 1980; Myers, 2007).

Mamie E. Locke (1997), current State Senator representing District 2 in Virginia, and former dean of the School of Liberal Arts and Education and associate professor of political science at Hampton University, provided an example of this experience at the beginning of her book chapter entitled, *Striking the Delicate Balances: the Future of African American Women in the Academy*. She shared the following experience of Patricia R. Williams, a professor at Columbia Law School:

I was raised to be acutely conscious of the likelihood that, no matter what degree of profession or professor I became, people would greet and dismiss my Black femaleness as unreliable, untrustworthy, hostile, angry, powerless, irrational and probably destitute. (Locke, 1997, p. 340)

In spite of these experiences, African American females continued to pursue administrative roles in academia. A report from the American Council on Education (2005) indicated that there had been an increase in number of African Americans in senior-level executive positions at predominately white institutions; however, African American scholars found that many of these new positions had less status, influence, power and authority (Bonner, 2001; W. A. Brown, 1997; Jackson, 2004a). They also found that these professionals were in positions tangential to the governance of the institutions; specifically academic support, student services and diversity initiatives (American Council on Education, 2005; W. A. Brown, 1997). With titles such as manager or director of minority affairs, these positions were considered staff positions rather than executive-level positions. Therefore, previous researchers concluded that there was still an underrepresentation of African Americans in higher education

governance positions at the dean, provost and vice president level (W. A. Brown, 1997; Jackson, 2004a; Mosley, 1980; Wilson, 1989).

African American women in academic administration continued to be doubly jeopardized by being a member of both an oppressed gender and racial group (Hackett & Byars, 1996; Zamani, 2003). Ann duCille (1994), professor and chair of English as well as professor of African American Studies at Wesleyan University, stated:

Given the occult of true Black womanhood, to be (not so) young, female, and Black on today's college campuses was difficult, to be sure. But more troubling still was the fact that [these] commodified, calibanized Black women intellectuals, whose authority as academicians often had been questioned at every turn in their careers, were not supposed to resent, or even to notice, the double standard that propels others forward even as it keeps them back. (p.77)

This quote supported the assertion that African American women experience inequality in multiple areas including isolation due to lack of a critical mass of African American female senior-level executives as compared to their White counterparts, unequal compensation as compared to male senior-level executives and disparate hiring in terms of the types of administrative positions they held (W. R. Allen, Epps, Guillory, Suh, & Bonous-Hammarth, 2000; Lloyd-Jones, 2009; Ramey, 1995).

Moreover, African American women often managed bicultural experiences as they navigate the predominately white culture in academia, but maintained their culture outside of the higher education institution (Alfred, 2001; Barrett, et al., 2003; Carnegie

Commission on Higher Education, 1973; Cheatham, 1990). Carol L. Patitu (2002), professor of adult and higher education at Northern Illinois University, mentioned that:

Many times, people of color were the sole entity or voice in a department. This sort of lone wolf environment breeds an atmosphere that may further marginalize the person of color. Persons of color should not be forced into situations where they were the representative of the race; this was often the case at many institutions. (p. 90)

As a result of this inhospitable environment, higher education institutions have experienced difficulties in retaining African American females, thus contributing to the lack of diversity at these institutions. However, given the changes in the demographics of students that were attending institutions of higher education, the need for a diverse faculty and administration was urgent.

Diversity was necessary in academia because it enriched the education experience for all students matriculating at the institution and fostered an exchange of ideas of people with varied life experiences (Turner, 2008). Caroline Sotello Viernes Turner (2008), professor, doctorate in educational leadership at California State University, Sacramento and professor emerita in the Division of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, Lincoln Professor of Ethics and Education at Arizona State University, stated that, “the invisibility of women of color as students and teachers and in leadership positions creates a void in the learning experiences of all students” (p. 231). Student exposure to diverse people fostered acceptance of experiences and cultures that students might not have encountered prior to attending the institution (W. R. Allen, et al., 2000;

Fleming, 1984; Gardiner, Enomoto, & Grogan, 2000; Patitu & Hinton, 2003). Moreover, diverse professionals in academia served as role models and advocated for under-represented students, as well as provided additional perspectives for their majority colleagues on issues related to diversity and higher education governance (W. A. Brown, 1997; Crews, 2007; Patitu & Hinton, 2003; Stroud, 2009).

Although there have been many studies conducted on African American senior-level female administrators, researchers stressed that more studies were needed that examined their experiences from a minority perspective (Stroud, 2009; Wolfe, 2010). Researchers suggested that additional studies of African American senior-level female executives at predominately white institutions would provide a more complete picture of the experiences of these women (Bailey, 2010). In addition, researchers suggested that including assistant and associate level positions in addition to dean, vice president and provost would increase the number of participants in studies and provide for a richer understanding of the experiences of African American women in senior-level positions at predominately white institutions (Bailey, 2010; Wolfe, 2010). This study adds to the current literature by addressing these gaps in the literature.

### **Purpose of the Study**

It was important to document the experiences of African American senior-level executives in predominately white institutions in order to develop strategies that address their concerns. Retention of these professionals was essential to ensure that higher education remains diverse (Hurtado, 2007; Patitu & Hinton, 2003). Although there were several studies that have researched the experiences of female African American

administrators, the purpose of this study was to determine how the experience of African American senior-level executives at predominately white institutions changed given the shifts in the legal climate and expectation for diversity in higher education. To address this purpose, the following section included the questions that were used to frame the study.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were used to guide this research study:

1. How do African American female senior-level executives describe their workplace experiences at predominately white institutions (PWIs)?
2. How do African American female senior-level executives discuss how their multiple identities inform their experiences at predominately white institutions (PWIs)?
3. How do African American female senior-level executives cope with challenges and celebrate successes they experience in their roles as senior-level executives at predominately white institutions (PWIs)?

### **Brief Overview of Methodology**

This qualitative study used a phenomenological perspective to address the research questions, as phenomenology was uniquely suited to capture participants lived experiences (Guido, et al., 2010; Perl & Noldon, 2000). The conceptual framework for the study was based on the theoretical concepts of black feminist theory, biculturalism and intersectionality. The combination of these theories was uniquely appropriate for

researching the lived experiences of African American women (Barrett, et al., 2003; Collins, 2000; Du Bois & Edwards, 2007). Black feminist theory addressed the lived experiences of African American women (Collins, 2000); intersectionality highlighted the oppression of African American women (Collins, 2000) and biculturalism explained how African American women adapt to be successful (Barrett, et al., 2003).

To recruit study participants, I sent a correspondence with information about the study to the Association of Black Women in Higher Education, the American Association of Blacks in Higher Education and the American Council on Education Women's Network and requested that they forward the invitation for participation to their members (Patton, 1990). The organizations were also given an option to forward the contact information to me to allow me to contact the participants directly. In addition, I sent invitations to the state coordinators of the American Council on Education Women's Network. Individuals that were eligible to participate in the study were females that (a) identify as African American or Black, (b) were currently employed in a dean, provost, vice president or president track position in administrative affairs, academic affairs, or student affairs (c) at a predominately white institution in the United States. The sample size for this study was twelve participants, which was commensurate with previous research conducted on this topic. Participants were contacted via email to ensure they meet the criteria to participate in the study and determine their preference for the interview method, either in person or via phone. Data for the study was obtained through two semi-structured interviews with African American women senior-level executives at predominately white institutions of higher education in the United States (Perl & Noldon,

2000; Seidman, 2006). Senior-level executives were selected because attaining this status represented the highest level of achievement in higher education, thus understanding their experiences provided information that can assist all African American females in academia.

Substantive interviews were recorded, transcribed and coded using open coding and a priori coding based on the conceptual framework of black feminist theory, biculturalism and intersectionality (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Merriam, 2009). ATLAS.ti software was used to organize the coding process. Through the data analysis process, findings were generated regarding the experiences, challenges and strategies for success of African American female senior-level executives at predominately white institutions.

### **Definition of Terms**

The key terms and definitions used in the literature and germane to this study were listed below. Clarification of these terms was necessary to ensure clear understanding of the research presented in this study.

*Administrator:* A person in a managerial and/or policy-making capacity in administration at an institution of higher education (Sagaria, 1988).

*African American or Black:* A person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa. For this study, African American and Black were used interchangeably.

*Biculturalism:* Explored how minority professionals develop competencies to meet career expectations in White organizational cultures. Research revealed that African American women perceive themselves as living in two distinct cultural

contexts and tend to have highly complex life structures to embrace both cultural contexts (Alfred, 2001; Bell, 1990) (This was true of Black men as well, was it not?)

*Black feminist theory:* Connected the issues affecting African American women to the struggle for women's emancipation from sexism and disrupts the racism inherent in the historical presentation of feminism as a White only ideology and political movement (Cleage, 1993; Collins, 1999; A. Y. Davis, 1990; S. M. James, 1994; White, 2010).

*Chilling effect:* Resulted in an environment when a practice was discouraged and restricts the ability of a group to act (Garner & Black, 2004).

*Critical mass:* A meaningful representation that encouraged under-represented populations to feel included (Garner & Black, 2004).

*Culture:* A distinctive way of life within a social or racial group including their customary beliefs, values, and practices.

*Diversity:* Encompassed acceptance and respect across dimensions of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs, or other ideologies.

*Inclusiveness:* an environment where no group was excluded.

*Insider versus outsider phenomenon:* an experience of being physically allowed to enter a place, but to not be recognized in the space.

*Higher education institutions:* Four-year, public and private institutions of higher education; for the purposes of this study, higher education institution does not include community colleges, for-profit institutions or vocational schools.

*Intersectionality:* Collins (2000) defines intersectionality as an “analysis claiming that systems of race, social class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, and age form mutually constructing features of social organization, which shape Black women’s experiences and, in turn, were shaped by Black women” (p. 320).

*Perception:* the act or faculty of apprehending by means of the senses or of the mind; cognition; understanding (dictionary.com).

*President-track position:* For the purposes of this study, a president-track position was one that was a senior-level specialist supporting a University president, but not in a vice president position. Examples of a president-track position were special assistant and deputy positions.

*Predominately white institution (PWI):* An institution of higher education where White Americans currently or historically represent 50% or more of the student population.

*Racism:* Defined as the belief system that people of different races have different qualities or abilities, and that some races were inherently superior to others. This was implemented in society through a system of oppression or individually through personal acts of discrimination (Bonilla-Silva, 2006).

*Senior-level executive:* An administrator at a higher education institution in a dean, provost, vice president or president track position.

*Sexism:* A social relationship in which males as a group have authority over females as a group (Cleage, 1993).

*White privilege:* Encompasses a number of unearned and often unrecognized assets that belong to individuals born into the dominant culture (McIntosh, 1988).

### **Delimitations and Limitations**

This study focused on the experiences of African American female senior-level executives at predominately white institutions of higher education. The study did not include faculty, classified staff or student experiences at these institutions. Also, the study did not address experiences of other racial groups or males at these institutions. For the purposes of this study, higher education institutions were four-year, public or private institutions of higher education; and do not include community colleges, for-profit institutions or vocational schools.

The limitations of the study were those that were inherent in qualitative research. Due to the qualitative approach used in the study and the focus on African American female senior-level executives at predominately white institutions of higher education, the results cannot be generalized for all African American female administrators. Moreover, because participation was voluntary and not mandatory, the experiences presented in the research only reflect the experiences of African American females that chose to participate in the study.

## **Assumptions**

The researcher made several assumptions in conducting this research study. The first assumption was that diversity will remain a compelling interest in higher education, at all levels, including administration. Second, it was assumed that African American females face unique challenges while advancing in academic settings, but continued to enter senior-level executive leadership at predominately white institutions of higher education. Finally, it was assumed that the presence of African American female senior-level executives contributed to the diversity of predominately white institutions of higher education.

## **Significance of the Study**

Given the recent changes in educational policy regarding diversity, there was a need to investigate the current experiences of African American female senior-level executives and administrators at PWIs. This research enhanced the current literature on African American female senior-level administrators by revisiting themes found in previous research regarding their experiences and determining if they were still reflective of their experiences at predominately white institutions of higher education. In addition, the study enriched the literature by providing university leadership with information about salient factors that support the positive experiences of African American female senior-level executives at these institutions. The benefits for the institution included better recruitment and retention of African American females, thus increasing diversity at the institution. This research also added to the knowledge base regarding leadership preparation programs that can support other senior-level executives (Collins, 2000;

Farmer, 1993; Howard-Vital, 1989). The benefits of the study for African American females were two-fold. First, the experiences presented in the research provided valuable information for African American professionals that were aspiring to senior-level executive roles in PWIs. Second, the experiences served as support for African American females that were currently in senior-level executive positions in PWIs.

### **Summary of the Chapter**

In this chapter, the researcher provided the context for the research study to determine the experiences of African American female senior-level executives in administration at predominately white institutions (PWIs) of higher education to determine their experiences, challenges and the strategies they use to be successful in academia. This qualitative study used a phenomenological perspective to address the research questions. The conceptual framework for the study was based on the theoretical concepts of black feminist theory, biculturalism and intersectionality. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews of current and former African American female senior-level executives in administration at predominately white institutions.

Chapter Two presents a review of previous research related to this study. This literature review includes a historical overview of the status of African American females in higher education, current status of African American female senior-level executives at predominately white institutions, a review of the literature related to the challenges that African American females face at predominately white institutions and additional information regarding the conceptual framework of black feminist theory, intersectionality and biculturalism to ground the study.

## **Chapter Two – Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, the researcher presents a review of literature that is foundational for a study exploring the experiences of African American female senior-level executives at predominately white institutions (PWIs). The chapter culminates with the significance of the study. For the purposes of this review, African American and Black are used interchangeably. Also, Negro is used when appropriate. The literature review begins with historical information regarding African American females in higher education and current research related to the experiences of African American female senior-level executives in administration at PWIs. It includes an overview of the conceptual framework for the qualitative, phenomenological study based on the theoretical concepts of black feminist theory, biculturalism and intersectionality.

### **African American Female Senior-level Executives at Predominately White Institutions of Higher Education**

This section of the literature review examined the historical background regarding how African American females gained access to higher education with relevant research on the current status of African American women senior-level executives in higher education at predominately white institutions. The review was organized chronologically in three sections including before World War II, after World War II and current status.

## **BEFORE WORLD WAR II (PRE-1945)**

Higher education in the United States reflected the larger society and was intrinsically connected to the societal views of the period (W. R. Allen, et al., 2000; Ladson-Billings & Tate IV, 1995; Zamani, 2003). Originally considered a frill and not a necessity in the early nineteenth century, higher education was legally and socially prohibited for women and African Americans (Faragher, Howe, & College, 1988; Noble, 1988). Reginald Wilson (1989), senior research scholar emeritus at the American Council on Education and former president of Wayne County Community College, stated in his article “Women of Color in Academic Trends, Progress, and Barriers”:

The fate of Blacks was, and continues to be, the barometer by which the progress of all other groups-minorities and women could be measured. Although the progress of some of these groups often surpassed that of Blacks, it was the pressure of Black demands that usually signaled legal and legislative changes that would benefit all oppressed groups. Thus it was the bloodiest war in American history—the Civil War—and the subsequent freeing of the slaves that marked the beginning of progress toward social justice for all groups. (p. 86)

As the nation transitioned during the Civil War, societal views began to change to support women’s and African Americans’ access to educational opportunities appropriate for their social position. For White women, this role was to be a dutiful and obedient wife; For African American women, this role was to be a respectable and humble servant (Solomon, 1986). The impact of industrialization and the significant decline in fertility rates coupled with the introduction of formal education for youth also supported this shift

in societal roles for women and African Americans (Chamberlain, 1991; Lucas & Tucker, 1996). After the abolition of slavery, African Americans viewed education as a way to elevate and uplift the race (Howard-Vital, 1989). They received a proper education, which included apprenticeships, non-degree programs and teaching programs (Noble, 1988; Solomon, 1986). Moreover, with the passage of the Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890, which included a provision for Negro education, African American women were able to participate in higher education more than 200 years after men began to matriculate at Harvard College (Chamberlain, 1991; Lucas & Tucker, 1996).

Access to education for Negroes was not without resistance as some citizens felt it threatened the White position of dominance (Solomon, 1986). Even with legal milestones, Solomon (1986) noted that, “in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the Black college woman was the exception of the exceptions in that neither Black nor White colleges wanted her” (p76). Black college women could not attain the ideals espoused for White women through education, but they strived to move past the limited expectations of character building and moral training for Negro education (Faragher, et al., 1988; Perkins, 1990) African American women went to college because it provided them with the education to obtain an acceptable profession for females, improved their economic condition, allowed them another profession other than being a domestic, and, in some cases, created an alternative to dealing with White people (Faragher, et al., 1988; Noble, 1988).

Legislation in the late 1800’s provided much needed improvements for African American men and White women; however, the position of African American women did

not seem to change. In 1890, 30 Black women attained college degrees as compared to 200 Black men and 2,500 White women (Faragher, et al., 1988). The *Plessey v. Ferguson* (1896) Supreme Court decision ruled that separate facilities for Blacks and Whites did not violate the thirteenth and fourteenth amendments. Although this specific case focused on the right of a Black man to sit in the White section of a passenger train in Louisiana, the ruling extended to everything in the South including educational institutions and was known as the “separate but equal” doctrine (Crews, 2007; Holmes, 2004). African American women took this opportunity to create gender separate schools where they were able to provided leadership and direction for the learning of girls and women (Faragher, et al., 1988; Solomon, 1986). Because of the “separate but equal” doctrine, poorly funded Negro primary and secondary schools gained resources to become institutions of higher education (Wilson, 1989)

### **POST WORLD WAR II (1945 – 1999)**

Immediately following the war, government support of African American’s access to higher education intensified. Congress passed the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 (GI Bill) granting a free college education to all returning veterans. The *Sweatt v. Painter* (1950) case successfully challenged the "separate but equal" doctrine of racial segregation at institutions of higher education established by *Plessey v. Ferguson* (1896). This case was the foundation for the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) case four years later (Lavergne, 2010). In *Sweatt*, the Supreme Court ruled that separate schools were not equal because of differences in facilities and intangible factors. The court held that in graduate education intangibles must be considered. The *Sweatt* decision

mandated access to graduate and professional programs for African Americans (Lavergne, 2010). In 1954 the Supreme Court interpretation of *Brown v. Board of Education* dismantled the “separate but equal” education system (Lindsay, 1994). Although this legislation was directed at secondary institutions, it had positive effects on Black student enrollment and participation in higher education (Aguirre & Martinez, 2003; Crews, 2007; Holmes, 2004).

Immediately following *Brown*, most African American women still received their undergraduate education at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs); however, with the passage of Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, African Americans gained access to predominately white institutions (Crews, 2007). Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act made it illegal to discriminate in public and private institutions in higher education at the undergraduate, graduate and professional levels (Crews, 2007). Coupled with the 1954 Supreme Court interpretation of *Brown v. Board of Education*, segregation at all levels of public and private education was deemed unconstitutional. Unfortunately, faculty and administrative hiring was not covered under Title VII. Various affirmative action executive orders beginning with Order 10925 issued in 1961 by President John F. Kennedy, and detailed further by Executive Order 11246 in 1967 by President Lyndon B. Johnson, expanded legal pressure for integration of higher education. These orders required institutions, public and private, that received government funds to take "affirmative action" in the hiring and promotion of minorities and women in their work force (Aguirre & Martinez, 2003; Mosley, 1980; Valentin, 1997; Wilson, 1989).

Additional stimulus for African American women's access to predominately white institutions was supported by three statutes enacted in the 1970s. First, the passage of Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972 added sex as a category of protected classes of people and prohibited the exclusion of any American citizen from participation in an educational program or the denial of benefits based upon sex. (Connor, 1985) Title IX was identical to that of Title VII, except that it was restricted to educational activities, contained additional exemptions, and included an amendment to the Equal Pay Act. This amendment extended protection against sex discrimination to administrators, professionals and executives in higher education (Glazer-Raymo, 2001; Sandler, 2000; Valentin, 1997). Second, the passage of the Basic Educational Opportunity Grant legislation in 1972 provided need-based financial awards to millions of citizens, including African Americans. Third, the decision in the *Adams v. Richardson (1973)* ordered ten Southern states to dismantle their dual systems of segregated public, higher education and desegregated the predominately Black and White institutions in their student bodies, faculties, and administrations (Wilson, 1989).

**African American Females Entering Higher Education Administration at PWIs.** Although hopeful that access to predominately white institutions marked an opportunity for them to participate fully in higher education, African American women experienced tension from their marginal status in society and inability to access the benefits of higher education (Solomon, 1986). College educated African American females expressed feelings of isolation and estrangement not only from African American males or White women, but also from uneducated African American females

(Faragher, et al., 1988). Inequalities in the status of African American women and African American men caused problems with power differentials. Even though Black women matriculated in higher education at a rate of three to one as compared to African American men, African American men were still in a majority of manager and administrator positions in higher education (Faragher, et al., 1988; Ladson-Billings & Tate IV, 1995; Noble, 1988). In a 1973 report the Carnegie Commission stated, "...they (women) were so rarely represented in top academic administrative positions as to be practically nonexistent in the upper echelons" (p 115). In their book *Black Educators in White Colleges*, William Moore, Jr. and Lonnie Wagstaff (1974), former A.M. Aikin Regents Chair in the Department of Educational Administration at the University of Texas at Austin and former dean of Teachers College at the University of Cincinnati respectively, provided an overview of the contributions, challenges, and roles professional African American women in higher education. Findings of the Moore and Wagstaff qualitative study indicate that Black women were at the bottom of the educational hierarchy as well as subject to racial and sexual discrimination at all levels of academic life. The majority of African American women administrators were in urban institutions (W. Moore & Wagstaff, 1974). In addition, they were under-represented at senior institutions, and tended to serve as assistants to assistants (W. Moore & Wagstaff, 1974). Supporting the findings of Moore and Wagstaff, Robert Hoskins (1978) forecasts a dubious future for African American women in higher education administration. Results from his study of African American administrators at land grant colleges entitled *Black Administrators in Higher Education: Conditions and Perceptions* revealed that

women held less than 30% of the administrative positions, and these positions were usually at a lower level than those of African American males (Hoskins, 1978).

The status of African American women continued to be disadvantaged in the 1980s. In her anthology *Black Women Administrator's in Higher Education: An Endangered Species*, author and educator Myrtis Mosley (1980), former associate dean, College of Arts and Sciences, and adjunct assistant professor of Afro-American Studies at the University of Cincinnati, presented the state of African American female administrators in higher education. The study administered via questionnaire, had 120 respondents. One participant stated:

The present backlash along with the cutbacks in higher education has resulted in the removal of many qualified minority women and men, but particularly minority women. They were simply not retained or tenured at the institutions which hire them as faculty or administrators....Although initial opportunities have been somewhat improved, retention opportunities have worsened considerably. (p. 298)

Themes found in Mosley's study related to African American females in higher education indicated that they experience isolation, uncertainty, lack of status and invisibility.

Mosley (1980) concluded:

Black women administrators were an endangered species. They were few in number, and the number was shrinking. They occupy positions that were outside the main structure of the university. They have little, if any, power. Many receive little or no support from their peers, Black or White. They were underpaid and

overworked. Affirmative action policies, once thought of as a panacea for equal opportunity, have failed them miserably. (p. 295)

Moreover, Constance Carroll (1982), current chancellor of the San Diego Community College District, analyzed the status of Black women in higher education in relation to the advancement of Black men and White women after the Civil Rights Movement and the Women's Liberation Movement respectively. In her study entitled *Three's a Crowd: the Dilemma of Black Women in Higher Education*, Carroll mentioned that during the late 1970's and early 1980's the retention of minority African American men and women waned. Carroll spoke of the tense relationship between African American women and White women. Although both groups experience some discrimination based on gender, Whites were still more highly favored than African American women, and had advanced with opportunities won during the women's movement (Carroll, 1982).

Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith (1982), feminists and Black studies scholars, affirmed the invisibility surrounding African American women. In their book entitled *All the Women are White, All the Blacks are Men, But Some of Us are Brave: Black Women's Studies*, they found that society does not recognize the importance of African American women's lives and contributions through racial, sexual, and class oppression. They called for an examination of the lives and experience of ordinary as well as exceptional African American women from a feminist perspective to encourage the expansion of the study of African American women (Hull, Scott, & Smith, 1982). Althea Smith and Abigail J. Stewart (1983), researchers at Boston University, reiterated the concerns discussed in Hull et al.'s book in "Approaches to Studying Racism and

Sexism in Black Women's Lives." They indicated that researchers have only recently begun to recognize and study unique characteristics of female African Americans. They asserted that many studies that have researched African Americans focused only on African American males and studies that focused on women examined White females. They concluded that the lack of studies regarding African American women demonstrated "our inability to view contextual interactions that were pivotal to defining commonalities and differences between racism and sexism" (Smith & Stewart, 1983, p. 12).

Determining the characteristics of females holding the role of, or comparable ranks of, chief academic officer at 36 African American colleges or universities was the purpose of Lea Williams', former director of Educational Services at the United Negro College Fund (1986) study entitled "Chief Academic Officers at Black Colleges and Universities." The findings suggested that a female African American chief academic officer at an African American college or university would most likely earn a lower salary than her male counterparts, be promoted from within the institution, be slightly older than her male counterparts, have more experience, be single, be engaged in little scholarly writing, be a member of several professional organizations, performed slightly different tasks than male counterparts, and were not expected to assume the college presidency as her next position (Williams, 1986). Yolanda Moses (1989), professor of anthropology, vice provost for Conflict Resolution, and the special assistant to the Chancellor for Excellence and Diversity at University of California Riverside, explored the climate for Black female administrators, faculty and students at both predominately

white institutions and historically black colleges and universities in her study *Black Women in Academia Issues and Strategies*. The research focused on the “double-jeopardy” of racism and sexism on African American females. The report used Project on the Status and Education of Women’s (PSEW) files and previous reports as well as informal information from questionnaires. PSEW was a program of the Association of American Colleges and Universities which provided support to women faculty, administrators, and students in higher education through its programs and publications. The current priorities of PSEW included improving curricula and campus climates, promoting women's leadership, and disseminating new research on women and gender (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2012). Through extensive examination of Black women’s perceptions about many different attributes of higher education, Moses (1989) found that overall, “Black women students, faculty members, and administrators do not perceive themselves and their concerns as integrated into the missions, goals, and social structures of college campus” (p. 22).

Black women not only had to deal with racism in the broader society, but also sexism at predominately White and Black institutions. Reginald Wilson (1989), senior research scholar emeritus at the American Council on Education and former president of Wayne County Community College, noted that “sexism in the minority communities is as great a barrier to the academic advancement of women of color as is racism in the broader society” (p. 89). Wilson (1989) elaborated on this statement when he said:

Women of color were better represented in administrative positions below the presidential level than in faculty ranks, about 4.3% of total administrators vs. 2%

of faculty; however, this numerical representation was deceiving because many of these positions do not lead to upward mobility.... Women of color, as did minority males, often came into higher education as directors of TRIO programs (Talent Search, etc.), directors of remedial and compensatory programs, affirmative action officers, heads of ethnic studies programs, etc. These positions do not carry the status of chairs of traditional disciplinary departments or directors of funded research programs. (p. 90)

Wilson went on to argue that although these positions were not considered a part of mainstream higher education, without them African American female administrators had limited access to higher education (Staples, 1984; Wilson, 1989).

Wilson also noted that an additional area of challenge for African American women in higher education was the type of graduate degree attained by professionals aspiring to be senior executives. In 1989, approximately 50% of African Americans earned doctorates of education in educational administration. The stigma that a doctorate of philosophy was required to obtain a senior-level administrative position in higher education had been cited as the central reason for limited advancement of African Americans (Wilson, 1989).

**Chilling Effect of Bakke on Higher Education.** Although at the onset affirmative action and diversity initiatives in higher education received strong support, in the 1980's progress slowed. Felicenne Ramey (1995), professor emerita of business law at California State University – Sacramento, stated that, “the 1980s had been referred to by some as the “lost decade” for African Americans in higher education administration,

in that during the period they made little progress” (p. 114). Opponents of diversity and affirmative action used *Regents of the University v. Bakke (1976)* to challenge the use of race, ethnicity, sex or national origin in student admissions, financial aid, and staff and faculty employment. The Supreme Court decision in the *Bakke* case left a “chilling effect on minority advancement in all areas, with institutions supposedly fearful of lawsuits of reverse discrimination by Whites” (Wilson, 1989, p. 93). The combined application of *Bakke* and *Adarand Constructors, Inc. v. Peña (1995)* – a case that held that racial classification imposed by the federal government must be analyzed via strict scrutiny – permitted the use of affirmative action in higher education admissions, but not in hiring (Aguirre & Martinez, 2003; Kellough, 2006). The *Bakke* and *Adarand* decisions along with the election of Ronald Reagan reversed societal views on affirmative action. This resulted in a halting of progress made to diversify higher education administration and a decline in the numbers of African American women in academic administration.

In the 1990’s researchers found that many African American women in all areas of higher education including administration were exiting academia. Research found that factors that influenced their job satisfaction included family factors, geographic region, area of interest, characteristics of the institution i.e. people, environment and facilities, compensation and opportunities for advancement (Gregory, 1999; Patitu & Hinton, 2003; Thompson & Louque, 2005). Researchers suggested that numerous internal stressors uniquely affecting women and minorities must be recognized to enhance job satisfaction and create a better fit in academia. Specifically, data suggested that women in academia were less satisfied than their male colleagues because they were often forced to sacrifice

more in terms of their personal lives to meet the demands of their positions (Tack & Patitu, 1992). In addition, African American faced challenges of racism and sexism in the workplace. Their concerns also included chilly campus climates, isolation, alienation, marginalization, wage inequalities, unrealistic role expectation, feelings of powerlessness, tokenism, and lack of mentoring and sponsorship (Farmer, 1993; Holmes, 2004; Ramey, 1995; Singh, Robinson, & Williams-Green, 1995). Ruth Farmer (1993), a social change activist and program director of the Master of Arts in Individualized Studies Program, at Goddard College, found in her study *Place but not Importance: The Race for Inclusion in Academe*, that even though these women might have attained titles that would seem to provide them with access to the benefits of attained higher education, their actual duties were not consistent with their titles. Frequently they were on the front-lines executing tasks versus generating ideas and participating in knowledge production. This lack of time or expectation to participate in knowledge production affected their success at their institutions because the generation of ideas created a work product that leads to promotion (Farmer, 1993).

Examining the differences between African American women and men faculty, and administrators, researchers at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University Kusum Singh, Adriane Robinson and Joyce Williams-Green's (1995) quantitative study: "Differences in Perceptions of African American Women and Men Faculty and Administrators", included responses from 413 members of Virginia Black Faculty and Administrators Association representing many different institutions to a Black Institutional Faculty and Administrator's Satisfaction Survey. Results suggested that

although understanding that policies for tenure and promotion were similar, opportunities to participate in these activities were disparate for African American females and men. In general, the women surveyed perceived more inequality and were less satisfied with various aspects of their institutional life such as work environments, salaries, and efforts to recruit and retain African American faculty and administrators (Singh, et al., 1995). Similarly, Ramey (1995), professor emeritus of business law at California State University – Sacramento, studied the experiences of African American female administrators at California institutions in the Western Association of Schools and Colleges and Historically Black Colleges and Universities using a qualitative method. A participant in her study stated:

Often institutional policies work against you. Coalitions are built to prove your incompetence. Interestingly, women—particularly White women – build coalitions with White men. They see me as vulnerable and not one them. Therefore, they are willing to hurt me. (p. 116)

Themes from the research suggested that African American females experienced barriers to success in higher education including racism, sexism, family issues and perceptions of competence (Ramey, 1995). In their study “The Common Experience of “otherness”: Ethnic and Racial Minority Faculty,” Linda Johnsrud and Kathleen Sadao (1998), Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost of the University of Hawaii System and program specialist at Supporting Early Education Delivery Systems respectively, sought to understand the experience of ethnic and racial minority faculty members at a research university in Hawaii. They analyzed and clustered the experiences

of the ethnic and racial minority faculty interviewees to provided insight into their academic lives. Three distinct but related experiences emerged as common across ethnic and racial minority groups, including the bicultural stance minority faculty were likely to cultivate, the ethnocentrism they perceived on the part of White administrators and faculty, and the discriminatory behavior they experienced as minorities (Johnsrud & Sadao, 1998).

By the end of the 1990's, African American women continued to be a minority in university employment and generally achieved middle management positions in student affairs and external affairs (Glazer-Raymo, 2001). Judith Glazer-Raymo (2001), Lecturer and Fellow of Higher and Postsecondary Education (HPSE) Program, and professor of Education Emerita at Long Island University, stated:

Proof of their scarcity in the academic executive suite was evident in the data: after twenty-five years of affirmative action, only 15 percent of all chief executive officers were women and 70 percent were in colleges of enrollments of fewer than three thousand students. (p. 196)

Although equal employment and affirmative action had increased the number of female students, faculty and administrators in higher education, these numbers masked gender stratification (Ladson-Billings & Tate IV, 1995). Thus in actuality, although African American females have a higher rate of employment, they have a lower likelihood of advancement (Glazer-Raymo, 2001).

## **CURRENT STATUS (2000 - PRESENT)**

In studying this phenomenon, researchers found that African American female professionals working in higher education experience an insider/outsider phenomenon (Collins, 2000; Lorde & Clarke, 2007). Although African American senior-level executives had access to the institution, they were not welcomed or accepted in the environment. As a result, Black women experienced isolation, discrimination due to racism and sexism, and lack of support in career development as compared to their male and White colleagues (Collins, 2000; Ladson-Billings & Tate IV, 1995; Loder, 2005; Myers, 2007; Zamani, 2003). In “Introduction: An Overview of African American College Presidents: A Game of Two Steps Forward, One Step Backward, and Standing Still” Sharon Holmes (2004), associate professor of Student Affairs Administration at Binghamton University, combined the narratives of six African American presidents with descriptive statistics from national level data in an effort to provide a snapshot of the current status of African American presidents in public and private institutions. The findings suggested that, although still salient, issues related to race were secondary to how they managed their overall administrative roles, but may have been primary considerations in their being selected for the positions (Holmes, 2004). Looking through a faculty lens in her research study, “Finding Rainbows in the Clouds: Learning about the Full Professorship from the Stories of Black Female Full Professors,” Croom (2011), a researcher at Iowa State University, examined the difficulty of advancement in academia. Findings from three semi-structured interviews with seven participants indicated that racism and sexism played a major role in their professional experiences. Further, racial

and gender oppression existed to limit the power and influence of African American females in academia (Croom, 2011).

In addition to racism and sexism, African American women managed bicultural experiences as they navigate the predominately White culture in academia, but maintain their culture outside of the higher education institution (Alfred, 2001; Barrett, et al., 2003). Mary Alfred (2001), associate professor of Educational Administration and Human Resource Development at Texas A&M University, examined the professional development history of African American women at a predominantly white university to explore how minority professionals developed competencies to meet career expectations in White organizational cultures. Five tenured African American women participated in the study entitled, “Expanding Theories of Career Development: Adding the Voices of African American Women in the White Academy.” Findings indicated that race, culture, and identity played a vital role in the career development of minority professionals in majority organizations. In addition, the women accessed the power of their bicultural life structure to develop strategies for maintaining successful careers in White organizational cultures (Alfred, 2001).

Furthermore, African American women experienced inequality in multiple areas, including unequal compensation as compared to male senior-level executives and disparate hiring in terms of the types of administrative positions they held (W. R. Allen, et al., 2000; Lloyd-Jones, 2009). Kim Barrett-Johnson (2009), a researcher at Indiana State University, focused on the experience of an African American woman selected to the position of chancellor in “Moving Heaven and Earth: Administrative Search and

Selection Processes and the Experience of an African American Women Senior Administrator.” Results of her qualitative phenomenological study revealed four key themes, including the need for institutional sensitivity and representation in key positions; ensuring that search committees were actively looking for diverse applicants; ensuring candidates understood the institutional environment and were prepared for the search and selection process; and ensure candidates know how to interview (Barnett-Johnson, 2009). The research presented consistent findings regardless of the type of higher education institution. In “An Phenomenological Study of African American Administrators at For-Profit Institutions of Higher Education” John Beckem (2009), at Oakland University, explored the experience of African American administrators at for-profit institutions. This study, conducted through in-depth interviews with four administrators, found that race continues to be a salient challenge in higher education (Beckem, 2009).

The most recent studies found were qualitative and focused on the experiences and resistance strategies for African American women in senior-level administrative positions in higher education. Researchers observe that the creation of support systems, spiritual and psychological support, and mentoring have helped African American women be successful (Beckem, 2009). In “The Hidden Leaves of the Baobab Tree: Lived Experiences of African American Female Chief Academic Officers” Kyeanna Bailey (2010), a researcher at Mercer University, examined the life histories of four African American women who were serving in Chief Academic Officer (CAO) positions at minority-serving institutions (Bailey, 2010). Bailey’s findings included the foundational role of family and education in their success, the role of mentoring both

personally and professionally, and the need to be prepared for challenges faced in academia, specifically the affects of racism and sexism on African American female administrators. Brandon Wolfe (2010) explored the experiences and persistence strategies of six African American administrators at higher education institutions in the southeastern portion of United States in “When Being Black Isn’t Enough: Experiences and Persistence Strategies of Six African American Administrators at a PWI.” Themes that emerged from the research included maintaining a healthy self image, understanding the higher education environment, and establishing a support system (Wolfe, 2010). Institutional strategies that created a positive environment for African American females included creating programming, campus communication and forms of scholarship that demonstrated the institution’s commitment to diversity (Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003).

Even with the challenges documented in the literature, there are several examples of highly successful African American female senior level executives in higher education i.e., Dr. Shirley Ann Jackson, Dr. Ruth Simmons and Dr. Condoleezza Rice. Among her numerous achievements, Dr. Shirley Ann Jackson is the first Black woman to earn a Ph.D. from Massachusetts Institute of Technology (M.I.T); to receive a Ph.D. in theoretical solid state physics and to be president of a major research university, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, 2012). Similarly, Dr. Ruth J. Simmons, 18th president of Brown University, is the first Black president of an Ivy League institution (Brown University, 2013). Dr. Condoleezza Rice is currently a professor of Political Economy in the Graduate School of Business; the Thomas and

Barbara Stephenson Senior Fellow on Public Policy at the Hoover Institution; and a professor of Political Science at Stanford University. She previously served as Stanford University's provost from 1993-1999, during which she was the institution's chief budget and academic officer (Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies, 2013). Each of these women's highly successful careers served as an example for how to thrive at predominately white institutions.

### **Re-visiting the Literature – The Need for a Study of the Experiences of African American Female Senior-level Executives at Predominately White Institutions**

A review of recent research on African American women in higher education demonstrated that there was not a great deal of research related to African American women in senior-level executive positions in higher education. Yet, the current and developing body of research regarding African American women in higher education provided the groundwork for relating their experiences in higher education. In critiquing previous research, many of the recent research studies focused on African American senior-level executives at historically black colleges and universities (HBCU) (Bailey, 2010; Green, 2009). In addition, previous studies that focused on African American females do not separate the experiences of faculty from the experiences of administrators or the experiences of women and men (Croom, 2011; Ramey, 1995; Singh, et al., 1995). Although there were some similarities in their experiences, they also had unique challenges that should be examined. Moreover, most studies were conducted in the 1990's and thus do not reflect societal changes related to the need for diversity (A. Davis, 1994; Farmer, 1993; Gregory, 1999; Ramey, 1995; Singh, et al., 1995). Furthermore

studies used critical race theory or black feminist theoretical framework for the study (Croom, 2011; Holmes, 2004; Wyche-Hall, 2011). Therefore, they explored the experiences of African American females, but do not inform questions related to the reasons for the challenges or adaptation strategies needed for success.

Methodologically, the studies conducted do not create a complete picture of the experiences of African American female senior-level administrators at predominately white institutions. Most of these studies were qualitative and delimited by a geographic region or University system focus. Thus, these studies cannot be generalized to be the experiences of all African American female administrators. The few quantitative studies conducted can be generalized, but were conducted almost 20 years ago or lack the rich descriptions of the lived experiences of African American female senior-level administrators at predominately white institutions (Singh, et al., 1995).

In their collective suggestions for future studies, researchers noted that more studies were needed that examine the African American female experience in all areas of academe because, despite their rich history in higher education, their voice was absent from educational literature (Stroud, 2009; Wolfe, 2010; Zamani, 2003). Researchers also suggested that more studies of women at predominately white institutions would help create a more complete picture of their experiences, challenges and strategies for success (Bailey, 2010). Moreover, scholars have suggested that in addition to senior-level executives, future studies should include assistant and associate executive level positions to increase the number of participants in the studies and provided for a richer

understanding of the experiences of African American women in senior-level positions at predominately white institutions (Bailey, 2010; Wolfe, 2010).

This study added to the current literature by addressing several of the shortcomings mentioned by previous researchers. The purpose of the study was to determine if the experiences of African American senior-level executives at predominately white institutions have changed based on shifts in the legal climate and expectation for diversity in higher education. This study enhanced the current research by using a conceptual framework that incorporates biculturalism and intersectionality with black feminist theory. In this way the research explored how societal factors affect Black female administrators and how they have adapted to be successful. Although the study was not a mixed methods study, the sample size was both larger, 12 participants, and broader geographically, a national sample. This study sought to interview more participants to ensure that more perspectives and experiences were acknowledged and explored.

### **Conceptual Framework for this Study**

Applying appropriate theoretical frameworks for studies regarding African American women was challenging because many theories were not able to analyze their multiple roles and identities. Howard-Hamilton (2003) suggests that black feminist theory is an appropriate framework to investigate the experiences of African American women in higher education. The conceptual framework for this study includes black feminist theory (Collins, 2000; Walker, 2003), intersectionality (Collins, 2000), and

biculturalism (Bell, 1990; Du Bois & Edwards, 2007; Etter-Lewis, 1991b; Higginbotham, 1989). Black feminist theory speaks directly to the lived experiences of African American women; intersectionality speaks to societal oppression and African American status in society; and biculturalism explains how African American women have adapted to oppression in the workplace to be successful. A graphic representation of the conceptual framework is presented in Figure 2.1.

### **BLACK FEMINIST THEORY**

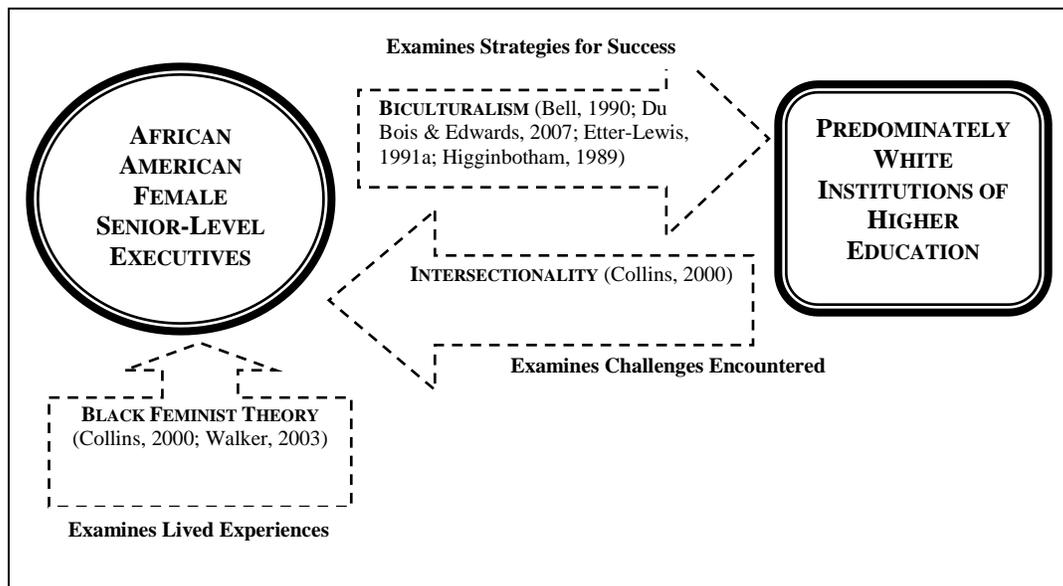
Early feminist theories were developed from a White female perspective and did not take into account the effects of oppression, opportunities and socioeconomic status. In contrast, black feminist theory provided a context to investigate the experiences of African American women (Bailey, 2010; Collins, 2000; Cooper, 2001; Haywood, 2009; Wallace, 1982). The term "black feminism" connected the issues affecting African American women to the struggle for women's emancipation from sexism, a social relationship in which males as a group have authority over females as a group (Cleage, 1993; Collins, 1999; A. Y. Davis, 1990; S. M. James, 1994). It disrupted the racism inherent in the historical presentation of feminism as a White only ideology and political movement (Collins, 1989, 1999; White, 2010). Using the black feminist perspective as the lens of analysis allowed for the previously silenced voices of women of color to be heard (Collins, 1999; hooks, 1989; Moraga & Anzaldua, 1983). Collins described creating black feminist thought as a process that included recapturing the lost knowledge of African American females (Collins, 2000). Collins presented three themes that were seminal to black feminist thought, including affirmation of the importance of Black

women's self-definition and self-valuation, attention to the interlocking nature of oppression specifically race, gender and class, and efforts to redefine and explained the importance of Black women's culture (Collins, 1986). As a collective, the three themes of black feminist theory have made significant contributions in clarifying an African American woman's position and voice (Collins, 1986).

**Womanism.** Some scholars prefer the ideology of womanism instead of black feminist theory. Womanism was a doctrine of uplift based on the cultural, historical and political status of African American women (Collins, 1999; Walker, 2003). This perspective was created through the intersection of racism, sexism and classism; and sought to understand interlocking oppression, empower individuals to collective action and ultimately liberate everyone through humanism (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002). Womanism provided African American women distance from Whites, but still allowed for organizing around issues of gender (Higginbotham, 1992). Overall, the use of Walker's term "womanism" created conceptual space that reflected the bona fide philosophical differences that exist among African American women (Collins, 1999; Walker, 2003). Womanism was an epistemological stance that recognized current knowledge before trying to impart new knowledge. It focused on the connections and relationships that African American women have with the community and each other (Phillips & McCaskill, 1995). Researchers have indicated that women who use this approach in their work as administrators exhibit an ethic of caring that included embracing the material, political clarity and the ethic of risk (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002). In leading with this perspective, they asserted that African American women were

able to create an environment of caring in academia and change the culture. Although the concept of womanism was compelling, the researcher chose to use black feminist theory as part of the theoretical framework because of its use in previous research regarding African American female administrators in higher education and its closer connection to feminism.

Figure 2.1. Conceptual Framework for the Study of Black Feminist Theory, Biculturalism and Intersectionality



## BICULTURALISM

At its root, biculturalism was a restatement of Du Bois “double consciousness” concept (Du Bois & Edwards, 2007). In 1903, W.E. B. Du Bois wrote about the two-ness of being both American and Negro as well as the convergence of Afro-American tradition with values and social behavior of the dominant American society. This concept

was now known as double consciousness. He explained double consciousness as follows:

One ever feels his two-ness, - an American, a Negro: two souls, two thoughts, two reconciled strivings; two warring ideals in the one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder (Du Bois & Edwards, 2007, p. 8)

Dorothy Sterling provided the following analogy for this experience in Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham's (1989) article titled "Beyond the Sound of Silence: Afro-American Women in History."

Only one generation or two removed from slavery themselves, hemmed in by the same discriminatory laws that poor Blacks faced, they nevertheless strove to live up to the standards of their white associates. No one's curtains were as starched, gloves as white, or behaviors as correct as a Black women's in the anti-slavery societies. (p. 56)

The cultural containment exemplified in the quote above translates into cultural marginality as "gaining respect, even justice, from White America- required changes in religious beliefs, speech patterns, and also in gender roles and relations" (Higginbotham, 1989, p. 56). Biculturalism informed the African American woman's identity as she navigated the majority culture (Higginbotham, 1989). Feminist scholar Audre Lorde (2007) supported this assertion in the following quote:

For in order for us to survive, those of us for who oppression was as American as apple pie have always had to be watchers, to become familiar with the language

and manners of the oppressor, even sometimes adopting them for some illusion of protection. (p. 114)

Biculturalism was used to explore how minority professionals develop competencies to meet career expectations in white organizational cultures. Research revealed that African American women perceive themselves as living in two distinct cultural contexts, one Black the other one White. These women compartmentalized the various areas of their lives in order to manage the bicultural dimensions and tended to have highly complex life structures to embrace both cultural contexts (Alfred, 2001; Bell, 1990; Cheatham, 1990). The construction of the insider versus outsider concept along with double-consciousness and biculturalism created a continuum of evolution of the idea that African Americans must take on majority attributes to be successful, thereby sacrificing their authentic selves or bifurcating their lives (Barrett, et al., 2003; Du Bois & Edwards, 2007). In this study a bicultural perspective was used to determine how African American female senior-level administrators adapted to be successful at predominately white institutions.

### **INTERSECTIONALITY**

Intersectionality was an “analysis claiming that systems of race, social class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nationality, and age form mutually constructed features of social organization, which shape Black women’s experiences and, in turn, were shaped by Black women” (Collins, 2000, p. 320). Interest in intersectionality arose out of a critique that gender-based and race-based research was not dynamic enough to account for the intersections of factors affecting lived experiences (Crenshaw, 1991; McCall, 2005). These theories although comprehensive in explaining a singular oppression, were

not able to explain the intensified affects of multiple levels of oppression. Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991), professor of law at the University of California at Los Angeles, stated that:

[She] used the concept of intersectionality to denote the various ways in which race and gender interact to shape the multiple dimensions of Black women's employment experiences. My objective there was to illustrate that many of the experiences Black women face were not subsumed within the traditional boundaries of race or gender discrimination as these boundaries were currently understood, and that the intersection of racism and sexism factors into Black women's lives in ways that cannot be captured wholly by looking at the race or gender dimensions of those experiences separately. (p. 1244)

Intersectional analysis can be used to identify political, structural and representational oppression (Crenshaw, 1991).

Critics of intersectionality fault the theory for being too broad (K. Davis, 2008); however, this was also considered the theory's strength (Alexander-Floyd, 2012; McCall, 2005). The intersectionality of racism, sexism and the other challenges that affect African American women administrators in higher education created a chilly climate that these professionals had to overcome to be successful (Giddings, 1996; Sandler, 1986; Zamani, 2003).

## **Summary of the Chapter**

In this chapter, the researcher presented a review of previous literature related to this research study to determine the experiences of African American female senior-level executives in administration at (PWIs) of higher education. The review also included an overview of the conceptual framework, research design and significance of this qualitative, phenomenological study based on the theoretical concepts of Black feminist theory, biculturalism and intersectionality. It was apparent from this review of literature regarding the experiences of African American females in executive level positions in higher education that more scholarly studies were needed to illuminate the experiences of African American women in different higher education environments. Without this intellectual activity, African American women would continue to be invisible, isolated, and powerless. Also, with the recent change in institutional policies regarding affirmative action and diversity, new studies were necessary to gauge whether these policies were affecting the experiences of African American female senior-level executives at predominately white institutions. As diversity was central to the educational mission of higher education institutions, it was important to explore the challenges that under-represented populations faced in academia in order to develop solutions to encourage their participation in higher education at all levels, including administration.

In Chapter Three, the researcher presents the design and methodology used to further research this phenomenon. This includes the research method and design, a description of the population and sample, the data collection instrument and procedures,

and the data analysis procedures. The chapter concludes with a calendar of this research activity and a synopsis of the chapter.

## **Chapter Three – Design and Methodology**

### **Introduction**

In Chapter Three, the researcher presents the design and methodology used to further research this phenomenon. This chapter includes the research method and design, a description of the population and sample, the data collection instrument and procedures, and the data analysis procedures. The chapter concludes with a timeline for this research activity and a synopsis of the chapter.

As mentioned in Chapter One, it was important to document the experiences of African American female senior-level executives at predominately white institutions in order to develop strategies that address their concerns. Retention of these professionals was essential to ensure that higher education remained diverse. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to determine how the experiences of African American women senior-level executives at predominately white institutions have changed given the shifts in the legal climate and expectations for diversity in higher education. To address this purpose, the following questions were used to frame the study:

- 1) How do African American female senior-level executives describe their workplace experiences at predominately white institutions (PWIs)?
- 2) How do African American female senior-level executives discuss how their multiple identities inform their experiences at predominately white institutions (PWIs)?

- 3) How do African American female senior-level executives cope with challenges and celebrate successes they experience in their roles as senior-level executives at predominately white institutions (PWIs)?

The next section of this chapter provided concise information about the research method and design.

### **Research Method and Design**

Qualitative research values individual voices and was often used to illuminate voices that have been previously marginalized. Qualitative approaches to research were based on a holistic belief that there was no single reality; reality was based upon the perceptions of each person and their experiences have meaning within a given situation (Guido, et al., 2010; Maxwell, 2005; Perl & Noldon, 2000). Sources of data in qualitative research include participant observations, interviews, written documents and the actual text of the research interaction with the participants. Qualitative research had many strengths, including being accessible as it can be intuitively learned, being relatively easy to conduct, facilitating uncovering answers to questions and allowing for the expression of unique and varied experiences (Perl & Noldon, 2000). The limitations of qualitative research included the amount of time it took to gather the data; the results were not generalizable to the larger population; the study could be vulnerable to external and internal validity concerns; the study cannot be easily replicated and could be less reliable if there was not a strong data instrument; and the study does not uncover larger trends (Perl & Noldon, 2000).

Qualitative research was used for this study because it provided a means to investigate complex issues; and the use of this methodology allowed for a deeper knowledge of the experiences of African American female senior-level executives at predominately white institutions (PWIs) in higher education settings. Because participants shared their experiences, the theoretical orientation that was most appropriate to capture the lived experiences of African American female senior-level executives regarding their work experiences at PWIs was phenomenological. (Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Maxwell, 2005).

#### **PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH**

Phenomenology was designed to gain a deeper understanding of our everyday life experiences; specifically how people perceive, describe, feel, judge, remember, make sense of, and talk about a phenomenon (Ausmer, 2009; Patton, 2002). Phenomenological epistemology validated perceptions and examined how things seemed rather than how they were, focusing not only on people's subjective experiences, but also on their interpretations of the world and reflected the heart of knowing (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2007). It acknowledged that our personal experiences have meaning and that there was a need for sharing that knowledge. All three of these areas—how things appear, the interpretations of experiences, and the need to know—were significant in further understanding the perceptions of African American female senior-level executives at PWIs. A phenomenological approach allowed the researcher to give voice to the study participants and identify the insider versus outsider phenomenon documented in the literature (Collins, 2000; DuCille, 1994; Lorde & Clarke, 2007).

**Giving Voice to African American Females.** Researchers discussed how the experiences of African American women typically were not included in historical records as they were overshadowed by the stories of white men and women (Alfred, 2001; Higginbotham, 1989, 1992). They purported that one way to share and preserve the unique experiences of African American women was through the use of oral narrative (Etter-Lewis, 1991a). Sharing these stories not only allowed the participants to express their experiences in their own voice, but also acted as a strategy for success as these women; as they found community through the telling of their experiences (Banks Wallace, 1998; Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 1996).

**Insider versus Outsider Phenomenon.** Feminist scholar Audre Lorde (2007) discussed the lived experiences of African American women in American society as an insider versus outsider phenomenon and presented oppression as an intersectional construction in their lives (Collins, 2000; Lorde & Clarke, 2007). This feeling was also referred to as the “otherness” that one feels when they were physically in a space, but not included in the space. (DuCille, 1994; hooks, 1989; Johnsrud & Sadao, 1998) Researchers applied Lorde’s analysis to the experiences of African American female professionals working in higher education and found that Black women experience isolation, intersectional discrimination and lack of support in career development as compared to their colleagues (Bailey, 2010; Farmer, 1993; Moses, 1989; Ramey, 1995). Specifically, they found that African American women “feel the numerous effects of being outsiders to the centers of academic privilege” (Aronson & Swanson, 1991, p. 168) including the pressure to assimilate and to withdraw simultaneously.

A phenomenological approach allowed African American female senior-level executives at predominately white institutions, who might feel marginalized and isolated, to tell their stories and reclaim their experiences. Moreover, the selected research design of qualitative, phenomenological multi-case oral history further supported the goal of highlighting the participant's voices in the research.

## **RESEARCH DESIGN**

Qualitative research “values individual voices and was often used to illuminate voices that have previously been marginalized” (Perl & Noldon, 2000, p. 38). It often included the collection of data through case study, personal experience, introspection, life story, interview, observational, historical, document analysis, interactional and visual texts (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The research design for this study was qualitative, phenomenological multiple-case oral history, which involved the collection of data through in-depth interviews and written document analysis. Oral history was selected because it allowed for the expression of new insights and perspectives of African American women senior-level executives in higher education at PWIs. “Telling stories was essentially a meaning-making process” (Seidman, 2006, p. 1) Participants used their own voices and experiences to provide a better understanding of African American women senior-level executives in administration at PWIs.

**Implications of Oral History.** Oral history involved the use of oral interviews of individuals who witnessed or participated in particular events as sources of data about the past (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996; Seidman, 2006). It was sometimes referred to as a life story, a life history, a case study, a personal narrative, a biography, or an autobiography.

Oral histories usually captured the life of a person from birth to present or some particular period in their life, expressing the experiences in their own words. Gwendolyn Etter-Lewis (1993), professor of English, Black World Studies and Women's Studies at Miami University, stated:

Oral narrative, sometimes referred to as oral history, was a dynamic interactive methodology that preserves an individual's own words and perspectives in a particularly authentic way. Oral narratives offer an intimate perspective of a narrator's interpretation and understanding of her/his own life unabridged. An individual's account of her/his own life was not just personal, but also social, historical, political. (p. xii)

This study allowed African American women's experiences to be expressed through their own words and perspectives. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) note, "feminist approaches to life history tend to emphasize the lived experience of the narrator and how that related to the intersection of gender, race and social class" (p. 57). The conceptual framework for this study, a combination of black feminist theory, biculturalism and intersectionality, were used as a lens to frame the research questions and data analysis. The combination of the theories in the conceptual framework facilitated the researcher's understanding of race and gender for African American women senior-level executives in higher education. Etter-Lewis (1991) notes,

Oral narratives offer a unique and provocative means of gathering information central to understanding women's lives and viewpoints. When applied to women of color, [oral narratives] assumes added significance as a powerful instrument for

the rediscovery of womanhood so often overlooked and/or neglected in history and literature alike. Specifically, articulation of Black women's experiences in America was a complex task characterized by the intersection of race, gender and social class with language, history, and culture. It was oral history that was ideally suited to revealing the "multilayered texture of Black women's lives." The resulting information was not a mere compilation of idiosyncratic recollections only interesting to a specialized audience; rather Black women's life stories enrich our understanding of race and gender. (p. 43)

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) also noted that, "while some life history interviews were directed at capturing the subjects' rendering of their whole lives, from birth to present, others were more limited. They seek data on a particular period in the person's life" (p. 57).

This study was limited in that it seeks to explore the challenges African American women experience as senior-level executives at PWIs. However, information on significant events in their lives was also mentioned to provide additional context their experiences at PWIs.

### **Description of the Population and Sample**

Generally, higher education institutions are organized into three major categories: academic affairs, student affairs, and administrative affairs (Sagaria, 1988). Positions in academic affairs included president, vice president for academic affairs, provost, and college deans. Student affairs positions included vice president for student affairs, dean of

students, registrar, and director of student financial aid. The administrative affairs departments encompassed positions such as vice president for finance, director of alumni relations, director of security, and director of information systems (K. M. Moore & Sagaria, 1982; Sagaria, 1988). For this study, an administrator was defined as a person in a managerial or policy-making capacity with a line function. A line function was part of the institution's hierarchy and someone to whom others report (Sagaria, 1988).

Administrators with a line function also reported to a supervisor. The target population for this study was (a) females that identify as African American or Black, (b) who were currently or formally employed in a dean, provost, vice president or president position in administrative affairs, academic affairs, or student affairs (c) at a predominately white institution in the United States. Study participants were solicited nationally to allow for a robust and rich group of participants and research findings. Purposive sampling and snowball sampling were used to select the participants in the study.

Purposive sampling was a research selection technique in which the researcher selected the possible participants based on specific characteristics (Patton, 1990). The following was the process for purposive sampling in this study. Individuals that were eligible to participate in the study were females that identify as African American or Black who were currently or formally employed in a dean, provost, vice president or president position in administrative affairs, academic affairs, or student affairs at a predominately white institution in the United States. Participants were accepted in the order that they were received up to a maximum of 12 participants. If more than 12 participants were interested in participating, the researcher selected candidates that

allowed the research to represent the broadest geographical range of the United States. Candidates were evaluated based on institutional type with participants that were or have been employed at four-year institutions and were members of the Association of American Universities (AAU) selected first. A list of the current AAU institutions was found at <http://www.aau.edu/about/default.aspx?id=4020>. Participants that were employed at institutions that were not members of AAU, but were part of state university systems, were selected second. Finally, participants that were affiliated with schools that do not meet the above criteria were selected based on the years of experience of the participant, with more years of experience being desirable.

To recruit the sample for the study, an invitation with information about the study was sent via electronic mail to the Association of Black Women in Higher Education, the American Association of Blacks in Higher Education and the American Council on Education Women's Network. These organizations were selected because they were women's higher educational organizations with a diverse national membership. In the invitation, the researcher asked them to forward the information about participating to their members or to send the researcher their contact information so that the researcher can send the information directly (see Appendix A).

Additionally, study participants were asked to recommend possible candidates for the study. This was commonly referred to as "snowball sampling." Gall (1996) defined snowball sampling as a group of cases that were selected by "asking well-situated people to recommend cases to study. As the process continued, the researcher discovered an increasing number of well-situated people and an increasing number of recommended

cases, all or some of whom can be included in the sample” (p. 234). Through a combination of purposive and snowball sampling the researcher solicited participants for the study.

The sample size for this study was twelve participants. This sample size was selected because it was commensurate with previous research conducted on this topic (Alfred, 2001; Bailey, 2010; Barrett, Cervero, & Johnson-Bailey, 2004; Crews, 2007; Croom, 2011; Green, 2009). Potential participants were contacted via email with an invitation to participate as well as a recruitment communication to ensure they met the criteria to participate in the study. They were also asked their preference for the interview method, either in person or by phone. Data for the study was obtained through two-part, semi-structured interviews with African American female senior-level executives at predominately white institutions of higher education in the United States. Senior-level executives were selected because attaining this status represented one of the highest levels of achievement in higher education, thus understanding their experiences provided information that can assist all African American females in academia.

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) stated that, “two issues dominate traditional ethics in research with human subjects: informed consent and the protection of subjects from harm” (p. 43). Upon agreeing to participate in the study, the women signed consent forms (Appendix C). The consent form provided a description of the study, what would be done with the study and how confidentiality would be maintained. As the researcher, it was my responsibility to protect the participants by maintaining anonymity. To ensure that their identity was protected, the researcher used pseudonyms instead of the participant’s actual

names. Participants were also assigned pseudonyms to protect their identity and in some instances, quotations were edited for clarity. Moreover, the identities of individuals they referenced, locations, and events were altered to protect the confidentiality of the study participants.

## **Data Collection Instruments**

This section included information about the data collection instruments for the study; which were the interview protocol and participant documents. Moreover, the section described the role of the researcher as an instrument for the study.

### **INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

An interview protocol (see Appendix D) was developed for the substantive interview with study participants. Interviews allowed for the expression of unique cases and multiple perspectives (Perl & Noldon, 2000; Seidman, 2006). The first part of the interview was used as an introduction of the researcher and the goals and objectives of the research. The second aspect of the interview was substantive where the researcher asked the questions that were essential to the research. The research questions were developed based on interview guides from Cheresa Hamilton's (2009) dissertation titled, "The Perception of African American Administrators regarding their Work Experiences at Predominately White Institutions of Higher Education" and Germaine Becks-Moody's (2004) dissertation titled, "African American Women Administrators in Higher Education Exploring the Challenges and Experiences at Louisiana Public Colleges and Universities." Additional questions were added that focus specifically on the research

questions of this study. The instruments were tested with colleagues in the Higher Education Administration Program at the University of Texas at Austin to ensure technical adequacy of the instrument.

## **DOCUMENTS**

The documents reviewed for the study included participant vitae/resumes and institutional websites. Once participants agreed to be in the study, the researcher requested that they forward a copy of their vitae/resume. The researcher reviewed the information to learn more about the participants experience at a predominately white institution and their journey to senior-level executive management. The resume also provided additional context for the data analysis phase of the research. In addition, the researcher conducted an online search for information about the higher education institution where the participant was employed to determine how institutional diversity and affirmative action were represented (see Appendix B). Websites were rated using criteria developed by the Public History Resource Center at the University of Maryland (DeRuyver, Evans, Melzer, & Wilmer, 2004). This website research provided additional information about the predominately white institution and also supported the data analysis process through triangulation with the interview transcripts.

## **ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER**

It was crucial to understand the possible biases the researcher brought to the study and what measures the author took to minimize the influence of this bias (Maxwell,

2005). In this section, the researcher presented her relationship to the topic and the participants in the study.

**Relationship to the Topic.** All of my 15 years of professional experience were as an African American female in administration at a predominately white institution. I was fortunate to obtain a position in administration immediately after I earned my undergraduate degree and have worked in various positions in higher education with the most recent position being in senior management. I became interested in this topic after attending a Critical Race Studies in Education Association conference session where African American female faculty members discussed the challenges they experienced transitioning into administrative roles at their institutions. Because of my experience, many of the examples that the faculty members presented as solely rooted in racial and gender inequalities seemed like situations where standard operating procedures needed to be followed regardless of the person involved in the incident. Although there was no disputing the influence of racial and gender inequalities in higher education, I wondered if another cause for their difficulties could be the lack of access to information and resources due to their status at the institution. This study was designed to determine how African American female senior-level executives made sense of their experiences at predominately white institutions and developed strategies for success in academia. Moreover, the research helped me make sense of my own experiences and evaluate my personal perspective regarding administration in higher education at a predominately white institution.

Given my experience as an African American female, it was important for me to be reflective in this research process so as to not project my issues and beliefs onto the study participants. Further, it was important that I do not assume that every Black woman in this study had a Black feminist epistemological perspective as it related to life and work, or that they articulated a racialized and gendered way of knowing and understanding. For this reason the conceptual model for this research study was expanded to include biculturalism and intersectionality, which facilitated the inclusion of broader themes in the analysis.

**Relationship to the Participants.** I anticipated that I would have no direct relationship with any of the participants. However a similarity in background between the study participants and me, which provided a sense of “insider” privilege, was that we identify as an African American females that have worked at a predominately white institution. As such, I had first-hand experience with many of the documented challenges of African American senior-level executives at PWIs.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

This section provided information about the data collection procedures for the study including the required approvals and processes the researcher used to collect the data through the administration of the data collection instruments; specifically the biographical profile and the interview protocols.

## **RESEARCH APPROVALS**

An application to conduct the study was submitted to the University of Texas at Austin Institutional Review Board for approval of human subject's research before the study began via the electronic portal at <http://www.utexas.edu/research/rsc/humansubjects/>. The application was submitted and approved in November 2012.

## **DATA COLLECTION**

The data collection instruments included the participant's curriculum vitae or resume, and an interview protocol. Details about the data collection procedures for each instrument were provided in this section.

**Curriculum Vitae or Resume.** Once potential participants were identified they were sent an email requesting their participation in the study. If they agreed to participate, a research study packet was sent to them with an Informed Consent Form (Appendix C). The resume or curriculum vitae were utilized to obtain background information, so that it was not necessary to collect this information during the interview. An Informed Consent form was utilized to gain final approval and confirmed acceptance of participation in the study.

**Interviews.** Once the completed study packet was returned and the participant agreed, the researcher contacted them to set up the initial interview. Interviews were the primary method of data collection. For the purposes of this study, the researcher utilized

open-ended interviews (See Appendix D) and interviewed each participant in two-parts (Seidman, 2006).

**Part One.** The first part of the interview was introductory (Seidman, 2006). This meeting was conducted via email. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) noted, “at the onset of a life-history study, when the subject and the interviewer do not know each other well, discussion usually covers impersonal matters” (p. 57).

**Part Two.** The second part of the interview focused on the professional experiences of each participant (Seidman, 2006). These interviews were conducted at a place of the participants choosing, but the researcher suggested conducting them at the higher education institution where the participant was employed. If possible, all of the second interviews with the participants were face-to-face. Gillham (2000) notes that the “overwhelming strength of the face-to-face interview was the richness of the communication that was possible” (p. 62). The researcher could be responsive to the context and adapt techniques to the circumstances (Merriam, 2009). All interviews were digitally-recorded with the permission of the participants. The participants were also informed that they could stop the taping at any time during the interview. Documents offered by the participants were reviewed to verify credentials or request clarification. The interview protocol (Appendix D) was used as a guide to elicit the information to ensure that the interviews stayed focused on addressing the key interview questions; which, in turn, supported the study’s main research questions. The researcher also probed beyond the participant’s answers to obtain clarification or further details where needed (Berg, 2004). The researcher also took notes during the interview to capture any insights

or distinct statements by the participants. Merriam (1998) asserts that interview notes allowed the investigator to monitor the process of data collection as well as to begin analyzing the information itself. The interview lasted an average of 60 minutes.

***Member Checking and Follow-up.*** Follow-up emails were sent to participants to verify responses and ask questions, if necessary, and provided an opportunity for member checking of the interview transcript. Member checking, “the process of having these individuals review statements made in the report for accuracy and completeness” was used to avoid misrepresentation of the data as well as to give the participants the opportunity to review the interpretations (Gall, et al., 1996). Each participant was electronically sent a copy of her profile and story before this follow-up to check for accuracy and respond to any discrepancies. Upon conclusion of the interview, participants were asked if they have any additional information to add that was useful to the investigation and were thanked for their time. The researcher sent a follow-up thank you letter.

During the interview, the researcher took field notes by hand on tablets only used for the assigned participant. Immediately following each interview, the researcher wrote down reflections that included insights and general impressions gained from the interview. Miles and Huberman (1994) purported that reflective remarks usually strengthen coding by identifying underlying issues that deserved analytic attention. This process allowed for informal theorizing about emerging patterns and their relationships (Miles & Huberman, 1994). These tablets contained the raw form of observations and reflections of the participants, their environment, documents, and any other relevant

sources. Upon completion of the interviews, the field notes were typed and saved on a computer, on a flash drive and on Dropbox, a digital cloud back-up system, for later analysis. Once the interviews were completed and all the other data had been collected, precautions were taken to protect the original data, including password protecting the data files and keeping all raw data and back-up files in a locked desk drawer.

## **Data Analysis Procedures**

This section of the chapter provided details of the process for data analysis, including descriptive statistics, coding procedures, quality measures and use of technology to analyze data obtained in the study.

### **DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS**

As the biographical data was received, frequency distributions were calculated for qualitative variables to determine percentages of categorical variables of the study participants. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze background information on study participants including range, mean and frequency distribution (Coladarci, Cobb, & Minium, 2010). The researcher also utilized the biographical data, the position, office and personal profiles to organize information about the participants.

### **CODING PROCEDURE**

Once the interviews were completed and all other data had been collected, the information was separated into folders, which were then analyzed for common themes. Substantive interviews were transcribed verbatim. “Verbatim transcription of recorded

interviews provided the best database for analysis” (Merriam, 2009). Field notes and personal notes of the non-verbal reactions of the participants augmented the database to support the verbal data provided. The transcripts were analyzed and coded for themes in a two-step process; specifically open coding and coding based on the conceptual framework.

**Open Coding.** The researcher separated the interviews into segments by reading and re-reading the transcripts thoroughly for readily identifiable themes and patterns. This was the process used to develop the coding system for the data. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007):

Developing a coding system involves several steps: You search through your data for regularities and patterns as well as for topics your data cover, and then you write down words and phrases to represent these topics and patterns. These words and phrases were coding categories. They were a means of sorting the descriptive data you have collected so that the material bearing on a given topic can be physically separated from other data. (p.171)

Once the initial codes were developed, the researcher listened to the tapes while following the transcripts in order to recapture what was discussed in the interviews and identify emerging patterns and themes. The interviews were coded using Atlas.ti software and quotations were organized under the appropriate theme. After the themes and patterns were identified and organized, the researcher began the second phase of data analysis.

**Coding Based on Conceptual Framework.** In order to analyze and interpret the interview data, the researcher utilized the conceptual framework of black feminist theory (Cleage, 1993; Collins, 2000; hooks, 1989; Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Walker, 2003), intersectionality (Collins, 2000; Giddings, 1996; Sandler, 1986; Zamani, 2003), and biculturalism (Alfred, 2001; Banks Wallace, 1998; Bell, 1990; Du Bois & Edwards, 2007; Etter-Lewis, 1991b; Howard-Hamilton, 2003). The combination of black feminist theory, intersectionality and biculturalism was uniquely appropriate for researching the lived experiences of African American women. Black feminist theory spoke directly to the lived experiences of African American women; intersectionality spoke to societal oppression and the position of African Americans in society; and biculturalism explained how African American women adapted to oppression in the workplace to be successful. A priori coding for this conceptual framework was included in Table 3.1. Additional codes were created through the coding process. Through the data analysis process, themes were generated regarding the perceptions, challenges and strategies for success for African American female senior-level executives at predominately white institutions.

Table 3.1

*A priori coding based on the Research Study Conceptual Framework*

Black Feminist Theory	Biculturalism	Intersectionality
Knowledge through Wisdom	Cultural Switching	Racism and Class
Dialogue in Knowledge	Cultural Misunderstanding	Racism and Gender
Ethic of Caring	Cultural Emersion	Gender and Class
Personal Accountability	Cultural Isolation	
	Cultural Silencing	

***Black Feminist Theory.*** The term "black feminism" connected the issues affecting African American women to the struggle for women's emancipation from sexism, a social relationship in which males as a group have authority over females as a group (Cleage, 1993; Collins, 1999; A. Y. Davis, 1990; S. M. James, 1994). It disrupted the racism inherent in the historical presentation of feminism as a white only ideology and political movement. (Collins, 1999; White, 2010). Using the black feminist perspective as the lens of analysis allowed for the previously silenced voices of women of color to be heard (Collins, 1999; hooks, 1989; Moraga & Anzaldua, 1983).

***Intersectionality.*** Intersectionality was an "analysis claiming that systems of race, social class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nationality, and age form mutually constructing features of social organization, which shaped Black women's experiences and, in turn, were shaped by Black women" (Collins, 2000). The intersectionality of racism, sexism and the other challenges that affect African American women administrators in higher education created a chilly climate, which these professionals have to overcome to be successful (Sandler, 1986).

***Biculturalism.*** Biculturalism was used to explore how minority professionals developed competencies to meet career expectations in white organizational cultures. Research revealed that African American women perceived themselves as living in two distinct cultural contexts, one Black and one White. The women compartmentalized the various components of their lives in order to manage the bicultural dimensions and tended to have highly complex life structures to embrace both cultural contexts (Alfred, 2001; Bell, 1990).

## **QUALITY MEASURES**

Guba and Lincoln (1982) proposed four criteria for judging the soundness of qualitative research including credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. The researcher employed the following procedures to ensure the quality of the research. To insure credibility, all interview data were triangulated with other research data, including the documents, the online research, and the participants through member checking to ensure that the researcher correctly recorded the data. The qualitative researcher enhanced transferability by doing a thorough job of describing the research context and the assumptions that were central to the research. In regards to dependability, the researcher described any changes that occur in the setting and how these changes affected the way the researcher approached the study. In terms of confirmability, the researcher documented the procedures for checking and rechecking the data throughout the study and actively search for and described negative instances that contradict prior observations (Guba & Lincoln, 1982).

## **USE OF TECHNOLOGY**

Several technological tools were used to analyze the data. The interviews were recorded using a digital recorder with the capability of converting the audio files into electronic wave files to save on a laptop computer. ATLAS.ti analytical software was used on a laptop computer to code the transcripts. Participants were contacted via a personal cell phone and any phone conversations with these participants were recorded

via Trigma Call Recorder for the Android Phone. Participant interviews and researcher field notes were transcribed and backed-up through Dropbox, a cloud storage software.

### **Calendar of Research Activities**

In this section of the chapter, the researcher presented the calendar of research activities related to this study. A timeline for these activities were listed in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2

#### *Timeline of Research Activities*

Month	Research Activity
October 2012	Dissertation Proposal Meeting and Submit IRB
November 2012 – February 2013	Data Collection
February 2013	Data Analysis
March 2013	Complete Chapters Four and Five
April 2013	Dissertation Defense Meeting
May 2013	Graduation

The proposal meeting was held in October 2012. The IRB was approved in November 2012. The researcher collected data from November 2012 through February 2013. Data analysis was conducted in February 2013 and March 2013. The researcher completed Chapters Four and Five in March 2013. The dissertation defense meeting was held in April 2013. The researcher graduated in May 2013.

## **Summary of the Chapter**

This chapter provided information about the methodology and design used for this study. This qualitative study used a phenomenological perspective to address the research questions, as it was uniquely suited to capture participants lived experiences (Guido, et al., 2010; Perl & Noldon, 2000). The research design was a multi-case, oral history through guided interviews. The selection criteria for study participants included females that identify as African American or Black who were currently or formally employed as a dean, provost, vice president or president in administrative affairs, academic affairs, or student affairs at a predominately white institution in the United States. Purposive sampling and snowballing techniques were used to acquire the sample size of twelve participants. The researcher conducted two-part interviews with participants; specifically an introductory interview and a substantive interview. Interviews were transcribed and data analyzed two ways, using open coding and using a priori codes developed from the conceptual framework of black feminist theory, biculturalism and intersectionality. Emerging themes were organized and quotes used to identify each finding. The results are discussed in the final chapter.

## **Chapter Four – Data Analysis and Findings**

### **Introduction**

In Chapter Four, the researcher presents the data analysis and findings from this research study. Interviews were conducted with 12 participants and interview transcripts were coded using ATLAS.ti to determine the emergent themes through open coding and based on the theoretical framework of the study. Findings were developed from the emergent themes.

As mentioned in Chapter One, it was important to document the experiences of African American female senior-level executives in predominately white institutions (PWIs) in order to develop strategies that address their concerns. Retention of these professionals was essential to ensure that higher education remained diverse. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to determine how the experiences of African American female senior-level executives at predominately white institutions have changed given the shifts in the legal climate and expectations for diversity in higher education. The following questions were used to frame the study:

- 1) How do African American female senior-level executives describe their workplace experiences at predominately white institutions (PWIs)?
- 2) How do African American female senior-level executives discuss how their multiple identities inform their experiences at predominately white institutions (PWIs)?

- 3) How do African American female senior-level executives cope with challenges and celebrate successes they experience in their roles as senior-level executives at predominately white institutions (PWIs)?

This chapter has four sections. The first section presents an overview of the implementation of the research study. The second section presents descriptive statistics regarding the participants including profiles of the participants and their institutions. The third section presents the findings and data analysis by research question both thematically through open coding (inductive analysis) and based on the theoretical framework. The final section of the chapter presents a summary of the chapter.

### **Implementation of the Research Study**

This qualitative study used a phenomenological perspective to address the research questions, as it was uniquely suited to capture participants lived experiences (Guido, et al., 2010; Perl & Noldon, 2000). The research design was a multi-case, oral history through guided interviews. The selection criteria for study participants included (a) females that identify as African American or Black, (b) who were currently or formally employed as a dean, provost, vice president or president track position, (c) in administrative affairs, academic affairs, or student affairs at a predominately white institution in the United States. Purposive sampling and snowballing techniques were used to identify the 12 study participants. The researcher conducted two-part interviews with each participant; specifically introductory and substantive. Interviews were transcribed and data analyzed in two ways, (a) using open coding created through

interview analysis (inductive analysis) and (b) using a priori codes developed from the conceptual framework of black feminist theory, biculturalism and intersectionality.

Emerging themes were developed and organized using ATLAS.ti. Findings were developed from the themes and supported using participant quotes. Quotes were used extensively throughout the data analysis to ensure participant voices were heard.

This section of the chapter provided a synopsis of the implementation of the research. The next section of the chapter provided descriptive statistics related to the study participants.

### **Descriptive Statistics of the Participants**

Twelve African American female senior-level executives agreed to participate in the study. Table 4.1 provided details related to the study participants, the area of the country they represent, the area of higher education they work or worked in, their position type and the number of years in their position. The participant's actual title was not disclosed to protect their identity. The area of the country they represent was consistent with the regions identified by the U.S. Census Bureau. Brief profiles for each participant were included in this section of the chapter.

### **PARTICIPANT PROFILES**

There were several notable statistics regarding the study participant population. Participant ages ranged from mid-thirties to early sixties, with experiences in senior-level executive positions ranging from being newly appointed with one year of experience to seasoned professionals with 18 years of experience. Of the sample, six (50%) worked in academic affairs, three (25%) worked in administrative affairs and three (25%) worked in

student affairs. Of the sample, six (50%) held Ph.Ds, one (8%) was in a doctoral program pursuing a Ph.D., four (34%) earned Ed.Ds. and one (8%) held a J.D. Eleven (92%) matriculated at or worked at higher education institutions located in the South. Eleven (92%) of the participants were married or partnered. Ten (83%) of the participants were mothers. Four (33%) of the participants have resigned from their senior-level executive position; however, all twelve (100%) of the participants continued to work in the higher education industry in some capacity.

**Addison Michael.** Addison Michael had four years of experience in a provost-track position in academic affairs at South One Public. Her area of responsibility included ensuring the university recruits and enrolls a talented and diverse student body. Prior to this position, she was an associate director at a PWI. She held a B.A. in Sociology, a M.A. in Educational Administration, and a Ph.D. in Educational Administration.

**Amelia William.** Amelia William had 18 years of experience in a vice president-track position in academic affairs at Northeast Public. Her area of responsibility included student advocacy, alumni relations and academic services for students. Prior to this position, she was an associate director at an HBCU. She held a B.A. in Sociology with a concentration in pre-professional Social Work, a M.Ed. in Business Education with an emphasis in management and administration, and an Ed.D. in Higher Education Administration.

**Ava Jack.** Ava Jack had five years of experience in a vice president-track position in administrative affairs at West College. Her area of responsibility included assisting with planning, coordinating, implementing, and accessing operational and

strategic goals related to diversity and inclusion. Prior to this position, she was an associate professor at a PWI. She held a B.S. in Business Administration with a management emphasis, M.A. in Educational Administration and Policy Studies with a higher education emphasis, and an Ed.D in Educational Leadership and Diversity Studies. She was currently employed as a director at a national higher education organization.

**Charlotte James.** Charlotte James had six years of experience in a vice president-track position in student affairs at South One Public. Her area of responsibility included overseeing the programming and academic support components of a program to maximize the academic success and social connection of new first-generation and under-represented college students. Prior to this position, she was a principal at a public school district. She held a B.S. in Speech and Hearing, a M.S. in Speech Language Pathology, and a Ph.D. in Educational Leadership and Research.

**Emily Aiden.** Emily Aiden had 16 years of experience in a vice president-track position in academic affairs at South Two Public. Her area of responsibility included developing and implementing a comprehensive plan to recruit, retain and graduate undergraduate, masters, and doctoral students in her college. Prior to this position, she was an assistant professor at a HBCU. She held a B.S. in Health and Physical Education, a M.A. in Therapeutic Recreation, and an Ed.D in Developmental Education. She also received professional development training at an elite institution.

**Emma Noah.** Emma Noah had two years of experience in a vice president-track position in administrative affairs at South One Public. Her area of responsibility included providing leadership for a unit that ensures compliance with state and federal regulations.

Prior to this position, she was a director at a PWI. She held a B.S. in Biology Education, and a professional degree.

**Isabella Jacob.** Isabella Jacob had one year of experience in a dean-track position in academic affairs at Midwest College. Her area of responsibility included providing leadership for a first-year student transfer program. Prior to this position, she was a faculty member at a PWI. She held a B.S. in Science and M.A. in Education. She also received professional development training from an elite institution. Currently, she was a Ph.D. student in a higher education administration program.

**Lily Carter.** Lily Carter had seven years of experience in a vice president-track position in student affairs at South One Public. Her area of responsibility included overseeing and managing ten programs in a student affairs unit. Prior to this position, she was in a vice chancellor-track position at a PWI. She held a B.A. in Economics, a M.A. in Education, and an Ed.D in Educational Administration.

**Madison Lucas.** Madison Lucas had two years of experience in a vice president-track position in administrative affairs at Northeast College. Her area of responsibility included foundation relations for several colleges and units at her institution. Prior to this position, she was a director at a HBCU. She held a B.S. in Elementary Education, a M.Ed. in Educational Psychology, and a Ph.D. in Educational Leadership.

**Mia Jackson.** Mia Jackson had 11 years of experience in a dean-track position in academic affairs at South One Public. Her area of responsibility included leadership and management of a liberal arts unit. Prior to this position, she was employed as an associate

professor at a PWI. She holds a B.S. in Theater, a M.A. in Interpretation, and a Ph.D. in Educational Theater. She was currently an associate professor at a PWI.

**Olivia Ethan.** Olivia Ethan had one year of experience in a vice president-track position in student affairs at South One Public. Her area of responsibility included overseeing a portfolio of programs that provided college readiness services for under-represented students. Prior to this position, she was an assistant principal at a public school district. She held a B.A. in English, a M.Ed. in Educational Administration, and a Ph.D. in Educational Administration.

**Sophia Mason.** Sophia Mason had three years of experience in a vice president-track position in academic affairs at South Three Public. Her area of responsibility included implementing and managing a program that provided college readiness and academic enrichment services to under-represented student population. Prior to this position, she was a consultant at a private company. She held a B.S. in English, a M.A. in Education, an Ed.S. in Education, and a Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction. She was currently employed as chief of staff for a national educational association.

Table 4.1

*Research Study Participant Demographic Information*

Alias for Institution	Name/Alias for Participant	Area of Higher Education	Position Track Type	Years in Position
Midwest College	Isabella Jacob <sup>1</sup>	Academic Affairs	Dean	1
Northeast College	Madison Lucas	Administrative Affairs	Vice President	2
Northeast Public	Amelia William	Academic Affairs	Vice President	18
South One Public	Addison Michael	Academic Affairs	Provost	4
South One Public	Charlotte James	Student Affairs	Vice President	6
South One Public	Emma Noah	Administrative Affairs	Vice President	2
South One Public	Lily Carter	Student Affairs	Vice President	7
South One Public	Mia Jackson <sup>1</sup>	Academic Affairs	Dean	11
South One Public	Olivia Ethan	Student Affairs	Vice President	1
South Two Public	Emily Aiden	Academic Affairs	Vice President	16
South Three Public	Sophia Mason <sup>12</sup>	Academic Affairs	Vice President	3
West College	Ava Jack <sup>1</sup>	Administrative Affairs	Vice President	5

Note: <sup>1</sup> Denoted participants who were no longer in their senior-level executive position

<sup>2</sup> Denoted the participant that was un-partnered

Table 4.2 provided information about the institutions where the study participants were employed as of Fall 2012. The study participants may not have been employed at that institution at this time. Fall of 2012 was used as a benchmark for a comparison of the institutions. Brief institutional profiles were presented in this section.

## **INSTITUTIONAL PROFILES**

Of these institutions, five (72 %) were public and two (28 %) were private. Six (86 %) were located in urban areas while one (14%) was a rural institution. Five (72%) were large institutions with greater than 20,000 students enrolled and two (28%) were small institutions with less than 10,000 students enrolled. The institutions represented in the study provided perspectives on higher education from the four main geographical regions designated by the U. S. Census Bureau.

**Midwest Public.** Midwest Public was a large, public, urban institution in the midwest region of the United States. It was a public flagship university designated as a land-grant, sea-grant and space-grant institution. Midwest Public had 19 colleges, schools, and other major academic units as well as six University-wide interdisciplinary centers and institutes whose work crossed collegiate lines; and offered bachelors, masters, doctoral and professional degrees. The institution had 4,234 faculty as well as 15,054 administrators and staff. Midwest Public had an enrollment of 30,375 undergraduates and 16,948 graduate students with 27.6% racial diversity and specifically 4.5% African Americans. The demographics of the institution as it related to gender were 49.1% males and 50.9% females.

**Northeast College.** Northeast College was a large, private, urban institution in the northeast region of the United States. It was organized into 13 schools and colleges, with nationally recognized programs in information studies and library science, architecture, communications, business administration, public administration, engineering and the College of Arts and Sciences; and offers bachelors, masters, doctoral and professional

degrees. The institution had 1,563 faculty as well as 3,693 administrators and staff. Northeast College had an enrollment of 14,798 undergraduates and 6,231 graduate students with 25.1% racial diversity and specifically 7.6% African Americans. The demographics of the institution as it related to gender were 44% males and 56% females.

**Northeast Public.** Northeast Public was a small, public, rural institution in the northeast region of the United States. The institution offered associate, bachelors, master's degrees and post master's certificates. Northeast Public was a high-achieving, nationally recognized, comprehensive university that delivered a personal and challenging academic experience. The institution had 387 academic staff. Northeast Public had an enrollment of 5,895 undergraduates and 1,096 graduate students with 13.9% racial diversity and specifically 5.7% African Americans. The demographics of the institution as it related to gender were 35.1% males and 64.9% females.

**South One Public.** South One Public was a large, public, urban institution in the south region of the United States. It was a research-intensive university and contained 17 colleges & schools, which offered bachelors, masters, doctoral, and professional degrees. The institution had 3,018 faculty as well as approximately 24,000 administrators and staff. South One Public had an enrollment of 38,463 undergraduates and 12,682 graduate students with 50.2% racial diversity and specifically 4.5% African Americans. The demographics of the institution as it related to gender were 49.6% males and 50.4% females.

**South Two Public.** South Two Public was a large, public, urban institution in the south region of the United States. It was a flagship, land-grant, space-grant, research

university; and offered 214 areas of study leading to bachelors, masters, doctoral, and law degrees. The academic programs were based out of the ten primary colleges on the main campus. The institution had 1,058 faculty as well as 2,942 administrators and staff. South Two Public had an enrollment of 20,433 undergraduates and 4,162 graduate students with 24% racial diversity and specifically 5% African Americans. The demographics of the institution as it related to gender were 51% males and 49% females.

**South Three Public.** South Three Public was a large, public, urban institution in the south region of the United States. It was a public flagship, land-grant, sea-grant and space-grant institution with 14 schools and colleges as well as extensive research facilities. The institution had 5,000 faculty as well as 1,500 administrators and staff. South Three Public had an enrollment of 24,641 undergraduates and 4,908 graduate students with 26.4% racial diversity and specifically 10.3% African Americans. The demographics of the institution as it related to gender were 48.6% males and 51.4% females.

**West College.** West College was a small, private, urban institution in the west region of the United States. It was a private liberal arts college and offers bachelors, masters and professional degrees. The institution had 209 academic staff. West College had an enrollment of 2,576 undergraduates and 209 graduate students with 25% racial diversity and specifically 3% African Americans. The demographics of the institution as it related to gender were 43% males and 57% females.

Table 4.2

*Description of predominately white institutions where study participants were employed as of Fall 2012*

Institution Alias	Institutional Profile	Enrollment Statistics (in percentages)		
		By Gender	Racial Diversity	African Americans
Midwest Public	Large, Public, Urban	49.1 (M); 50.9 (F)	27.6	4.5
Northeast College	Large, Private, Urban	44 (M); 56 (F)	25.1	7.6
Northeast Public	Small, Public, Rural	35.1 (M); 64.9 (F)	13.9	5.8
South One Public	Large, Public, Urban	49.6 M); 50.4 (F)	50.2	4.5
South Two Public	Large, Public, Urban	51 (M); 49 (F)	24	5
South Three Public	Large, Public, Urban	48.6 (M); 51.4 (F)	26.4	10.3
West College	Small, Private, Urban	43 (M); 57 (F)	25	3

This section included descriptive statistics regarding the study participants. In the next section, an overview of the coding procedure was provided. Further, a synthesis of the findings for each research question and the emergent themes was presented.

### **Findings Based on Coding Procedure**

In this section the procedure for coding was reviewed and the findings were presented related to each research question.

## **SYNOPSIS OF OPEN CODING PROCEDURE**

The researcher separated the interview transcripts into segments by reading and re-reading the transcripts thoroughly for readily identifiable themes and patterns. The researcher's review was informed by themes in previous literature. Once the initial codes were developed, the researcher listened to the recordings while following the transcripts in order to recapture what was discussed in the interviews and identify emerging patterns and themes. The interviews were coded using ATLAS.ti software and quotations were organized under the appropriate theme. After the themes and patterns were identified and organized, the researcher began the second phase of data analysis.

## **Synopsis of Conceptual Framework Coding Procedure**

In order to analyze and interpret the interview data, the researcher utilized the conceptual framework of black feminist theory (Cleage, 1993; Collins, 2000; hooks, 1989; Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Walker, 2003), intersectionality (Collins, 2000; Giddings, 1996; Sandler, 1986; Zamani, 2003), and biculturalism (Alfred, 2001; Banks Wallace, 1998; Bell, 1990; Du Bois & Edwards, 2007; Etter-Lewis, 1991b; Howard-Hamilton, 2003). The combination of these theories was uniquely appropriate for researching the lived experiences of African American women. Black feminist theory spoke directly to the lived experiences of African American women; intersectionality illuminated the societal oppression African American women experience and position in American society; and biculturalism explained how African American women have adapted to oppression in the workplace to be successful. Through the data analysis

process, themes and findings were generated regarding the experiences, challenges and strategies for success for African American female senior-level executives at predominately white institutions.

### **Data Analysis for Research Question #1**

The first research question explored African American female senior-level executive's experiences at predominately white institutions. Interview protocol questions 1 – 5 and 10 - 14 were written to explore the answer to this question. Throughout the interviews six findings regarding these African American women's perceptions and experiences at predominately white institutions were revealed. Based on interview analysis using ATLAS.ti, emerging themes and findings were identified. The findings for research question #1 were (1) relationships and connection were essential; (2) strategic and political savvy were vital; (3) one must have an awareness of your perception; (4) higher education was an isolating place; (5) racism and sexism were still prevalent; and (6) work/life balance was a myth.

Table 4.3 showed the relationships between the findings, emergent themes and open coding for this question. The remainder of the section provided an analysis of the study participants experiences in higher education based on the findings.

Table 4.3

*Findings for Research Question # 1*

Findings	Emergent Themes	Codes
<b>Finding #1 - Relationships and connections were essential</b>	Allies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Codes (6)</li> <li>• Quotation(s): 90</li> </ul>	OC: Advice (14) OC: Allies (18) OC: Mentors (19) OC: Role Model (7) OC: University Culture (32) OC: Upward Mobility (6)
	Mentors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Codes (4)</li> <li>• Quotation(s): 54</li> </ul>	OC: Allies (18) OC: Mentors (19) OC: Relationship Building (14) OC: Role Model (7)
	Partnerships <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Codes (3)</li> <li>• Quotation(s): 48</li> </ul>	OC: Allies (18) OC: Mentors (19) OC: Relationship Building (14)
<b>Finding #2 - Strategic and political savvy were vital</b>	Higher Education as a Strategic Place <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Codes (5)</li> <li>• Quotation(s): 55</li> </ul>	OC: Higher Education as Game (8) OC: Historical Connection (7) OC: Position and Power (7) OC: Regulations (1) OC: University Culture (32)
<b>Finding #3 - One must have an awareness of your perception</b>	Awareness of Perception <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Codes (10):</li> <li>• Quotation(s): 76</li> </ul>	BFT: Perceptions (16) OC: Fear (2) OC: Higher Education as Game (8) OC: Historical Connection (7) OC: Oppression (3) OC: Patriarchy (1) OC: Racism NOW (1) OC: Sabotage (11) OC: Support (3) OC: University Culture (32)
<b>Finding #4 - Higher education was an isolating place</b>	Isolation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Codes (6)</li> <li>• Quotation(s): 37</li> </ul>	BC: Cultural Isolation (11) OC: Isolation (1) OC: Patriarchy (1) OC: Resistance (6) OC: Sabotage (11) OC: Tokenism (12)

Table 4.3, cont.

Findings	Emergent Themes	Codes
<b>Finding #5 - Racism and sexism were still prevalent</b>	The -ism's <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Codes (8)</li> <li>• Quotation(s): 42</li> </ul>	INT: Ageism (1) INT: Racism (11) INT: Racism and Sexism (16) INT: Racism, Sexism, geographic (1) INT: Racism, Sexism, SES (1) INT: Sexism (3) INT: Sexual Orientation, Racism (1) OC: Tokenism (12)
<b>Finding #6 - Work/life balance was a myth</b>	Work/Life Unbalance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Codes (2):</li> <li>• Quotations (s): 27</li> </ul>	OC: Twice as Good/Confidence (12) OC: Workload Issues/Balance (17)

Note: The abbreviation before the colon for the coding denoted the theory the code was most closely associated with from the researcher's perspective. OC meant open coding; BFT meant black feminist theory; BC meant biculturalism and INT meant intersectionality.

Overall, the study participants had positive responses when asked directly about their experiences working at predominately white institutions. They enjoyed the work they were doing. Moreover, they felt that the work they were doing was greater than themselves. Even though they did experience challenges, they persisted because they believed they were in the best position to advocate for their particular expertise as well as diversity and inclusion efforts at their institution. Addison Michael, a study participant in a provost-track position in academic affairs at South One Public, remarked the following about her senior-level executive role in higher education:

Higher education is about changing lives. It changes lives for young people. My job is the entry level version of that. You have the opportunity to really change the trajectory for families.

Dr. Michael's quote exemplified the importance and purpose the study participants placed on the positions they held and the role they filled at the predominately white institution.

This was not to say that they did not experience racism and/or sexism as they commenced with their work, struggled with work/life balance issues, or experienced isolation at the institution. In spite of their obstacles, the study participants mentioned that the way they were able to impact the lives of students, faculty, administrators and staff at their respective institutions was a tangible example of how their presence in higher education made a difference and increased accessibility to educational opportunities for under-represented populations. Isabella Jacob, a study participant in a dean-track position in academic affairs at Midwest College, shared the following regarding her experiences:

I helped a lot of students to get through just in making sure they [were] aware of what they needed to do so they [could] graduate and move into the position that they [were] really coming here for. Sometimes it was creating an atmosphere of hope, [which] motivated a lot of people.

Ms. Jacob's comment demonstrated the ethic of caring and uplift that many of the participants brought to the institution. Because of their perspective was different than the traditional culture of higher education, they became a beacon of hope for students at the institution. Emma Noah, a study participant in a vice president- track position in administrative affairs at South One Public, also shared positive sentiments regarding her impact at her institution when she stated, "in due time [we] will see the fruits of our labor pay off and we are going to rise. We are going to elevate [the institution]." They admitted that institutional change was slow, but they were committed to advocating for that change

at their institutions. The remainder of this section included the analysis of the interviews as related to the findings for research question #1.

**Finding #1 - Relationships and connections were essential.** Relationships and connections were fundamental to all of the participant's success at higher education institutions, and were the common finding in three emerging themes; specifically (a) allies, (b) mentors and (c) partnerships. Based on the interviews with these African American female senior-level executives, there was a distinct difference in each type of relationship, and their absence or presence impacted their experiences at the PWI. The *allies* emergent theme related to having champions that were willing to advocate on their behalf and vouch for them to ensure their success. The *mentors* emergent theme focused on having people that provided them with advice and counsel regarding their journey through the predominately white institution. The *partnerships* emergent theme was more focused on professional working partnerships or building bridges with other colleagues, departments and units both internally and externally. Each theme was described in more detail below.

*Allies.* The first emergent theme in this finding was related to African American senior-level executives' experiences of seeking out and making allies. The participants stressed that their experiences at their institutions were affected by their ability to find allies. Moreover, they were explicit in explaining that allies were not always the individuals that one assumed they would be, and could be cross-race and cross-gender colleagues. Ava Jack, a study participant in a vice president-track position in administrative affairs at West College, stated:

I think that we have to be able to find ally-ship. We have to be willing to look for it outside the places that we might normally find it. We cannot make assumptions about who was on board with us. We have to be able to expand our notation of ally-ship and be willing to speak your own truth.

Dr. Jack mentioned directly that one should expand their assumptions regarding ally-ship to be able to be successful at predominately white institutions. In the opinion of the participants of this study, ally-ship cannot be limited to African Americans. Women and men of other racial and ethnic backgrounds were not always adversarial and could be strong allies. Madison Lucas, a study participant in a vice president-track position in administrative affairs at Northeast College, also mentioned how important it was to get to know people for who they were in order to know if they were allies. Dr. Lucas stated, “Sometimes we think that color determines allies, but [we need to] get to know people as people.” Throughout her interview, she mentioned her various ally networks that could be considered non-traditional and how these allies enhanced her experiences at the predominately white institution. Emily Aiden, in a vice president-track position in academic affairs at South Two Public, also mentioned how one of her allies, an incoming vice provost for diversity (a White woman), advocated for her to be included in visits with employers to discussed diversity initiatives at her institution. Prior to this, Dr. Aiden was asked to arrange the visits but not to participate in the meetings. This vice provost to recognized the valuable contribution that Dr. Aiden made and advocated on her behalf.

Participants also discussed the reality that not all African American’s were allies. Dr. Jack stated, “Some of the colleagues that you thought would be allies turned out to be people [that were not]. They want you to take on their mantle.” She warned about those

people that one might feel would be supportive of one's work, but in reality were not. Her comment was echoed throughout the interviews that not only should one not limit their allies to one particular group, one should also not assume that someone was their ally just because they were affiliated with a certain racial group.

Moreover, allies do not need to be employed at your institution. Dr. Jack went on to mention how one should develop ally relationships outside of the institution. She stated:

You have to have a constituency outside [the institution]. I had different folks from community, alumni, on campus and grew new allies on campus. I think that colleagues that might have assumed that it would be just about race with me found out that it was not just about race, and I was able to cultivate ally-ship with new colleagues.

Dr. Jack's comment exemplified the need to be open and cultivate relationships in order to be successful at the PWI. Sophia Mason, a study participant in a vice president-track position in academic affairs at South Three Public, mentioned how her allies made her feel comfortable and supported in spite of a difference in racial background. Dr. Mason remarked:

It was a welcoming environment and they were so passionate about what they were doing. It really was not about whether a person was yellow, green, purple or blue. They applied the rules across the board for everyone. They really embraced and enjoyed what they did. I think a lot of time when [people] don't enjoy what they do, they project that on other people and pick up on other things. It could be a racial issue when people do not enjoy what they do. [Like] little things with the subordinates that were things that shouldn't stick out or make them feel uncomfortable.

Dr. Mason spoke about the difference in her experiences as an undergraduate and an administrator at her institution. This quote refers to a student experience, but still exemplified how allies promoted an inclusive environment. She juxtaposed her

undergraduate work experience with her professional experience; which was positive, but not nearly as welcoming as the culture and climate of her administrative office was chillier.

Many of the participants shared experiences where they did not have allies and how those led to challenging experiences at the PWI. Emma Noah, in a vice president-track position in administrative affairs at South One Public, presented the consequences of not having strong allies to introduce her when she was hired for her position. Dr. Noah stated in reference to her predecessor that, “She was not able to vouch for me. [She felt like] she was going to earn it. If [she was] going to be successful [she needs] to earn it.” Due to not having this relationship with her predecessor, Dr. Noah had to seek out ally-ships and build relationships from scratch. Two years into her position, she continued to build these relationships. This quote exemplified how not having allies can be disruptive to African American women’s experiences and success in senior-level executive positions at predominately white institutions.

***Mentors.*** The second emergent theme in this finding was the importance of mentorship to African American female senior-level executive’s experiences at predominately white institutions. Several of the interviewees mentioned how the mentorship they received at critical times in their professional careers as they navigated higher education was essential to them being in the positions that they held today. These mentors were generally not African American females and were not assigned to them, although several of the mentors were their supervisors. Many participants mentioned that their mentors were at other institutions and seasoned professionals. In most cases the

onus was on the African American female senior-level executive to seek out their mentors and cultivate the relationships. Cross-culture and cross-gender mentors were instrumental to their success. Emma Noah, a study participant in a vice president-track position in administrative affairs at South One Public, shared the following thoughts on mentors:

I do think that young African American women should not just network with your own people, but network with people that look different than you. Because they were probably more in positions of power, and can broker things that people that look like you cannot.

Dr. Noah's quote connected the value of great mentors to advancement at the PWI.

Having mentors that were able to vouch for her and expose her to experiences that were valued in higher education was critical to her success. Olivia Ethan, a study participant in a vice president-track position in student affairs at South One Public, supported the need for mentors and how they helped one be successful.

I will say mentors come in different forms and I've not really had a mentor assigned to me, but sometimes I am able to seek them out. [I] find people that have historical knowledge or people who can give me advice about navigating the university and also navigating some of the partnership situations that I have to manage on a regular basis.

Dr. Ethan's quote demonstrated how she was able to leverage her mentorship relationships into professional success by tapping into their experiences in terms of the partnerships she had to navigate daily and the politics of the predominately white institutions. Isabella Jacob, a study participant in a dean-track position in academic affairs at Midwest College, introduced another dimension of mentorship which was encouragement. She stated:

Having those people in your life that God sends that encourage you in little ways that [they] remind you that yes you were that president or you were that dean. You were that person that God had called to do a special work.

This quote exemplified the responses of many of the participants that their mentors do not have to have any association with higher education. The main criteria for a mentorship relationship was that the mentor to be willing to support the study participant as they navigated the institution, thus enriching their experience at the PWI.

One study participant did not experience a mentorship relationship in her senior-level executive role. She mentioned that she tried to find a mentor, but when she came to her institution there were only two African American females in executive roles.

Although she was cordial with these women, she was not able to develop a mentor relationship with them. Further, she reached out to a colleague at another institution, but they were not able to maintain a connection. Dr. Jackson stated, “I just wanted someone to talk to and bounce ideas off. [I would have] appreciated having those conversations about university culture with a Black woman.” Her quote demonstrated the void that she experienced by not having a mentor, and specifically an African American female mentor, to assist her in navigating the predominately white institution.

***Partnerships.*** The third emergent theme for this finding was the ability to build and maintain relationships both internally and externally. All of the participants were collaborators or wanted to be collaborators. They shared that, in their experience, for any progress to be made at the higher education campus it was necessary to partner with others. Emily Aiden, a study participant in a vice president-track position in academic affairs at South Two Public, summed up this sentiment by saying, “I partner with people,

I collaborate with people and sometimes I even drive the engine myself. It is important to me to collaborate and build bridges. I also do that in the community.” Dr. Aiden’s comment was particularly important given the isolating environment of her institution. Partnerships have helped her employ agency and have a more positive experience at that campus.

Emma Noah, a study participant in a vice president-track position in administrative affairs at South One Public, agreed with this sentiment in her comment regarding relationships. Dr. Noah stated:

In terms of building relationships [you were] struggling to make sure that the work that you were doing was seen as valued. You were still trying to build relationships [to] strengthen and further the work that you were doing.

Dr. Noah’s comment demonstrated the interrelatedness of the themes. Even with her position, her educational attainment and her willingness to partner, she was still working to ensure that the predominately white institution valued her contribution and supported her work.

**Finding #2 - Strategic and political savvy were vital.** The second finding was that the study participants experienced higher education as a strategic place and operated within the political environment to be successful. Specifically in their senior-level positions, they learned how to evaluate institutional changes. Moreover, they have learned the culture of the institution and have strategically ensured that their professional experiences were synergistic to those things that were valued at the predominately white institutions. Olivia Ethan, a study participant in a vice president-track position in student

affairs at South One Public, stated the following about higher education being a strategic place and compared it to a game:

It was like playing the game that was set-up for you to play. Well, you decide if you want to play the game or not play the game. But if you want to be in [this] environment, you need to hold on to those things [that] can't be put on paper in the form of the degree. It's all about professional development. I think that [to] survive, be able to navigate here and move forward they need that.

Dr. Ethan's comment highlighted the need for academic credentials, but also professional development experiences that were valued and celebrated at predominately white institutions. Examples of professional development experiences included participating on or leading departmental or university committees, and obtaining additional leadership and management training. Having participated in these experiences increased opportunities for her and enriched her experience at the predominately white institution.

Mia Jackson, a study participant in a dean-track position in academic affairs at South One Public, made a clear connection between the strategy of the predominately white institution and the support of ideas that promote African American perspectives. Dr. Jackson stated, "If White administrators can take credit for doing something for Black people they will; if they cannot they were less likely to support it." Dr. Jackson was in a unique position as the administrator of a unit in liberal arts at a PWI. She more often than not was advocating for resources for her unit, which meant resources specifically for African American issues and support. Through her work she became keenly aware of the strategic nature of the institution. Although other participants hinted to the notion of credit and ownership of ideas related to African American progress at

predominately white institutions, Dr. Jackson was the only participant that so clearly articulated the connection.

Other study participants acknowledged that they felt part of their role was to advocate for diverse populations and inclusive ideas that were not the norm in the University culture. They had a unique opportunity to be present when critical decisions were made and argue a case for less conventional perspectives. Study participants stated that understanding all aspects of an issue was critical to know the most strategic way to respond in those situations. Olivia Ethan, a study participant in a vice president-track position in student affairs at South One Public, added that the strategic nature of higher education was not specific to higher education, but was present everywhere. Dr. Ethan stated:

It took me a while to really understand all of that [the strategic environment] because I came from a place where that dynamic was not there. So that was really something to get used to knowing that this was the world that we live in. While I did not have to face it every day where I was before this, it was what people face every day. For African American women and men this was what they face every day. Having to negotiate all these different issues and challenges based around who you were and what you look like and how much education you have.

She went on to say that as the number of African Americans in her area increased, they consulted each other and worked together to prepare for the strategic nature of higher education. Dr. Ethan continued:

Many of the people in the area in which I work also have a similar experience because many of us were staff [and] many of us were not from the dominate culture. We can talk about different ways that we were able to approach partners or meetings or situations. We [can] get our marketing strategy or whatever our proposal was as tight as it can be, so that we were respected and held in as much regard as someone just walking into the room automatically [receives] just because you were from this university or this department or have this title. I

[know] I might not be from that, but I have something of high quality to show you and I have other experiences to back that up.

Dr. Ethan's quote demonstrated how she was able to capitalize on her professionalism and experiences to change the perception of African American women in the academy and turned skeptics into allies and advocates for non-traditional positions.

**Finding #3 - One must have an awareness of your perception.** The third finding was related to the awareness of the perception of African American women in higher education and in society in general. All of the interview participants mentioned that their experiences in higher education were affected by the social construction of the character traits of being a woman and being African American. Stereotypes such as African American women were aggressive, angry, loud, overly assertive and incompetent were mentioned in the interviews as effecting how they were perceived and how colleagues interacted with them at their institutions. Sophia Mason, a study participant in a vice president-track position in academic affairs at South Three Public, stated in relation to perception and stereotypes that:

I think we have to be who we are, but we can't be angry Black women either. Now that is what the stereotype is and that is what people expect from us so when we go on our jobs we have to make sure that we always keep in mind how we come across.

Dr. Mason's comment illuminated the troubling perceptions of African American women not only at predominately white institutions, but in society in general. Even with professional credentials and education attainment, colleagues and constituents assumed that African American women were disruptive, difficult and unstable. This belief sometimes became a self-fulfilling prophecy because, due to the isolation they experience

at the institution, they became more aggressive to be able to advance and persist at the predominately white institution. When posed with this possibility, study participants acknowledged that negative stereotypes were prevalent in the environment; however, they did not feel that those stereotypes hindered them from achieving their goals. Olivia Ethan, a study participant in a vice president-track position in student affairs at South One Public, further elaborated on this theme when she said:

I do not feel oppressed as an African American or as a female. I do not come to work every day having those thoughts. But I definitely do realize that when I am outside of the area in which I work that there were not [African American females there]. I can be sitting in a room where I am the only African American or I am the only female, so then when I go into the room I definitely notice that. I am not sure that I am feeling oppressed by that, but feelings do come into play or thoughts do come into play as an African American woman [like] how am I going to negotiate this? You have some historical thoughts coming with you. [I am thinking] I am in here with the dominate culture. How do they perceive me and my ability to be able to do what I am here to do?

Dr. Ethan recognized that she was very visible in certain situations and that she was not just representing her unit, but also the societal and historical perception of African American women. In addition, in more gendered spaces, she was also challenged by patriarchy and societal gender roles. However, her quote demonstrated that even though she was aware of her perception, she was not crippled by it.

Addison Michael, a study participant in a provost-track position in academic affairs at South One Public, provided another example of the effects of perception. She shared her thoughts about how a conversation within her professional life shifted once people realized that she was an African American woman. Dr. Michael shared:

I think that being an African American woman [I] certainly recognize the moment when that was front and center in my professional experience either internally or externally. There were moments [when] I open the door and I know when I have

seen the shock on their face or when I have gone from a phone conversation to an in person conversation. That was unique to people of color and it was unique to younger professionals [rather] than older professionals. [In] those moments when they occur there was a change. There was a different dynamic so in a sense it was oppressive. I have an awareness of it and I have to function within that awareness because I never know what was going on in someone's head. I have to be aware of the possibilities of changing expectations or different expectations based on what they see and what they assume.

Dr. Michael's quote vividly explained the reality for the participants as they navigate their PWIs. They had to be vigilant in negotiating their perception. Further, Emma Noah, a study participant in a vice president-track position in administrative affairs at South One Public, expressed her frustration with having to continuously fight the perception of being an African American female. Dr. Noah stated:

You come in [and] you were African American [and] you were female and there was already some preconceived [thoughts about you]. You feel like you were working from a deficit. I feel like I came in and am working from a deficit. All of [my] forthrightness was now a negative, not a positive.

This quote expressed the constant struggle that African American women in senior-level position participating in this study had to continually demonstrate that they have the skills, knowledge and credentials to serve in those positions. Moreover, regardless of the length of time they were in position, they had a continual struggle due to the dynamic nature of higher education.

The quotes by Dr. Ethan, Dr. Michael and Dr. Noah demonstrated the awareness of their perception and the historical connection to their status in society as African American women. However, they went on to say later in their interviews that they were not paralyzed by this knowledge. In fact, it fueled them to be better and transcend these negative perceptions. Study participant Sophia Mason, in a vice president-track position

in academic affairs at South Three Public, summed this up by stating, “I never forget that I am a Black women, but I don’t think that it has prevented me from achieving the things that I wanted to achieve.” Dr. Mason’s comment exemplified the resiliency of the study participants.

**Finding #4 - Higher education was an isolating place.** The fourth finding revealed the isolation African American females experience in the academy. Most of the participants expressed some form of loneliness and isolation in the work that they do either because they were the only woman, the only African American, the only person who did the work or they perceived they were the only person that cared about the work that they did. Despite this isolation, these participants continued to persist because they felt their work was important. Emma Noah, a study participant in a vice president-track position in administrative affairs at South One Public, expressed this when she said, “Nobody care[s], nobody supports us, nobody is doing what they are supposed to do, but I am here fighting the good fight.” Emily Aiden, a study participant in a vice president-track position in academic affairs at South Two Public, also expressed these feelings as she recalled her experience when she started working at her institution.

I can remember being referred to as the other people. I can remember people would only come and visit me when they have problems. Whenever I would visit them with a problem, it was very difficult [to get help]. I got to be known as the person that would get it done. It’s a kind of interesting position. It has only been in the last five years that I can get people to actually collaborate and do things with me that do not look like me.

Dr. Aiden discussed how her perception of the university culture, and the isolation and marginalization she felt at her institution.

I describe it as the “closet concept.” People know that I am here. They know what I do. They know my approach. They know I am proactive on things. When there is a problem, I come out of the closet. As long as there is not a problem they keep me in the closet, which means they do not engage with me. If I don’t approach people for engagement, it will not happen.

Dr. Aiden was in an interesting position because her work was directly related to diversity initiatives; her main focus was executive-level student academic retention initiatives. Because she was such an effective administrator, the reports and tasks that she was required to complete were done seemingly automatically to her colleagues. However, when she attempted to initiate new projects, she mentioned an isolation of her work. Although she was provided with a budget, office space, staff and office tools to complete her routine responsibilities, she did not receive support from colleagues when she engaged in new projects. This inhibited her ability to work collaboratively with others and caused her to have to be proactive and almost “bullish” to advocate for herself at her predominately white institution.

Sophia Mason, a study participant in a vice president-track position in academic affairs at South Three Public, added another dimension to the isolation theme when she remarked that at some point because of her executive status, her White colleagues began to not view her as African American, and African American colleagues did not see her as “Black enough.” This created isolation within racial groups at the PWI. Even in situations where one should be able to connect to other African American women, they were not able to because of this perception. Dr. Mason stated:

You walk around and you were always mindful of Black people saying that you were not Black enough. And your White colleagues, they want to identify you as something else because that was more comfortable for them.

This quote exemplified a possible cost of obtaining a senior-level position and that isolation was a multidimensional theme that was reinforced by under-represented and majority colleagues at the predominately white institution.

Interview participants acknowledged that some of the isolation they experienced was self imposed either due to not knowing how to find other African American female senior- level executives on campus, focusing on learning a new position and a new institution or work/life duties overload. Emma Noah, a study participant in a vice president-track position in administrative affairs at South One Public, shared this sentiment in the following quote:

I don't think there were enough African American administrators considering our population, what we bring, what we do. I don't know. Were we an afterthought or were we even a thought? And then we don't come together. I don't know who they were on this campus. I have not reached out. I have not done what I need to do [to connect]. I have been focused on what I need to do. I would be curious to see who was here.

Dr. Noah's comments highlighted many of the interview participants responses related the cohesiveness of African American women in senior-level positions and higher education general. The problem was two-fold. Generally these women were leading organizations and in organizations that have few African American women, and they were so focused on the work that they were doing they were not able to reach out to break the isolation. Moreover, when they did think about reaching out they were not sure how to find other African American senior-level executive women.

The only participant that did not mention that isolation was relevant to her specifically, although she acknowledged it was a problem generally for African American women, was Madison Lucas, a study participant in a vice president-track position in

administrative affairs at Northeast College. She was recruited for her position by an African American female mentor she met in her doctoral program. In addition, there were several African American female senior-level administrators at her institution who provided her with support. These women met monthly to discuss issues that were specific to the African American female experience at PWIs. Moreover, Dr. Lucas also sought out the support of allies outside of the institution, which provided networking and mentorships opportunities. Dr. Lucas understood the importance of not being isolated and made a commitment to build a community to combat isolation.

**Finding #5 - Racism and sexism were still prevalent.** The fifth finding related to the experiences of African American female senior-level executives was that racism and sexism (“the –ism’s”) were still prevalent at the predominately white institution. Study participants labeled experiences as racist or sexist, but also in many different ways such as tokenism, marginalization and patriarchy. The effects of the experiences on the participants were challenging, but also inspiring. Mia Jackson, a study participant in a dean-track position in academic affairs at South One Public, mentioned that there were many times that she would, “go to a high level executive meetings where [she] did not feel that [her] ideas were as important as [her] presence.” Her perception of these meetings was that they needed a female and an African American at the meetings, so they called her. Her contribution to the meeting, regardless of her preparation and ideas she presented, was only her presence. She expressed that she felt marginalization by these experiences.

Isabella Jacob, a study participant in a dean-track position in academic affairs at Midwest College, shared this comment about the reasons she left her predominately white institution:

I was pressured to do things that I did not believe in. I was not supported by the administration, which was one reason that I left. Another reason was I got tired of all of the racism. If something went wrong I would have to take the blame and if I did good work I would not receive credit for that. It was like that whole flip flop.

Her comment demonstrated how the toxicity of “the –ism’s” created a workplace that was not positive for African American women. Amelia William, a study participant in a vice president-track position in academic affairs at Northeast Public, expressed that her mentors have told her and experiences have taught her that “a Black woman [was] going to have to work 150% to [a man’s] 75%.” A concrete example of the sexism at her institution was her significant inequity in pay with her colleagues in her department, in spite of the fact that she had advanced to senior leadership and had continually taken on more and more responsibility in her positions.

Emily Aiden, a study participant in a vice president-track position in academic affairs at South Two Public, mentioned the additional burden of being marginalized. She stated:

Here was the part that gets a little tricky. I set my own agenda and that part kind of bothers me because it was as if they know diversity was down the hall, but it will take care of itself. So I am constantly making sure [diversity] gets integrated into the fibers of the college and the university.

Because she was at the predominately white institution, the university culture does not feel pressure to actively embrace her. Just by virtue of her being physically at the

institution, they felt that they had “taken care of” diversity. To them, Dr. Aiden’s presence was enough.

Emma Noah, a study participant in a vice president-track position in administrative affairs at South One Public, mentioned the work expectation that racism and sexism places on African American females when she said, “They see me and they see that I am African American. You have to be better and of more without question.”

She went on to say that in spite of this expectation she was successful:

I am not going to fail. I am not going to fail. I am just not going to let you take it from me. I am going to be successful. You are going to thrive. We are not going waver, quiver or whatever. I just was not going to. You can put whatever obstacle in from of me and I am going to grow, I am going to develop, I am going to learn. There was so much to do and this was too important. I am going to take it and I am going to do it.

Dr. Noah’s quote exemplified the spirit of all of the interview participants. They recognized that “the –ism’s” existed but they worked to create a record of success, integrity and credibility to counteracted the effects of ‘the –ism’s” at the predominately white institution. These oppressions were not first and foremost in their minds; but rather they were a backdrop to their experiences.

**Finding #6 - Work/life balance was a myth.** The sixth finding regarding African American female senior-level executives at predominately white institutions was work/life unbalance. All participants mentioned the unbalance that can occurred in their higher education positions and how one should be willing to work through that unbalance to be successful. Included in this theme was work and role overload, so that even within the separate spheres of your professional and personal lives there was disequilibrium.

Lily Carter, a study participant in a vice president-track position in student affairs at South One Public, stated that, “I don’t believe in or support the notion of balance; I believe you choose at one time or another to accept the disequilibrium.” Her statement exemplified the sentiments of the interview participants that work and life balance was not an achievable goal. At some times one focused on work and at other times one focused on life. Addison Michael, a study participant in a provost-track position in academic affairs at South One Public, concurred and explained how work and life unbalance manifested in her life. Dr. Michael stated:

My life is my work. My work is my life. My work is my work. My life is my life. I know earlier I said that I know when to turn it off and I do, but I love what I do and what I do was part of who I am.

Dr. Michael’s sentiment exemplified the passion that the interview participants had for higher education and the work that they do. In some ways, they were so connected to the work that they chose not to balance their work and life. Sophia Mason, a study participant in a vice president-track position in academic affairs at South Three Public, added more to this observation in her comment that work/life unbalance was about choices:

I think you make a tradeoff at times depending on where you want to be professionally. I don’t think to be honest with the hours that I work most weekends that I would be able to have a family, a solid family unit.

Dr. Mason’s comment demonstrated that for some African American women in senior-level positions, they made a conscious decision to be unbalanced and focus on harmony, or forgo traditional family structures in order to be successful.

**Black Feminist Theory.** In addition to open coding, the interviews were analyzed specifically looking for the occurrence of themes related to the theoretical framework for the study. The theory linked to the first research question was black feminist theory. Black feminist theory spoke directly to the lived experiences of African American women. In Table 4.4, the a priori coding was listed with the number of times the theme was found in the interview transcript.

Table 4.4

*A priori coding based on the Research Study Conceptual Framework – Black Feminist Theory*

Theory	Coding
Black Feminist Theory	BFT: Dialogue in Knowledge (2)
Codes (4):	BFT: Ethic of Caring (6)
Quotation(s): 60	BFT: Knowledge through Wisdom (16)
	BFT: Personal Accountability (34)

Note: The abbreviation before the colon for the coding denotes the theory the code was most closely associated with from the researcher’s perspective. BFT meant black feminist theory.

Using the black feminist perspective as the lens of analysis allowed for the previously silenced voices of women of color to be heard (Collins, 1999; hooks, 1989; Moraga & Anzaldua, 1983). It highlighted that women of color, “not only experience a different reality than a group that rules, but [also] may interpret the reality differently than the dominate group” (P. H. Collins, 1989, p. 748). As a collective, the four themes of black feminist theory; specifically, concrete experience as a criterion of meaning, the use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims, the ethic of caring and the ethic of personal accountability; made significant contributions in clarifying an African American women’s position in an African American women’s voice (Collins, 1986). These tenets

of black feminist theory were found throughout the interviews of the participants in this study with the most salient tenets being knowledge through wisdom and personal accountability.

**Knowledge through Wisdom.** Regardless of the environment at a predominately white institution, all of the participants were determined to make that environment positive. They understood that their “ways of knowing” for how to manage the predominately white institution environment were counter to that of the norm. However, they were “called” to be in this environment and had a connection to the work that was greater than a desire for a title or a salary. Emma Noah, a study participant in a vice president-track position in administrative affairs at South One Public, described her connection to the predominately white institution when she said, “we were drawn to try to help, motivate, empower, mentor. Hopefully [we] have a seat at the table to allow people to hear what you have to say.” Her comment reflected a theme throughout the interviews that African American women knew they were outliers in higher education, but rather than shrinking away from that they used that difference to their advantage.

**Personal Accountability.** Lily Carter, a study participant in a vice president-track position in student affairs at South One Public, spoke of that difference when she discussed her motivation to work in higher education was actually for the “redemption” of her parents who were not allowed to attend a predominately white institutions, not personal gain. Dr. Carter shared that although she had reached a senior-level position she was, “never driven by position or title or money, [rather she was] driven by happiness and health.” Although she wanted to be challenged she was not sure where her path

would take her. She was personally accountable for the choices she made and willing to be open to possibilities for growth and development in higher education. She mentioned a colleague that had the same opportunities, but was not willing to take advantage of the opportunity. This colleague still had not obtained her doctoral degree. She stressed that personal accountability and empowerment was essential for positive experiences at the PWIs. Ava Jack, a study participant in a vice president-track position in administrative affairs at West College, also shared her approach to working in the higher education environment:

I do know that you have to have a strong sort of a backbone. You have to like yourself. You have to be aware of yourself and how you come off as a leader. I think I am a work in progress. If I learn something new I might change my mind. I believe in being open and accessible and being true of myself.

Dr. Jack's comment demonstrated that her success in higher education was less about the institution and more about her professional code and her lived experiences. Her statement exemplified the tenets of black feminist theory in that her lived experiences informed how she grew and succeeded at the predominately white institution.

Olivia Ethan, a study participant in a vice president-track position in student affairs at South One Public, shared the following quote regarding the responsibility she accepted as a visible leader at a PWI.

I know that there were other people out there watching and wondering about African American women and people of color who have been successful, what they have considered to be successful. And to know that I am one of those people is definitely something that I value. I know that there are people looking, and I want to set the best example for women who might be pursuing things like that.

Dr. Ethan's quote exemplified a black feminist perspective of the ethic of caring, mentoring others and leading by example (Collins, 2000). She was cognizant of the work that she was doing and she was accountable to others who view her as a role model. This philosophy supported her success at the predominately white institution.

This section of the chapter presented the findings for research question #1 which were (1) relationships and connection were essential, (2) strategic and political savvy were vital; (3) one must have an awareness of your perception; (4) higher education was an isolating place; (5) racism and sexism were still prevalent; and (6) work/life balance was a myth as well as an analysis of the interviews using the theoretical framework of black feminist theory. The next section presented the findings for research question #2 and the theoretical framework of intersectionality.

#### **DATA ANALYSIS FOR RESEARCH QUESTION #2:**

The second research question explored how African American female senior-level executives discussed how their multiple identities informed their experiences at predominately white institutions (PWI). Questions 3, 8 and 15 in the interview protocol provided insight into the multiple identities that these African American senior-level executives had and whether they were able to express them in higher education.

Using the transcripts, interviews were coded using ATLAS.ti, emerging themes generated and findings identified. Three findings regarding identities that inform African American women's perceptions at predominately white institutions were revealed, which were (7) the creation of a professional identity as the primary identity at PWI, (8) gender and race as prominent identities, and (9) personal persona purposely protected from PWI.

Although each of these themes was presented separately, they operated synergistically to influence the experiences of the study participants. Table 4.5 showed the relationships between the open coding, the emerging themes and the findings for this question. The remainder of the section provided an analysis of the study participants experiences in higher education based on these findings.

Overall, a key sentiment among all of the participants was that the professional identity was essential to their success at the predominately white institution. Younger professionals did not articulate the separation of their personas as distinctly as more seasoned professionals. That was not to say that this was the most important identity for them, as in most cases their most important and influential identity as it related to the study participants life choices and career decisions, was their family identity. As expected, all of the participants mentioned their race and gender identities informed and influenced their experiences at the PWI. The remainder of this section included an analysis of the interviews as related to the findings for research question #2.

Table 4.5

*Findings for Research Question # 2*

Findings	Emergent Themes	Codes
<b>Finding # 7 - Creation of a professional identity as the primary identity at PWI</b>	Professional Persona Codes (4): Quotation(s): 73	BFT: Personal Accountability (34) OC: Align the personal and professional (2) OC: Twice as Good/Confidence (12) OC: Workload Issues/Balance (17)
<b>Finding #8 – Gender and Race as prominent identities</b>	Gender Codes (5): Quotation(s): 21	INT: Age, Gender, male dominated(1) INT: Race and Gender (16) INT: Race, Gender, Nation (1) INT: Race, Gender, SES (1) INT: Gender (5)
	Race Codes (5): Quotation(s): 27	INT: Race (11) INT: Race and Gender (16) INT: Race, Gender, Nation (1) INT: Race, Gender, SES (1) OC: Race NOW (1)
<b>Finding #9 - Personal persona purposely protected from PWI</b>	Family Codes (3): Quotation(s): 12	OC: Family (12) OC: Motherhood (2) OC: Partnership (1)

Note: The abbreviation before the colon for the coding denoted the theory the code was most closely associated with from the researcher’s perspective. OC meant open coding; BFT meant black feminist theory; and INT meant intersectionality.

**Finding # 7 - Creation of a professional identity as the primary identity at PWI.** Many of the participants mentioned that they were completely different people in their personal lives and that they had a separate persona that was displayed in the work environment. Although the interviews do not reveal the personal persona, they confirmed that their professional persona was necessary to be successful in higher education. Moreover, these women actively separated their other identities from this professional

identity. Emily Aiden, a study participant in a vice president-track position in academic affairs at South Two Public, described this in the following quote:

And I do not take this home with me. When I walk out of this door at 5pm or 6pm, I leave it right here and I have too. When I walk out of this door it can't be about this institution, it had to be about my family.

Based on the participant's experiences, the professional persona was extremely confident, overly competent, non-emotional, graceful and well-versed in the norms of the institutional culture. More seasoned professionals explained that because they experienced scrutiny to a greater degree they had to be intensely conscious of their actions and reactions at PWIs. Emily Aiden, a study participant in a vice president-track position in academic affairs at South Two Public, shared the following regarding the need for professional persona:

When we start to wobble, we have to know who was watching. We can't let people see us wobble. I equate the wobbling with lack of confidence [on] a certain issue, not taking a position and even when we feel down and depressed and tears begin to appear. We were not afforded the opportunity to do that at PWIs. We can't let them see us sweat. It was the weakness they were looking for, so we were not about to have a weakness. You need to [show weakness] behind closed doors in the bathroom in another building or you do it at home, but you do not do it here.

A part of my job here was to hear the woes and moments of disappointment that happen to Black faculty, staff and Ph.D. students. [And I tell them] when you walk back on this campus you step like you were Daniel in the Lion's Den. Because it was not just for me, it was for all the students that were looking at you; it was for those that thought they cut you down and for all those that were not here and coming. So I need you to walk tall and walk strong, and you can't let anything bother you.

Dr. Aiden's quote exemplified the additional scrutiny placed on African American women and the perception of the environment at the predominately white institution. The biblical reference of African American women (and men) as Daniel in the Lion's Den,

provided a visual of the African American against the predominately white institution and highlighted the continual struggle to integrate diverse peoples and perspectives into the predominately white institution. Dr. Aiden's description of the professional persona was more heightened than other participants, but they all agree with the usefulness of the professional persona to be successful. Emma Noah, a study participant in a vice president-track position in administrative affairs at South One Public, described the actions of the professional persona as being somewhat of a performance.

It was a performance. It really was. I really want to get in here and do my work, [but] you have to be on [point], you have to be funny [and] you have to be likeable. It's almost like, as I sit and talk out loud, they have to like you before we do [anything together].

Dr. Noah's comments highlighted how the professional persona strategically created a space for African American women to mirror the values of the predominately white institution where the African American female was employed. It was not merely an identity that acted appropriately in the business setting, but rather it became a shielding to cover one's native culture in a foreign culture.

**Finding #8 - Gender and Race as prominent identities.** Gender and race continued to be prominent identities that informed the experiences of African American female senior-level executives at predominately white institutions. Data analysis for both these emergent themes was presented in the following section.

**Gender.** Study participants recognized that gender was an identity that they bring to the PWI. For most of the participants the effects of race and gender occurred simultaneously; however, they mentioned that gender was extremely salient in the

professional arena. Olivia Ethan, in a vice president-track position in student affairs at South One Public, remarked that:

I would say that in higher education it really all went back to, and I hate to use slang language, “Were you worth your salt?” Always feeling as though you have to prove that you were able to do this in a workplace where it was predominately male, whether that was White males, African American males, or Latino males. The first binary was male and female, and then you get into the race and ethnicity.

This quote clearly explained the awareness and salience of gender at the predominately white institution and the perception of secondary status for females. Study participants mentioned instances of being the only women in meetings and having to fight perceptions associated with gender stereotypes. Also participants mentioned being hired into positions that have the same job responsibilities as men, but with a lower title and salary. The multiplicative effects of this were enormous. Amelia William, in a vice president-track position in academic affairs at Northeast Public, mentioned that a colleague, who started at the same time that she did and now had the same title that she had, retired making \$30,000 more than she currently earned. In addition, another colleague with her same title with less tenure and a masters degree had a higher salary than her. When she asked about this to supervisor and human resource department said the reason was the number of staff he supervised. However, last year, this participant supervised several units and did not receive a substantial increase. When asked about the patriarchy and sexism at the predominately white institution, Mia Jackson, a study participant in a dean-track position in academic affairs at South One Public, stated that it, “rewards men for being male in very traditional ways.” Regardless of how capable African American

women were they continued to confront challenges related to sexism at the predominately white institution.

***Race.*** Study participant were cognizant that they brought their racial identity to the higher education environment as well. Participants mentioned situations where they were met with disbelief when they told colleagues, internal constituents or external constituents that they were a senior-level executive. Race was a salient identity for both African Americans and other ethnicities.

Although normally viewed and experienced as a negative identity, study participants also highlighted that this identity brought benefits both for the participants and the institution. Addison Michael, a study participant in a provost-track position in academic affairs at South One Public, discussed the effect of her race on being hired for her position. Dr. Michael stated:

Do I think that race played a part? Yes, it is hard to me to say that it doesn't, but I don't think it was THE reason why. I don't think it was the primary or secondary reason, but I think there was some appreciation for the gain that there could potentially be. [My being hired] was an accomplishment that my race played a part [in] but it was also important because I had come through as a student and employee, because I had degrees from the institution, because I was an ambitious and aspiring female and because I was Black. I think all of those things [were] packaged [and race played a role], not in an overriding way, but certainly an impactful way.

Dr. Michael's quote exemplified how these participants used their racial identity to their advantage in the predominately white institution.

**Finding #9 - Personal persona purposely protected from PWI.** This third finding related to the ability of African American senior-level executive's ability to bring their identities to predominately white institutions was personal persona was purposely

protected from the PWI. Included in this theme were family, motherhood and partnership. For the 10 participants that were mothers, they expressed a desire to be good mothers and this dimension of their lives was “front and center” as they made decisions regarding predominately white institutions. Moreover, many of the study participants planned their careers based on factors related to the personal persona. This included evaluating opportunities for promotion as well as exiting academia. Isabella Jacob, a study participant in a dean-track position in academic affairs at Midwest College, stated:

My first goal was to be a good mother and wife. So when my kids grow up they can say that my mother was there for them. That’s what I really want. The reason that I worked so hard was to provide for them and be there for my husband.

This quote exemplified the work/life imbalance theme described in the previous research question and the dominance of the family as an identity for African American women. This participant chose life, rather than work at a PWI by stepping down from her position.

Mia Jackson, a study participant in a dean-track position in academic affairs at South One Public, added an additional dimension to the discussion of family due to her sexual preference. Dr. Jackson stated that, “I am a queer woman and that opens up some very dense layers of patriarchy that were not always part of the analysis when straight women were involved.” Because she identifies as a queer woman, the affects of family identity (specifically partnership) challenged the norms of the heterosexual society. Those challenges affected her ability to express all of her identities at the predominately white institution.

**Intersectionality.** In addition to open coding, the interviews were analyzed specifically looking for the occurrence of themes related to the theoretical framework for the study. The theory linked to the second research question was intersectionality, which spoke to societal oppression and African American position in society. In Table 4.6, the a priori coding was listed with the number of times the theme was found in the interview transcript. Intersectionality was an “analysis claiming that systems of race, social class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, and age form mutually constructing features of social organization, which shape Black women’s experiences and, in turn, were shaped by Black women” (Collins, 2000, p. 320). It acknowledges that there was a multiplicative effect of being a member of more than one marginalized group. An intersectional analysis revealed that although the participants do not specifically mention it, they brought multiple identities into the workplace. A code analysis revealed that gender and race were the most salient intersectional aspects of the participant’s professional lives. Emma Noah, a study participant in a vice president-track position in administrative affairs at South One Public, remarked on the intersectional affects of race and gender on environment in higher education.

Table 4.6

*A priori coding based on the Research Study Conceptual Framework - Intersectionality*

Theory	Coding
Intersectionality Codes (7) Quotation(s): 35	INT: Age (1) INT: Age, Gender (1) INT: Race (11) INT: Race, Gender (16) INT: Race, Gender, SES (1) INT: Gender (1) INT: Sexual Orientation, Race (1)

Note: The abbreviation before the colon for the coding denoted the theory the code was most closely associated with from the researcher’s perspective. INT meant intersectionality.

Dr. Noah stated, “We have two barriers - first break the gender glass ceiling and then we have to break the racial glass ceiling.” Her comment acknowledged the intersectional affects of gender and race as well as the order that she experiences them in higher education. Addison Michael, a study participant in a provost-track position in academic affairs at South One Public, stated that although she recognized that race and gender were salient, she worked hard to overcome those phenotypical identities. Dr. Michael stated

If you take the time to learn your craft, really put your head down and take care of your responsibilities as you were charged [with], were always seeking others and being anxious to learn things you don’t know, then your race and gender were not what you were carrying on your sleeve anymore. Your credentials and your experience were what you were carrying on your sleeve and the added benefit was your race and gender.

Dr. Michael’s quote exemplified how she acknowledged her race and gender identities, but hoped that her professional persona would be at the forefront at the predominately white institution. Her professional persona was built through her mastery of her work, record of success and reputation at the institution.

Throughout their interviews, study participants mentioned other identities they have that they felt were also marginalized. One intersectional factor was age for younger professionals. Sophia Mason, a study participant in a vice president-track position in academic affairs at South Three Public, provided her perspective on this:

I have worked in environments where most often I come into a position where I am the right hand or that go to person. You have people that were much older who were White and who don't like that because they might have once been in that position. I get caught in resistance in different places. Typically I am the youngest person on the senior leadership team.

This quote exemplified the experience of young many African American females that have worked hard to get earn their credentials, but still were marginalized because of their age and lack of familiarity with the predominately white institution.

Lily Carter, a study participant in a vice president-track position in student affairs at South One Public, also mentioned an intersectional factor of origin as a source of marginalization and, sometimes, a disadvantage. Dr. Carter's "outsider" identity posed a challenge as she navigated the predominately white institution as she did not know the "unwritten rules" of the institution. Mia Jackson, a study participant in a dean-track position in academic affairs at South One Public, added her sexual preference identity changed how both men and women were able to relate to her.

Patriarchy is both more pronounced and more subtle for queer folks and queer women in particular. Queer men could access the perks of patriarchy if they so desired or attempted. Therefore queerness does not put them at a lower level in the hierarchy. Women do not have that luxury at all. When straight women enter into a conversation with administrators, there is a way that they can be associated with upper administrators; while with queer women there was not a possibility of association.

Thus her sexual preference identity had an intersectional effect on her experiences at the predominately white institution because it challenged the norms of the university and societal culture. Dr. Jackson was also an artist and activist scholar; so she had a particularly unique experience at the PWI. Interestingly, none of the participants mentioned socioeconomic status as an intersectional factor affecting their experiences at the PWI.

The findings for research question #2 were (7) creation of a professional identity as the primary identity at PWI, (8) gender and race as prominent identities, and (9) personal persona purposely protected from PWI as well as an analysis of the interviews using the theoretical framework of intersectionality. The next section will present the emergent themes for research question #3 and the theoretical framework of biculturalism.

### **DATA ANALYSIS FOR RESEARCH QUESTION #3:**

The third research question investigated how African American female senior-level executives cope with challenges and celebrate the successes they experience in their roles as senior-level executives at predominately white institutions (PWIs). Interview protocol questions 5-9, 14 and 16 were written to provide insight on this question. Based on interview analysis using ATLAS.ti, coding was conducted and emerging themes were identified. The findings for this research questions were (10) know yourself and focus on your goals; (11) identify something to ground you outside of the PWIs; (12) invest in your success through academic and professional preparation; and (13) advance to uplift others. Table 4.7 showed the relationships between the open coding, emerging themes

and findings for this question. Each theme was discussed and supported using quotes from the interviews.

Collectively, all of the participants had unique systems for coping in the predominately white institution including meditation, yoga, prayer, religion or combinations of these elements with support from outside of the institution. Spirituality was a key theme throughout all of the interviews. The participants expressed a desire to find meaning in their experiences that was greater than them. Emily Aiden, a study participant in a vice president-track position in academic affairs at South Two Public, shared the following advice regarding strategies for success:

Know what it is that you want to accomplish and make sure that you don't waiver because of what people suggest and recommend. [Also] find that one thing that keeps you grounded [and hold fast to that].

Dr. Aiden's quote revealed the importance of a strong personal foundation at a predominately white institution. Lily Carter, a study participant in a vice president-track position in student affairs at South One Public, mentioned that, "you have to learn to be in it but not of it," so for African American female senior-level executives this meant to learn how to operate and thrive in the predominately white institution environment.

Table 4.7

*Findings for Research Question # 3*

Findings	Emergent Themes	Codes
<b>Finding #10 - Know yourself and focus on your goals</b>	Know Yourself Codes (4) Quotation(s): 31	OC: AA Women Supporting each other (11) OC: Align the personal and professional (2) OC: Health (5) OC: Know Yourself (15)
<b>Finding #11 - Identify something to ground you outside of the PWIs</b>	Spiritual Grounding Codes (3) Quotation(s): 18	OC: Safe Space (4) OC: Spirituality (12) OC: Support (3)
<b>Finding # 12 - Invest in your success through academic and professional preparation</b>	Invest in Yourself Codes (10) Quotation(s): 98	BFT: Personal Accountability (34) OC: AA Women Supporting each other (11) OC: Advice (14) OC: Align the personal and professional (2) OC: Choice (1) OC: Confidence (3) OC: Invest in Yourself (18) OC: Relationship Building (14) OC: Soft Skills (1) OC: Twice as Good (12)
<b>Finding # 13 - Advance to uplift others</b>	African American Women helping each other Codes (3) Quotation(s): 30	OC: AA Women Supporting each other (11) OC: Advice (14) OC: Role Model (7)
	Advancement for the Greater Good Codes (5) Quotation(s): 57	OC: AA Women Supporting each other (11) OC: Advice (14) OC: Align the personal and professional (2) OC: Uplift (34) OC: Vision (1)

Note: The abbreviation before the colon for the coding denoted the theory the code was most closely associated with from the researcher's perspective. OC meant open coding; and BFT meant black feminist theory.

**Finding #10 - Know yourself and focus on your goals.** The participants all mentioned that in order to be successful at a predominately white institution one must

know yourself. Mia Jackson, a study participant in a dean-track position in academic affairs at South One Public, stated that her strategy for success was to, “know what was important to you and go in with a particular vision. Don’t get caught up in university politics.” Dr. Jackson’s quote showed that her experience in order to be successful one needed to focus on what’s important in the midst of all of the other distractions at predominately white institutions. Sophia Mason, a study participant in a vice president-track position in academic affairs at South Three Public, added that now, with her experience, she knew herself and she focused on her strengths. Dr. Mason stated:

I think after being a professional for X number of years, I finally know what I am good at and what I am not good at. I know what things that I can do, but it may require a whole lot of energy from [me].

Dr. Mason developed a work process and strategy that highlighted her strengths and supported the areas where she was less strong. Knowing yourself was essential to her managing and thriving at the predominately white institution.

Isabella Jacob, a study participant in a dean-track position in academic affairs at Midwest College, added another dimension to the know yourself finding related to health. Many of the participants mentioned the physical effects of the stress of working at the PWI. She stated that:

I think it is important to forgive and release. So many African American women have high blood pressure [and] heart disease. It is all because we were holding on to pain and hurt and we never forgive. We have to let it go.

Her comment exemplified the need for African American women to not internalize the affects of the challenges they experience, not just for the benefit of predominately white institution, but also for their own sake.

**Finding #11 - Identify something to ground you outside of the PWIs.** Both spirituality and religion were mentioned as a source of support at the PWI. Those that were religious mentioned that prayer and attending weekly church service was a constant source of strength. Amelia William, a study participant in a vice president-track position in academic affairs at Northeast Public, mentioned, “she needed [church] to get through the week.” She also mentioned being active in the church. She was the superintendent of Sunday school and sang in the church choir. For her, church was both a spiritual support and an area to focus on outside of the predominately white institution. In addition, Charlotte James, in a vice president-track position in student affairs at South One Public, mentioned that she was a very prayerful woman and in times of challenge, she used prayer to focus her thoughts and received spiritual strength to endure.

Although many of the participants were not religious, they still had a spiritual source that provided them with strength, comfort, peace and rest as they navigated predominately white institutions. Addison Michael, a study participant in a provost-track position in academic affairs at South One Public, stated the following when asked how religion or spirituality played a role in her professional life:

I think that I am not a highly religious person, but I think I have solid core of ethos and spirituality in a sense that my [ethical] code was solid. My core was solid. I find my balance. I think in recognizing that things happen for a reason and that some things were charted in a way that I have no control over.

Lily Carter, a study participant in a vice president-track position in student affairs at South One Public, shared in response to this same question:

I have a place that I go that is supernatural, it is not human. It is extremely safe and provides me with peace. They say that I am an eternal optimist, but this was

so much bigger than me. [I understand that things are] just as it is supposed to be, if I stay true to myself.

Dr. Carter acknowledged her spiritual connection, which helped her place the challenges of the PWI in the proper perspective. Both of these quotes exemplified the experiences of all of the study participants. In order to succeed in the higher education environment a spiritual grounding was crucial to obtain peace in what can be a chaotic environment.

**Finding # 12 - Invest in your success through academic and professional preparation.** Participants stressed that investing in yourself was necessary to be successful at a predominately white institution. They mentioned this theme in many different ways including making sure you have academic credentials that you need to advance, volunteering for new assignments to acquire new skills as well as making sure you were visible and developing new relationships. Participants mentioned that sometimes this required that you incur the personal expense of paying for and obtaining outside professional development if one's current workplace was not offering it. Emma Noah, a study participant in a vice president-track position in administrative affairs at South One Public, shared the following insights about how to invest in yourself.

Work hard but establish networks. Do get the mentors. Do join organizations, which was everything that I did not do. Get networked. Meet people make friends. Find mentors. Find people that you aspire to and talk with [them]. Work hard and make sure you were on point.

First and foremost in Dr. Noah's remarks was work hard. This was a common theme from the study participants. They all worked extremely hard and positioned themselves to be successful. Sophia Mason, a study participant in a vice president-track position in

academic affairs at South Three Public, added to the theme of hard work and investing in yourself in the following quote:

I have a philosophy I am not going to allow anyone to make me fail. If it's on me then I can understand, but I am not ever going to [fail]. I'm going to work hard. I will put in the hours. If I have to come in early or stay late, it is going to be done and it will be done well. I still live by that saying that we have to work twice as hard to be considered half as good.

Dr. Mason's quote exemplified the drive that participants used to fuel their success.

Olivia Ethan, a study participant in a vice president-track position in student affairs at South One Public, provided some practical advice for how to invest in yourself. Dr.

Ethan stated:

It's about growth and professional development for what you plan to do next. At an institution of higher education many people were looking for what was next. Talking about when were you going to start that Master's degree or what Ph.D. program were going to apply to because I know from working within the university to many those things matter. It was not always based on what education you came with but what's on that paper matters too. [Think about] how do you balance those informal experiences that you have had, those experiences that can't be put down resume as a degree, your professional experience to help you be marketable?

Dr. Ethan's clear advice for how to invest in yourself demonstrated the need for professional development and educational attainment to be successful at predominately white institutions. Addison Michael, a study participant in a provost-track position in academic affairs at South One Public, also shared thoughts about taking on additional professional development opportunities and educational attainment.

Never say no when you were being asked to do something that was ethical and right. Always be willing to take on a challenge when you were given one and always seek a challenge when you were not being given one. It can go both ways sometimes you can be asked to do things when your plate was full; find a way to do it. And you can NOT be asked to do things that need to be done, so volunteer

to do those. You have to put yourself out there to demonstrate your skills and not wait for people to ask you.

Credentials were a must. Again we were not that far from our past. Experience alone or working alone was not going to do it. Don't give them a reason to tell you no. You have to have all of your ducks in a row and don't let someone [tell you] that's why not. You don't want to give someone an excuse for you.

The key part of Dr. Michael's quote and a theme in all of the interviews was that one cannot wait for others to provide them with an opportunity; as that opportunity might come or it might not. Instead, one needed to seek out opportunity, and be ready to and willing to accept opportunities when they become available.

**Finding # 13 - Advance to uplift others.** All of the study participants connected their success and advancement in higher education to uplift of others. The two emergent themes in this finding were (a) African American women helping each other and (b) advancement for the greater good. Data analysis for each of the emergent themes was in the following sections.

*African American women helping each other.* The first emergent theme in this finding was African American women helping each other. All of the participants mentioned that as African American women progressed to senior-level leadership of higher education, they had to find a way to help each other. Interestingly, most of the participants were not in mentorship relationships with other African American women specifically. Three were able to connect to women through national organizations that facilitated those relationships. However, only one had strong ties to African American senior-level executives at her institution. Ava Jack, a study participant in a vice president-track position in administrative affairs at West College, stated the following

related to this theme:

I think we need to do more to cultivate, support and create pipelines specifically that help African American women overcome some of the stressors [of being in academia]. I think we need to be more supportive of each other. I found that some of the people that surprised me the most were other African American women who were not on board and were not supportive. We have to get over some of the petty jealousy that women bring to the workplace. But I think African American women have a particular way of being with each other and I think we need to call that out.

Dr. Jack's comment echoed participant's sentiments about relationships with other African American females. When present, these relationships were not always positive. However, all of the study participants believed that this finding was necessary for the continued success of African American women in academia. Amelia William, a study participant in a vice president-track position in academic affairs at Northeast Public, also mentioned the need for them to support each other because of the unique perspective that they have and the unique set of stressors they experience in higher education. Having support from someone who knows exactly the pressure one was feeling was very helpful in providing sage advice and supporting them through challenges.

*Advancement for the Greater Good.* The second emergent theme, advancement for the greater good, was related to how African American women celebrate success at the predominately white institution. All of the interview participants mentioned that they viewed their success as a success for the community. The work that they do was about much more than them. They have an obligation and responsibility to uplift the community, and they wanted their work to show their commitment to higher education

and community service. Olivia Ethan, a study participant in a vice president-track position in student affairs at South One Public, concluded her interview by saying:

I think that in addition to what that I have said [I want] to reinforce that once you get to that place where you feel that you have arrived at the goal that you set for yourself, realize that there were other people that were just like you that were trying to get there. Always give back and do whatever you can to continue that upward mobility for other African American women. Continue to be that role model and seek out those staff people and help them to grow as leaders and develop themselves as well. I think that that was something that all African American women need to remember and to do.

Isabella Jacob, a study participant in a dean-track position in academic affairs at Midwest College, shared the same sentiment at the conclusion of her interview. She stated:

I would say never forget why you do the work. For all of my sisters out there doing the work, never forget why you decided to do the work. For most of us it was about helping our community. When I graduate my whole family graduates and when I get a promotion my whole community gets a win.

Dr. Ethan and Dr. Jacob's comments were consistent with all of the interview participants. They were not haughty or prideful in their successes. They were grateful and humbled by the having the opportunity to be in their positions; and felt that their advancement was an advancement for their families, for African Americans and their community.

**Biculturalism.** In addition to open coding, the interviews were analyzed specifically looking for the occurrence of themes related to the theoretical framework. The theory for this question was biculturalism. In Table 4.8, the a priori coding was listed with the number of times the theme was found in the interview transcript.

Biculturalism was used to explore how minority professionals develop competencies to meet career expectations in white organizational cultures. Research revealed that African American women perceived themselves as living in two distinct cultural contexts, one Black the other one White. These women compartmentalized the various components of their lives in order to manage the bicultural dimensions and tended to have highly complex life structures to embrace both cultural contexts (Alfred, 2001; Bell, 1990; Cheatham, 1990). Much of the literature presented biculturalism as an abhorrent occurrence.

Table 4.8

*A priori coding based on the Research Study Conceptual Framework - Biculturalism*

Theory	Coding
Biculturalism Codes (5): Quotation(s): 18	BC: Cultural Emerson (1) BC: Cultural Isolation (11) BC: Cultural Misunderstanding (3) BC: Cultural Silencing (2) BC: Cultural Switching (4)

Note: The abbreviation before the colon for the coding denoted the theory the code was most closely associated with from the researcher's perspective. BC meant biculturalism.

Throughout the interviews, many of the participants mentioned that they were completely different people in their personal lives and that they had a separate persona that was depicted in the work environment. They lived bicultural lives, and actively worked to separate their other identities from this identity. However, the use of biculturalism served a positive purpose to protect their personal persona or support appropriate professional relations. The participants used this strategy to be successful at

predominately white institutions. Emily Aiden, a study participant in a vice president-track position in academic affairs at South Two Public, described the benefits of this in the following quote:

I made a conscious decision that I cannot take things home with me. I need my down time. I need moments when I don't think about it. And here was the other side of it. Because I have moments that I don't think about it I am refreshed when I come back to it. I need to feel disconnected long enough so when I come back to it I have the proper approach. But by the time I walk into the office, I have an answer and [that answer] could be just [that I am] reenergized.

Dr. Aiden's quote highlighted the restorative qualities of biculturalism. Sophia Mason, a study participant in a vice president-track position in academic affairs at South Three Public, mentioned how this separation was also helpful to support staff management.

Some people cannot distinguish the work part from the personal part so I don't hang out with the people that I work with. I really always keep that professional distance because if I need to chastise you about something I don't need it to be blown out of proportion or you getting all dramatic.

Dr. Mason's quote exemplified the isolation that was inherent in management and the use of biculturalism to maintain distance. Addison Michael, a study participant in a provost-track position in academic affairs at South One Public, summed up the need for separate lives in the following quote:

I think in a high pressure executive world particularly for women and people of color and women of color, we are balancing so many things. We are CEOing a lot of places, not just at work. We are CEOing at home and balancing the two as well as different societal issues.

Dr. Michael's quote exemplified how the use of biculturalism was actually a role management tool to maintain and balance the many different responsibilities African American women were balancing both at the higher education institution and in society.

This section of the chapter presented an overview of the coding procedure used in the study. Moreover, a synthesis of the findings related to each research question and the emergent themes revealed from the open coding and theoretical framework was discussed. The next section of the chapter was the summary.

### **Summary of the Chapter**

Overall this study provided insight into the experiences, challenges and strategies for success of 12 African American female senior-level administrators at predominately white institutions. The narrative in this chapter presented an overview of the implementation of the study. The second section of this chapter presented descriptive statistics regarding the participants including a profile of the participants and their institutions. The third section presented the findings by research question both thematically through open coding and based on the theoretical framework. The chapter concluded with a synopsis.

The findings for this study of African American female senior-level executives at predominately white institutions included: regarding experiences (1) relationships and connection were essential; (2) strategic and political savvy were vital; (3) one must have an awareness of your perception; (4) higher education was an isolating place; (5) racism and sexism were still prevalent; and (6) work/life balance was a myth; regarding identities (7) creation of a professional identity as the primary identity at PWI, (8) gender and race as prominent identities, and (9) personal persona purposely protected from PWI; and regarding strategies to cope with challenges and celebrate successes (10) know

yourself and focus on your goals; (11) identify something to ground you outside of the PWIs; (12) invest in your success through academic and professional preparation; and (13) advance to uplift others.

Chapter Five of this dissertation presents the results related to the research questions, summary of the overall study, conclusions drawn from the research findings, a discussion of the research findings, recommendations and future research.

## **Chapter Five – Discussion and Recommendations**

### **Introduction**

Studies indicated that despite achieving high levels of educational success and advancing to senior-level positions within academia, African American females continue to be outliers in academia (Bailey, 2010; Farmer, 1993; Gregory, 1999; Moses, 1989; Ramey, 1995). African American women experienced intersectional effects of racism and sexism, isolation, distrust and tokenism as well as struggled with navigating the organizational structure of the academic institution (Carroll, 1982; Howard-Vital, 1989; Lloyd-Jones, 2009; Mosley, 1980; Zamani, 2003). As diversity was central to the educational mission of higher education (Hurtado, 2007), it was important to explore the challenges that under-represented populations might face in academia in order to develop solutions to encourage their participation in higher education. This study focused on an exploration of African American females in senior-level executive positions in higher education, specifically dean, provost, vice president and president track positions at predominately white institutions (PWIs), to examine their experiences, challenges and strategies for success.

In this chapter, the researcher provides the discussion and recommendations for the research study including statement of the problem, research questions and methods. The chapter continues with a synopsis of the findings, the limitations of the research and the significance of the study. The chapter concludes with the recommendations for practice, directions for future research, conclusion and a summary.

## **Statement of the Problem, Research Questions and Method**

Education was considered the great equalizer through which anyone had an opportunity to be successful (Hurtado, 2007; Lloyd-Jones, 2009). Implied in this ideal was the duty of academia to provide equal access and opportunity for people from ethnically diverse populations to all areas of higher education. Although key legal decisions in the 1960s and 1970s, such as affirmative action legislation supplementing the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and women's rights legislation, accelerated recruitment efforts of African American women in academia, their numbers were still small (Alfred, 2001; Farmer, 1993; Jackson, 2004b; Mosley, 1980; Wilson, 1989). According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in Fall 2009 there were 230,579 higher education executive, administrative and managerial professionals of which 13,394 (5.8%) were African American women (U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics, 2010). This number was low given that in 2009 African American females represented 6.8% of the U.S. population and 8.8% of the fall undergraduate enrollment (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Researchers have found that African American female professionals working in higher education experienced an insider versus outsider phenomenon (Aronson & Swanson, 1991; Collins, 1986; Lorde & Clarke, 2007), which refers to an experience of being physically allowed to enter a place, but not being recognized in the space. Moreover, Black women experienced isolation, discrimination due to racism and sexism, and a lack of support in career development as compared to their male and white colleagues (K. Allen, et al., 1995; Carroll, 1982; Collins, 2000; DuCille, 1994; Etter-

Lewis, 1991a; Fleming, 1984; J. James & Farmer, 1993; Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 1996; Loder, 2005; Lorde & Clarke, 2007; Moses, 1989; Mosley, 1980; Myers, 2007).

As a result of this inhospitable environment higher education institutions may experience difficulties in retaining African American females, thus contributing to the lack of diversity at the institution.

However, given the changes in the demographics of students that were attending institutions of higher education, the need for a diverse faculty and administration was dire. Diversity was necessary in academia because it enriched the educational experience for all students matriculating at the institution and fostered an exchange of ideas of people with varied life experiences (Turner, 2008). Student exposure to diverse people fostered an acceptance of experiences and cultures that students might not have encountered prior to attending the institution (W. R. Allen, et al., 2000; Fleming, 1984; Gardiner, et al., 2000; Patitu & Hinton, 2003). Moreover, diverse professionals in academia serve as role models and advocates for under-represented students as well as provided additional perspectives for their majority colleagues on issues related to diversity and higher education governance (W. A. Brown, 1997; Crews, 2007; Patitu & Hinton, 2003; Stroud, 2009).

A review of recent research on African American women in higher education demonstrated that there was not a great deal of research related to African American women in senior-level executive positions in higher education. Yet, the current and developing body of research regarding African American women in higher education provided a groundwork for relating their experiences in higher education. In critiquing

previous research, many of the recent research studies focused on African American senior-level executives at historically black colleges and universities (HBCU) (Bailey, 2010; Green, 2009). In addition, previous studies that focused on African American females do not separate the experiences of faculty from the experiences of administrators or the experiences of women and men (Croom, 2011; Ramey, 1995; Singh, et al., 1995). Moreover, most studies were conducted in the 1990's and thus did not reflect societal changes related to the need for diversity (A. Davis, 1994; Farmer, 1993; Gregory, 1999; Ramey, 1995; Singh, et al., 1995). Furthermore studies used a critical race theory or black feminist theoretical framework for the study (Croom, 2011; Holmes, 2004; Wyche-Hall, 2011). Therefore, they explored the experiences of African American females, but do not inform questions related to the reasons for the challenges or strategies needed for success. Methodologically, the studies conducted did not create a complete picture of the experiences of African American female senior-level administrators at predominately white institutions. Most of these studies were qualitative and delimited by a geographic region or University system focus. Thus, these studies cannot be generalized to be the experiences of all African American female administrators. The few quantitative studies conducted can be generalized, but were conducted almost 20 years ago or lacked the rich descriptions of the lived experiences of African American female senior-level administrators at predominately white institutions (Singh, et al., 1995).

In their collective suggestions for future studies, researchers noted that more studies were needed that examine the African American female experience in all areas of academe because, despite their rich history in higher education, their voice was absent

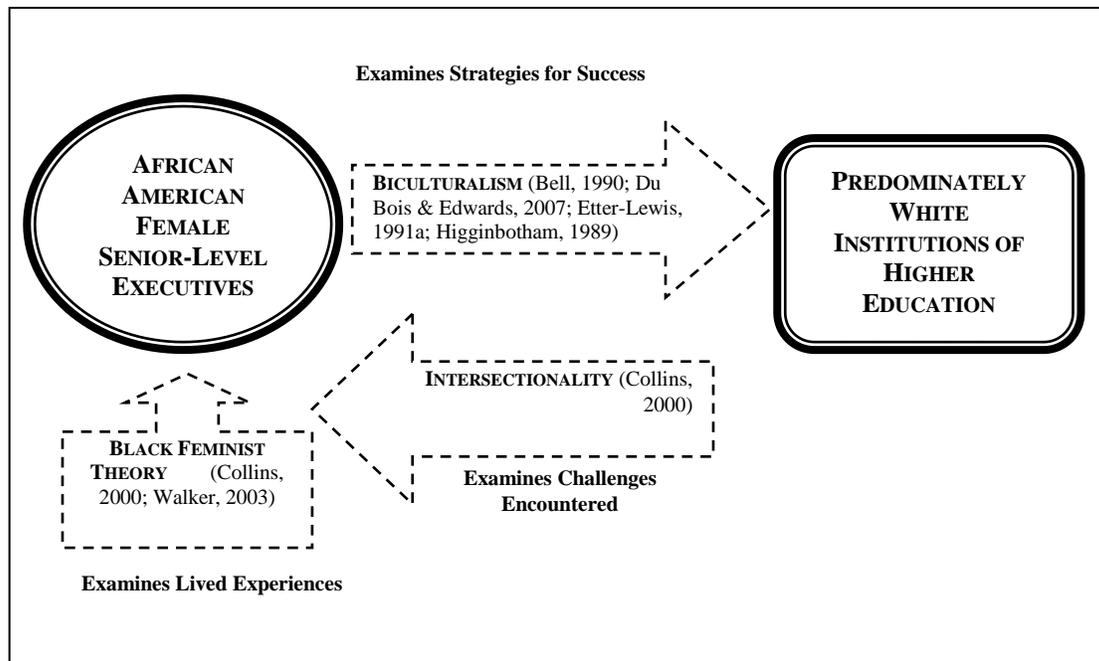
from educational literature (Stroud, 2009; Wolfe, 2010; Zamani, 2003). Researchers also suggested that more studies of women at predominately white institutions would help - create a more complete picture of their experiences, challenges and strategies for success (Bailey, 2010). Moreover, scholars suggested that in addition to senior-level executives, future studies should include assistant and associate executive level positions to increase the number-of participations in the studies and provided for a richer understanding of the experiences of African American women in senior-level positions in predominately white institutions (Bailey, 2010; Wolfe, 2010). This study added to the current literature by addressing these gaps. The following research questions were used to guide this research study:

1. How do African American female senior-level executives describe their workplace experiences at predominately white institutions (PWIs)?
2. How do African American female senior-level executives discuss how their multiple identities inform their experiences at predominately white institutions (PWIs)?
3. How do African American female senior-level executives cope with challenges and celebrate successes they experience in their roles as senior-level executives at predominately white institutions (PWIs)?

This qualitative study used a phenomenological perspective to address the research questions, as phenomenology was uniquely suited to explore participants lived experiences (Guido, et al., 2010; Perl & Noldon, 2000). The conceptual framework for the study was based on the theoretical concepts of black feminist theory, biculturalism

and intersectionality. The combination of these theories was appropriate for researching the lived experiences of African American women (Barrett, et al., 2003; Collins, 2000; Du Bois & Edwards, 2007). Black feminist theory addressed the lived experiences of African American women (Collins, 2000); intersectionality highlighted the oppression of African American women (Collins, 2000) and biculturalism explained how African American women adapt to be successful (Barrett, et al., 2003). Figure 5.1 was a graphic representation of the conceptual framework.

Figure 5.1 Conceptual Framework for the Study of Black Feminist Theory, Biculturalism and Intersectionality



The research design was a multi-case, oral history through guided interviews. The selection criteria for study participants included females that identify as (a) African American or Black who were (b) currently or formally employed as a dean, provost, vice president or president track-position in (c) administrative affairs, academic affairs, or student affairs at a predominately white institution in the United States. Purposive sampling and snowballing techniques were used to recruit a sample size of 12 participants. The researcher conducted two-part interviews per participant; specifically an introductory and a substantive. Substantive interviews were transcribed and data analyzed two ways, using open coding developed using inductive analysis and using a priori codes developed from the conceptual framework of black feminist theory, biculturalism and intersectionality. Emerging themes were organized and quotes used to identify each phenomenon. The next section of the chapter discusses the findings of the study.

## **Discussion of Findings**

Using open coding and the theoretical framework of black feminist theory, biculturalism and intersectionality, participant interviews were analyzed and emergent themes identified for each of the research questions (See Table 5.1). A synopsis of these findings is presented in this section of the chapter.

### **Findings for Research Question #1**

The first research question for this study was: How do African American female senior-level executives describe their workplace experiences at predominately white

institutions (PWIs)? The findings from the data analysis were: (1) relationships and connection were essential; (2) strategic and political savvy were vital; (3) one must have an awareness of your perception; (4) higher education was an isolating place; (5) racism and sexism were still prevalent; and (6) work/life balance was a myth.

Table 5.1

*Finding related to the Research Questions for the Study*

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**Research Question #1: How do African American female senior-level executives describe their workplace experiences at predominately white institutions (PWIs)?**

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- Finding #1: Relationships and connection were essential
  - Finding #2: Strategic and political savvy were vital
  - Finding #3: One must have an awareness of your perception
  - Finding #4: Higher education was an isolating place
  - Finding #5: Racism and sexism were still prevalent
  - Finding #6: Work/life balance was a myth
- 

**Research Question #2: How do African American female senior-level executives discuss how their multiple identities inform their experiences at predominately white institutions (PWIs)?**

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- Finding #7: Creation of a professional identity as the primary identity at PWI
  - Finding #8: Gender and race as prominent identities
  - Finding #9: Personal persona purposely protected from PWI
- 

**Research Question #3: How do African American female senior-level executives cope with challenges and celebrate successes they experience in their roles as senior-level executives at predominately white institutions (PWIs)?**

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- Finding #10: Know yourself and focus on your goals
  - Finding #11: Identify something to ground you outside of the PWI
  - Finding #12: Invest in your success through academic and professional preparation
  - Finding #13: Advance to uplift others
-

Overall, the participants had positive comments regarding their experiences at the predominately white institutions. They recognized the structural and oppressive forces i.e. racism and sexism existed, but they worked diligently to ensure that they attained the necessary educational credentials, professional development, work experiences and communication skills to be successful at the PWI. The participants stressed that relationships were critical to having positive experiences at the predominately white institution and counted mentors, allies and partnerships as essential. Cultivating cross-gender, cross-racial relationships were necessary to achieve both professional goals and changes in university culture. For some participants the development of these relationships was more natural than others as they had only attended or worked at predominately white institutions, so they had no reference for professional experiences where addressing these challenges was not necessary. This theme revealed how relational higher education was and the fact that perceptions mattered. To be successful at PWIs, one must develop supportive relationships (allies, mentors and partnerships) to help one persist.

The participants also remarked about higher education as a strategic environment and the need to learn the informal rules of the university as well as the culture to have positive experiences. It was important to note that the experiences and impact of African American female senior-level executives varied at different types of predominately white institutions i.e. urban, rural, private or public. Moreover, based on the size of the institution, the influence and opportunities for advancement for the African American senior-level executive also varied. Amelia William, a study participant in a vice

president- track position in academic affairs at Northeast Public, moved from a dead-end position at an HBCU to a position with upward mobility at a rural PWI where she was able to have a positive influence. As African American women consider the impact that they would like to have, they should also consider which type of institution was the best one to achieve their goals.

Participants also stressed that one should have an awareness of the perception of African American women in higher education and in society. This awareness was protective in that it was not meant to keep one from being successful, but rather it was important to be aware of the environment and be ready to adapt one's behavior and communication strategies depending on the situation. Throughout the interviews the participants mentioned the higher-level of scrutiny they received from others. However just as detrimental, in my opinion, was the self-monitoring they engaged in daily as they assessed situations. The participants were constantly adjusting their behaviors based on their understanding of how others perceived them or to try to change the perceptions of others. This monitoring led to the isolation, which was another finding of the study.

Participants mentioned that higher education was an isolating place and that creating a connection with other African American women was ideal, as it facilitated the creation of a safe space and to counter isolation. Moreover, in terms of isolation at the PWI, most participants admitted that they also have some responsibility in the isolation they experience. Many of the study participants did not seek out other African American women for a host of reasons including the lack of knowledge regarding where to look for them; lack of time to seek them out if they did know where to look for them; or lack of

the ability to maintain a meaningful relationship if they did find them. One participant Ava Jack, a study participant in a vice president-track position in administrative affairs at West College, mentioned the need to create a pipeline of African American female leaders. Charlotte James, a study participant in a vice president-track position in student affairs at South One Public, suggested creating an internship program for African American women interested in administration to provide first-hand experience and mentorship regarding what was needed to be successful. Although similar to the ACE Fellows program that was offered by the American Council on Education, this program would focus on preparing African American female college students and new professionals in higher education for the challenges of working at a predominately white institution. It would be a directed program that would match students with African American female leaders in their interest areas, i.e. if the student was interested in advancement services they would be matched with an African American female in this area. Both of these suggestions were proactive steps where African American women assisted each other, regardless of whether the university culture shifts to be more supportive of their needs. This solution demonstrated the applicability of black feminist theory as a lens to analyze the participant interviews.

Participants reinforced that racism and sexism “the –ism’s” were still salient at the PWI. They used terms like tokenism, marginalization, lack of equity and isolation, but the cause of many of the challenges was racism or sexism. Participants shared experiences of being the “only” twice over; specifically the only African American and the only woman, and the challenges this presented when navigating the predominately

white institution. They also mentioned the mechanics of how sexism and racism were experienced at a PWI. No longer was it a “bold faced assault”, but rather it was carried out through institutional policies and procedures. Moreover, the PWI received benefits simply by having an African American female in a senior-executive role. But in most cases the institution, like the society it represented, was still evolving around areas of inclusion; and these professionals experienced the stress associated with that growth. However, as mentioned, the participants tried not to internalize these aggressions.

Another important finding was related to managing the demands of work and life at the predominately white institution. From the participant’s perspective, work/life balance was a myth, and they shared that from their experience the way to navigate the PWI was to know that there would be disequilibrium. In essence, one actually chose to live in that unbalance. Thus the goal was not work/life balance, but rather work/life harmony.

Open coding findings for research question #1 were consistent with the theoretical framework of black feminist theory. Black feminist theory addressed the specific experiences of African American women based on historical context and societal oppression, but placed emphasis on the understanding and empowerment of African American women. Using the black feminist perspective as the lens of analysis allowed for the previously silenced voices of women of color to be heard (Collins, 1999; hooks, 1989; Moraga & Anzaldua, 1983). Collins described creating black feminist thought as a process that included recapturing the lost knowledge of African American females (Collins, 2000). Collins presented themes that were seminal to black feminist thought

including affirmation of the importance of Black women's self-definition and self-valuation, attention to the interlocking nature of oppression specifically race, gender and class, and efforts to redefine and explain the importance of Black women's culture (Collins, 1986). Specifically for the African Americans that were at a predominately white institution, it addressed the isolation, marginalization and microaggressions they experience daily. Black feminist theory demonstrated an awareness of the challenges at a PWI but also the African American women's self-confidence, self-empowerment and resilience.

### **Findings for Research Question #2**

The second research question was: How do African American female senior-level executives discussed how their multiple identities inform their experiences at predominately white institutions (PWIs)? The findings from the data analysis were: (7) creation of a professional identity as the primary identity at PWI, (8) gender and race as prominent identities, and (9) personal persona purposely protected from PWI.

Participants discussed the professional persona as the identity that performed their experience at the PWI. This persona was capable of resisting the negative effects of being at the PWI. Characteristics of this persona include confidence, capableness, strength, decisiveness, and a mastery of the university culture. Participants hoped that this was the primary identity that colleagues saw and that it counteracted the negative perception and stereotypes of African American women. However, participants recognized that when they entered a room with new constituents, as well as some old ones that the professional persona might not counterbalance their racial and gender

identities. These phenotypical identities and the reaction to them actively changed the dynamics of their experiences on campus. Although participants have a personal person (denoted by codes of family, motherhood and partnerhood), they were not inclined to bring this persona to the workplace. These participants actively keep these identities separate from their professional persona.

In reflecting on this finding, I wonder if, in some ways, the self-regulations mentioned previously and the creation of the professional persona reinforced the norms of the dominate culture. Therefore, even though African American women were in the space (the PWI) their diverse perspectives were not. Essentially, the PWI had racial diversity, but did not receive the full benefit of the diversity of ideas and perspectives. In other words, the institution was desegregated, but not integrated.

The open coding findings for research question #2 were consistent with intersectionality. Intersectionality was an “analysis claiming that systems of race, social class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, and age form mutually constructing features of social organization, which shape Black women’s experiences and, in turn, were shaped by Black women” (Collins, 2000, p. 320). Intersectional analysis identified political, structural and representational oppression (Crenshaw, 1991). Most participants focused on the intersectional effects of race and gender more than other identities. But through interview analysis experiences were captured where participants mentioned how other dimensions of their identities affected the way that people interacted with them and in turn their experiences at the institution. Examples of these dimensions included age, origin and sexual preference.

### **Findings for Research Question #3**

The third research question was: How do African American female senior-level executives cope with challenges and celebrate successes in their roles at predominately white institutions (PWI)? The findings from the data analysis were: (10) know yourself and focus on your goals; (11) identify something to ground you outside of the PWI; (12) invest in your success through academic and professional preparation; and (13) advance to uplift others.

All of the participants had a focus outside of the educational institution to keep them grounded. In addition, many had a religious and/or spiritual focus that provided an enlightened perspective related to their work at the PWI. Some felt that the work they were doing at the predominately white institution was the work they were born to do, and connected an almost supernatural purpose to their being at the predominately white institution. Participants also mentioned that their families, church communities, professional organizations and community engagement were all places for grounding.

Participants shared that knowing yourself was also a strategy for success at the PWI. Each of the participants was focused on the impact they wanted to have at the institution as well as the things that they do not want to do. Of course, they all had professional responsibilities that they might not agree with, but in general they focused on the bigger picture. Synergistic with knowing yourself was the finding of investing in yourself.

Participants stated that colleagues, who challenged their ability to be senior-level executives, were not able to dispute educational credentials, professional development

acquired, work experiences and soft skills. Participants stressed the need to make sure to have the requisite educational preparation for an executive level positions. Moreover, they shared the need to network, find mentors, develop allies, and nurture relationships that promoted success.

The participants also stated that a way they celebrate their successes was generally silently. The work that they did was so challenging and dynamic that once they had a success, they moved on to the next challenge. However, each of those successes built their credibility, which bolstered the professional persona. In addition, participants said they celebrated their successes by using their position and power to help others. From their perspective a key component of their job was to uplift, whether it be African Americans or others. Therefore when they advanced, the entire community advanced. Participants recommended that as African American women succeeded they should be mindful of the reason they do the work and stay focused on their goals.

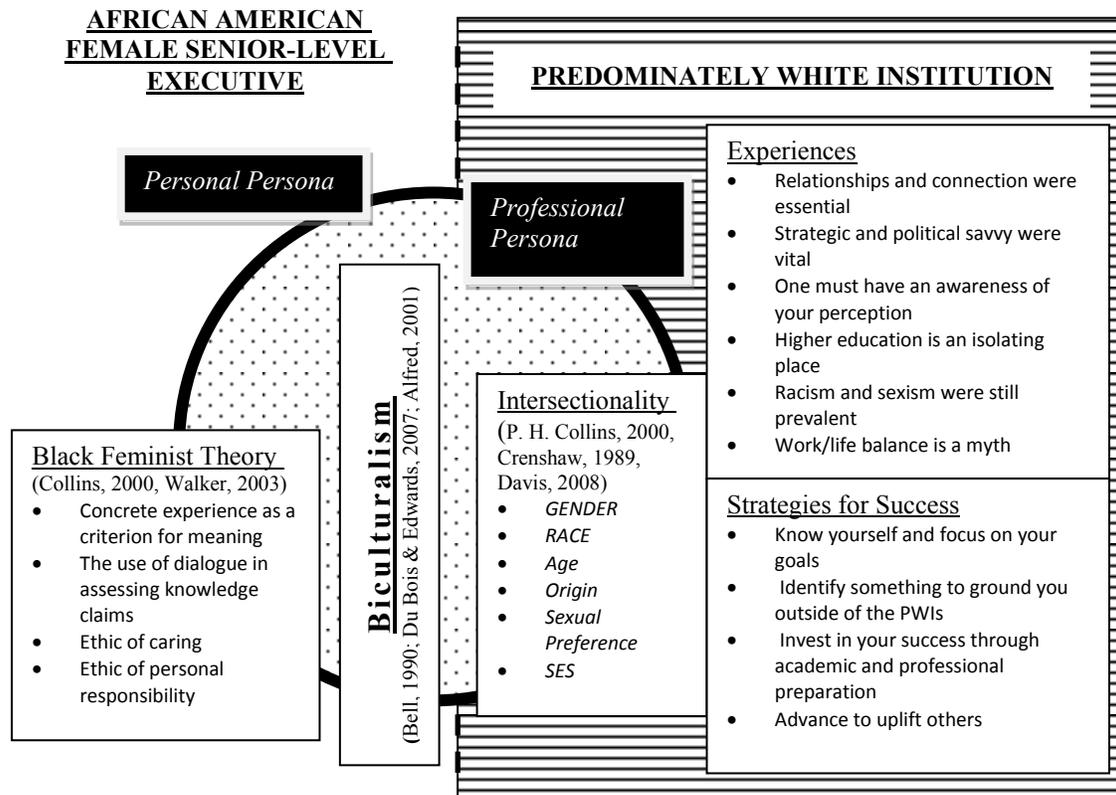
The open coding findings for research question #3 were consistent with biculturalism. As mentioned, biculturalism informed the African American women's identity as she navigated the majority culture (Higginbotham, 1989). Research revealed that African American women perceived themselves as living in two distinct cultural contexts, one Black the other one White. These women compartmentalized the various components of their lives in order to manage the bicultural dimensions and tended to have highly complex life structures to embrace both cultural contexts (Alfred, 2001; Bell, 1990; Cheatham, 1990). All the participants created a professional person that was bicultural in nature. More seasoned professional were more vocal about the creation of

this identity, while younger professionals seemed to just know this was necessary to be successful in their lives in general, so they adapted it to the predominately white institution environment. Counter to the literature that depicts biculturalism as a negative phenomenon, the participants perspective of bicultural experiences were positive and necessary to preserve not only the personal person, but also the professional person. Thus biculturalism itself was a strategy for success at a predominately white institution.

### **FINDINGS RELATED TO THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

After conducting the study and determining the findings, the researchers revisited the conceptual framework for the study to determine if it explained the findings of the study. Figure 5.2 was a graphic representation of the revisited conceptual framework. The dotted circle represented the African American female senior-level executive and the stripped square represented the predominately white institution. The way that the African American female senior-level executive defined herself and her ways of knowing was supported by black feminist theory. Aspects of the personal persona that supported this self-definition were the support of her spiritual source, community and family; her connectedness to community to create knowledge through interaction and dialogue; the value of “street smarts” in addition to academic knowledge as well as her connectedness and empathy for others. The African American female managed her interaction with the predominately white institution through biculturalism using the professional persona. The predominately white institution environment was where her intersectional identities were valued or devalued through various experiences and she created her strategies for success.

Figure 5.2. Revised Conceptual Framework for the Study



In looking at the specific theories in the conceptual framework, black feminist theory explored African American women’s self-defined standpoint within their oppression. Collins (1989) purported that their standpoint was unique due to their political and economic status, which causes African American women to experience the world differently than those that were not Black and not female. Collins (1989) stated “a subordinate group not only experienced a different reality than a group that rules, but a subordinate group may interpret that reality differently than the dominate group” (p. 748).

In higher education, a Eurocentric masculine knowledge-validation process was prominent. This process for creating knowledge and understanding included two parts (1) knowledge was valued by a community of experts within the same standpoint of the community and (2) the community of experts must maintain their credibility as defined by the larger groups. Their knowledge validation process suppressed the knowledge and ways of knowing for subordinate groups because it valued and reinforced the beliefs of those that were in power.

Created from both an Afrocentric and feminist standpoints, black feminist theory was a lens to understand how subordinates create knowledge that allows them to resist oppression (Collins, 1989). Black feminist theory had four tenets; specifically concrete experience as a criterion of meaning; the use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims; the ethic of caring and the ethic of personal accountability (Collins, 1989). This study supported black feminist theory as a salient mechanism of identifying ways of knowing for African American women. Further when the study participants were not able to access these more Afrocentric and feminist ways of knowing because of the oppressive nature of the Eurocentric knowledge-validation process, they shared that they experienced challenges. Participant's emotional commitment to the work was synergistic with the ethic of caring tenet of black feminist theory and their responsible and accountable perspective as it related to their success at the predominately white institution were rooted in the ethic of personal accountability. The professional persona identified in this study resembled the Eurocentric masculinity knowledge- validation process; and was a

way in which African American women took on the values of the dominate culture to be successful in white organizational cultures.

Davis (2008) stated, “intersectionality refers to the interaction of gender, race and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices and cultural ideologies” (p.68). The theory focused on the axis of the difference in identities (K. Davis, 2008). Although an intersectional analysis assumed that no one factor was more salient than another and it was the multiplicative effect that was salient, the results of this study suggested that for African American women, gender and race were primary identities when assessing the degree and impact of oppression experienced. Other identities did have effects and were important in the analysis, but there was something unique about the effects of gender and race on the experiences of African American women.

Although cross-racial and cross-gender allies, mentors, colleagues, and partnerships were extremely beneficial at a predominately white institution, there was still a need and desire to connect to someone of the same racial and gender background. This study suggested that there was something unique about those two axes of oppression, the bicultural competency and ways of knowing of African American women, which make a connection to other African American females impactful even if other intersectional factors of their lives were different i.e. age, origin, sexual preference and socio-economic status.

The study also supported the continuum of theories regarding the approaches African Americans have historically used to analyze the “dilemma of the double consciousness in their struggle to survive in two racio-cultural worlds, one White and one

Black” (Alfred, 2001, p. 113). Biculturalism allowed us to examine the dialectic phenomena of “identity and community, inclusion and exclusion, voice and represented, as well as power and subordination” through an analysis of a subordinate group” (Alfred, 2001, p. 114). Understanding of the process of implementing biculturalism evolved. Bell (1990) found that the transition between cultures was stressful and straining for African American women. Alfred (2001) found that successful African American women were able to move fluidly between both cultures. This study of African American female senior-level executives furthered this investigation by finding that the ability to access biculturalism was the strategy in and of itself to be successful at the predominately white institution. Moreover, the mechanism that facilitated this transition was the professional persona. All of the participants in the study demonstrated a bicultural competence that balanced personal integrations and individualism to avoid the negative consequences that could be felt by living in two cultures (LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993). Moreover, a strong sense of Black cultural identity and positive self image were essential to successfully maintain a fluid bicultural life structure. The results of this study supported previous studies by Rashid (1984) and Seelye (1984) that asserted that biculturalism was a “vital prerequisite for coping with racism and classism” at the predominately white institution. It was a mechanism by which they could practice agency “to contest the terrain of difference that contributes to their marginal position in white dominated organizations” (Alfred, 2001, p.123). Therefore, African American women used biculturalism to access power and assert agency in what seemed to be a powerless situation.

## **FINDINGS RELATED TO THE LITERATURE**

The results of this study reified all of the major findings of previous literature reviewed for the study. Similar to studies by Farmer (1993), Holmes (2004), Mosley (1980), Moses (1989) and Ramey (1995), African American women in senior-level positions still experienced chilly climate, isolation, alienation, marginalization, wage inequality, unrealistic role expectations, feelings of powerlessness, tokenism, as well as lack of mentorship and sponsorship at the predominately white institution. As Moore and Wagstaff (1994) stated, most of these women were employed at urban institutions. I believe this was a function of the location of the institutions and the job market at that time. In this study, there was some diversity in the institutions where the study participants were employed; specifically there were private, small and rural institutions represented. However, contrary to the previous literature, 66% of my sample earned Ph.D. and 75% were hired in positions outside of student affairs. Moreover, these women were the decision makers in their areas and were not “assistants to assistants”; which demonstrated that some progress had been made in terms of upward mobility for African American females at predominately white institutions. Black feminist theory definitely helped to inform the experiences of these women as it illuminated their unique perspective within both a historical and current context. It was applicable in regards to this study because it could be used as a lens to analyze the oppressive behaviors that African American women face every day from an empowerment perspective. It represented the perspective that all of the participants had regarding their experiences at

the predominately white institutions. Participants felt that their experiences were necessary to ensure that higher education continued to be inclusive, and rather than exit the institutions, they remained loyal, created coping strategies to persist and provided a voice for under-represented perspectives.

Moreover, regarding the identities that inform their experiences at the predominately white institution, this research supported the bicultural approach discussed previously by Alfred (2001) and Johnsrud & Sadao (1998). Moreover, it identified the desire for the professional persona created by the African American female administrators in order to counteract the phenotypic identities of race and gender. Although not in the literature, through an intersectional analysis other dimensions of their lives were also identified as impactful including age and sexual preference. The nuances of how racism and sexism affected the experiences were consistent with the previous studies by Carroll (1982), Collins (2000), Farmer (1993), Holmes (2004), Hull, Scott & Smith (1982), Ladson-Billings & Tate IV (1995), Loder (2005), Moore & Wagstaff (1974), Mosley (1980), Moses (1989), Myers (2007), Patitu & Tack (1992), Ramey (1995), Smith & Stewart (1995), Wilson (1989) and Zamani (2003).

Finally, the coping strategies for being at a PWI were also similar to those that were in the literature, which included developing relationships and making connections; whether that be with mentors, allies, or partners; having a grounding to keep you focused; for most this was a spiritual grounding; and ensuring they have the proper credentials. The research supported the need for women to have a role model, mentor or ally to share their unique perspective. Although all of the women did not have these mentors, they

expressed that they desired someone that shared their generalizable experiences, could serve as a sounding board for them and provided a safe space for rest and peace. In addition, finding for this question also supported the literature regarding biculturalism with one distinct difference. The literature assumed that creating a bicultural identity, i.e. professional persona, was abhorrent; however, from the interviews of the participants in this study, biculturalism was positive and even necessary for their success. It was a protective mechanism to counteract the effects of the PWI environment. It placed parameters around the mental exposure to the PWI, created a time and space for rest, relaxation and reflection, and provided a place of peace. Without the bicultural mechanism, these participants would have no reprieve from the stressors associated with being at the PWI. When asked about their experiences, the study participants responded effortlessly that it was positive. Only when I probed further in the interview did they reveal their challenges. I believe that this was indicative of the bicultural nature of the predominately white institution. In some ways the better the administrator was able to isolate the personal persona from the PWI, the more satisfaction there were able to feel from being a senior-level executive.

### **Enhancements to the Literature**

There were four aspects of the findings that were not anticipated based on the literature reviews for the study, which include the positive connotation of biculturalism, focus on diversity regardless of job responsibility, the salience of gender over race and the lack precise career planning. These were discussed in the section below.

**Positive connotation of biculturalism.** Findings from this study indicated that biculturalism was used as a tool to create a safe space for the personal persona. The ability to make a distinction between their two roles allowed for better productivity and enjoyment of both roles. Moreover, specifically for the professional persona, having a time when this persona was not “front and center” allowed for a time of rejuvenation. This has also been a theme in African American women’s literature. Darlene Clark Hine’s *concept of cultural dissemblance* and *the politics of respectability* purported that African American women have taken on historically White, traditional, middle-class values to overcome their perception in society and achieve the status of “womanhood” (Hine, 1989). This dissemblance was synergistic with the theory of biculturalism.

**Focus on diversity regardless of job responsibility.** Findings from this study indicated that there was a focus on diversity initiatives no matter what position or area of higher education the senior-level executive was associated with. Whether by coincidence or design, all of the women that participated in the study had some connection to diversity work and this work was mentioned in our conversations. I suggested that this could be attributed to three things. First, the participants might have mentioned their diversity work because of the subject of this study. They could have felt that discussing this work was germane to research, which was understandable. There was a question in the research protocol that asked if the participant’s felt that the institution supported diversity, but none of the questions asked specifically about institutional diversity work in which the participants were engaged. The second was that although African American women were advancing they were not being hired to manage the business administrative

side of institutions i.e. financial affairs, business affairs. Therefore their job duties have some interpersonal components which include diversity work. Third, this could be indicative of a cultural tax that was placed on these women when they advanced to these positions. It could be an unwritten expectation that they would lead or participate in diversity work.

**Salience of gender over race.** The third unexpected finding was the pronounced salience of gender over race as the oppressive structure in higher education. The literature mentioned that race and gender act synergistically, but that was hard to determine the more oppressive factor. This was not the case in this study. The participants clearly felt gender was the more salient factor at the predominately white institution. I believe this was due to the patriarchy nature of higher education, where the dichotomy began with male and female, and then split again from there based on race and other intersectional factors. Therefore, the participants first experienced the oppression of being female, and then the oppression of being African American in the predominately white institution context. Moreover, if these women were participating in diversity work, they actively sought to find solutions to create an inclusive environment for diverse groups. However, sexism was a complicated phenomenon and combating institutional gender inequalities related to advancement, finances, and invisibility (Risman, 2004) remained challenging. Those in positions of power must constantly be reminded of the gender inequalities embedded in institutions like higher education. The salience of gender over race exposed institutional inequalities and demonstrated how different the

lived realities of women and men were at predominately white institutions (Glazer-Raymo, 2008; Vaccaro, 2011).

**Lack of precise career planning.** The last unexpected finding was that of the lack of precise planning in the educational trajectories of the study participants. They had varied life experiences, paths of educational attainment, degree fields, and professional credentials. Most of them did not have a clear plan for what their next step would be in terms of working at a predominately white institution, nor did they have a plan when they entered their current position. Rather, they prepared themselves with formal education and professional development opportunities and were willing to take advantage of opportunities that were made available to them. Their education and hard work gave them choices and opened doors. One study participant compared her doctoral degree to an “E-ticket at Disneyland.” It provided her access to opportunities that she did not have before. This section discussed the findings of the study as related to the research questions, conceptual framework, literature review and unexpected findings. The next section discusses the limitations of the research study.

### **Limitations**

The limitations of this study were those that were inherent in qualitative research. Due to the qualitative approach used in the study and the focus on African American female senior-level executives at predominately white institutions of higher education, the results could not be generalized for all African American female administrators. Moreover, because participation was voluntary and not mandatory, the experiences presented in the research represent only those African American females that chose to

participate in the study. Additionally, 11 participants (92%) worked at or received their degrees from institutions of higher education in the South. It was possible that this regional and cultural influence might affect their perceptions of their experiences at predominately white institutions. Even with these limitations, the findings of this study added to the literature regarding African American senior-level executives in some meaningful ways. The next section of this chapter discusses the significance of the study.

### **Significance**

The findings of this study enhanced the current literature by supporting previous findings; reframing the discussion on biculturalism as a positive phenomenon; and introducing the intersectional effects of age, sexual preference and origin into the conversation about the experience of African American women. In addition, the study highlighted the creation of the professional persona by African American women at PWIs and an expansion of research regarding the faith practice for African American females from being solely religious to including spirituality. Further the revisited conceptual framework provides a dynamic operational model of how black feminist theory, biculturalism and intersectionality are applicable to the experiences of African American female senior-level executives.

The study also enriched the literature regarding African American female senior-level executives at PWIs by providing university leadership with information about salient recommendations that supported the positive experiences of African American female senior-level executives. The benefits for the institution included better recruitment and retention of African American females, thus increasing diversity at the

institution. The benefits of the study for African American females were two-fold. First, the experiences presented in the research provided valuable information for African American professionals that were aspiring to senior-level executive roles in PWIs. Second, the experiences served as support for African American females that were currently in senior-level executive positions in PWIs. This section provided the significance of the study. The next section discussed the recommendations for practice generated by this research.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

After careful analysis and review of the interviews of the 12 participants in the study and reviewing the literature that was the basis of the theoretical framework and historical context for the study, the researcher had the following recommendations for practice. These recommendations were divided into sections for institutions, African American senior-level executives, African American female students and professional organizations.

#### **For Institutions**

The following were six recommendations for institutions:

1. Create affinity groups for African American female senior-level executives.

Institutions could create and/or support the creation of African American female senior-level executive affinity groups at their institutions. The groups could be the first step toward reducing the isolation that these executives felt at the institution. Many institutions already had Black faculty and staff associations,

and I believe they should continue to have those organizations; however, in addition on the executive level they could create a space for these women to meet and network. This group could also foster conversations through email lists, newsletters, Listservs, Facebook pages, Twitter or RSS feeds, so that those women who were not be able to physically attend the meetings could still have that connection with the group. These organizations could be expanded to include African American female senior-level administrators at other predominately white institutions regionally or nationally.

2. Create campus wide mentorship/internship programs based on interest. This suggestion was raised by one the interview participants. Institutions could create a campus wide mentorship/internship program for students to learn about administrative work. This suggestion would allow African American women to learn the unwritten rules and responsibilities of administration at the PWI. As one of the criteria, it was suggested that African American women were matched with African American female students interested in their area of expertise.
3. Create a career path that rewards educational attainment. Institutions could support a career track that allowed for the advancement with proper credentials and professional development. So frequently, African American women became stagnant in positions when they do not have access to opportunities or mentors to help them navigate the institutions. This recommendation would help these individuals understand the skills and credentials necessary to advance at the institution.

4. Implement hiring practices that increase the critical mass of African American female senior-level executives. Institutions could implement and support fair hiring practices that welcome diverse applicants. These search committees would be culturally conscious and include representation from under-represented populations.
5. Address inequitable treatment for African American female senior-level executives. Institutions could investigate and address role overload as well as inequitable treatment and compensation for African American women at the institution. Although institutions were researching and addressing gender issues, I purported that the issues of under-represented populations within the female gender required devoted attention as well. Commissioning working groups or committees to investigate would help bring awareness to these issues at the institution.
6. Create a university culture that embraced the intersectional identities of its members. Institutions should assess and support the organizational environment to ensure that it embraces the intersectional identities of all of its members. This included discouraging racial and gender bias, respecting sexual preference, etc. This recommendation was aspiration as creating institutional change was a slow and ongoing process; however, institutions should be committed to this change.

### **For African American Female Senior–Level Executives**

The following were three recommendations for senior-level executives:

1. Join or create African American affinity groups at your institution.

Connection was crucial. Although time was always an issue, African American female senior-level executives should join or create affinity groups to facilitate support and networking as well as combat isolation. In addition, they could join and participate in groups offered by regional or national organizations in their particular field.

2. Actively seek out women with your same professional interest to support and mentor. African American senior-level executives should make the decision to reach back to assist others with your same professional interests. The mentee could be selected using an intersectional analysis, matching the African American senior-level professional with a mentee using a multitude of factors including race, gender, socioeconomic status, age, etc. Creating positive relationships through mentoring, partnering or being allies provided networking and support as well as combat isolation.
3. Find something that anchors you that was not associated with the predominately white institution. One should be sure to identify why you do this work and hold fast to that purpose in challenging times. Whether it be family, children, racial uplift, spirituality or something else, that purpose was necessary for balance and peace as you navigate the PWI.

## **For African American Female College Students**

The following were four recommendations for African American female college students that were aspiring to be senior-level administrators at a predominately white institution:

1. Join or create formal or informal African American affinity groups at your institution. Student should also create or join affinity groups to help them persist at the PWI and combat isolation. As mentioned for the senior-level professionals, they might also join state or national organizations in their fields.
2. Actively seek out support and mentorship. African American female students should seek out mentors. Creating mentorship, partnership or allyship provided networking and support as well as combat isolation. If possible, at least one of these relationships should be with an African American female because they might share your unique perspective and position in the academy.
3. Ensure that you take advantage of educational opportunities and create a list of your accomplishments. African American students should avail themselves to the formal education and professional opportunities to develop experiences to build their résumés and network. Be sure to write down the opportunities and accomplishments to include in your resume or curriculum vitae.
4. Determine the reason you want to work in academia and focus on this in the challenging times. African American students should contemplate the reason

why they would do this work and keep this in mind as they prepare themselves.

### **For Professional Organizations**

The following were two recommendations for professional organizations:

1. Create African American female senior-level executive affinity groups.  
Professional organizations should create African American female senior-level executive affinity groups to facilitate connections of these women within their membership. This would create another outlet for connection for these executives with people that could share the same perspective and unique experiences at institution of higher education.
2. Create leadership opportunities to help create a pipeline of qualified African American women leaders. Professional organizations should create and provided access to leadership opportunities, mentorship and professional development for African American women. This would help to create of pipeline of prepared African American women to become our next wave of senior-level administrators.

This section of the chapter presented the recommendations for practice related to the findings of the study. The next section presented the future research topics related to the study.

## Future Research

This qualitative study enhanced the body of literature regarding the experiences of African American female administrators at predominately white institutions. Further exploration of this population was needed to continue to understand their experiences in higher education. The study offers several recommendations for further research on this topic, which were listed below.

1. The demographics of students in doctoral programs at HBCU – One of the study participants mentioned that in her graduate experience at an HBCU, once she transitioned to graduate work she became a minority at the institution where you would think she would be the majority. It would be fascinating to study this topic and its effect on African American female leaders.
2. Analysis of these experiences through the lens of *Hirschman's Theory of Exit, Voice and Loyalty (1970)* – Another possible study was an analysis of the journeys of African American senior-level executives through the lens of Hirschman's Theory of Exit, Voice and Loyalty (1970). Moreover, the study would investigate the effects of these women's choice on the culture of the predominately white institution.
3. Demographics and impact of African American women on rural institutions – Another suggested study was regarding the demographics and impact of African American administrators at rural institutions. Could this be a place where African American women have been able to be successful and advance to senior-level management in greater numbers?

4. Study of the institutions where African American senior-level executives received their training and how the environment at these formative institutions effects how they lead at PWIs – A few of the African American women in the study received their training at HBCU's. It would be interesting to conduct a study on the leadership styles of those women and how their experiences at HBCU's informed how they led PWIs.
5. Impacts of being the first African American female in a position – Many of the African American women in this study were the first African American females to be in their position. An impactful study could explore the benefits and costs of being the first.

This section presented ideas for future research related to African American female senior-level executives. The next section presents the conclusion of the chapter.

## **Conclusion**

This study examined the experiences, challenges and strategies of success for African American female senior-level executives at predominately white institutions. The findings for the study suggested that even with increased diversity and inclusion efforts at the predominately white institution, maneuvering the organizational landscape continues to be challenging for African American women. Progress had been made in regards to the types of positions African American females were being hired for and the scope of responsibilities they have, i.e. the position were outside of student affairs and they were decision makers in their units. However, the university culture continued to

reflect the intersectional oppressions racism, sexism, ageism, sexual preference, which affected the ability of these women to navigate the campus environment. Moreover, the patriarchal nature of higher education proved to still be pervasive today and seen through inequities in salary, status and position for African American women. In addition, the study reinforces the relational aspect of higher education, i.e. mentors, allies, and partnerships, and without which African American females were ill-prepared for institutional politics.

In spite of these challenges, African American women continued to contribute to predominately white institutions and have found strategies to persist. Building relationships combated one of the most pertinent findings of this study, which was the isolation African American females experience at the PWI. African American women also countered these challenges by creating a bicultural persona that mirrors the values held in high esteem at the institution. This persona was not just a business appropriate identity; but rather it was a shielding to protect the areas of their lives that were most important from the effects of microaggressions of the predominately white institution. Furthermore, they were driven with a sense of purpose and uplift; and knew that education was the way to affect uplift for everyone including African Americans and under-represented populations'. In sharing their experiences, they hoped they helped inspire the next generation of African American women to not only persist, but thrive at the predominately white institution.

The theoretical framework of black feminist theory, biculturalism and intersectionality provided a lens to better understand the experiences of African

American females. Black feminist theory was applicable because it provided an understanding for the resiliency of the participants and their ways of knowledge-validation related to higher education. Moreover, it highlighted the sense of purpose that these African American female senior-level executives felt related to their work at the PWI. Intersectionality was also appropriate because it complicated the analysis regarding the multiple identities that affect the experiences of African American senior-level executives. Although gender, race, age, sexual preference and origin were identities they brought to the PWI; African American senior-level executives constructed an identity that was designed to counteract the preconceived beliefs regarding their other identities. Biculturalism was paradisiacal for this study not only a lens to examine strategies for success, but also as a strategy itself. This research found that, contrary to the literature, biculturalism was an positive occurrence, ensuring that the participants had a space for relationships apart from the PWI.

Personally, I was inspired by the experiences of my 12 study participants. Their poise when sharing their challenges as well as their passion when discussing their successes was both heartwarming and invigorating. It demonstrated to me that not only was their presence essential at the predominately white institution, but so was the sharing their experiences, challenges and strategies for success at the PWI. Their journey would not inspire anyone if it was not shared with aspiring African American female senior-level executives. Based on this research, I recommended more studies be conducted to reflect the experiences of African American senior-level executives at PWIs in their authentic voice. Qualitative studies were essential to capture the nuance of their

experiences; however, quantitative studies were also needed to demonstrate in a generalizable way the experiences of African American females at predominately white institutions. This section of the chapter provided the conclusion for the study. The next section included the summary of the chapter.

### **Summary of the Chapter**

In this chapter, the researcher provided the discussion and recommendations regarding this study of African American female senior-level executives in administration at predominately white institutions (PWIs) of higher education to determine their experiences, challenges and strategies they use to be successful in academia. The researcher provided a brief context for the study, research questions and methods. The chapter continued with a synopsis of the findings, the limitations of the research and the significance of the study. The chapter concluded with the recommendations for practice and directions for future research. This qualitative study used a phenomenological perspective to address the research questions.

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews of current and former African American female senior-level executives in administration at predominately white institutions. The conceptual framework for the study was based on the theoretical concepts of black feminist theory, biculturalism and intersectionality. The findings for this study of African American female senior-level executives at predominately white institutions include: regarding experiences (1) relationships and connection were essential; (2) strategic and political savvy were vital; (3) one must have an awareness of your perception; (4) higher education was an isolating place; (5) racism and sexism were

still prevalent; and (6) work/life balance was a myth; regarding identities (7) creation of a professional identity as the primary identity at PWI; (8) race and gender as prominent identities; and (9) personal persona purposely protected from PWI; and regarding strategies to cope with challenges and celebrate successes (10) know yourself and focus on your goals; (11) identify something to ground you outside of the PWIs; (12) invest in your success through academic and professional preparation; and (13) advance to uplift others. Based on the findings from this study, the researcher recommended more studies regarding the experiences of African American females in senior-level positions in higher education to continue to understand their unique challenges, but also to share their success stories at predominately white institutions.

## Appendix A – Final Request for Participation

Date

Name

Title

Address

City, State Zip

Dear Name:

I am writing to ask for your participation in my qualitative dissertation research study exploring the experiences of former and current African American senior-level executives at predominately white institutions (PWIs). My dissertation titled "*African American Females in Senior-Level Executive Roles Navigating Predominately White Institutions: Experiences, Challenges and Strategies for Success*" is a phenomenological inquiry using a conceptual framework of black feminist theory, biculturalism and intersectionality to investigate the experiences of African American females in senior-level executive positions at predominately white institutions, to examine their experiences, challenges and strategies for success.

Dr. Name, your response to this request is important to add the voices of African American women to research on higher education administration. Your participation was greatly needed, valued and would be deeply appreciated. The time commitment for study participants is one interview that will last no more than 90 minutes and be scheduled at your convenience from January 2013 to March 2013.

I would be honored if you would agree to share your experiences with me for this important research study. If you are interested in participating, please reply to this email with a copy of your curriculum vita or resume. Shortly after receiving your information, I will contact you to set up an interview. If you have questions or need additional information please feel free to contact me at 512.762.2888 or stella\_smith@austin.utexas.edu.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Best regards,



Stella Smith, Doctoral Candidate  
Higher Education Leadership Program, College of Education  
The University of Texas at Austin

## Appendix B - Website Rating Form

*Reference: DeRuyver, D., Evans, J., Melzer, J., & Wilmer, E. (2004). Rating System for Evaluating Public History Web Sites Retrieved from [www.publighthouse.org/reviews/rating\\_system.html](http://www.publighthouse.org/reviews/rating_system.html)*

### Rating Scale

- 1 - 20 points: Half Star
- 21 - 40 points: One Star
- 41 - 60 points: One and One Half Stars
- 61 - 80 points: Two Stars
- 81 - 100 points: Two and One Half Stars
- 101 - 120 points: Three Stars

### Basic Criteria

#### Scope/Content (15 points possible)

- Audience for the site/ stated purpose/ mission statement
- Comprehensiveness/ completeness/ does it do what it says it will
- Adequate amount of material to allow users to see a number of viewpoints and draw their own conclusions?
- Well written, free of grammatical errors, typos, etc.
- NOTE: Scope and Content were covered in more depth below, under Public History Specific

#### Authority/Bias (15 points possible)

- Who was sponsoring the site/ providing information?
- Reliable contact information/ snail mail/ phone/ etc.
- What was the point of view

#### Timeliness/Permanence (15 points possible)

- Posting/revision dates
- Do links work?
- Do you think the site will still be there in a year?

#### Value Added Features (15 points possible)

- Index/search/sitemaps
- Summaries/abstracts
- Annotated Links

Technical Aspects (15 points)

- Accessibility/ text only alternative/ alt tags in images/ plug-ins/ browser compatibility/ ADA compliant
- Navigation/ knowing where you were in the site/ knowing how to get back, go forward
- Printability

Aesthetics/Visual Clarity & Appeal (15 points)

- Consistent theme
- Visual cohesiveness/ page layout
- Readability/ colors/ font sizes/ background images

Overall impression of the site (10 points)

- Favorable/unfavorable

Promotion of a Community of Interest (20 points possible)

- Evidence of community involvement with materials? For example, mechanisms for community members to contribute to the historical record presented on the site?
- Evidence of active involvement in issues of importance to the communities whose stories were told on the site or to communities whose interests correspond to the site's topic? Does the site sponsor any Listservs, bulletin boards, conferences, outreach, etc around the topic?
- Interactive components outside of those covered under Education?

## **Appendix C - Informed Consent**

Study Number: 2012-10-0055

Approval Date: 11/27/2012

Expires: 11/26/2013

### **Consent for Participation in Research**

**Title:** African American Females in Senior-Level Executive Roles Navigating Predominately White Institutions: Experiences, Challenges and Strategies for Success

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this form is to provide you information that may affect your decision as to whether or not to participate in this research study. The person performing the research will answer any of your questions. Read the information below and ask any questions you might have before deciding whether or not to take part. If you decide to be involved in this study, this form will be used to record your consent.

#### **Purpose of the Study**

You have been asked to participate in a research study about African American women in higher education administration as part of my completion of the doctoral degree in higher education administration. The purpose of this study is to determine how the experience of African American senior-level executives at predominately white institutions has changed given the shifts in the legal climate and expectation for diversity in higher education.

#### **What will you to be asked to do?**

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete a demographic survey and participate in individual interviews. This study will take approximately 90 minutes and will include approximately 15 study participants. With your permission, your participation will be audio recorded.

#### **What are the risks involved in this study?**

There are no foreseeable risks to participating in this study.

#### **What are the possible benefits of this study?**

You will receive no direct benefit from participating in this study; however, the research benefits society and the field of study by enriching the literature on the topic of African American female senior – level administrators at predominately white institutions.

#### **Do you have to participate?**

No, your participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate at all or, if you start the study, you may withdraw at any time. Withdrawal or refusing to participate will not affect your relationship with The University of Texas at Austin (University) in anyway.

If you would like to participate please sign and return this form. You will receive a copy of this form.

#### **Will there be any compensation?**

You will not receive any type of payment participating in this study.

Study Number: 2012-10-0055  
Approval Date: 11/27/2012  
Expires: 11/26/2013

**What are my confidentiality or privacy protections when participating in this research study?**

This study is confidential and to ensure the confidentiality of the information shared by the participants, the researcher will use pseudonyms instead of participant actual names on the interview tapes. Participants will also be assigned pseudonyms to protect their identity and in some instances, quotations will be edited for clarity. Also, the identities of individuals they referenced, locations, and events will be altered to protect the confidentiality of the study participants.

If you choose to participate in this study, you **will be** recorded. Any **audio** recordings will be stored securely and only the research team will have access to the recordings. Recordings will be kept for **1 year** and then erased. The data resulting from your participation may be used for future research or be made available to other researchers for research purposes not detailed within this consent form.

**Whom to contact with questions about the study?**

Prior, during or after your participation you can contact the researcher Stella Smith at 512-762-2888 or send an email to stella\_smith@austin.utexas.edu.

This study has been reviewed and approved by The University Institutional Review Board and the study number is **2012-10-0055**.

**Whom to contact with questions concerning your rights as a research participant?**

For questions about your rights or any dissatisfaction with any part of this study, you can contact, anonymously if you wish, the Institutional Review Board by phone at (512) 471-8871 or email at orsc@uts.cc.utexas.edu.

**Participation**

If you agree to participate **please sign this form and return to the researcher.**

**Signature**

You have been informed about this study's purpose, procedures, possible benefits and risks, and you have received a copy of this form. You have been given the opportunity to ask questions before you sign, and you have been told that you can ask other questions at any time. You voluntarily agree to participate in this study. By signing this form, you are not waiving any of your legal rights.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

As a representative of this study, I have explained the purpose, procedures, benefits, and the risks involved in this research study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name of Person obtaining consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Person obtaining consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix D - Interview Protocol

1. How did you get to this position?
  - a. What role does race play in your current position?
2. Do you like what you are doing?
3. In what ways do you think your experiences are located in your specific context, or are generalizable to other African American women administrators in higher education?
4. What are your greatest challenges, personally and professionally?
  - a. Do you view these challenges as forms of oppression?
  - b. How has racial discrimination been exhibited in your environment?
  - c. What role has race played in your greatest challenges, personally and professionally?
5. What are your greatest successes, personally and professionally?
  - a. What role has race played in your greatest successes, personally and professionally?
6. What coping strategies do you utilize in your position?
  - From what source (s) have you found your support?
  - Who do you count on within the university as your support mechanism?
7. What has been your experience with mentorship?
8. What role has religion or spirituality played in your work experiences?
9. Have you ever gotten to the point where you considered resigning due to some of the issues you face as an African American woman? If so, why did you decide to stay?
10. What do you consider to be major contributions that you have made to the community? To higher education? For women?
11. Do you view yourself as an agent of significant historical change for African American women or any race of women in higher education?
12. Do you view yourself as a role model for other African American women? How are you a role model to students and other colleagues?

13. How does the university support diversity for African Americans?
  - a. How do you think other African Americans view your institution's commitment to diversity?
14. Where do you see African American women in higher education in the next decade? Century?
15. What are your future goals in working at a predominantly White institution of higher education?
16. What advice can you offer that will help to prepare me to be an African American administrator at an institution of higher education?
17. Are there any other experiences, thoughts or perceptions that you would like to talk about?
18. Do you have any questions for me?

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