Leadership Through the Lens of African American Women Senior and Executive Level Administrators at Predominantly White Public Institutions in California

by

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and Executive Level Administrators at Predominantly

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the seven phenomenal women who participated in my study. You are the role models and trailblazers who have paved the way, and indeed, have made a significant impact in higher education in California by your presence and success. I also dedicate this work to African American women who aspire to senior and executive leadership roles within higher education and are working assiduously to earn their academic credentials and progressing in their professional careers. You, and I, will carry the torch and lift as we climb.

The most heartfelt dedication for this work is to my mother, late father, four siblings, and many nieces and nephews. I feel so privileged to have had you all stand with me in the journey to complete this dissertation, and standing with me throughout my life. To my siblings, nieces and nephews, who taught me grace under fire, and validated my nature of fantasy; instilled in me the spirit of adventure and to truly “love life”; taught me how to use my strengths to overcome obstacles and to nurture others; and who brought out the “fight” in me and taught me how to stand my ground. To my mother Shirley, a true educator, who taught me to be a good student through your teaching and insistence on using the library as a child, and now adult. You began your career as a teacher late in life in order to work and raise a family. I have achieved the Doctor of Education for both of us. To my late father Vincent, as “daddy’s little girl,” you taught me so much to be a well-rounded girl, woman, and professional, from your guidance on respect and dignity, to learning how to drive a car. Riding on the bus with you as you finished driving your route for the day, exposed me to different types of people, and I still smile as I think about some of the stories about your passengers. So, to my entire family,
this dissertation is dedicated to you. Thank you for your support and I love you all so much!
ABSTRACT

While African American women are increasingly becoming equipped with the appropriate educational credentials and have made scant gains in the advancement to senior administrative roles over the past 20 years, African American women leaders remain in a quandary. Little has changed. Scholars have conducted extensive studies on issues related to African American women in higher education, yet the unique leadership experiences of African American women administrators remain absent in the literature. Research on African American women in higher education have asserted the need for additional and more targeted research on the experiences that African American women face in the academy, and most importantly at predominantly White institutions, to bring voice on the unique leadership experiences of African American women at the senior and executive level in higher education.

Therefore, this dissertation describes the leadership experiences of African American women senior- and executive-level administrators at predominantly White public institutions in California. Through a phenomenological research design, and triangulation of data collected through document analysis, informal and formal interviews, and naturalistic observation, this study explored the unique experiences, challenges, and perceptions of seven women, as they navigate as “firsts” and “the only” African American women serving in their leadership roles at predominantly White institutions in southern, central, and northern California. Using a social constructionist framework, through the epistemological lens of Critical Race Theory, Black Feminist Thought and a Womanist Ideology, and a leadership framework, this study sought to document the leadership experiences, retention strategies, effects of support networks,
how power impacts their roles as leaders, what meanings they ascribe to their experiences, and how experiences may differ based on institution type.

The data demonstrated that African American women senior- and executive-level administrators at predominantly White public institutions in California (a) have unique paths to leadership, (b) possess leadership styles based on purpose and core values and ideals, (c) experience multiple challenges rooted in issues related to race and gender, and (d) maintain resilient retention strategies which assists them in progressing and advancing in their administrative roles. The unique leadership experiences of African American women administrators is truly a phenomenon.
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CHAPTER 1—INTRODUCTION

Institutions of higher education are becoming more racially and ethnically diverse, with an influx of underrepresented minority students on predominantly White college and university campuses around the nation who desire to obtain their educational credentials for a chosen career in the future. The landscape of leadership by people of color, African American women in particular, at the helm of these organizations is also shifting, however at a much slower pace than the growth of a diverse student population. With increases in undergraduate enrollment and degree attainment, the postbaccalaureate degree achievement of women of color, specifically African American women, has shown steady growth with 1.4% of African American women obtaining a Master of Arts degree in 1995 to 5.2% in 2008 (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2009). Further, in 1977, the doctoral degree attainment for African American women was 6% and slightly increased to 8.1% in 2007 (NCES, 2008). With this minimal increase in advanced degree attainment over the past 30 years by African American women, there are greater numbers who aspire to and chose careers in higher education administration (Poock & Love, 2001). While African American women are increasingly becoming equipped with the appropriate educational credentials and have made scant gains in the advancement to senior administrative roles (Hamilton, 2004) over the past 20 years, African American women leaders remain in a quandary. Little has changed (McDemmond, 1999). However, as Hamilton (2004) asserted:

The fact that racial and ethnic minorities are expected to comprise more than 37% of post-secondary students by 2015, according to one government survey,
observers agree that as these changes gain force, they hold the potential to open up more leadership opportunities for women and particularly women of color. (p. 63) And as indicated in the data from the American College President (American Council on Education [ACE], 2007), the gains in African American women as Chief Executive Officers have occurred in recent years, and based on these increases, the trajectory of African American women in senior administrative positions is compelling (Hamilton, 2004; Penny & Gaillard, 2006). However, it will continue to be an uphill climb as African American women face multiple experiences on predominantly White campuses which may impede their trajectory and desire for advancement to senior administrative roles. Reflecting on African American females in academic administrative positions, Simpson (2001) poignantly stated, “Our numbers are low but our triumphs sizable—and we realize that the telling and passing on of our stories and learned strategies are essential [for] our own survival and for those preparing to follow in our footsteps” (p. 5). Therefore, this study will bring voice to the unique leadership experiences of African American women senior- and executive-level administrators at predominantly White institutions in the state of California, and illuminate the unique challenges which these women must endure, and with increasing numbers, as they negotiate a system deeply entrenched in a dominant ideology, and simultaneously how these women perceive and experience leadership within their administrative roles.

The purpose of this research was to shed light on the unique leadership experiences of African American women in their leadership roles as senior- and executive-level administrators within higher education and to understand how their perceptions and experiences have a significant impact on their current and future
advancement within the academy. Given the lack of empirical insight on the unique leadership experiences of African American women administrators, there are significant areas which are most important in critically analyzing, documenting, and bringing voice to their experiences. The comparably low numbers of African American women administrators in the academy exacerbates the issue of equity and opportunity in higher education. These women have been marginalized and tracked into positions of low status which prevent their trajectory to senior administration (Guillory, 2001; J. F. L. Jackson, 2001; S. Jackson & Harris, 2007; McDemmond, 1999; Rolle, Davies & Banning, 2000; Smith & Crawford, 2007; Watson, 2001; Wolfman, 1997; Zamani, 2003). Scholarly research has left void a discussion on the effects of support networks for African American women administrators, while mentoring relationships for African American women have been analyzed and discussed in the literature. And although marginal numbers of African American women hold administrative leadership roles at predominantly White institutions, the issue of retention is critical in bringing voice to their experiences and strategies utilized to remain and excel in leadership positions within the academy. Further, the literature lacks a robust discussion on differences and experiences of African American women administrators between the systems of higher education, including community college and 4-year public universities. As critical and needed as this study was, the high costs of revealing the experiences and complex realities of African American women in predominantly White institutions (Howe-Barksdale, 2007) is emotional; however, it cannot be ignored.
Statement of the Problem

Scholars have conducted extensive studies on issues related to African American women in higher education (Miller & Vaughn, 1997), yet the unique leadership experiences and perceptions of African American women senior- and executive-level administrators in higher education remain silenced in the literature. Scholarly research on African American women in higher education have asserted the need for additional and more targeted research on the experiences that African American women face in the academy (Holmes, Land, & Hinton-Hudson, 2007; Mosley, 1980; Penny & Gaillard, 2006; Watson, 2001), and most importantly at predominantly White institutions. Indeed, the overarching problem is that there has been minimal empirical research conducted to bring voice on the unique leadership experiences of African American women in higher education (Guillory, 2001; Harley, 2008; Holmes, 2003, 2004; Howe-Barksdale, 2007; J. F. L. Jackson, 2001, 2002; Miller & Vaughn, 1997; Moses, 1997; Mosley, 1980; Patitu & Hinton, 2003; Penny & Gaillard, 2006; Watson, 2001).

Though there is an increasing amount of highly qualified African American women with the appropriate educational credentials, leadership skills and abilities, and academic experience, there remains the contradiction in the amount of women who hold senior- and executive-level administrative positions in the academy. And with the paucity of African American women in leadership roles, they must endure a number of complex challenges within the academy, including marginalization, oppression, isolation and alienation, the duality of racism and sexism, peripheral positions with a lack of power and influence, hostile campus climates, and a lack of mentoring opportunities and
professional support networks, while also advancing their own professional goals, leadership styles, and philosophies within higher education.

Related to the main problem of the small body of literature on African American women administrators in higher education and the absence of their voice, this study also addressed the problem with the lack of African American women in senior leadership positions, scarcity in the analysis on the effects of support networks, limited research on the retention of African American women administrators, and the lack of comparative analyses on African American women leaders with the systems of higher education. The unique leadership experiences of African American women senior- and executive-level administrators is truly a phenomenon, and this study highlighted and exposed the complex realities of these women at predominantly White institutions.

**Lack of African American Women in Senior Leadership Positions**

There is a lack of a critical mass of African American women in senior administrative roles in higher education. While a disproportionate number are located in peripheral, nonmainstream leadership roles, including administrators who oversee minority affairs departments, federally-funded TRIO projects, and continuing education programs for example (Amey, VanDerLinden, & Brown, 2002; Crawford & Smith, 2005; Guillory, 2001; J. F. L. Jackson, 2001; Mosley, 1980; Rolle et al., 2000; Smith & Crawford, 2007). Though these positions are important and certainly are necessary to meet the needs of minority, underserved or at-risk students, what is concerning is that African American women are overconcentrated in these positions that lack legitimate power and decision-making, and not serving in senior administrative positions on their campuses (Watson, 2001, Wolfman, 1997; Zamini, 2003).
A search of databases found that the statistics on African American women administrative positions remains low and stagnant. As noted in the introduction, African American women do hold administrative positions; however, the numbers are scarce. Marginal gains have been made in institutions hiring and promoting African American women to serve in administrative posts, with an even more inadequate number at the helm. In 2005, there was a mere 4.9% of African American women serving in administrative leadership roles in higher education, compared to 36.4% White female administrators (ACE, 2007). Further, in regard to Chief Executive Officer positions, between 1986 and 2006 the number of African American women presidents rose from 3.9% to 8.1%. Though the increase may seem incremental and steady, 11.7% of the increase occurred as recently as 2006 (ACE, 2007). As evidenced by these statistics, indeed, there is a clear disparity in the number of African American women who possess senior leadership positions within the academy.

While acknowledging the mere lack of African American women in leadership roles, there is an overrepresentation of these women in low-status, dead-end, and peripheral positions (McDemmond, 1999; Mosley, 1980; Watson, 2001; Wolfman, 1997). African American women who occupy these positions are considered administrators and serve on leadership teams within their institutions; however, the peripheral roles which they hold lack the power, status, and decision-making authority, and can be identified as illegitimate leadership, compared to administrative positions inside the main institutional structure. These illegitimate roles include affirmative action programs, services provided to minority students (Watson, 2001), or similar programs,
such as TRIO programs, designed to meet the needs of low-income and first-generation college students.

**Scarcity in the Analysis on the Effects of Support Networks**

The research and literature is scarce in providing an analysis on the effects of support networks for African American women senior- and executive-level administrators in higher education. Although the paucity of research does include discussion on the importance of support systems including family, spirituality, and mentoring as important components in African American women succeeding and excelling in their administrative roles (Caldwell & Watkins, 2007; Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007; Crawford & Smith, 2005; Harley, 2008; Holmes, 2004; Holmes et al., 2007; Howie-Barksdale, 2007; Miller & Vaughn, 1997; Mosley, 1980; Nichols & Tanksley, 2004; Patitu & Hinton, 2003; Penny & Gaillard, 2006; Simpson, 2001; Smith & Crawford, 2007; Watson, 2001), there is a lack of disaggregation in the research related specifically on how mentoring and support networks differ for African American women leaders at predominantly White institutions.

**Limited Research on African American Women Administrators**

A limited amount of research has been conducted regarding the retention of African American women administrators specifically, although there has been literature facilitated in general terms on men and women of color and in bringing voice to their experiences and retention strategies. Jerlando F. L. Jackson (2001, 2002, 2004) and J. F. L. Jackson and Flowers (2003) has conducted a considerable amount of research on the retention of administrators of color in higher education but lack the specificity on the
challenges, needs, and leadership characteristics present for African American women in senior- and executive-level administrative roles at predominantly White institutions.

The negative barriers, including racism, isolation, and alienation that affect African American women administrators can be an emotional strain, thereby forcing many women to leave the academy (Holmes, 2003; Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003; S. Jackson & Harris, 2007; Patitu & Hinton, 2003; Watson, 2001) due to the barriers and their inability to be fully participative in the dominant ideological environment of predominantly White institutions. Women who have the desire for advancement in the academy simply give up as they contend with visible and invisible obstacles (S. Jackson & Harris, 2007) within their departments, among colleagues, and postsecondary education in general (Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003).

The research in general on African American women administrators in higher education is minimal, and further, there is a severe, if at all, lack of inquiry to describe the leadership perceptions and experiences of African American women leaders among or between the different systems of higher education including the community college system and 4-year public university. This lack of empirical studies compounds the problem in the scarcity of literature on the experiences of African American women administrators at predominantly White institutions, as it generalizes higher education and does not disaggregate. The experiences of these women may vary by institution type; however, it remains unknown with the paucity of literature published.

Considering the small body of literature and voice on the unique leadership experiences of African American women, it is undeniable that the future of postsecondary education will be impacted, and certainly, African American women will have a major
role in its success. Therefore, this study was poised to bring voice to the leadership experiences of African American women administrators at predominantly White institutions and analyzed issues related to the affects of support networks, ways in which retention and persistence are impacted in her career advancement within the academy, explore the contradictions of peripheral positions and leadership within the academy, and discussed the experiences of African American women from different systems of higher education. All with the hope that these courageous women will have voice, and continue on a trajectory of success in their professional careers in higher education.

**Purpose of the Study**

In her early seminal research on African American women administrators in higher education, Myrtis Hall Mosley (1980) strongly admonished:

[T]hose research and other educational organizations which spend so much money doing research and reporting on the status of Blacks and women in higher education cease their practices of hiding the disgraceful condition of Black females in higher education by either ignoring their plight or hiding them under categories of minorities, Blacks, or women. (p. 308)

In 2011, as in 1980, things have slightly changed, yet they have remained the same.

The negative barriers that African American women administrators face create inextricable obstacles to performance excellence and retention within their leadership roles on predominantly White college campuses, as well as the impact of exposure on African American students who seek culturally relevant support and motivation to persist from the virtual presence African American women administrators. Further, the postsecondary educational institutions themselves risk transgression in advancing their
established strategic priorities and community engagement opportunities in light of the lack of advancing African American women into administrative roles.

Therefore, this study sought to understand, examine and bring to voice the unique leadership experiences of African American women senior- and executive-level administrators at predominantly White institutions in the state of California. Although their voices were brought to the forefront and exposed, the barriers, struggles and leadership experiences that they face as they negotiate a system of dominant ideologies and disenfranchisement was well documented. If their voices continued to be silenced in the published discourse, the cycle of oppression would continue. It was a risk personally, as an African American researcher in an administrative position at a predominantly White institution, but one that was worth the emotion, insight, and more importantly empowerment and education.

**Research Questions**

The primary research question for this study was, “What are the unique leadership experiences of African American women senior- and executive-level administrators at predominantly White institutions in the state of California?” In this study, five sub-questions or subthemes were identified for this research:

1. What strategies do African American women administrators in higher education possess and utilize in their retention and progressive success?

2. How do personal and/or professional support networks impact the success of African American women administrators in higher education?
3. How do leadership positions which lack legitimate power and decision-making have an impact on African American women leaders in their trajectory to senior administration in higher education?

4. What leadership meanings do African American women ascribe to their experiences as administrators in higher education?

5. How do the experiences of African American women administrators in higher education differ by institution type?

**Significance of the Study**

Howe-Barksdale (2007) among other scholars, including Mosley (1980), assertively recommended that future research on the experiences of African American women administrators be further studied, in light of the potential backlash from the dominant ideology and continued marginalization and alienation of these women within the academy. Indeed, this study was timely and important in order to shed light on the leadership experiences of African American women administrators. The research intended to offer strategies for the empowerment and success of African American women leaders and inform senior administration at predominantly White institutions on the abilities, credentials, and drive that African American women professionals possess; to advance institutional values, goals, missions related to strategic planning, including diversity, equity, and social justice initiatives; and to provide encouragement, opportunity, and hope for current and future African American women administrators to advance professionally within higher education, and pointedly at predominantly White institutions.
While the findings of this study were of interest and significant to institutions of higher education, it was my hope that it will be embraced by African American women administrators as they increase their presence and leadership on college and university campuses. And though it may be at times painful, Frederick Douglass admonished, “If there is no struggle there is no progress” (Douglass, 1857, para. 3). Indeed, for African American women senior- and executive-level administrators in the academy the struggle ensues, but progress arises.

**Definitions and Related Concepts**

Below are definitions and descriptions of related concepts used throughout this dissertation:

*Administrator* – a person who serves at the level of vice-president, associate vice-president, or dean whose assignment includes major responsibilities for the management of an institution or a subdivision of an institution. Senior administrator denotes a chancellor, president or superintendent of an educational institution.

*African American* – citizens or residents of the United States who have at least partial Sub-Saharan ancestry from Africa. Black is used interchangeably in the citations and references.

*Discrimination* – the process of denying opportunities and equal rights to individuals and groups because of prejudice or other arbitrary reasons.

*Dominant ideology* – a set of cultural beliefs and practices that helps to maintain powerful social, economic, and political interests.
Executive-Level Administrator – a leadership position consistent with the president or chancellor role of an institution, also refers to a Chief Executive Officer in higher education.

Hegemony – the processes by which the dominant culture maintains its dominant position, especially related to patriarchy and dominance over women.

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) – those institutions whose principal mission was, and is, the education of Black Americans.

Marginalization – the social process of being made marginal, and being relegated and confined to a lower social standing, made powerless and unimportant.

Mentor – an individual with superior rank or status, who advises and guides a less experienced person, and facilitates personal, intellectual, and/or career advancement counsel and knowledge.

Minority – an individual within a subordinate group whose members have significantly less control or power over their own lives than the members of a dominant or majority group have over theirs.

Peripheral positions – an administrative leadership position providing oversight of programs and departments serving minority students, affirmative action programs, and other programs designed to address the needs of low-income, first-generation college, second-language, or other underrepresented groups of students; and also called illegitimate due to the lack of power.

Persistence – the ability to progress resolutely to one’s identified professional goal in spite of opposition or importunity; the behavior of never having given up despite obstacles.
Predominantly White institutions – an institution of higher education where the numerical majority of administrators, faculty, staff and students are of White, Caucasian or European-American descent.

Retention – the ability to remain resolutely in one’s professional position in spite of opposition or importunity; the behavior to keep going despite obstacles.

Senior-Level Administrator – a leadership position consistent with the vice-president, provost, or vice-chancellor role of an institution.

Support Networks – associations between and among individuals including professional networks, social and personal bonds, and collegial relationships.

Support Systems – a system of relationships between individuals including family, religion or spirituality, and mentoring.

Stereotype – unreliable generalizations about all members of a group that do not recognize individual differences within the group.
CHAPTER 2—REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The literature specific to the leadership experiences of African American women in administrative leadership positions within higher education is considerably sparse. Although there is a substantial amount of literature based on the experiences and challenges of African American female faculty members in academe, and on issues related to African American student academic achievement in undergraduate studies and graduate degree programs (Howe-Barksdale, 2007), there is a severe gap in the literature that specifically addresses the needs and unique leadership experiences of African American women in administrative positions in higher education (Guillory, 2001; Harley, 2008; Holmes, 2003, 2004; Howe-Barksdale, 2007; J. F. L. Jackson, 2002; Miller & Vaughn, 1997; Moses, 1997; Mosley, 1980; Patitu & Hinton, 2003; Penny & Gaillard, 2006; Watson, 2001). Moses (1997) accentuates this severe gap in the literature and research on African American woman administrators by asserting, “The result is that [B]lack women are virtually invisible” (p. 23).

Administrative leadership positions within institutions of higher education are challenging. Yet, the challenge is even greater for African American women who have the stress of having to work hard to prove themselves, as well as having to do so twice as much as compared to their White female counterparts (Harley, 2008). Nevertheless, in identifying the critical lack of literature on the experiences of African American administrators in higher education, Howe-Barksdale (2007) addresses a serious problem in the scarcity of research on African American women leaders and their added stressors, by positing:
The challenges that African American women encounter and the coping mechanisms they utilize to successfully manage the conflicts as professionals in higher education have not been adequately studied primarily because there is such a high cost in revealing such personal struggles and such personal pain connected to the challenges of African American women administrators face as they pursue advancement and promotion. (p. 3)

A research study by Patitu and Hinton (2003) also found “a search of databases for information on African American faculty and administrators in higher education revealed a dearth of research on the topic” (p. 79), and further states, “This paucity of literature and research reflect the scarcity of African Americans in academic affairs, student affairs, and other administrative positions” (p. 79). The lack of empirical research conducted to date exacerbates the problem of identifying strategies and solutions to address the barriers and negative experiences of African American female administrators within institutions of higher learning (Harley, 2008; Howe-Barksdale, 2007; S. Jackson & Harris, 2007; Moses, 1997; Turner, 2002). With the number of women entering and succeeding in postsecondary education, increasing amounts obtaining their postbaccalaureate and terminal degrees, empirical insight into the needs, experiences, and challenges of African American women administrators, the research seems warranted. And even more so, now, the interest and need for research on African American women administrators is critical and will offer insights on how to better advance and inform support strategies for these women in predominantly White colleges and universities.

There were two significant themes that emerged in the review of the literature on the unique leadership experiences of African American women administrators. The first
theme relates to the negative barriers that hinder the career success of African American women leaders. These barriers include the intersection of race/ethnicity and gender and how the manifestation of racism and sexism affect the performance and sense of self of African American women leaders, hostile campus climates at predominantly White institutions which are unwelcoming for women of color, the isolation and loneliness of being the only African American woman in leadership positions, and the negative perceptions and stereotypes by the dominant culture of the characteristics of African American women administrators. The second theme relates to the support networks, which focus on mentoring experiences of African American women in higher education and the impact that these relationships have on African American female leaders, informal social networks that enhance the professional growth of women in administrative positions, and familial relationships and spirituality as foundational for African American women leaders.

**Negative Barriers**

There are several substantial barriers that are consistently discussed in the literature on African American female administrators. These barriers negatively affect the advancement and increase of African American women administrators at institutions of higher education. They result in tangible costs for both individuals and their institutions (Howe-Barksdale, 2007; Myers, 2002; Penny & Gaillard, 2006). The most significant barriers discussed include the duality or intersection of race and gender, and issues of racism and sexism affecting African American women administrators; hostile “chilly” campus climates that lead to marginalization and the lack of power and decision making; isolation and loneliness experienced and being the only “one”; stereotypical
characteristics which are perpetuated by the dominant culture as negative; and African American women administrators in peripheral positions.

**Duality of Race and Gender**

The duality (J. F. L. Jackson, 2001; Smith & Crawford, 2007; Wolfman, 1997) of being female and African American emphasizes the fact that barriers are continually present for African American women in the academy where they must exist as an outsider within (Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007; Holmes et al., 2007; Howe-Barksdale, 2007; Myers, 2002; Zamani, 2003). African American women experience this phenomenon and are marginalized and possess less than full status in their positions in predominantly White male environments (Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007; Harley, 2008; Moses, 1997; Mosley, 1980; Turner, 2002). Zamani (2003), for example, argues that “African American women hold a unique position as members of two groups that have been treated in a peripheral manner by post-secondary education” (p. 6). This peripheral position makes them invisible (Turner, 2002; Zamani, 2003) and their duality of race and gender is devalued (Patitu & Hinton, 2003) in the academy among their predominantly White male counterparts.

The duality of race/ethnicity and gender are significant barriers to the advancement and success of African American administrators and are problematic as two forms of oppression (Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Zamani, 2003) and sources of tension and obstacles (Holmes, 2003) for these women. As discussed in Harley (2008), Wenniger and Conroy (2001) concur “African American women are at once more visible and equally isolated due to racial and gender differences” (p. 27). Discrimination takes form, although more subtle, as African American women continue to be further alienated
in the quest for success and advancement in their leadership positions in the workplace (Watson, 2001). For African American administrators, they are burdened by having the constant awareness, both consciously and unconsciously, of having the duality of race and gender. While scholars agree that there is a double burden for African American women, in describing the “double whammy” of race/ethnicity and gender that women face, Holmes (2003) offers a brief narrative on the double whammy and double consciousness that African American women endure, as one respondent states: “You are struck with a series of blows that come at you from all sides, blows that have the potential to knock you off your feet because while they may be anticipated, you don’t always see them coming” (p. 60). Discriminatory behaviors and actions by the dominant culture make the lives of these African American leaders fragile, in which they are constantly on edge.

**Issues of Racism and Sexism**

Scholars agree that, for African American women administrators, their racial and ethnic identification is a primary descriptor of their identity and the most salient (Holmes, 2003; McDemmond, 1999; Nichols & Tanksley, 2004; Patitu & Hinton, 2003; Turner, 2002; Watson, 2001). Harley (2008) offered insight into this claim by specifically identifying this salience as “gendered racism.” African American women are more oppressed by their race than they are by their gender (Harley, 2008; Holmes, 2003; Patitu & Hinton, 2003; Turner, 2002; Zamani, 2003). Patitu and Hinton (2003) cited a study in which five African American women who held administrative positions at five different institutions were interviewed and found that four of these women, “race was more salient in their efforts to retain their positions and seek promotion” (p. 81). Additionally, Clayborne and Hamrick’s study (2007) on the leadership experiences of African
American women at mid-level positions in student affairs clearly articulated the identity crisis and feelings of oppression faced by African American women, as one respondent, Lauren, summarizes: “I just wonder if that is just a figment of our imaginations, is race and gender really an issue? It is an issue; it is the truth. It is the truth; I watch it on a daily basis” (p. 132). African American women face a double bind, barrier, or double whammy (Holmes, 2003; Watson, 2001) in positions of leadership.

African American women are viewed, judged, marginalized, and categorized primarily based on their race, especially at predominantly White institutions (Patitu & Hinton, 2003; Smith & Crawford, 2007; Turner, 2002; Watson, 2001; Zamani, 2003). For instance, in the work by Patitu and Hinton (2003) on the experiences of African American women faculty and administrators, one respondent believed that “being a woman was less threatening to others than being African American” and then stated, “My race overshadowed being a woman” (p. 81). Notwithstanding, many African American female administrators must prepare themselves for the inevitable attacks on them based primarily on race and skin color (Holmes, 2003). This claim is also supported in the study by Holmes (2003) in an investigation of African American women administrators, and how race and gender, independently, can influence African American female leaders’ academic roles and collegial relationships at institutions of higher education. In her response to the idea of the double whammy of being African American and female, one administrator in the study exclaimed: “By the time they finish putting it on you because you are Black they stick it to you for being a female too” (p. 60). There is a daily assault of racist first, and sexist behaviors second, that African American women administrators ensure at their institutions. In addition, Patitu and Hinton (2003) posit that “for most
African American women, racism and sexism are not always distinguishable; often they exist in tandem” (p. 81). Racism and the added discriminatory actions of sexism against African American females further compound the issues of frustration and discouragement in these women’s lives (Watson, 2001). Because institutional culture, specifically the dominant ideology, becomes problematic for women in a male dominated field, African American women’s leadership styles or “ways of knowing” are targeted as being less than ideal (Watson, 2001). Women’s ways of knowing does not discriminate, as African American females in colleges and universities have a commonality with their White counterparts of the stress in being a woman in an educational culture that is dominated by men (Harley, 2008; Penny & Gaillard, 2006; Turner, 2002).

While African American men have gained status in administrative positions within higher education, they have joined forces with their White male counterparts by increasing the roadblocks for entry and access into the academy by African American women (Holmes, 2003). Hegemony in institutions of higher education decreases the advancement opportunities for African American women administrators. Holmes (2003) indicated that several participants in her study found that “ALL men, Black and [W]hite sometimes have difficulty taking direction from female supervisors as well as seeking women as competent and equal to them in the work place” (p. 59). And though African American women administrators are contrived and feel the indifference most from their African American and White male colleagues, so do their White female counterparts and other women of color (Holmes, 2003). The ideological hegemony within institutions of higher education is pervasive and career threatening to African American women who
endure racist and sexist discrimination while in isolation at predominantly White institutions.

**Hostile Campus Climates**

Hostility within the campus climate is another barrier that affects African American women administrators. As Smith and Crawford (2007) state, “No leadership development workshop, conference or workshop on administration can prepare African American female administrators for the demands of psychological warfare and alienation” (para. 37). Indeed Smith and Crawford present a sharp and negative statement related to progress and achievement for African American women who aspire to senior administration in institutions of higher education. However, it is a reality for senior administrators who endure this hostile climate among the ranks at their institutions (Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007; Farris, 1999; Holmes, 2003, 2004; Holmes et al., 2007; Howe-Barksdale, 2007; S. Jackson & Harris, 2007; Mabokela & Green, 2001; Miller & Vaughn, 1997; Moses, 1997; Myers, 2002; Patitu & Hinton, 2003; Penny & Gaillard, 2006; Smith & Crawford, 2007; Turner, 2002). These cold or “chilly” experiences of African American women often have served to hinder their professional progress (Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007; Farris, 1999; J. F. L. Jackson, 2001, 2002; Holmes, 2003; Moses, 1997; Smith & Crawford, 2007; Turner, 2002).

The institutional climate and culture on predominantly White college campuses is an impediment to professional growth for African American women administrators, but many times these women choose to leave higher education in general rather than take the daily assaults from their White male counterparts. In referencing faculty of color at historically White institutional environments but generalized to African American women
administrators, Smith and Crawford (2007) contend, “Many do not choose to endure the struggle to gain promotion and tenure in these universities due to the hostile climate” (para. 21). And although there have been strides in access for African American women into administrative positions (Howe-Barksdale, 2007), they continue to be marginalized in a chilly campus climates which limits their acceptance and respect within the academy as leaders, and institutional resistance to their positions of power.

Marginalization and lack of power. Treatment by fellow colleagues and institutional personnel at predominantly White campuses marginalizes and often diminishes the right of power and influence of African American women within their institutions (Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007; Farris, 1999; Guillory, 2001; Holmes, 2003, 2004; Howe-Barksdale, 2007; Mosley, 1980; Turner, 2002; Watson, 2001; Wolfman, 1997). The resistance, limitation, lack of power, respect, and acknowledgment not only hamper their capabilities as leaders, but it has a direct affect on the institution which would benefit from their expertise, excellent decision-making abilities, and collegial partnerships. Patitu and Hinton (2003) further accentuate the issues of marginalization of African American women administrators and asserted that “marginalization is defined as any issue, situation, or circumstance that has placed these women outside of the flow of power and influence within their institutions” (p. 82). Certainly the marginalization of African American women administrators affects their self-concept and increases their self-doubt (Patitu & Hinton, 2003), especially when those positions require them to make significant decisions that will impact both students and the institution in general. Watson (2001) agrees with Patitu and Hinton (2003), by asserting that “[African American women administrators] find their roles and positions to be ill defined with a lack of
authority and respect” (p. 8). Further, Watson contends, “African Americans continue to be grossly underrepresented when it comes to occupying administrative positions that control budgets and power” (p. 8). Consistent with Watson, the seminal study by Holmes (2003) on African American female leaders found that African American women are aware of the lack of power and authority granted, as one respondent stated: “Right now it seems en-vogue to have Black people in senior-level administrative positions. Now does that always translate into our having the same type of power and authority that say a White guy might have, no it does not” (p. 54). This does little to empower and increase the confident leadership skills and abilities of African American women administrators.

In her qualitative study on the experiences of mid- through senior-level African American student affairs professionals, Holmes (2003) shared the experiences of one research participant who acknowledged the struggle and professional stifling in being an African American woman on a predominantly White campus by lamenting:

At times it’s a real burden to be Black in a White institution because whether it is true or not you feel like your White colleagues are always questioning your credibility and your right to be here; largely because race relations in America permeates everything we do. (p. 52)

There is a constant need for African American women administrators to validate their positions, their effectiveness within their positions, and even further, their right, expertise and credentials to hold such positions (Holmes, 2003; Myers, 2002; Nichols & Tanksley, 2004; Watson, 2001).

In their study, Nichols and Tanksley (2004) summarized one subject’s claim that she was not respected in her position, even with the proper educational credential: “Some
of her colleagues would not refer to her as Doctor but would refer to her as Miss, acknowledging their disrespect for her doctoral degree” (p. 178). This outlines the social location in which African American women on college campuses are placed, and further diminishes their power and abilities, in addition to White colleagues on campuses who routinely disregard African American women for their accomplishments. This assertion also reflects the realities that African American women experience in hostile “chilly” campus environments, especially at predominantly White institutions (Holmes, 2003). And though African American women may have the position title and accompanying responsibilities, they realize the lack of valid authority in decision making, the lack of respect, and the absent support from other colleagues (Moses, 1997; Mosley, 1980; Patitu & Hinton, 2003; Watson, 2001). One respondent in the study by Watson (2001) eloquently shared: “African American women administrators must establish credibility even after their credentials and experiences have proven that they can do an effective job. We have to out think White administrators to gain the same amount of respect and credibility” (p. 11). The responses by this participant clearly emphasizes the fact that although African American women have taken strides to advance in the academy into senior or more mainstream administration, the ideology of the dominant culture continues to further strip away power, credibility, and the likelihood that these women will continue having problems in their quests for success. Further, while African American women administrators must consistently endure a chilly climate, the reality is, the inequities within higher education have not changed. In their study on race and mentoring, Holmes et al. (2007), state:
Four years ago, if anyone had said to me that the Black woman in higher education faces greater risks and problems now than in the past, I doubt I would have taken the remark seriously . . . . A great deal still needs to be done. (p. 107)

Watson (2001) summarizes the issues of marginalization and the added burden of isolation for African American administrators, by stating: “African American women are perceived by the [W]hite administrators as marginal in institutions of higher education. This translates to a lonely existence” (p. 12). Marginalization on predominantly White campuses where African American women experience a hostile and chilly climate leads to further isolation and loneliness in the academy, and serves as a deepened barrier to her success. The lack of acceptance and the sense of isolation African American women contend with at their hostile institutions results in a lack of respect and challenges to her administrative powers (Howe-Barksdale, 2007) and can be a contributing factor in her decision to leave the chilly climate of postsecondary education in favor of a more accepting and less alienating profession.

**Isolation and loneliness.** African American women are also challenged by feelings of isolation and loneliness in their administrative roles (Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007; Crawford & Smith, 2005; Holmes, 2003; Holmes et al., 2007; Howe-Barksdale, 2007; Jimison, 2008; Mabokela & Green, 2001; Moses, 1997; Mosley, 1980; Myers, 2002; Penny & Gaillard, 2006; Simpson, 2001; Smith & Crawford, 2007; Turner, 2002; Watson, 2001). African American administrator Sylvia Jimison (2008) describes her career journey, and personal experiences and issues of isolation and loneliness:

I’ll admit, as a person of color, that it was not easy working at an institution that was not diverse. I often felt isolated. As the only Black woman in a management
position at the college at the time, I never quite felt accepted in my work environment. (para. 4)

The scarcity of women in administrative positions, especially at the senior- and executive-level, leaves African American women with limited exposure to colleagues who share the same gender, race/ethnicity, culture, and overall life experiences. Isolation and loneliness limit future successes of African American women (Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Mosley, 1980; Smith & Crawford, 2007) and institutional goals of diversity by increasing the number of minority women into senior administrative positions in higher education to reflect the changing demographics of the student communities.

Isolation and loneliness are serious issues for African American women administrators, as Simpson (2001) movingly stated: “They are too often the ‘only Black women’ or the ‘only Black person’ in their setting and this alone makes them ripe for multiple emotional pitfalls” (p. 655). Among the most damaging professionally is the limitation for future success as these women simply give up and give in, and ultimately leave their positions in administration and many times in postsecondary education in general (Myers, 2002; Smith & Crawford, 2007). The lack of a critical mass of African American female administrators in higher education can be a predictor of the success for these women. Because of the isolation and loneliness, the decision to either stay at an institution or to seek another profession (Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Mosley, 1980; Myers, 2002) further affects the self-esteem and concept of African American women leaders who have the desire to advance in the academy, but these negative factors may prevent their ambitions. In addition to the possibility of lowered career aspirations
and advancement due to isolation and loneliness, physical illnesses, fatigue, and wariness (Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007; Simpson, 2001; Watson, 2001) and lack of purpose and increasing frustration emerge over time. This can take a toll on African American women administrators who operate in isolation on a daily basis. The fatigue of isolation and loneliness experienced by African American female leaders at predominantly White institutions is exclusionary; however, the issue of being the only African American woman in a leadership role may certainly be the most isolating and stressful.

**Race fatigue—being the “only one.”** African American women face stress and race fatigue as they are expected to be the only one to represent racial and gender issues on college and university campuses. Harley (2008) argued this point:

> African American women at predominantly [W]hite institutions suffer from a form of race fatigue—the syndrome of being over extended, undervalued, unappreciated, and just knowing that because you are the “negro in residence” that you will be asked to serve and represent the “color factor” in yet another capacity.

(p. 21)

Not only are there personal obstacles for advancement into administrative positions for African American women in higher education, but there is the added pressure of being the sole individual who many times is called upon to represent all African American people or topics on predominantly White institutions (Bradley, 2005; Holmes, 2003; Howe-Barksdale, 2007; J. F. L. Jackson, 2001; Moses, 1997; Mosley, 1980; Myers, 2002; Nichols & Tanksley, 2004; Smith & Crawford, 2007; Turner, 2002; Watson, 2001; Zamani, 2003). Patitu and Hinton (2003) further accentuate the notion of being the “only one” as one respondent in their study described her experiences:
Many times, people of color are the sole entity or voice in a department. This short 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 are the representative from the race; this is often the case at many institutions. (p. 90)

Essentially, African American women administrators are treated as tokens, and serve as the representative for all African American people and issues on predominantly White campuses, and this is burdensome given the fact that many of these institutions have not done their part to fully integrate and increase the diversity of administrators who hold key campus positions (Bradley, 2005; Holmes, 2003; Moses, 1997; Watson, 2001). Often African American women leaders are regarded as symbols, rather than individuals, on hostile predominantly White campuses (Moses, 1997). In sharing the voices of African American women administrators in her research, Watson (2001) discussed the “token syndrome” and how this syndrome is severely isolating for African American female leaders. She quoted one subject who declared:

I have been subjected to the token syndrome. I do not like being labeled or looked upon as the spokesperson for my culture. However, I would like to think that my actions and my demeanor will disprove the myths that society has placed on African Americans. (p. 12)

This subjects’ experience culminates the feelings and burdens which are placed on African American women leaders, who, in isolation, must be available to “represent” on behalf of the African American race, while maintaining her position and completing her direct responsibilities to ensure that she is not seen as lacking and will be able to advance
in the academy. There are no added benefits, compensation, recognition, or rewards for these women (Harley, 2008; Moses, 1997; Mosley, 1980).

Unfortunately, the added burden becomes problematic when the sole African American female administrator is called upon to provide support and encouragement to other African American administrators (J. F. L. Jackson, 2001; Mosley, 1980; Smith & Crawford, 2007; Watson, 2001). McDemmond (1999) describes her own experiences, stating: “As are many African Americans in predominantly White colleges and universities, I was called upon by those like me to hear their concerns and to assist them when they felt no one else would” (p. 79). Although providing support and encouragement to other African American leaders, the act of being a sounding-board becomes negative when others at predominantly White institutions feel that African American women may be taking sides or advocating for a colleague solely based on race and gender. McDemmond further accentuates this point through her experiences as a senior level administrator at a predominantly White institution:

For taking action well within the scope of my position as an officer of the university, I was accused of siding with those of my race and sex for some other reasons. Again, I found that I had to defend myself and my actions for no other reason than that I was a female African American administrator on a predominantly [W]hite campus. (p. 79)

The impact for African American administrators can be career-threatening for women who support and advocate for each other. Smith and Crawford (2007) validate this claim in their research on African American women administrators and mentoring at predominantly White institutions, as one respondent stated: “I could be a lot further along
in my career if I was willing to play some of the games that people want you to play, particularly in selling other people of color down the road” (para. 24). Smith and Crawford’s interviewee illuminates the disappointment and potentially career damaging experiences that African American women leaders face, especially in having the covert (or indirect) responsibility of representing herself on behalf of all African American professionals and students on predominantly White college campuses. Moreover, the categorized position that African American women administrators are placed in can reproduce stereotypical images from the dominant culture of African American women as nurturing, caretakers who make another’s needs more important than their own.

**Negative Perceptions and Stereotypes**

The characteristics of African American women are unique and multidimensional. However, the cultural stereotypes of these traits which are embedded in American culture about African American women are overwhelmingly negative and evolve into problematic situations within institutions of higher learning. The perceived negative stereotypes of African American women are socially constructed and can be tremendous obstacles in them being recognized and respected as fully qualified professionals on their campuses. The legacy of hatred and oppression of African American women have played out significantly in popular culture. Stereotypes and negative images of African American women in particular have solidified the dominant culture’s ideology and punitive labeling (Ladson-Billings, 2009), which certainly carries over into the experiences and barriers of African American women administrators in higher education.
The “Mammy” complex. In popular culture, there are two significant and historical stereotypical caricatures that negatively portray African American women. The first of these infamous images include the “Mammy” who is portrayed as the domicile, nurturing, and subservient caretaker. Her role is supportive of others, as seen by the archetype character of Aunt Delilah from the 1930s film *Imitation of Life* and the simple servant image of Aunt Jemima. She has no power, no authority, no personal desires, and no future. The caricature of mammy is also prevalent in stereotyping African American women in their roles as leaders. African American female administrators are expected to be silent, gracious, submissive, and care-giving (Bradley, 2005; Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007; Holmes, 2003; Johnsrud, 1990; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Myers, 2002; Watson, 2001). Although one would argue that these specific traits are culturally associated with African American women, and indeed the African American culture, they should not be seen as the only or dominant characteristic which therefore makes these women incapable of leadership. African American women are expected to remain in an inferior (Smith & Crawford, 2007) stance, and not encouraged to address problems or stand their grounds during disagreements or debates in meetings. And further, issues of racism and sexism in the workplace for African American women can lead to punitive reactions and ostracizing from fellow colleagues and supervisors when these women do not behave in accordance to the dominantly held view of African American women as the “mammy” (Bradley, 2005). As Bradley (2005) describes these issues, she stated: “It also signifies the penalty of being censored and often ostracized when African American women do not acquiesce to the unwritten rule of ‘serving and nurturing’ co-workers” (p. 520). Similarly, communication styles of African American women are culturally
significant (Bradley, 2005; Caldwell & Watkins, 2007; Watson, 2001) and can be misinterpreted based on stereotypical thinking as these women being abrupt and domineering.

**The “Sapphire” complex.** Conversely, the second stereotypical caricature of African American women in popular culture is the abrupt, domineering, threatening, and loud “Sapphire” character, introduced on the *Amos n’ Andy Show* from the 1950s and reflecting Jim Crow, and as portrayed for example as “Aunt Esther” on the sitcom *Sanford and Son* in the 1970s (Ferris State University, 2010). Administrative leaders in higher education are expected to voice their concerns and provide feedback on issues that may affect students, departments, or the institution. Unfortunately, this administrative expectation has been interpreted negatively for African American women in the academy, as they have been labeled as horn blowers. As Smith and Crawford (2007) point out when describing a unique experience by an African American manager, “[I was] like a horn always ready to go off” (para. 24). The domineering behavior and going-off, and the caregiving agreeable African American mother figure (Bradley, 2005; Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007; Harley, 2008; Holmes, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2009; McDemmond, 1999; Myers, 2002; Patitu & Hinton, 2003) stereotypical images that have been inflicted upon African American women prevents them from being seen appropriately as professionals. There tends to be a double-standard rather than embracing the unique leadership styles which African American women possess because they are always compared to the dominant culture that has labeled itself as the norm.

The negative perceptions and stereotyped images of African American women can be detrimental to their success as administrators in higher education. As scholars have
identified socially constructed characteristics of African American women and the negative implications on their abilities to serve in leadership roles, there is a considerable amount of stagnation that is experienced in advancing to upper-level leadership positions. Many African American women provide leadership in programs or departments which are considered less mainstream, yet peripheral with limited legitimate power, to the more desired administrative positions on predominantly White campuses. These leadership positions, in the margins, maintain the low-status of African American women leaders and perpetuates a double standard for advancement opportunities. You cannot be African American, a woman, and have power.

**Legitimate Versus Illegitimate Leadership**

Although the number of African American women who have obtained advanced degrees has increased, the professional career outlook and advancement opportunities to senior-level administrative positions are bleak (Holmes, 2003; Moses, 1997; Mosley, 1980; Searby & Tripses, 2006; Smith & Crawford, 2007; Watson, 2001; Zamani, 2003). Holmes (2003) asserts “the number of Black women ascending to mid through senior level administrative positions remains comparably disproportionate relative to their degree attainment” (p. 46). And in comparison to White women administrators, the number of African American administrators who have advanced to senior-level positions is minuscule (Holmes, 2003). Zamani (2003) addressed this issue and states that there is an “overrepresentation of women in low-status, low-income producing fields” (p. 6). In describing the status of African American women leaders in the academy by using the analogy of the “food chain,” African American women administrators would be at the bottom of the pyramid (Watson, 2001) and are stagnated in “ghettoized” low-status
positions (Wolfman, 1997). These low skill and low paying occupations cause stress and further victimization of African American female leaders. Additionally, African American women academic administrators are frequently found disproportionately in soft instructional areas such as nursing, education, continuing education, and home economics (S. Jackson & Harris, 2007). These fields, although foundational and necessary in American culture, are less prestigious and are thought of as low decision-making professions.

In their phenomenological study on eight executive-level African American administrators, both men and women, Rolle et al. (2000) discussed how many African Americans who enter into administrative positions do so in areas that focus primarily on the needs of minority students and in programs, such as federally-funded TRIO programs, which address the postsecondary access and retention issues of low-income and first-generation students from primarily underserved populations. One participant during her in-depth interview shared the experience and challenge in trying to advance to a more legitimate, rather than an administrative position which does not possess legitimate power:

I was well qualified for the Assistant Dean of Student Services; however, at that particular university all African Americans in the administrative track were part of federally-mandated programs. So I was not given the position but was made the coordinator of veteran services. In addition, I felt federally-sponsored programs became the [W]hites’ way to deal with affirmative action. (p. 83)

This respondent identified a critical issue with the devaluation of professional skills and potential upper-level administrative advancement by people of color and especially those
who work in social minority programs. Issues of tokenism (Rolle et al., 2000; Turner, 2002) lead many managers to become discouraged in their institution’s inability to promote well qualified African Americans to senior level track administrative positions. As one participant in the Rolle et al. (2000) study summarized, “We were generally viewed in positions as tokenism or that was a necessary political or administrative move to satisfy conditions at that time” (p. 87).

As many African American women have advanced in the academy, many have gained entry into administration through mid-level management positions within departments and programs that address the needs of minority students or affirmative action issues (Crawford & Smith, 2005; Mosley, 1980). The positions within these departments and programs tend to be and are considered dead-end career paths (McDemmond, 1999) for African American women. Leadership of minority or affirmative action-type programs are not valued at the same level as other more mainstream, legitimate, department and programs cross-divisionally at college and university campuses (Guillory, 2001; J. F. L. Jackson, 2001; Smith & Crawford, 2007). Further, in referring to women and people of color, Amey et al.’s (2002) study on community college leadership indicated: 

Being mindful of organizational silos for [W]hite women and administrators of color, particularly in the senior student affairs area, seems important to avoid the trap of appearing to promote greater diversity in community college leadership, when in fact such positions remain at the periphery. (p. 586)

Silos that are created and maintained at institutions of higher education are disproportionately populated by women and people of color in the areas of student
affairs (Amey et al., 2002; Crawford & Smith, 2005). As institutions of higher education seek to increase the diversity of both students, and in particular administrators, it is essential that they consider this silo-effect and work to increase the numbers of women and ethnic minorities into administrative positions who hold positions in nontraditional career trajectories, such as student affairs. There are considerable implications for African American women who serve in key leadership positions within student affairs or student services divisions. These positions are indicated as peripheral and illegitimate, and institutions of higher education must look beyond the traditional career trajectories to senior-level leadership. Although this study focused primarily on community college leaders, Amey et al.’s (2002) findings reflect what others have concluded about the experiences and challenges of African American women administrators at 4-year institutions. African American women leaders continue to be placed on the periphery in illegitimate roles and not fully integrated into more mainstream administrative positions in higher education which legitimately possess power, authority, and decision-making capabilities to impact institutions.

The negative barriers experienced by African American women administrators are enormous, while also demoralizing to her self-image, leadership capabilities, and professional aspirations. The women in the study by Holmes (2003) described their experiences being African American in White institutions as “tiring, exhausting, hard and [a] burden because of the constant need to validate their presence and existence to [W]hite colleagues who they felt held negative perceptions of them” (p. 52). In identifying the negative barriers experienced, the issue of validation permeates the mental psyche of African American women administrators. And in her ability to persevere
through trying situations and circumstances, African American female leaders rely on strong support networks and interpersonal connections to provide the necessary comfort, cultural grounding, coping strategies, and encouragement to advance professionally within hostile postsecondary educational environments.

**Support Networks**

Support networks are a vital and critical component to the success and advancement of African American women administrators and especially those that work at predominantly White college and university campuses (Harley, 2008; Howe-Barksdale, 2007; Miller & Vaughn, 1997; Myers, 2002; Patitu & Hinton, 2003; Watson, 2001). Given the need and ability to cope with such hostile environments, African American women utilize support networks including mentor relationships to provide guidance and assistance for career advancement, informal support networks that may include other colleagues within the academy, and the importance of familial relationships and spirituality to ensure administrative success and longevity. In her qualitative study on African American women serving in key administrative positions, Watson (2001) posits:

> Holistic support networks of African American administrators in higher education are critical for their personal and professional development as they move through the workplace culture. Such networks are vital to African American women’s survival and success because these women tend not to be in the mainstream of the university milieu. (p. 11)

Watson’s assertion summarizes the importance of support networks in persistence and professional success of African American women administrators in higher education.
Mentoring Relationships

Mentoring is an important component in the success of African American female leaders (Crawford & Smith, 2005; J. F. L. Jackson, 2001, 2002; J. F. L. Jackson & Flowers, 2003; Johnsrud, 1990; Mosley, 1980; Myers, 2002; Nichols & Tanksley, 2004; Penny & Gaillard, 2006; Searby & Tripses, 2006; Watson, 2001). Yet scholars consistently acknowledged that there is a severe lack of formal mentoring relationships available for African American women administrators (Caldwell & Watkins, 2007; Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007; Crawford & Smith, 2005; Holmes, 2004; Holmes et al., 2007; Howe-Barksdale, 2007; Mosley, 1980; Nichols & Tanksley, 2004; Patitu & Hinton, 2003; Penny & Gaillard, 2006; Simpson, 2001; Smith & Crawford, 2007; Watson, 2001). The role of a mentor is to provide guidance and to “show the ropes” (Penny & Gaillard, 2006) to their mentees. In addition, the role of a mentor is to advise, support, and to open doors for career growth and advancement (Crawford & Smith, 2005; J. F. L. Jackson & Flowers, 2003; Johnsrud, 1990; Nichols & Tanksley, 2004; Penny & Gaillard, 2006; Searby & Tripses, 2006). As Johnsrud (1990) asserts, “There is probably no other single relationship that can be as instrumental in enhancing an administrative career in higher education than a quality mentoring relationship” (p. 59). However, the lack of mentors available to African American women is a barrier to their professional growth and success (Crawford & Smith, 2005; Holmes et al., 2007; S. Jackson & Harris, 2007; Nichols & Tanksley, 2004; Searby & Tripses, 2006).

Lack of available mentors. It is especially problematic to match African American women in a mentor/mentee relationship due to the minimal numbers seated in, at minimum, mid-level to senior administrative positions (Crawford & Smith, 2005;
Holmes, 2003; Holmes et al., 2007; J. F. L. Jackson & Flowers, 2003; S. Jackson & Harris, 2007; Johnsrud, 1990; Smith & Crawford, 2007). There is a significant lack of African American women in positions of leadership on college and university campuses (Holmes, 2003; J. F. L. Jackson, 2004; J. F. L. Jackson & Flowers, 2003; S. Jackson & Harris, 2007; Moses, 1997; Mosley, 1980; Nichols & Tanksley, 2004; Patitu & Hinton, 2003; Watson, 2001). As Hamilton (2004) asserts in her research, “In comparison to their share of all faculty and senior staff positions—remain underrepresented in the top college and university jobs” (p. 63). In their discussion about the limited number of African American women in the academy and a study on African American female college and university presidents, S. Jackson and Harris (2007) argue:

Another difficulty is that the limited number of African American female college and university presidents makes it difficult for aspiring leaders to find African American role models who have been successful in breaking through the barriers of race and gender. (p. 119)

Mentoring can be a benefit globally, the mentor, mentee, and the institution. Penny and Gaillard (2006) contend that “if mentoring African American women in higher education becomes a valued part of the human resource development commitment of colleges and universities, there is little question that the institutional life of academe can benefit” (para. 7). It is imperative that the goals of the institution are aligned with the career advancement of African American women administrators (Crawford & Smith, 2005) and people of color in general. In their study investigating the importance of mentoring African American women professionals, Crawford and Smith (2005) assert:
Because African American women are often placed in positions that are on the perimeter of the organization and have little guidance and direction from mentors, they are unable to distinguish between the espoused theory of an organization and its theory-in-use. (p. 57)

Certainly, African American women administrators are already disenfranchised with their institutions, and any further disconnect in ideology, principle, or value between the individual and the academy will reinforce the notion of African American women’s incapability as administrators but also create negative reputations for college and university campuses. Mentoring can be a catalyst for African American women to senior leadership positions, and the lack of available mentors is problematic. And, although mentoring for African American women is essential, negative effects from noncollegial colleagues may prove to be damaging to potential career growth.

**Sabotage and lack of collegiality.** Lack of supportive relationships and some mentoring interactions may produce negative experiences for African American women. When discussing support opportunities and how mentoring facilitates professional growth, J. F. L. Jackson (2002) stated, “Hopefully, mentors will be honest with their comments and constructive criticism” (p. 14). In her qualitative study on support and sabotage among women in leadership positions, Brock (2008) introduces this point by stating: “Women’s trust in other women is also their Achilles Heel” (p. 211). She also asserts: “Historical accounts and current research reveals that woman-to-woman betrayal and sabotage covertly coexist alongside collaboration and mentorship” (p. 211).

In developing and establishing relationships, traditionally girls are socialized to value being kind and considerate, to be nice and cooperate with others, and to get along
with others; and ultimately girls are socialized to avoid conflict and to remain passive (Brock, 2008). The early socialization of girls is very much opposite of boys who tend to engage in direct and often times aggressive behaviors. However, there are negative issues to this passive socialization of girls which matures over time. In her discussion on the lack of girls being socialized to engage in negotiation and conflict resolution, Brock (2008) found that “girls are more likely to use passive aggressive behaviors, or indirect aggression, such as malicious gossiping, staring and giggling, ridiculing, writing anonymous notes, forming cliques, and excluding someone in response to conflict with peers” (p. 213).

These negative activities can prove damaging in the experiences of and between women as they advance in leadership positions and especially for African American women who can benefit from mentoring or supportive relationships. One woman respondent in the phenomenology by Brock (2008) explained, “There has been a lot of rhetoric on women mentoring other women. However, the so-called solidarity of women does not exist. Some women are engaged in competition and sabotage” (p. 216). This is an unfortunate consequence in potentially positive mentoring and support relationships among women in administrative positions.

In a study on issues surrounding the elimination of the “old boys” network, Searby and Tripses (2006) discussed the evidence found by Rhode (2003) on women excluding other women from these supportive or mentoring-type relationships and assert that, “the ‘Queen Bee’ phenomenon sometimes operates; women who reach positions of influence enjoy their status as one of the few females at the top thus taking no responsibility to assist less experienced women to reach their leadership potential” (p. 180). In their study
on the challenges and successful strategies of African American women administrators in higher education, Nichols and Tanksley (2004) provided insight through one respondent who “experienced problems with other African American women who refused to support her” (p. 178). There remains a lack of sisterly support (Holmes, 2003; Myers, 2002; Nichols & Tanksley, 2004) for African American women administrators, who must not only support themselves within predominantly White campus climates, but also “must realize that even a lack of assistance from [B]lack sisters and their pettiness” (Nichols & Tanksley, 2004, p. 179) prevents these women from advancement within institutions of higher education.

While there are instances of sabotage and the lack of collegiality among African American women administrators in the academy, it cannot be overshadowed by the dire need for mentoring relationships and support networks among African American women and how these positive relationships are necessary, critical and transformative in advancing African American women into senior-level administrative positions in higher education. As one respondent in Nichols and Tanksley’s (2004) study so eloquently described in speaking about the importance of mentors, “Women should identify strong and successful women mentors with similar ethical and moral beliefs” (p. 181). In doing so, African American women gain a considerable advantage of receiving the critical support of a constructive mentor, while avoiding individuals who may otherwise prove to be incompetent as mentors and professional advocates. Moreover, the social support for African American women administrators available through collegial relationships is particularly important for success and advancement. Additionally, the support from family members and spiritual connections for African American women leaders provide
the coping mechanisms and emotional outlets needed to navigate at predominantly White institutions.

**Interpersonal Connections**

African American women historically have developed and sustained strong interpersonal support networks within and among their communities. This is equally important and significant for African American women in administrative positions in higher education. Interpersonal connections among African American leaders allow for an increased level of social and professional support, as well as emotional well-being (Brock, 2008; Caldwell & Watkins, 2007; Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007; Crawford & Smith, 2005; Myers, 2002; Penny & Gaillard, 2006; Smith & Crawford, 2007; Turner, 2002) and is critical to the perseverance of African American women administrators in their career paths (Turner, 2002). For example, in a study on the career paths of three women of color presidents, Turner (2002) indicated that “each president underscored the importance of maintaining close relationships with other women of color” (p. 17). Moreover, these relationships provide a very valuable and critical means to increase the retention and further development of women of color to senior-level administrative positions (Turner, 2002). Even if these professional women are strangers, they will reach out to one another and develop a supportive relationship, which Penny and Gaillard (2006) call “sisterhood experiences” (para. 27) as African American women are able to create meaningful bonds and support groups. Along with the collegial relationships that African American women administrators develop and maintain, sociocultural institutions of spirituality and the family are critical elements to professional success.
Spirituality and Familial Relationships

Spiritual connections and relationships with family members are also strong interpersonal support structures for African American women leaders (Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007; S. Jackson & Harris, 2007; Myers, 2002; Nichols & Tanksley, 2004; Simpson, 2001; Smith & Crawford, 2007; Turner, 2002; Wolfman, 1997). African American women enhance their spirituality as a support and stress reducing mechanism through praying, reading the Bible, and by attending religious services (Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007; Wolfman, 1997). The reliance on a higher power and spirituality provides a critical means in assisting African American women administrators alleviate the stressors that are present in their positions in the academy. In describing one respondent in their study, Patitu and Hinton (2003) stated: “Her strong faith in God and her prayer life, stand out as her main coping mechanism” (p. 83). As Simpson (2001) observed in her study on African American women administrators, “Most often God and family reign at the center of their lives” (p. 671). The value and commitment to spirituality allows African American women to persevere even in the most trying situations (Harley, 2008; Howe-Barksdale, 2007; Nichols & Tanksley, 2004; Simpson, 2001; Wolfman, 1997). In describing a difficult work situation, Clayborne and Hamrick’s (2007) respondent stated, “I know that God is good, and He will supply my needs and I just have to be faithful” (p. 135). Paradoxically, Wolfman (1997) contends “Church is a place where leadership skills are first taught and tested” (p. 164). The levels of faith, spirituality, and prayer are important and help with not only weathering tumultuous situations in the work environment but also in supporting the professional growth of African American women as leaders.
Like spirituality, family is foundational in providing a strong level of support and encouragement for African American women administrators (Caldwell & Watkins, 2007; Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007; Crawford & Smith, 2005; S. Jackson & Harris, 2007; Moses, 1997; Nichols & Tanksley, 2004; Smith & Crawford, 2007; Turner, 2002; Wolfman, 1997). As stated by Crawford and Smith (2005), “Their families provided the only support in helping them strive to attain educational and professional goals” (p. 56). The most important support structure is the family who will challenge, support, and nurture African American women as they progress in the academy in senior administrative roles. In their findings from a qualitative study on African American women in higher education, Crawford and Smith (2005) identified “the most important personal descriptions were through their relationships with their families” (p. 59). A key predictor to African American women administrators’ professional success, and women of color leaders in general, is the validation received from supportive family members to assist in overcoming self-doubt, receiving advice, and advancing reciprocal relationships (Turner, 2002). To be sure, interpersonal supportive connections from friends, colleagues of color, church, and family are transformative and continue to be a contributing factor in the lives and professional growth and retention of African American women administrators within institutions of postsecondary education.

Interpersonal support networks for African American women administrators is critical and can be transformative in their professional success. In contextualizing the support connections for African American women, socioculturally, values, culture, religion, family, and social identity are all intertwined (Miller & Vaughn, 1997) and influence the coping strategies needed to successfully navigate and excel in
administrative positions at institutions of higher education, which maintain high levels of dominant culture supremacy and exclusivity.

**Summary and Synthesis of Reviewed Literature**

Although there was an absence of considerable research on African American women’s experience in the academy, it is important for African American women to continue the trajectory of advancement to executive administration within higher education. There were several unique experiences identified in the literature. But as demonstrated, the characteristics and experiences of African American women within the academy are considerable barriers to advancement and can have significant implications for institutional leadership and future advancement within the academy. Indeed, exposing the barriers and struggles that are experienced by African American female leaders through research may give rise to the dominant culture’s perception and reinforcement that African American women are powerless, incapable, have multiple troubles that may impact their ability to lead, and ultimately further increase the absence of African American women in leadership positions in the academy. The cycle would continue, and especially perpetuated, by White male senior- and executive-level administrators at predominantly White institutions. It is significant to note that little has changed in the literature and with the experiences of African American women administrators in higher education. Mosley (1980) conducted critical research on African American female administrators in 1975 and noted the issues of isolation, alienation, double jeopardy of racism and sexism, being the only “one,” leadership positions in peripheral departments and positions of power, lack of support and collegiality, which all continue to be experienced by African American women leaders in the new millennium. The literature
and research on the experiences and barriers of African American women administrators must continue to be facilitated to thwart any further marginalization and oppression from dominant culture’s misguided perceptions, and to empower current African American women leaders and those aspiring to leadership positions to ultimately create strong and diverse postsecondary educational institutions.

The literature on the unique leadership experiences of African American women administrators in higher education is not comprehensive, and scholarly evidence found does not fully address the mitigating factors of their experiences, perceptions, and successes. There is limited literature which considers the retention of African American women in administrative roles in the academy. While J. F. L. Jackson (2001, 2002, 2004) and J. F. L. Jackson and Flowers (2003) have conducted several studies on the retention of African American executive leaders in higher education, there is a deficiency in the research that is specific to African American women administrators, as well as qualitative inquiry to give voice on her unique experiences in the academy.

Scholars have maintained in the literature the placement of African American women administrators in positions on the periphery (Amey et al., 2002; Crawford & Smith, 2005; Guillory, 2001; J. F. L. Jackson, 2001; S. Jackson & Harris, 2007; McDemmond, 1999; Mosley, 1980; Rolle et al., 2000; Smith & Crawford, 2007; Watson, 2001; Wolfman, 1997; Zamani, 2003) that negate power and decision-making. Yet, the question remains, why and how do African American women advance to senior- or executive-level status in these peripheral positions that lack legitimate power?

The benefits of supportive networks and mentoring experiences for African American women administrators are noteworthy and have been investigated in the
literature by a number of scholars (Caldwell & Watkins, 2007; Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007; Crawford & Smith, 2005; Holmes, 2004; Holmes et al., 2007; Howe-Barksdale, 2007; Mosley, 1980; Nichols & Tanksley, 2004; Patitu & Hinton, 2003; Penny & Gaillard, 2006; Simpson, 2001; Smith & Crawford, 2007; Watson, 2001). And although the literature implies that African American women benefit from these relationships, the research is nonexistent regarding the professionally damaging effects of support networks that are competitive and lend to sabotage, especially when there is such a critical lack of African American women in senior- and executive-level administrative positions.

The final sizeable gap in the literature is related to the investigation of African American women administrator’s advancement and experiences specifically in regards to community colleges, 4-year universities, and historically African American colleges and universities (HBCUs). The implied environment, although hostile and chilly, in the literature references the 4-year public university only. Minimal research addresses institutional experiences in higher education of African American women administrators including community colleges, 4-year universities, and HBCUs (Amey et al., 2002; Harley, 2008; Holmes, 2004; J. F. L. Jackson, 2004; S. Jackson & Harris, 2007; Miller & Vaughn, 1997; Moses, 1997); however, the citations are not insightful enough to substantially address the issues and experiences pertaining to African American female leaders.

Given that the listed gaps were notable and immense, all was not fully addressed in the study. This research provides insight into the unique leadership experiences of African American women administrators in general, but specifically sheds light on the issues the intersection of race and gender for African American women administrators,
the effects of support networks, leadership philosophy, professional retention, career advancement, and finally, an examination of difference for African American women administrators from the community college and 4-year university system of higher education.

Theoretical Framework

The unique leadership experiences and perceptions of African American women senior- and executive-level administrators was framed in an epistemology based on multiple perspectives, all related to the issues of race/ethnicity, gender, and oppression. For this study, I utilized social constructionism as the overarching conceptual framework to purposively view and provide insight on the unique experiences of African American women administrators through the concepts of Critical Race Theory, Black Feminist Thought and the ideology of Womanism, and their leadership perceptions based on the framework provided by leadership theorists Bolman and Deal (2008) and Kouzes and Posner (2002). The social constructionist frame encompasses each conceptual lens into one epistemological perspective of how realities and those imposed are critical in defining and articulating the professional experiences of African American administrators within the social construct of higher education.

Noted sociologists, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1967) theorized that “by the very fact that all social phenomena are constructions produced historically through human activity, no society is totally taken for granted and so, [even more so], is no symbolic universe” (p. 106). The social construction of reality is based on time, history, and interactions among individuals. The constructed realities of African American women administrators in education, the negative barriers including chilly campus
climates, racism and sexism, marginalization, and stereotypical images, as well as the value of support networks, mentoring, family, and spirituality are based en-total on the subjective definitions by the dominant ideological culture. And while the numbers of African American women in leadership roles within the academy have slightly increased, though in lower-level administrative positions or as nondecision making managers of programs for minority students, Collins (2001) argued “given the illusion of change, this strategy of symbolic inclusion masks how the every institutional policies and arrangements that suppress and exclude African Americans as a collectivity remain virtually untouched” (p. 9). The reality of African American women senior- and executive-level administrators within predominantly White institutions provides the phenomenon and purpose of this study. And related to African American females’ marginal status and lack of power within higher education, even while in positions of authority as administrators, Jodi O’Brien (2001), in her analysis of the social construction of reality, theorized that power as a symbolic construct is “the ability to define a situation in a particular way and to have others act in accordance with this definition. Reality may be a social construction, but we are not all equal participants in this construction” (p. 351).

For this very reason, it is critically important to shed light on the unique leadership experiences and perceptions of African American women senior- and executive-level administrators at predominantly White institutions. The creation of meanings and the construction of reality, whether it from an epistemology of Womanist and Black Feminist ideology, Critical Race Theory, or a leadership framework, will continue to be reproduced and maintained, unless there are noteworthy research studies
completed to address the leadership experiences and perceptions of African American women senior- and executive-level administrators at predominantly White institutions, to change the cycle and to re-define the realities for these women. The explanations for underrepresented groups, and specifically African American women administrators exclusion (S. O’Brien & O’Fathaigh, 2004) in education, is due to “symbolic violence” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) which guarantees the dominant symbolic power by the monopoly of symbolic classification and categorization (Siisiainen, 2000). Thus, African American women administrators are oppressed and unable to successfully advance into positions of executive administration due to hegemony and efforts by predominantly White institutions to maintain African American women’s marginal status in the academy due to their intersection of gender and race.

It was imperative to synthesize the research based on the perspectives of Critical Race Theory, Black Feminist Thought and the ideology of Womanism, and a leadership framework, as it gives a full conceptualization of the experiences of African American women and how the meaning of race, gender, and dominant ideologies impact the leadership success and advancement in their administrative positions within predominantly White institutions.

**Critical Race Theory**

Although its roots are grounded in critical legal studies and the analysis of the law based on the inequity in power among people of color and the dominant culture, Critical Race Theory (CRT) is concerned primarily with issues of racism and power constructs. There are five central tenets of Critical Race Theory within the perspective of education, which assert that:
1. There is a centrality of race in American society and that racism is prevalent in our society, while also intersecting with other forms of subordination such as gender.

2. Challenges are made to the dominant ideology, that include claims of objectivity and meritocracy in society, especially related to the covert self-interests of power and privilege by the dominant group.

3. There is a legitimacy by people of color through experiential knowledge in understanding and analyzing racial inequality in institutional practices.

4. There is an insistence that race and racism be located in both a contemporary and historical context utilizing interdisciplinary epistemological and methodological perspectives.

5. That the framework is committed to a social justice agenda to eliminate all forms of oppression, while empowering underrepresented minority groups (Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1999, 2009; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001).

Critical Race Theory, then, addresses the racial system of oppression of those situated at the bottom of the social hierarchy, while providing insight into how hierarchies are related to and preserved by the dominant ideology (Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Torre, 2008) and systems of subordination. Critical Race Theory also challenges the dominant ideology in education, which advances the notion of a deficit theory among people of color (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001), in this case, African American women administrators. This point was well articulated in the review of literature in the ways that African American female
administrators are oppressed within the ivory tower and how these women are placed in
the margins in “leadership” positions on college campuses. While there was a minimal
amount of scholars in the literature who fully utilized CRT as a framework for their
studies on African American women in higher education, most spoke to the issues
outlined as the central tenets of CRT, especially as it relates to the oppression and
intersectionality of race and gender, with race being primary, the dominant ideology
within predominantly White institutions where African American women are not
recognized for their talents, abilities, nor professional merits, and the legitimate
experiences of African American women who deal with racial inequality as an integral
part of their daily realities in higher education.

Recognized critical race theorists, Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, and Thomas (1995)
argued that CRT “uncovers the ongoing dynamics of racialized power, and its
embeddedness in practices and values which have been shorn of any explicit, formal
manifestations of racism” (p. xxix). And while the experiences of marginalization and
racialized incidents on African American women are significant, the racial impacts
against African American males is more commonplace (Crenshaw et al., 1995) and is
studied frequently in the scholarship written on African Americans in general. In her
discussion of African American racialism, Kimberly Crenshaw (Crenshaw et al., 1995)
asserts:

The [B]lack racialist account proffers a vision of racism which portrays racial
power primarily through its impact on African American males. Because it is
unwilling or unable to apprehend the ways in which racial identities are lived
within and through gendered identities, racial essentialism renders the particular experiences of [B]lack females invisible. (p. xxxi)

The lack of literature addressing the unique leadership experiences of African American women administrators at predominantly White institutions relates to Crenshaw’s issue on racial essentialism. In her view, and as with the literature, African American women’s experiences are void, insignificant, and remain in isolation due to the absence in literature to bring voice to her oppression, although it may be damaging (Howe-Barksdale, 2007) and there is a “high cost” (p. 3) in publicly sharing and articulating through scholarly research the struggles, professional and personal oppression, and feelings of powerlessness experienced by African American women administrators within the chilly climates of higher education.

As applied to education, CRT differs minimally, and though the focus addresses issues of race as racism too, the educational lens attempts to challenge traditional paradigms to indicate how social constructs of oppression impact people of color (Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Noted theorist Gloria Ladson-Billings (1998), laid the foundation for critical race theory in education in her article: “Just What Is Critical Race Theory, and What’s It Doing In a Nice Place Like Education?” and stated: “Race-neutral perspective[s] purports to see deficiency as an individual phenomenon” (p. 19). In essence, Ladson-Billings (1998) asserted that race neutrality in education denies the social constructs and the realities that people of color experience in their everyday lives. And in adopting a critical race theoretical perspective in education, she argued that “CRT as a framework for educational equity means that we will have to expose racism in education and propose radical solutions for addressing it” (p. 22), and that researchers and
those advocating for racial equality “will have to take bold and sometimes unpopular positions, [and] may be pilloried figuratively or, at least, vilified for these stands” (p. 22). And in a similar stance to Patricia Hill Collins (1990b, 2001; 2002, as cited in Howard-Hamilton, 2003), Ladson-Billings (1998) noted that “we run the risk of being permanent outsiders” (p. 22) as people of color, researchers and advocates for educational equity and illuminating race in a dominant ideological culture.

In their qualitative research on the issue, the racial climate at college campuses and racial microaggressions, Solorzano et al. (2000) highlighted one African American female respondent who commented, “Every time I leave my room I’m conscious of the fact that I’m Black. I’m really conscious of the fact that people are looking at me and [saying], ‘She’s here on affirmative action’” (p. 67). An African American male echoed her point and stated. “A lot of people don’t accept the fact that I’m here on academic, and actually I got a scholarship for academics. All my scholarships were in academics, and they were not in sports” (p. 67). African American female administrators must prove on a regular basis that they are in their positions due to their professional abilities and educational credentials, as well as being in high-power decision-making roles, rather than peripheral, illegitimate roles which lack authority. And while the research participants in their study were African American college students, the experiences of these men and women can be generalized to the unique leadership experiences of African American women administrators at predominantly White institutions, who like these students, must negotiate a system of hegemony and continually challenge a system of dominant ideology for their advancement.
The assumption and epistemological framework of CRT is essential in understanding the issues of racial ideology and how salient hegemony is within predominantly White institutions that prevent African American women administrators from advancing and possessing the power important for her professional success. And indeed, in using CRT, it is understood that race is a social construct (J. O’Brien, 2001) within American culture, and that this construct was designed to maintain subordinance and superiority by the dominant culture to maintain its oppressive position (Broido & Manning, 2002; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). And further, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) noted:

Social reality is constructed by the formulation and the exchange of stories about individual situations. These stories serve as interpretive structures by which we impose order on experience and it on us. . . . The story of one’s condition leads to the realization of how one came to be oppressed and subjugated and allows one to stop inflicting mental violence on oneself. (p. 57)

Storytelling is used among scholars to analyze and to show the permeance of race in American culture (Ladson-Billings, 2009), and to begin reconciliation and determinism among African American women in their professional goals to seek executive leadership within the academy. This research brought to light the unique leadership experiences of African American women senior- and executive-level administrators at predominantly White institutions in California through their own voice and stories in which embedded racism and sexism is a daily reality, as they negotiate the entrenched system of dominance within institutions of higher education.
Black Feminist Thought: The Ideology of Womanism

Black Feminist Thought and the ideology of Womanism is a collective framework from the works of African American female intellectuals, such as Patricia Hill-Collins, Alice Walker, bell hooks, and Barbara Omolade, who answer the question: “What is Black feminism?” African American women, and indeed African American intellectuals and academic scholars, assign varying meanings and definitions in describing African American feminism. Collins (2001) described the term stating “[B]lack feminism positions African American women to examine how the particular constellation of issues [intellectual, political, social, sexual, spiritual, and economic] affecting [B]lack women in the United States are part of issues of women’s emancipation struggles globally” (p. 13). However, there is a potential problem with this definition and assumption as there are many African American women who reject the premise of African American feminism due to its foundation in addressing the issues related to White women, while rejecting the needs of African American women (Collins, 2001; Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Collins (2001) further posits that “many see feminism as operating exclusively within the terms [W]hite and American and perceive its opposite as being [B]lack and American” (p. 13).

In order to utilize a more conceptualized framework for understanding and analyzing African American administrators in higher education, the analysis of multiple theoretical frameworks related specifically to African American women by Mary Howard-Hamilton (2003) summarizes Collins’ (2002) three key themes in Black Feminist Ideologies related to this study:

First, the framework is shaped and produced by the experiences [B]lack women have encountered in their lives, even though others have documented their stories.
Second, although the stories and experiences of each woman are unique, there are intersections of experiences between and among [B]lack women. Third, although commonalities do exist among [B]lack women, the diversity of class, religion, age, and sexual orientation of [B]lack women as a group are multiple contexts from which their experiences can be revealed and understood. (p. 21)

While these three themes represent a more succinct and action-oriented definition of Black Feminist Thought and provides an epistemological framework, Howard-Hamilton (2003) asserted that “[the role of] Black female intellectuals is to produce facts and theories about Black female experience that will clarify a Black woman’s standpoint for Black women” (p. 21). Indeed, this very study was aimed and positioned to do so.

Alice Walker (1983), in her book on Womanist prose entitled *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens*, describes Womanism as centered in the unique history of racial and gender oppression of African American women. She simply defined Womanist as “a [B]lack feminist or feminist of color” (p. xi). And, while Walker provided additional descriptions of womanism, such as “committed to survival and wholeness of entire people” and “not separatist, except periodically, for health” (p. xi), Collins (2001) contends that “Walker’s use of the term womanism promises [B]lack women who both operate within [B]lack nationalist assumptions and who simultaneously see the need to address ‘feminist’ issues within African American communities partial reconciliation of these two seemingly incompatible philosophies” (p. 10) and urges an understanding of how both Womanism and Black Feminism can be interchangeable yet distinct.

Black feminist scholar bell hooks (2000), identifies feminism as “the struggle to end sexist oppression. Its aim is not to benefit solely any specific group of women, any
particular race or class of women. It has the power to transform in a meaningful way” (p. 28). Conversely, Collins (1990b) defined African American feminism as “a process of self-conscious struggle that empowers women and men to actualize a humanist vision of community” (p. 39). And in understanding the humanist vision of feminism that African American women possess, Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002), as quoted in the policy report by Howe-Barksdale (2007), viewed womanism as an epistemology resulting from an assortment of collective experiences, “used generally to represent the cultural, historical, and political positionality of African American women, a group that has experienced slavery, segregation, sexism, and classism for most of its history in the United States” (p. 3). As discussed in the literature, there is a burden of being both African American and female (Holmes, 2003) as an administrator at predominantly White institutions; however, African American women administrators are courageous. Holmes (2003) sums this assertion related to the burden and the humanist vision of community in her research, by stating: “They [African American women in her study] exposed themselves to critique in hopes that others would become more knowledgeable of the challenges some African American women encounter in higher education and join the fight to eradicate racism and sexism against women in general” (p. 61). Collins (2001) agrees with this point, and stated: “By grounding womanism in the concrete experiences of African American women and generalizing about the potential for realizing a humanist vision of community via the experiences of African American women” (p. 11), it will design the framework for understanding their oppression and in developing cultural competence and strategies for the success of African American women administrators at predominantly White institutions of higher education.
Although the term Womanism is used interchangeably with Black feminism, Black Feminist thought is primarily based on systems of oppression faced by African Americans (Collins, 1998), whereas a Womanist framework addresses the intersection of survival mechanisms linked to family, spirituality, and support networks, while overcoming racist and sexist attitudes and other systems of oppression from the dominant ideology through empowerment and self-definition (Rasak, as cited in Coleman, 2006).

And while African American women administrators in higher education are in possession of an “outsider within” status (Collins, 1990a), systems of oppression, exclusion and isolation, hostility, and marginalization based on racial and gender identity prevent these women from full status within the academy. Mary Howard-Hamilton (2003) argues this point by stating: “A sense of belonging can never exist because there is no personal or cultural fit between the experiences of African American women and the dominant group” (p. 21), and most specifically within predominantly White institutions of higher education.

In her comparative discussion and analysis of womanism and African American feminism, Collins (2001) argues that “Many African American women see little difference between the two [Black feminism and Womanism] since both support a common agenda of [B]lack women’s self-definition and self-determination” (p. 10). Further, Barbara Omolade (1994) posits that “Black feminism is sometimes referred to as Womanism because both are concerned with struggles against sexism and racism by [B]lack women who are themselves part of the [B]lack community’s efforts to achieve equity and liberty” (p. xx). In her study on the challenges that African American women face as administrators in higher education using a Womanist perspective,
Howe-Barksdale (2007) found that although oppressive barriers, such as isolation, lack of power and authority, and chilly climates were prevalent for the African American women in her study, in a Womanist tradition, their goal was strength and survival through relationships. One respondent in her study shared:

The family I speak of is one of the most influential forces in the African American community and is vital for our survival. . . . it is not the nuclear family necessarily, not an individual burden, but of an extended community taking care of one another—it is a continuing exchange of favors, reciprocity, whatever is needed, whatever is nurturing and provides the strength to face another day.

(p. 18)

Indeed, nurturing, strength, support, and “other-mothering” is critical to the success and survival of African American women administrators at predominantly White institutions who experience this daily on their individuality, psyche, and also for their sisters.

The unique leadership experiences of African American women administrators at predominantly White institutions is rooted in multiple systems of oppression, such as racism, sexism, and marginality and negative barriers, including the lack of power and position which are perpetuated by the dominant culture that limits the current and future success of these women. When using the lens of a Womanist epistemology, the systems of support identified in the literature mentoring, informal support networks, family, and spirituality are ways in which African American women can effectively lead, cope, and overcome the systems of oppression from ideological hegemony that is prevalent within institutions of higher education, and specifically predominantly White institutions.
Leadership Frames

The final conceptualization utilized to bring voice to unique experiences and perceptions of African American women administrators at predominantly White institutions was through the analysis of leadership frames as outlined by Bolman and Deal (2008), in addition to the challenge of leadership by Kouzes and Posner (2002). Bolman and Deal (2008) identified four frames of leadership necessary for success in framing and reframing organizations for administrative leaders. These four frames include (a) structural, (b) human resource, (c) political, and (d) a symbolic frame. Each of the four frames represents key areas of leadership, which as viewed from a multi-frame standpoint, Bolman and Deal contend “each of the frames has its own image of reality” (p. 18). Each of the four frames offers central concepts relative to leading organizations. The central concept of the structural frame identified rules, roles, goals, and policies as key to organizations. Institutional leaders that use a structural framework believe in rationality and trust that formal roles and responsibilities would minimize the personal and maximize job performance. The human resources frame conceptualizes leadership based on needs, skills and relations, and finds the value in people, and how organizations rely on the talents of their people, as people rely on the organizations’ ability to provide careers and opportunities. The political frame acknowledges the issues of power, conflict, and competitions within an organization, while valuing a coalition of people and the impact of bargaining and negotiations, especially as it relates to the allocation of scarce resources. The final frame, symbolic, is based on the concept of culture, ritual, metaphors and stories through meaning, interpretations, and how organizational values shape its people.
In acknowledging the epistemological framework of organizations and the leadership challenges of African American women administrators within higher education, the ability to use leadership frames simultaneously is essential in effective leadership. And with the overarching epistemology of this study focusing on the social constructionist paradigm, leadership challenges and frameworks provide images of leadership, and how the use of more than one lens by organizational leaders is essential to develop diagnoses of what leaders contend with and how they can move forward (Bolman & Deal, 2008). This is especially relative to the experiences of African American women senior- and executive-level administrators and how meaning and perceptions impact their success. The images and meaning of leadership from a frames-model sees social architecture, empowerment, advocacy and political savvy, and inspiration as core to move organizations forward. In her research on presidential leaders within higher education, Bensimon (1989) asserted that the use of multiple frames was essential for executive administrators, and that “organizations have multiple realities and that a manager who can use multiple lenses will likely be a more effective one who deals with problems from a single perspective” (p. 108). Leaders who implicitly use different frames to define their roles, understand the behaviors of their organizations (Bensimon, 1989). Using multiple lenses to examine and understand the leadership experiences of African American women is vital, as the frames influence what administrators within an organization see and do. And with African American women, their lens is based on their leadership landscapes, and addition to their perceptions and behaviors. Further, leaders in general, but African American women administrators specific to this study, must parallel the use of multiple frameworks and the images of each frame based on meaning, relative
to their purpose, values and vision, and the goal of strengthening others (Kouzes & Posner, 2002) to effectively guide organizations, as well as progressing professionally.

With the overarching epistemological framework of social constructionism, this study used Critical Race Theory, Black Feminist Thought and a Womanist Ideology, in addition to the conceptualization of leadership frameworks to explore and bring voice to the unique leadership experiences of African American women senior- and executive-level administrators at predominantly White institutions. The combination of these conceptual frameworks was fundamentally vital in being able to show the complexities of the perceptions and lived experiences through the lens of the women in this study.
CHAPTER 3—RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the research methods which were utilized to answer the five research questions posed for this study. Topic areas include the research design and methodology, the role of the researcher, participant sampling strategies, data collection and analysis, trustworthiness of the study, and limitations. In order to understand and describe the leadership experiences of African American women senior- and executive-level administrators at predominantly White public institutions in the state of California, a qualitative, specifically phenomenological, research design was applied. This methodology illuminated and brings voice to the unique experiences of African American women administrators at predominantly White institutions and their perceptions of leadership, and was appropriate and most meaningful in developing a full analysis and understanding of their realities.

Qualitative Research Method and Design

Given the exploratory essence of this study, qualitative research methodology and protocol was used to “tell a story” (Patton, 2002) about the unique leadership experiences of African American women administrators at predominantly White institutions. As the literature has shown, there is a severe lack of empirical research on the experiences of African American women leaders in the academy (Guillory, 2001; Harley, 2008; Holmes, 2003, 2004; Howe-Barksdale, 2007; J. F. L. Jackson, 2001, 2002; Miller & Vaughn, 1997; Moses, 1997; Mosley, 1980; Patitu & Hinton, 2003; Penny & Gaillard, 2006; Watson, 2001). Yolanda Moses (1997) articulated in her article, “Black Women in Academe,” “they are almost totally absent from the research literature” (p. 23). Further, while there was a paucity of research on African American administrators, very few
studies provide a narrative of bringing voice to the African American women who serve (or have served) in senior- and executive-level leadership roles in higher education. This qualitative research study also allowed me to examine both the internal and external influences that construct and shape (Holmes, 2003) the perceptions and experiences of African American women leaders in higher education. Indeed, given the research questions and knowledge gaps, qualitative research was the most appropriate method to study the social phenomenon of African American women administrators at predominantly White campuses and was most fitting for telling the personal stories to shed light on their unique leadership experiences within the academy. And in the theoretical tradition of a constructionist framework, this empirical study highlights the social construction of reality as it relates to the lived experiences of African American women administrators who endure issues of racism, sexism, feelings of isolation and loneliness, lack of legitimate power, stereotypes, limited support networks, and chilly campus climates at predominantly White institutions.

Phenomenology

Construction of a research methodology is based primarily on the particular phenomenon which will be investigated (Holmes, 2003). Therefore, this research study utilized a phenomenological design to provide insight and voice to the unique leadership experiences of African American women senior- and executive-level administrators at predominantly White institutions. Simply stated, the research praxis of phenomenology is a strategy of inquiry where the researcher identifies the “essence” of human experiences as described by the research subjects (Creswell, 2009). Further, it involves exploring a small number of study participants through extensive and prolonged
engagement (Creswell, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). As will be described in the data collection section of this chapter, an extensive and engaging methodology facilitated my understanding of the unique leadership experiences of African American women senior- and executive-level administrators at predominantly White colleges and universities.

Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) was identified as the “fountainhead” of phenomenology in the twentieth century, and determined that individuals can be certain about how things appear in, or present themselves to, their consciousness (Groenewald, 2004; Moustakas, 1994). Husserl’s assertions were essentially based on a philosophical perspective of the existential world and how human beings come to understand and gain knowledge, or reality, through their experiences. He argued that phenomenology as a philosophical method, was “the science of pure phenomena” (Groenewald, 2004, p. 4). And as indicated in the theoretical framework section of Chapter 2, the research paradigm of phenomenology most certainly is a social construction of reality, as Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1967) theorized “that all social phenomena are constructions produced historically through human activity” (p. 106). And in a social constructionist interpretation of this study, the researcher engaged in “constructing knowledge about the reality” (Patton, 2002, p. 96) of African American women leaders who serve in senior- and executive-level positions at predominantly White campuses. Thus, the exploratory nature of this research illuminated the pure phenomena of experiences as reflected, described and realized through the voices of the African American women administrators highlighted in this study.

Further, in considering the essence of the phenomenological process, Groenewald (2004) asserted that “the here and now dimensions of those personal experiences gives
phenomena existential immediacy” (p. 18), thus the truly lived by individuals, in this case African American women administrators’ experiences are existential, a reality. In his seminal book *Phenomenological Research Methods*, which provides an overview of the multiple philosophical and humanistic paradigms of phenomenology, Moustakas (1994) stated: “In phenomenological research, the question grows out of an intense interest in a particular problem or topic. The researcher’s excitement and curiosity inspire the search. Personal history brings the core of the problem into focus” (p. 104). As the researcher for this empirical study, I met all of these requirements, and a phenomenology on the unique leadership experiences of African American women administrators at predominantly White institutions is most appropriate.

**Participant Sample**

There were seven research participants in this study. Within a qualitative methodology, specifically, phenomenology, it was important to seek depth of insight into the African American women administrators’ lived experiences and their phenomenon as leaders at predominantly White institutions. In his discussion on phenomenology based on the philosophy of Moustakas (1994), Creswell (2009) stated: “The procedure involves studying a small number of subjects through extensive and prolonged engagement to develop patterns and relationships of meaning” (p. 13). Therefore, a research pool of seven women for this study is fitting via the use of multiple methods of data collection through document analysis, naturalistic observation, and informal and formal interviews. Furthermore, given that I traveled to visit these women on their college and university campuses, this research study required a smaller sample to offer depth, rather than breadth on the unique leadership experiences of African American women at
predominantly White institutions. As highlighted in the review of literature, there are few empirical studies which examine African American women administrators (Guillory, 2001; Harley, 2008; Holmes, 2003, 2004; J. F. L. Jackson, 2001, 2002; Holmes et al., 2007; Howe-Barksdale, 2007; Miller & Vaughn, 1997; Moses, 1997; Mosley, 1980; Patitu & Hinton, 2003; Penny & Gaillard, 2006; Watson, 2001), and my in-depth analysis has brought voice to that void in the research.

The women identified for this study were strategically selected, and represent diversity in the academy, represent instructional and student service areas, tenure and length of experience, senior- and executive-level, and from the community college and 4-year university through purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2009). As noted in Groenewald (2004), Welman and Kruger consider purposive sampling as, “the most important kind of non-probability sampling, to identify the primary participants” (p. 8). The target population for this study was African American women administrators in senior- and executive-level positions at predominantly White public institutions in California. The women in the study represented the three public systems of higher education in the state, the California Community College, California State University (CSU), and University of California (UC). There are 112 institutions within the California Community College system, 23 CSU campuses, and 10 UC campuses.

The process to identify potential participants for my study began with seeking information from professional organizations, including the American Council on Education/Office of Women in Higher Education (ACE/OWHE) and the Women of Color Summit, the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), Association of California Community College Administrators (ACCCCA); and the
Community College League of California (CCLC). I reviewed the ACE/OWHE website to check for special programs focused specifically on women of color, where the only program specific to the target group was the Women of Color Summit. This summit was designed to address the leadership issues relating to women of color in senior- and executive-level administrative positions. Unfortunately, the website showed that the Women of Color Summit was no longer active. There was no public list of participants. In further review of the website, other special programs or summits within ACE/OWHE were also inactive. I also sought the ACE/OWHE regional networks to see if any representatives listed were African American women. In reviewing the list, I chose names that “looked” African American and checked the website of their institutions to obtain more information about them and to also “see” a picture. Although most of the women found on the list were not African American, a majority of women on the Network Representative list held mid-level or dean positions, and therefore did not meet the criteria of my study. I also e-mailed the representative from my public 4-year institution, and she was unaware of any African American women representatives in California who held senior- or executive-level positions. The contact at my institution was an African American woman. However, she held a middle-manager position and, too, did not meet the criteria for my study.

Another organization that I sought potential participants was the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA). And while this is a national organization, I was hoping to get some information from administrators specifically within California. After reviewing the organization’s website, I was unable to identify any subgroups or special committees focused on African American women or women of
color. I inquired with a female colleague at my institution who held an upper-level position (White female), to see if she was familiar with women who met the criteria of my study. She was unaware. Additionally, she shared that NASPA was primarily for entry- and mid-level managers and probably was not the best organization to seek participants for my study.

The last two organizations in which I sought information from was the Association of California Community College Administrators (ACCCA) and the Community College League of California (CCLC). I viewed the ACCCA website to inquire if a Black Caucus for the organization existed; however, there was no such special population group noted. The ACCCA is a professional organization for California community college administrators, and I thought would be a great resource for seeking the information needed for my study. I made a request via e-mail to the director of ACCCA to inquire, and also gave a brief description of my study. I received a response which noted that the organization did not have a Black Caucus or a list of African American women administrators. The CCLC was more fruitful in obtaining information. I took the opportunity to send an e-mail to the president of CCLC, describing my study and also asking for names of potential participants who met my study criteria. The CCLC president, within an hour, responded to my e-mail with a list of six African American female Community College presidents and chancellors, along with the names of their campuses or districts. This was indeed a break in seeking participants for my study.

The second strategy that I employed to seek potential participants for my study, was a thorough review of each systems’ and individual campus websites. I first reviewed the University of California (UC) Office of the President website to identify any
individual campus president who may be an African American woman, and then went to
the individual websites of each of the 10 campuses to seek potential participants. The
process for each campus involved reviewing the campus presidents’ page and looking at
his or her administrative team members. Some vice-presidents had specific information
about themselves and their division, while others did not have any identifying
information. Using the names of female presidents, provosts, or vice-presidents, I began
to use a Google image search to look for any photos of these women. Within the
University of California system, I was able to identify four women who met most of the
criteria and held positions ranging from vice-chancellor to associate vice-chancellor.
I then repeated the same process for the California State University (CSU) system,
beginning with the CSU Office of the Chancellor website. When reviewing individual
campus presidents, and their administrative team, I was able to identify two potential
study participants who held vice-president positions. There are 23 campuses within the
CSU system, and I had identified only two African American women serving in senior-
level positions.

The final public system of higher education was the California Community
College system, which has 112 campuses within 72 districts around the state. I began
with the California Community College Chancellors Office, and a similar review of
executive administration. However, each campus’ website was different and rather
difficult to navigate. I found limited information on the administrative team at each
campus. I decided to consult with networks around the state, to use “snowballing”
(Patton, 2002) as a way of gaining some ground on identifying potential study
participants both from the community college level, but also from the 4-year institutions,
in case some of the information found on their websites was incorrect. I consulted with both vice-presidents (White females) at my institution, as well as other contacts, upper-level administrators primarily, at my local area community colleges (White females). In addition, I inquired with a classmate (African American female) who is an upper-level administrator, and she was able to give two names of possible participants for my study. I also used snowballing by connecting with colleagues from a regional professional listserv for educational equity programs, WESTOP, asking for names of potential study participants. Colleagues from this listserv work at numerous campuses around the state, and through this network I received a number of responses. Through my contact at the CCLC, I was advised to e-mail the CEO listserv for all community college chancellors and presidents. An e-mail was sent briefly describing my dissertation topic and asking for their assistance in identifying potential participants for my study. A total of 31 responses was received from community college CEO’s around the state, with some expressing interest, potential names, and some regretfully sharing that their campuses did not have any African American women senior-level administrators. As the same names began to appear from these responses and those from the WESTOP listserv, exhaustion was met. I had a total of 35 potential participants identified for my study, with 29 from the community college, two from the CSU, and four representing the UC.

Once the potential participants were identified, a demographic data search commenced to establish predominantly White institutional status based on White as the largest student demographic. From 35 African American women in the potential study participant pool, only 10 were from predominantly White institutions. In an effort to increase the potential participant pool from only 10 African American women senior- and
executive-level administrators, I expanded “predominantly White institutions” to include women from campuses whose first and/or second highest student population was White. Additionally, the educational level criteria was expanded to include women who either had a doctoral degree or were in progress towards a doctoral degree. As a result of these expansion measures, the potential participant pool increased to 28 women to recruit for this study.

The recruitment process began by gathering e-mail addresses of the 28 women in the potential participant pool and sending a message providing an overview of my study, the Informed Consent Form, and a request to participate in my dissertation study. Over the course of 5 weeks and multiple e-mail follow-up requests, I was able to confirm seven women who were available to participate in my study. The remaining 21 potential participants either did not reply to my multiple inquiries or did not want to commit to the study due to their sporadic work schedules. The confirmed women in this study proportionately represent the three systems of higher education, the divisions of student affairs/services and academic affairs/instruction, and represent the three regions within the state. This broad representation within California, including the southern, central and northern regions of the state, allowed for better transferability of my findings to other states and regions. Given the diversity of African American women identified for this study, there was maximum variation in sampling which lent to a robust study to explore, understand, and bring voice to the unique leadership experiences of African American administrators at predominantly White institutions.

The seven women in this study represent varied experiences within the academy, years of administrative experience, divisional expertise, and degree. Table 1 outlines the
### Table 1

**Participant Profiles**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region in California</th>
<th>Pseudonym, leadership level, and division</th>
<th>Doctoral degree</th>
<th>Years in position</th>
<th>Years in higher education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Central</td>
<td>Dr. Judy Anderson Senior-Level Student Services</td>
<td>Ed.D.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Northern</td>
<td>Dr. Tiffany Russell Senior-Level Student Affairs</td>
<td>Ed.D.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Southern</td>
<td>Dr. Susan Moorland Executive-Level CEO</td>
<td>Ed.D.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Southern</td>
<td>Dr. Paula Lincoln Executive-Level CEO</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>25+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Northern</td>
<td>Dr. Abigail Miles Executive-Level CEO/Instruction</td>
<td>Ed.D. &lt;1/10 as senior-level, instruction</td>
<td>3+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Northern</td>
<td>Ms. Michelle Dunn Senior-Level Student Development and Instruction</td>
<td>Ed.D. (in progress)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Central</td>
<td>Dr. Cynthia Peterson Senior-Level Academic Affairs</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>25+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

important characteristics and credentials of the women in this study. Additionally, given the confidential nature of this study, pseudonyms were used in lieu of actual names to protect their individual identity and respective campuses of the women in this study.

As demonstrated in Table 1, the seven women in this study have a wealth of experience and backgrounds which lent well to this study on the unique leadership experiences of African American women senior- and executive-level administrators at predominantly White public institutions in California, and represent the three major systems of higher education in the state.
Ethical Issues

In her research on African American women administrators, Sydney Howe-Barksdale (2007) pointed out that exposing the experiences of African American women administrators through research is delicate and perilous, “primarily because there is such a high cost in revealing such personal struggles and such personal pain connected to the challenges African American women face as they pursue advancement and promotion” (p. 3). The unique leadership experiences of African American women administrators at predominantly White institutions, is delicate yet worthy of empirical exploration. African American women administrators in the academy are considered vulnerable populations (Creswell, 2009), and should not be put at further risk at predominantly White institutions by their participation in this study. Therefore, ethical considerations within the research, and confidentiality for the subjects, was critical. The careful attention to confidentiality and respect of privacy is evidenced in this study through the use of pseudonyms for the seven participants, in addition to concealing their specific titles and institution names.

The design and data collection instruments for this study were submitted to the San Diego State University (SDSU) Institutional Review Board (IRB) for review and approval. The IRB approval can be found in Appendix A. An approved Informed Consent Form (see Appendix B) was used, and each subject signed to acknowledge their participation in this study, as well as understanding the research process and their rights to decline answering any questions. The participants also had the option to have their names identified in this study, and to permit the researcher to use any quotations taken from their individual interview. Approval from the San Diego State University IRB and
facilitation of a signed Informed Consent form assured compliance with ethical standards for this dissertation study.

**Data Collection Methods**

To fully understand the leadership experiences of African American women senior- and executive-level leaders at predominantly White public institutions in California, this study utilized multiple qualitative data collection methods, including document analysis procedures through review of each participants’ professional resume and curriculum vitae, facilitation of two semi-structured (informal and formal) person-to-person interviews, and direct naturalistic observation methods at each participants’ campus. Triangulation of the three qualitative research approaches used in this phenomenological study ensured validity and lent to a more robust data analysis and discussion.

Document analysis was the first step in data collection methods for this research study. Prior to the interview process, I requested a professional resume and curriculum vitae from each participant. In his discussion on qualitative methodology, Patton (2002) notes: “Documents prove valuable not only because of what can be learned directly from them but also as stimulus for paths of inquiry that can be pursued only through direct observation and interviewing” (p. 294). I reviewed and analyzed the professional resume and curriculum vitae of each participant, in an effort to gain further understanding of their educational and professional background, academic instruction or student services experience, and to review any published articles, books, or abstracts authored by the participant. Information gathered from analyses of these documents allowed for patterns or themes to emerge, which included successful retention and career advancement, the
effects of support networks, meanings of leadership and strategies for success; and further lent to additional questions or inquiries that were discussed during the semi-structured interviews or in making connections during the direct observations. Document analysis was a key element in identifying each participant’s professional journey to their current administrative role; for example, a traditional path to leadership through the faculty ranks or nontraditional by way of student affairs, in addition to gaining insight into their stories as African American women leaders serving in positions of power at predominantly White institutions.

The interview process with each study participant followed the document analysis phase within a maximum of 4 weeks after scheduling the interview date and time with each woman in the study. Semi-structured, open-ended interview questions were designed in an effort to explore the unique leadership experiences of African American women administrators at predominantly White institutions of higher education, and to gain perceptions of their leadership within the academy. The semi-structured interview protocol enabled the seven research participants an opportunity to openly share their experiences, career journeys, and obstacles to success which enabled me to fully examine the phenomenon of African American women administrator experiences in higher education. In his article on phenomenological research design, Groenewald (2004) discussed the importance of interviewing in a phenomenological study and cites Kvale (1996) who remarks that a qualitative interview “is literally an interview, an interchange of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest, where [the] researcher attempts to understand the world from the subjects’ point of view, to unfold meaning of people’s experiences” (p. 13).
There were 12 interview questions, related to the five subtheme research questions which assisted in guiding this study:

1. What strategies do African American women administrators in higher education possess and utilize in their retention and progressive success?

2. How do personal and/or professional support networks impact the success of African American women administrators in higher education?

3. How do leadership positions which lack legitimate power and decision-making have an impact on African American women leaders in their trajectory to senior administration in higher education?

4. What leadership meanings do African American women ascribe to their experiences as administrators in higher education?

5. How do the experiences of African American women administrators in higher education differ by institution type?

During the interview process, demographic questions were also asked of each participant to understand her personal background, educational and professional experiences, demographics of the administration at current (and past) institution, and each woman’s leadership philosophy of higher education administration to understand their experiences and perceptions as senior- and executive-level administrators and to fully bring voice to their experiences in this study. The Interview Guide is included as Appendix C.

The first of two individual interviews was informal and scheduled on average for 45 minutes, and took place prior to observing each participant facilitating their leadership team meetings. This informal interview primarily focused on demographic information, inquiries about the participants’ background, her experiences leading to a chosen career in
higher education administration, and a discussion on the planned observation, including the agenda, purpose of meeting or function, and a description and roles of other individuals who would be attending the meeting. The second interview was formal, and took place after the first interview and observation, and each lasted between 40 and 90 minutes. The formal interview included questions that arose from the informal interview and/or observation, in addition to formal questions noted in the Interview Guide. The formal interviews were face-to-face, as I was able to schedule long distance interviews in another region within the state accordingly. All seven participants were interviewed in person. The individual interviews took place privately in the participant’s campus office which offered privacy and confidentiality, and were recorded. I offered the use of a private research journal for each participant to document notes and other observations made during the study, as well as audio recorded both interviews. Of the seven participants, only one woman in the study utilized the journal; however, the content was minimal and did not lend to the findings in this study. The recordings were transcribed at the conclusion of all interviews for further analysis. Saturation of data collection was attained by the conclusion of the second individual interview from each study participant.

The third phase of the data collection process was naturalistic observation of each research participant, as they facilitated a leadership team meeting for their division or institution. The observations commenced immediately after the semi-structured informal interview, during which the participant gave an overview of the meeting or function. Due to the sensitive nature of their leadership team meetings with the state budget crises and bargaining unit negotiations, along with scheduling restrictions based on location, I was
unable to observe two of the women in this study. Given that this was a qualitative study, I tended to collect data at the site where research participants experienced and perceived their leadership roles. As Creswell (2009) states regarding research subjects, “Seeing them behave and act within their context” (p. 175). Data gathered from naturalistic observation were work or office climate; interactions with administrative peers and/or direct reports, body language and communication styles, observation of leadership styles, as well as during lunch, which two of the seven participant planned during their participation in this study. In essence, my data collection process was to document the lived experiences (Creswell, 2009; Groenewald, 2004; Patton, 2002) of African American women senior- and executive-level administrators in their environments at predominantly White institutions. I used a research journal to document observations and to track anomalies or data that was directly related to the research study and included in the analysis and discussion. Additionally, journaling the research allowed me to keep track of the interactions that emerged during the observations that was used to clarify and follow up on during the formal interviews that followed the observations.

Trustworthiness and Quality Assurance

It was important to ensure that my interpretation of the data collected in this study was trustworthy and reflective of the research participants’ responses, experiences, and environments. As this research reflects a qualitative inquiry and methodology, there are four measures which were identified and adhered to in order to maintain trustworthiness and were essential to the role of the researcher. These measures included a maximum variation in sampling, using multiple methods to collect data, member-checking and peer debriefing. These measures also addressed credibility, transferability, dependability, and
confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and allowed for quality assurance within the study.

Trustworthiness and quality assurance was established in this study through data triangulation, and employed through the use of document analysis, individual interviews, and naturalistic observation of African American women administrators at predominantly White institutions. Triangulation was facilitated in this qualitative research design to strengthen the study by combining multiple data collection methods, rather than risking the vulnerability of errors or limitations linked to the use of only one research method (Patton, 2002). In addition, triangulation was a means to compare and cross-check the consistency of information found at different times and by different means within this qualitative research study (Patton, 2002). As an empirical phenomenology, the utilization of multiple data collection processes through triangulation lent credibility to the study, ensured validity of the data analysis (Groenewald, 2004), and offered significant insight into the leadership experiences of African American women senior- and executive-level administrators at predominantly White institutions.

The selection of seven research participants for this phenomenological study through purposive sampling enabled me to fully explore the unique leadership experiences of African American women senior- and executive-level administrators at predominantly White institutions, and gave a California perspective on the phenomena in this study through participants from the major regions of the state. African American women who hold leadership positions within the academy are considered a vulnerable population due to their experiences as described in the literature. Therefore, I was sensitive to all ethical issues as a researcher and regarded the confidentiality of the
women in the study as a priority. Given triangulation of three data collection sources facilitated in this research, document analysis, individual interviews, and direct observations, the empirical reality on the unique leadership experiences of African American senior- and executive-level women administrators at predominantly White institutions is fully described and illuminated in the data analysis and discussion sections of this dissertation.

**Data Analysis**

In the data analysis process, as the researcher, I practiced “epoche” which Moustakas (1994) explains as “the first step in coming to know things, in being inclined toward seeing things as they appear, in returning to things themselves, free of prejudgments and preconceptions” (p. 90). He further states that “the process of [e]poche, of course, requires unusual, sustained attention, concentration, and presence” (p. 88). The ability and importance of being present during my research study was paramount, especially as it relates to African American women administrators’ experiences and my personal in-depth realities as a professional working within the dominant ideology of predominantly White institutions. It required that I let go of any assumptions of the research participants based on my experiences and the meaning of theirs, critically self-reflect (Moustakas, 1994), and to permit the thoughts to enter my consciousness but to leave freely (Groenewald, 2004; Moustakas, 1994) to allow the rich voices and experiences of these women be heard and validated through the study.

Given my positionality as a researcher-practitioner in this study, I further employed epoche by experiencing the same research protocol which I designed for the African American women administrators in this study through the peer debriefing
process. Through the rigor of epoche, and gaining clarity about my preconceptions (Patton, 2002) as a researcher-practitioner, a “phenomenological attitude shift” was accomplished. Patton defines a phenomenological attitude shift as:

A different way of looking at the investigated experience. By moving beyond the natural attitude or the more prosaic way phenomena are imbued with meaning, experience gains a deeper meaning. This takes place by gaining access to the constituent elements of the phenomenon and leads to a description of the unique qualities and components that make this phenomenon what it is. (p. 485)

I enlisted a colleague within my institution to facilitate the same data collection methods designed for this study and the research participants, including review of my resume, observing my facilitation of a staff team meeting at a predominantly White institution, and to use the same interview protocol as utilized with the research participants. This process was fairly daunting, as I struggled to take myself out of the research role, and to understand the thought processes experienced by the research participants in this study. It was also challenging for me, as I have a history and collegial relationship with this colleague, but felt comfortable with her as it was assured to remain confidential. A phenomenological attitude shift took place, and epoche was attained through this phenomenological procedure (Patton, 2002).

In addition to epoche, I utilized bracketing in the data collection and analysis of this research study to gather each participants’ experiences, feelings, perceptions and beliefs, and convictions (Groenewald, 2004) and bring voice to the experiences of African American women senior- and executive-level administrators at predominantly White institutions. Bracketing is used when the research inquiry is performed from the
perspective of the researcher (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998; Groenewald, 2004). Groenewald (2004) identified two forms of bracketing, which include describing the lived experiences of the research participants in a language free from the constructs of the intellect and society, and second that the researcher must “bracket” her own preconceptions and enter into the research participants world and use the self as an “experiencing interpreter” (p. 13). Given that my experiences and professional career interests mirror that of my research participants, the use of bracketing was critical in maintaining trustworthiness of the study and ensuring that the data were analyzed according to the experiences of the women in the study and not my own. However, as an “experienced interpreter” and a practitioner of epoche, my personal and professional experiences were embraced by the research, validated the findings, and offer a humanistic perspective on the unique leadership experiences of African American women senior- and executive-level administrators at predominantly White public institutions in California.

As the research methodology for this study had been accomplished, I used a strict protocol for coding and the analysis of data collected. Coding is an important link between the data collection, and the development of emergent themes and theories to explain the data (Charmaz, 2006). To define the themes and determine meaning in the data, Charmaz (2006) identified three pertinent phases for coding data collected in a qualitative research study: open, focused, and axial. The first coding practice which was employed from the interpretation of document analysis, individual interviews, and naturalistic observation notes in this study was initial coding through a line-by-line coding strategy. Through the data collection and transcription, each line of the written data was named to determine emergent themes (Charmaz, 2006). In bringing voice to the
experiences of the research participants, it was especially important to use this first
coding practice as it crystallized the significance of the points noted and identified any
gaps found in the data. The second practice was focused coding to identify more
directed, selective, and conceptual (Charmaz, 2006) elements of the data collected. A
focused coding method allowed me to further define emergent themes from the large
amount of data which were collected through document analysis and naturalistic
observation, though most importantly the interviews. While document analysis and
observations were critical components of the research, the two face-to-face interviews
represent a larger section of the data collected, and categorization of the data and themes
were incisive and complete. And third, the use of axial coding followed the first two
preliminary phases, to begin the categorization, subcategorization, and disaggregation of
core themes which emerged. Axial coding permitted me to develop a frame and avoid
ambiguity (Charmaz, 2006), especially as this research study is meant to be impactful to
bring voice to the African American women in this study.

To synthesize the data collected, ATLAS.ti (Version 6.211), a qualitative data
management software program, was used to assist in sorting and linearly arranging the
primary emergent themes which developed in this study. This process began with line-
by-line coding, which resulted in 688 duplicated codes. Through the use of ATLAS.ti,
114 unduplicated codes were identified. The process continued with focused coding to
identify more selective and identifiable codes, by grouping the duplicated codes into
“families” within ATLAS.ti, which then I was able to identify related broad themes that
began to emerge. Through this grouping process, 23 “families” were created. The final
process of coding, axial, involved the categorization of emergent core themes which were
salient based on the triangulation of data collected. Ultimately, as described in this study, 10 subthemes emerged with four primary themes on the leadership experiences of African American women senior- and executive-level administrators at predominantly White public institutions in California. After the 11 subthemes and four themes were solidified, I identified descriptions of what the seven women in this study experienced, and how they perceived their experiences and the phenomena of being an African American woman senior- and executive-level administrator at a predominantly White institution. The following themes, and subthemes, outlined in Table 2, essentially capture the essence of the participants’ shared experiences.

Table 2

*Emergent Themes and Subthemes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emergent Themes</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 The Journey to Leadership</td>
<td>Accidental, Intentional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Leadership Styles and Philosophies</td>
<td>Leadership Along the Continuum, The Power of Relationships, Social Justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Challenges Faced</td>
<td>Race and Gender Dynamics, Isolation and the “Only One”, Misperceptions and Labeling, Need to Work Harder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Retention Strategies</td>
<td>Students and Impact in Higher Education, Mentoring Opportunities, Mirroring Success, Support from Family, Friends, and Faith</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A constant comparison of the data was facilitated to avoid misinterpretations and to seek saturation on a particular theme or experience. Data saturation occurs when no new themes emerge from the data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Patton, 2002) through
documents analysis, naturalistic observation, and interviews in this study. As a practitioner researcher, I had the obligation to ensure validity of this study for myself, the degree-awarding institution, the field of higher education administration, but most importantly for the women of the study who offered themselves, shared their experiences, experienced emotion, felt empowered, and risked exposure to allow for the future advancement and empowerment of other African American women who aspire to a professional career in higher education administration most certainly at a predominantly White institution.

**Role of the Researcher**

The role of the researcher for this phenomenological study was paramount, as qualitative research is interpretative, with the researcher being involved in a sustained and intensive relationship with the research subjects (Creswell, 2009). Therefore, it was important to identify reflexivity as an important element in the role of the researcher. As Patton (2002) reinforces, “Reflexivity reminds the qualitative inquirer to be attentive to and conscious of the cultural, political, social, linguistic, and ideological origins of one’s own perspective and voice as well as the perspective and voices of those [interviewed]” (p. 65).

I have multiple similarities and share a “double consciousness” (DuBois, 1903) with the seven research participants for this study. And as cited in Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), Collins (1991) shares that “individuals who have lived through the experiences about which they claim to be experts, are more believable and credible than those who have merely read and thought about such experience” (p. 472). Indeed, I have lived the experience. As an African American woman mid-level administrator, I have
worked in the field of higher education for the past 15 years at predominantly White campuses in southern California. I possess a Bachelor of Arts degree in Social Sciences and a Master of Arts degree in Sociological Practice, both from a 4-year predominantly White public institution in San Diego County. My career journey as an administrator has been primarily in the area of student services, specifically providing leadership for multiple programs and departments which serve underrepresented, low-income, minority students. Additionally, I have worked within the academic affairs division, as an adjunct faculty member and lecturer in the areas of Sociology and Counseling at both the community college and 4-year university level. This career path is reflective of the positions which many African American women in higher education gain entry into administration, as outlined in the literature, paralleled with many of the women in this study.

My experiences on predominantly White college and university campuses are situated perfectly within the literature. And in relation to the research paradigm of phenomenology and shared experiences of the researcher, Moustakas (1994) summarizes this thought by stating: “The empirical phenomenological approach involves a return to experience in order to obtain comprehensive descriptions that provide the basis for a reflective structural analysis that portrays the essences of the experience” (p. 13). This interpretive framework encouraged the construction of shared experiences and realities of African American women administrators at predominantly White institutions.

As a researcher who experiences the same “double consciousness” (DuBois, 1903) as the women in this research study, I ensured validity through addressing the four issues of trustworthiness which included credibility, transferability, dependability, and
confirmability. Credibility is in reference to the internal validity of the study and is an 
evaluation of whether the research findings are a credible interpretation of the data from 
the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility in this study was met by 
triangulation of the data, through document analysis, interviews, and naturalistic 
observation. I also ensured credibility through the use of a peer debriefer (Lincoln & 
Guba, 1985), as well as allowed for member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) with each 
research participant being informed of the process, asked to verify the transcripts from 
their formal interviews and summaries, and to gain their feedback. Of the seven 
participants, only one study participant asked that I disregard a small portion of her 
responses, and not use in the analysis of data. Transferability was used to address 
whether the data and findings may be transferable to similar individuals and contexts 
that reflect those in this study, and external validity in which findings may be applied 
to other situations (Shenton, 2004). Further, rich-thick description of the participants’ 
backgrounds, experiences, and campus contexts in this qualitative study will allow 
readers to evaluate the transferability of the findings and relate it to their own experiences 
or observations. Dependability addressed the issue of reliability within the study through 
careful research design and implementation, specific details of data collection, and 
reflective analysis of the study (Shenton, 2004). As discussed previously, I employed 
reflective analysis in my research study through journaling and being mindful of epoche 
in the data collection and analysis processes, as my experiences mirror the literature and 
professional career path and goals as the women participants in this study. And finally, 
confirmability referred to objectivity and reflective commentary (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; 
Shenton, 2004) in the study, and relates to the methods that were strictly followed
through dependability, data collection and analysis, epoche and bracketing, as well as ensuring integrity of the study and confidentiality of the seven African American women senior- and executive-level administrators who offered their personal insights and perceptions on their leadership experiences at predominantly White institutions.

Given these experiences, my career trajectory, and thoughtful, objective reflection, I am situated quite perfectly to validate this study through similar educational, professional and lived experiences, which allowed me to be able to build and sustain positive rapport with the research participants, as well as strengthen the relationship to create a very robust study. “Rarely is the impact of racism and sexism on [B]lack women in the academe examined” (Moses, 1989, p. 1), and their voices as administrators in higher education continue to be silenced in the literature, and in many ways within the academy due to the dominant ideology on predominantly White campuses. This research study provided data, analysis, information, empowerment, and referendum for institution of higher education to address the needs of African American women leaders at predominantly White institutions and also aid in her advancement beyond the glass ceiling. And in the Womanist tradition of Mary Walker, as discussed by Rasak (as cited in Coleman, 2006), the relationship between myself as a female researcher and the women in the study was to “validate our ability to love, support and nurture” (p. 99).

Limitations

All efforts were made to ensure the trustworthiness of the data collected and the analysis of this study. However, there were six noteworthy limitations identified in this research study on the unique leadership experiences of African American women
senior- and executive-level administrators at predominantly White public institutions in California. The first limitation was that the research is not generalizable to African American women administrators who hold positions at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU). The study focused primarily on African American women leaders who serve in senior- and executive-level administrative positions at identified predominantly White public institutions in California. Further, the research does not include African American women administrators in leadership positions at Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI) where there are large populations of Latino students enrolled on these college campuses. The second limitation identified is that I am currently serving in a similar role as a mid-level administrator at a predominantly White university on a career path to upper- and senior-level administration. There was a strict use of epoche and bracketing to ensure that the study was not invalid due to projection of my personal and professional experiences in higher education at predominantly White institutions. Another limitation to this study was the lack of African American women administrators at predominantly White institutions who hold senior-level leadership positions and possess a doctoral degree. As mentioned in the data analysis, there were only 35 women identified that met the criteria for this study in the initial potential participant pool. And further, the numbers of African American women serving in senior- or executive leadership roles within the CSU and UC is abysmal. Though there are many African American women serving as administrators within the three public systems of higher education on predominantly White college and university campuses and may hold a doctoral degree, a large number of these women are in positions of limited power and serve as entry- and mid-level director or associate/assistant dean positions, and are
focused largely in the areas of student services and diversity programs. Given the sensitive or controversial nature of the meetings facilitated by the senior- and executive-level women administrators in this study and limited regional constraints due to transportation and availability, the final limitation was that two of the seven women in this study were not observed. Their informal and formal interviews were incredibly rich, therefore the absence of these two observations within this study was not significant.

**Summary**

The purpose of this study was to bring voice to the unique leadership experiences of African American women senior- and executive-level administrators through their perceptions and “lens” at predominantly White institutions. This study was fascinating, emotional, yet rigorous and robust, and will add significantly to the absent literature on their leadership experiences. As Groenewald (2004) noted in his article on phenomenological research, “Realities are thus treated as pure ‘phenomena’ and the only absolute data from where to begin” (p. 4). The use of phenomenology as a research design, fully explored the leadership experiences of African American women at predominantly White institutions of higher education, and how their experiences are perceived as challenges, while the identification of strong retention strategies emerged. The epistemological frameworks provided an additional lens to holistically capture the contextualized experiences of the women in this study. The analysis provided a meaningful structure to organizing and developing critical themes and subthemes to give voice to the participants’ leadership experiences. The seven “wise” women in this study were very courageous and gracious to spend time in their incredibly busy schedules to be a part of this important research.
CHAPTER 4—PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to shed light and bring voice to the unique leadership experiences of seven African American women senior- and executive-level administrators at predominantly White public institutions in California. Through a phenomenological approach and a triangulated data analysis based on documents, interviews, and observations, this study aimed to bring voice to the leadership experiences of African American women administrators and their strategies for retention, support networks, and perceptions in terms of how they would describe issues related to race and gender, within a predominantly White institutional context. The research questions for this study were:

1. What strategies do African American women administrators in higher education possess and utilize in their retention and progressive success?

2. How do personal and/or professional support networks impact the success of African American women administrators in higher education?

3. How do leadership positions which lack legitimate power and decision-making have an impact on African American women leaders in their trajectory to senior administration in higher education?

4. What leadership meanings do African American women ascribe to their experiences as administrators in higher education?

5. How do the experiences of African American women administrators in higher education differ by institution type?

There is a high cost of revealing the experiences and complex realities of African American women at predominantly White institutions (Howe-Barksdale, 2007).
However, bringing voice to the unique leadership experiences of African American women administrators at predominantly White public institutions in California is a story to be told. The strength of the women in this study is powerful, introspective, often painful, yet inspiring. This chapter describes the results of their story and experiences related to the research questions, and based on the theoretical and conceptual framework surrounding the study, as noted in Table 3.

Table 3

Emergent Themes and Conceptual Frameworks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emergent themes</th>
<th>Corresponding research questions</th>
<th>Corresponding theory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Path to Leadership</td>
<td>One, four, and five</td>
<td>Social Constructionism, Womanist/Black Feminist Thought</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Leadership Styles and Philosophies</td>
<td>Three, four, and five</td>
<td>Social Constructionism, Leadership Frameworks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Challenges Faced</td>
<td>All five questions</td>
<td>Social Constructionism, Womanist/Black Feminist Thought, Critical Race Theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Retention Strategies</td>
<td>One and two</td>
<td>Social Constructionism, Womanist/Black Feminist Thought</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Confidentiality and anonymity of the research participants in this study was paramount. As discussed in the literature, many African American women are the “only one” (Patitu & Hinton, 2003; Simpson, 2001), as the number of African American women administrators at predominantly White institutions is minimal at best. Therefore, to protect the identity of the women in this study a pseudonym will be used for each participant and their specific administrative titles will be identified as either “senior-level” or “executive-level.” Further, given the “only one” nature of the research
participants in this study, they will not be identified by institution type. Rather, their institution locations will be reflected by region. In instances where the data could lead to possible identification of the participants, nonidentifiable data were substituted and bracketed.

Although the women in this study represent different levels of leadership, as well as institutional locations and culture, there was consistency in their experiences and phenomena of being an African American women senior- or executive-level administrator at a predominantly White public institution in California. Through document analysis, individual informal and formal interviews, and naturalistic observations, there were consistent themes that emerged from the data analysis, and are divided into four sections of this chapter as highlighted in Table 2 (Chapter 3, p. 88) on the emergent themes and subthemes of this study.

The first section, “The Journey of Seven Wise Women,” describes the participants’ journey into administrative leadership, as some women found their journey as “accidental” and others through the identification and guidance of others. Section two, “Values-Based Leadership,” provides an analysis of prominent leadership styles from each participant. The third section, “A Unique Set of Challenges,” presents the perceived challenges associated with race and gender, and the anomalies related to being an African American women administrator at a predominantly White institution. The fourth section, “Staying Connected: The Circle of Support,” specifically highlights the successful retention and survival strategies utilized by the women in this study to retain in their positions as administrators and to advance. The chapter concludes with a summary of the findings.
The Journey of Seven Wise Women

The journey to administrative leadership by the women in this study is varied. Two of the participants came from an academic background in nursing, one in behavioral sciences, and one in literature. The remaining women have backgrounds primarily in student affairs and student services, including counseling, admissions, and student activities, with the final participant having a unique background in federal aviation. Truly, very dynamic women from a cross section of backgrounds, experiences, and journeys. This was evidenced in the décor and other artifacts in the offices of the seven participants in this study. Each of the participants has a full mosaic of frames displaying their Bachelor, Master, and Doctoral degrees. Most of the women had ascending sizes of the frames to represent the respective degree. These women were quite accomplished and celebrated as scholars and academics within higher education. Their walls also presented a multitude of certificates of recognitions, awards from professional associations, proclamations from their local state or federal congressional representative or mayor, and in the case of Cynthia’s office, the innocent drawings from her admirers who were children of every hue that thanked her in many ways, with smiles, bright suns and trees. There were artifacts from around the globe, African art beautifully framed and prominently placed, pictures of loved ones, and “creature comforts,” such as large bowls of chocolates to share or coffee and tea for visitors and other colleagues who graced their presence for meetings or to bend their ear. I had the fortune and pleasure of perusing their bookshelves, and found a tapestry of textbooks, inspirational books, “how to’s.” Offices, truly, of those who lead.
In analyzing the documents, resumes, and curriculum vitae, provided by the women in this study, they all represent a broad range of trajectories into senior- and executive-level administration. Four of the seven women in this study began their careers as academic faculty members and advanced in their careers through the academic track to academic affairs and instructional services. Their academic area of teaching was primarily in the health and social services areas, with one being an academic specialist in arts and letters. The remaining three participants advanced through the student affairs and student services track. Their careers within higher education began in counseling, admissions, and special programs. All of the women in the study noted extensive credentials, including published works and seminars facilitated across the state of California and nationally.

While the seven women in this study have different backgrounds, aesthetics, and personalities, their leadership paths were quite similar. A number of the participants in this study are considered “accidental leaders,” as they did not intentionally select senior or executive leadership as their career goals. In describing her journey to her current position as a senior-level administrator, Judy shared with me that, “I never in my younger years envisioned being a [senior-level administrator] in a higher ed setting. In fact, I didn't even know what that was.” Of all of the women in this study, Judy’s journey to leadership was “Certainly not traditional.” as she exclaimed. Her background began with a career in the United States Air Force during the Vietnam War era, and through her military training spent close to 14 years as an [aviation specialist] with the United States Federal Government, with an incredible amount of responsibility to ensure safety in the aviation industry. Prior to meeting with Judy, I received her resume/curriculum vitae via
email, and as I read through the pages, I was completely in awe of the experiences which she had early in her career, and how her path led to her current position as a senior-level administrator in student affairs. I was very anxious to meet her, to hear her stories about what led her to the here and now in higher education. As noted earlier, she had never imaged herself in her position. And while working for a nonprofit community agency, Judy, a single mother, used her GI Bill to advance in education, taught part-time and said “So I was starting to get that flavor of getting my feet wet, my curiosity going for higher ed.” This was Judy’s accidental, and certainly nontraditional, path to senior-level administration.

Even for the women in this study who began in higher education as faculty members, they did not intend to become administrators. As Abigail shared expressively, “One of the things that I commonly say is, I stumbled up.” When Abigail was sharing with me her journey to executive-level leadership, she was very animated and I could see the personal pride on her face as she told the story about being a faculty member and through her personality characteristics found that administration was perfectly situated for her:

I would find myself in different positions because I started out, I studied [healthcare] and I started out as a [healthcare practitioner]. . . . , and then I got into teaching and enjoyed teaching, and could have done that for the rest of my life. [But], I think, by virtue of personality and mouth, I end[ed] up in leadership positions because I tend to be pretty direct.

As a struggling undergraduate student, Tiffany reflected on the challenges she faced when things became a little tough for her, especially being away from home at a
predominantly White institution, and she found the dean of student affairs, an African American male, at her campus as a net that caught her as she was ready to fall between the cracks as a first-generation college student. Tiffany shared:

And he helped, encouraged me and helped retain me, and when I wanted to quit he had me come and sit in his office and just, you know, hang out and he would say, bring a book tomorrow. You know, bring your books and study.

This experience was her first interaction with a student affairs professional, and from this experience and her resulting success, Tiffany recognized the power of higher education and student affairs. And though Tiffany’s mentor worked in higher education when she was an undergraduate and graduate student, she shared with me that she had intended to go to law school, but “ended up working [in higher education], . . . and loved it.” Her commitment and passion to work with students began very early in her career in an accidental, unintended way.

Other women in this study found that there were other individuals, such as former supervisors or peer colleagues, who saw within these women the potential to grow and advance in their career to senior- and executive-level administrative leadership in higher education. Abigail, in addition to stumbling into higher education through teaching, found that her personality and commitment to purpose and mission for students, enticed others to push her professionally:

I end up being encouraged into these leadership positions or end up kind of naturally assuming those positions, not necessarily by design or by strategy, but by purpose, by mission, by the mission that I may be working toward the purpose.

The women in this study were very humble when reflecting on their path to leadership. In
a natural style of recognizing the importance of relationships, yet being focused on their own personal values, Cynthia, who is very much spiritually driven in her path shared that, “So I haven’t had that kind of straight path as it were, but it’s just being open, you know, and being blessed and listening.” And while Judy was determined to advance in a career early on was to benefit her son as a single parent, stated that, “They saw things in me that I didn’t see in myself.” People around Judy, and other women in this study, recognized their potential and commitment to the mission and purpose of higher education, and assisting students and institutions move forward to success.

Both Susan and Paula were very self-directed in their path to leadership, as they, too, were committed to the mission and purpose of higher education, and used their experiences and academic expertise to catapult themselves into administration. Susan, who began her career in higher education on the east coast, shared her intentional path to leadership and said “I wanted to go into administration in [the healthcare industry], and along the way started doing some teaching. And then I accepted my first full-time teaching position at a new college [on the east coast].” Susan amusingly reflected on her first opportunities early in her career of being in charge and wanting to do a good job to further her career and commented “God, you know, I was a pill.” However, Susan was very determined as a young professional, and her hard work is evident in her executive-level administrative role, and the warm, yet direct nature. In sharing her experiences as an executive-level and over 25 years experience in higher education, Paula commented that she had never received a negative review from her constituents in her career. She went on to explain how she was able to attain this distinction as a successful leader:
You know, for leadership, and that doesn’t happen easily. And it’s all about relationships more than anything, more than anything else. So yes, you need good evidence, and data, and the other components that go into making a decision to move forward, but in the end, whatever that decision is, will not work without the relationships that go along in shaping it and go along in supporting its implementation.

The women in this study recognized the importance in reflecting on their personal philosophies and purposes, honoring those who recognized potential in them, and nurturing relationships to advance in their careers. I could see their purpose and commitment to higher education through observation made in their offices, in which I saw multiple books on their bookshelves including the true indicator of a senior- and executive-level administer, the rows and rows of institutionally labeled committee binders. And though accidental, stumbled, identified, or intentional, the seven women in this study have a style that fits perfectly in administrative leadership within higher education.

**Values-Based Leadership**

The leadership framework of the African American women administrators in this study is grounded in the context of purpose, relationships, values, and social justice. The findings identified that the research participants framed their roles as administrative leaders around their personal ideologies on leadership, the value of people, as well as understanding the bigger picture of an organization and their role within the institution of higher education to make a difference through social justice. In describing her personal leadership philosophy, Cynthia commented, “So leadership for me is having a purpose and
being authentic, and it is about liking people.” In general, Cynthia’s comment was consistent with the other women in the study, and especially the notion of possessing strong values and garnering trust from direct reports, peers, and colleagues. Within her organizational structure, Cynthia poignantly shared that “I have demonstrated a set of values that I am going to try to operate by so that people can be able to trust, because leadership is also about getting people to trust you.”

And while strong values and trust were important characteristics of leadership for the women in this study, a purpose driven philosophy was shared in terms of personal responsibility and commitment. Abigail shared during the interviews that she spent a considerable amount of time, thought, and reflection into creating her own personally crafted leadership statement, and summarized that “it is really a statement that I believe, that my responsibility is to lead to transgress.” Truly, the women in the study understood their roles and the significance as administrative leaders within a predominantly White institution. I found a comment by Abigail to be a perfect synopsis extrapolated from the responses by the other women in the study. She states:

The whole purpose of leadership whether you’re African American or not, you know, or Latino or [W]hite, is that because I believe in education as a practice of freedom, and because I believe in education is the source of liberation, then my responsibility is to lead in education and to liberate, and to change the structures of power and privilege that we have here. This is a powerful statement on purpose driven leadership, and embodies the spirit of purpose, social change, and their successes in being able to crack the glass ceiling as senior- and executive-level African American women administrators. And while these
women have a strong sense of personal values and purpose, they are very much aware of their leadership styles and how there is a continual ebb and flow in how they lead their perspective units, and also how they move their institutions forward.

**Leadership Along the Continuum**

The women in this study hold strong to their values and sense of purpose as leaders. They also have a holistic view of what leadership is and how their own personal styles define who they are, as purpose driven leaders, but also these women understand the multiple complexities of their institutions and the necessity to be multi-dimensional to lead along a continuum. Leadership to these women is not static. After discussing her role as a senior-level administrator, Michelle shared that, “My philosophy has been leadership along the continuum. In other words, you don’t have to be, always be in the front to be a leader.” Michelle shared this statement also in the context of how she promotes and lifts her own staff members to higher levels, while at the same time understanding the goals of the institution and aligning them to her personal values. Michelle validates this point by stating, “Part of what I think leadership is, is finding, building on the strengths that people come with. And the leader’s role is to help people identify their strengths and to leverage those strengths into a forward motion.” The participants in this study echoed Michelle’s point in many ways, in addition to the emphasis on people and positional power. In characterizing her leadership along the continuum, Judy commented,

When I first became a leader or was given leadership roles, I probably focused more on the relationships and the people. But what I have learned over time, it is really a combination of things that you have to learn to do.
In essence, the ability to lift people up as a leader, while understanding their roles as administrative leaders and the positional power in which they have and must use as situations within an organization ebb and flow.

The interviews with the research participants were facilitated in a time of crisis within the state of California, as budget cuts, potential layoffs, elimination of class sections, and increases in student fees, have had a huge impact on the ways that these women lead within their organizations, and how their leadership philosophy and organizational frameworks essentially moved to one side of the continuum indefinitely. Paula summarizes best the challenges of leadership in turbulent times, while continuing to identify her leadership strengths and need to be flexible given institutional, and state, circumstances. She shared, “Unfortunately I think what I’m trying to say is the fiscal crisis is dominant now and that requires an authoritarian emphasis. Absent the fiscal crisis then my style would be a hundred percent servant leadership.” Paula also noted that leadership in times of crisis and her actual servant leadership philosophy “are not mutually exclusive.” The women in this study felt strongly that it was important to have purpose and perform as a leader based on values and philosophy to be consistent in their roles to maintain integrity, while at the same time needing to make tough choices. Cynthia shared her experiences by sharing:

There are some decisions made and people have not liked them, but they have respected me, and that is what I have tried to differentiate . . . . I have a core set of ideals. I’m not intending to harm. I’m intending to always try to keep at the center of what we do [as an organization].
The leadership styles of the women in this study are influenced by a core set of values, purpose, flexibility by using multiple frames (Bolman & Deal, 2008) along the continuum, but the power of relationships also guides their leadership capabilities and styles.

**The Power of Relationships**

The women in this study discussed at length the power of relationships in their leadership styles and how they advance their personal goals, as well as the goals of their institutions. Each of the women drew from examples in their current positions, as well as reflecting on their experiences in the past and understanding that relationships are a necessity for organizational survival and professional growth. This was evidenced through observing the women interacting with their leadership team members and staff members, along with the observations made while on their campuses. For example, when spending a day with Tiffany on her campus and during lunch, she was well connected with a number of colleagues to whom she graciously said “hello,” along with giving hugs to multiple people. While eating lunch and traveling back to her office location, Tiffany shared with me the context of her relationships with the individuals we came into contact with, and how the relationships were nurtured for support and needed resources. Tiffany also had that same relational style with a couple of her leadership team members. When I asked her about the dynamics of her leadership team and her lead member, she commented, “She is really my right-hand person. She’s very trustworthy. She is on my program and they [other leadership team members] don’t like it because they tend to want to do work-arounds and she is able to call them on it.” Paula described the power of relationships within an organizational structure in detail:
Relationships [are] 90%, and 10% being vision, communicating with people, listening. I do believe the overwhelming emphasis in administrative leadership is relationship building because, especially the higher you go in administrative channels, the broader your lens gets. If you have good relationships, good listening skills with people, then your vision is probably going to be a more reliable one and your followership is going to be assured.

She goes on to say that “this business of emphasizing relationships is, I think critical, a critical component of leadership, and it is really the center piece of my own leadership.”

In the discussion on the power of relationships as an institutional leader, the women in the study identified the need to nurture relationships to avoid potential issues, and how these relationships have proven an effective strategy in eliminating possible hazards. For example, Paula poignantly noted that:

As long as you maintain relationships, this is the key and this is what so many administrators don’t do, as long as you maintain and nurture relationships within the institution, the style you need to emphasize for a given issue will succeed because the relationship underguards it at all times. It’s when there isn’t a relationship that individuals have problems.

However, these women did reflect on how challenging it can be to continue to nurture and develop relationships within an organization, because the institution of education is not static and people within an organization change, move on, or do not possess a strong set of values and purpose to effectively align them with their institutions, or many times, have personal agendas that prevent positive relationships from developing. Judy pointed out:
I think in striking off and going in these different directions, you lose people along the way. You lose connections, but at the same time you’re building. You know, you’re building other connections that you have going forward. And it is not always easy.

And however difficult nurturing and building relationships within an organization can be, on a positive note, Judy also shared, “And I know some people are very much more comfortable staying where they are, and keeping those connections, and nurturing those connections and having life-long relationships.”

The women in this study draw on their sense of purpose, core set of values, leadership philosophies, and on nurtured relationships as senior- and executive-level administrators. These elements are essential, as they build a strong foundation for these women to be grounded upon, especially as they face insurmountable adversary, multi-layered unique challenges, as African American women at predominantly White institutions.

Social Justice

The women in this study were very much grounded in their personal values and relationships with people, and further, they were just as committed to issues of equity and social justice as administrative leaders who have advanced as “only one’s” in the academy. In her interview, Michelle shared with me: “I wouldn’t be in [this position] for social justice if I wasn’t committed.” Many of the women in this study identified social justice as one of their core reasons for advancing within the administrative ranks in higher education, and especially as it related to students of color. Michelle’s work in higher education began as a counselor advocating the needs of first-generation and low-income
college students, and has continued her commitment to advocacy and social justice, as an administrator, for underrepresented groups and those students who are underserved. When discussing my observation of her leadership team meeting, Michelle discussed how important it was to not only advocate for students, but she recognized her role as a social justice practitioner to advocate and encourage her leadership team members-of-color, many of whom are fairly young in the field, to advance in their careers and to obtain the necessary credentials to be competitive and successful in their careers within higher education. When describing her leadership, and mentorship, to these particular team members, she told them “You people are of color and so they are not gonna let you get by for so long without having an [advanced] degree.” Michelle provided empowerment to these team members in order to eliminate oppression within higher education, and the administrative leadership track.

There was also a strong sense of passion related to issues of equity within the larger context of social justice for these women as senior- and executive-level administrators, and this passion was related to their leadership philosophies. For example, from a leadership standpoint, Abigail was connected with the issues related to social justice and equity and her role as an African American woman administrator to “speak truth to power,” and to use her executive-level status to eliminate oppression within the academy and to change the structures of power therein. While sitting in her office during the interview, just beyond the silhouette of her hair, a large African print hung on the wall in the background, Abigail read out loud her personal leadership philosophy. This finely tuned statement included, “I lead to liberate, strengthen, and educate. I lead to freedom . . . to change the racist and sexist structures of powered
privileges . . . . I lead to make a difference in the world.” This was her foundation on which she stood and acted on as an administrator; this was her purposive philosophy on educational leadership, social justice and equity, and affecting change in her position of power as an African American woman administrator.

The women in this study, as described by both Michelle and Abigail, demonstrate their commitment to social justice within higher education, and specifically at predominantly White institutions. These women who have found their ways to advanced leadership within the academy through intention or “stumbling,” understand the power of relationships and the true nature of being a leader in multiple situations and within multiple contexts. The women in this study fight for social justice within higher education, for students, and for themselves as administrators, while enduring unique challenges specific to their race and gender. The same elements for social justice in which they are advocating change in their positions of power.

**A Unique Set of Challenges**

“I have life stories as a Black woman. I can talk all day about the difference [of] being a Black woman.” Abigail poignantly introduces this section on the unique challenges that African American women administrators face at predominantly White institutions. The challenges faced by these women are multi-dimensional, and affect every aspect of their experiences as leaders and their abilities to lead unabashed. The women in this study spoke humbly, with intermixed feelings of anger and frustration when they were asked to share with me the challenges of being an African American woman in a senior- or executive-level administrator at a predominantly White institution, how perceptions impact their roles through the perception of others, and issues related to
a chilly climate. The interviews with the women in this study were designed to be “comfortable conversations,” from eating lunch in their offices or at the campus dining facility, to walking across the campus center after observing at a meeting, the participants were really able to let down their guard and have a real “sistah-to-sistah” dialogue with me. On the drive back from lunch at the campus dining facility, Tiffany pointed out some of the “craziness of [W]hite folks” on her campus as it related to a recent demonstration and safety issues. Judy seemed exasperated, as we walked across a literally chilly campus, back to her office where she prepared me for an observation of a contentious meeting with colleagues, in which she was “tired of them.” I sat through this meeting and observed the continuous accusations of Judy, as if she was not competent to resolve a problem. Judy possessed a sense of reserve, yet struck back with a cool demeanor and was targeted in her words. This example was true of many women in the study who labor every day within a chilly climate at predominantly White institutions. And while some women in the study minimally gave feedback on such challenges, many of the women shared their experiences and challenges of being African American women administrators, that it seemed as if the interviews allowed them some sort of catharsis to be able to honestly and openly share their innermost thoughts and frustrations.

Ranging from lunch on campus with Tiffany, where I observed just two other African American people, to a walk across the quad with Judy, in which we were the only two African Americans in sight, the women in this study are not only an anomaly, they are women among the sea of “others.” Additionally, of the leadership team meeting observations conducted, there remained just two women in the study who had an African American member on her leadership team, with only one who had an African American
woman. The women in this study offered their introspections regarding race and gender intersectionality, the problems of persistent microaggressions, the challenges of being the “only one,” the misperceptions and labeling endured as African American women, and their need to work harder to prove their worthiness to serve in the capacity of senior- and executive-level administrators at predominantly White institutions.

**Race and Gender Dynamics**

In discussing the intersectionality of race and gender with the women in this study, it remains clear that race is salient in their perceptions of how they are viewed and the interactions that they have with other colleagues within their institutions. Abigail demonstrates this point by sharing with me:

> I am African American, Black, and a woman, and a mother and, you know, but I am Black first, and so because I have that identity it could be that I project that, you know. They can’t help but see all this Blackness, so I don’t know. I don’t know.

Two of the women in this study are from the segregated South and understand through personal experiences the difficulties of race, in a White environment. And not only do the seven women in the study understand their own perceptions of their racial identity, they are astutely aware of how others perceive, and react to, race within their institutional environments. While giving an example of a work meeting, in which she was the only African American woman in the group, she commented:

> I was just talking about when issues arise that, you know, where there are racial dynamics, then what is not lost on the group that you’re sitting with as an African American woman, is that you’re an African American woman. You know, in
other words, when stuff happens, when racial dynamics occur, there could be six [W]hite people sitting around the table and one Black person, and everybody’s aware of the Black person in the room. There’s six [W]hite people in the room and race is race is race, so it is not like everybody is aware of the race that’s sitting in the room, everybody is aware of the Black person sitting in the room.

Race is a consistent variable, with most women in the study recognizing that it remains a salient issue for them, and how race is a constant and ingrained in every aspect of their leadership and their abilities to lead.

However, the research participants also perceived their differences to be related to gender as second to race. The majority of women in this study were members of an executive leadership team, which consisted primarily of White men. They explicitly spoke of gender differences, in addition to racial dynamics, and were highly aware of the difference perceptions and dynamics which would be present if they were male. For example, Tiffany talked about gender differences and said:

Race and gender intersect and that it is an issue. I do, within this group the problem is, you know, it emerges as color but really they would respect a male better or differently. They would show difference to a male in a way that they don’t to me.

Tiffany goes on to say, “But yeah, I believe that were I a male I would have a different reception from some of my colleagues and probably from my subordinates.” In our conversation on race and gender, Michelle’s point echoes that of Tiffany, when she comments that, “So there is that walk, that line, that I think administrators, female administrators of color, have to walk that are different than what White women and/or
men have to walk.” The walk of African American women administrators is resoundingly different than that of men, and in some cases, as Michelle eluded too, for White women as well.

The perception of gender differences is figuratively present for the women in this study, as is the problem of racial dynamics within an institutional context. In essence, the women feel that they are inextricably identifiable because of their race, however gender challenges are present in the most innocent situations in which these women may find themselves. Paula gave examples of gender nuances, and said:

There are little nuances and subtle differences, you know, you wonder why is it if you go to a function and all the men are shaking hands that they are going to kiss you, and that is because you’re a woman. And it says that you’re different from us. It’s sort of like it’s in the culture. Or they give you a little half hand shake. I don’t know what they think; they are gonna break your hands. And then it is assumed that there are certain things you don’t know. You couldn’t be a facilities expert. You couldn’t be a finance expert, you know. Their eyes will shift to others to answer those questions until they really understand that that’s what you are. And so there’s discrimination against women. Women are second class.

Not only do the women in the study have to have a continuous, awareness of gender dynamics, in a profession which is dominated by White men, they must also deal with the insidiousness of racial issues which present themselves in an ongoing basis, as Paula noted, “The uneasy notion among as people [that African Americans] are not really as intelligent as the rest.” This is fundamentally a reality for the women in this study as they negotiate their positions as administrators within environments and situations that
question their intelligence, as well as the need for these women to endure verbal assaults related to their racial identity. In discussing those racial assaults and survival within a predominantly White institution, Tiffany shared:

There are also the times where I can honestly say I have sat in meetings with my colleagues and heard racist remarks, and folks didn’t intend them to be racist, but they just had no idea. Every time they would say, what do they [African American] want? And them [African Americans], and you know, those things. I’m thinking, wow, okay, . . . they forgot I’m Black.

These women must endure with, and address, the ongoing assault of racialized comments and microaggressions (Solorzano et al., 2002) which take place within their organizations. This can tend to weigh heavy on the minds and spirits of the women in this study, as not only do they need to stand up and advocate for themselves professionally, but they must address microaggressions in every form in a number of situations. For example, in a meeting with their executive council and a discussion regarding a predominantly African American campus within another region of the state, Abigail shared that:

At that time, the [institutional leader] made a joke about [a campus in another region], you know; I challenged that. I challenged and said, I don’t understand, I don’t understand the joke, and as a matter of fact it sounds like to me, is what you’re saying is all those Black people down there. And as soon as I say it out loud, now all of a sudden it isn’t funny anymore, nobody is laughing anymore.

The microaggressions and racial moments do take a toll on the women in this study, some to a stronger degree than others due to their regional location, in addition to their tenacity
and commitment to social justice and “speaking up” when issues of racial inequities arise or there are challenges made to their reserve base on race. As Abigail summarized, microaggressions within an institutional context, whether it is a large meeting or small insinuating circumstances, is exacerbating:

It takes you by surprise but it also, it digs into your reserve. . . . I believe that these racial moments, I call them racial moments, it is really, first of all it is really misleading. It is not a moment. It is something that lingers and it is cumulative. And so what happens is you have this experience. Things go on, everybody else has moved on to the next agenda, but you are still dealing with it. You are still dealing with it. First of all, it is occupying your mind. You may even be upset by it. Now that it affects your focus and ability to engage and it affects your, I think your health and well being as well.

And in dealing with these racial moments, Abigail shares the sentiment of many of the women in this study by sharing, “I have to develop my own tools and strategies to offset that, to protect myself from that and not get caught up in that, to recognize it when I see it and not take the bait.”

It is challenging for the women in this study “not to take the bait” when many times they are personally dealing with microaggressions and the need to use personal methods to address those making the racial comments. Further, it can have an impact, when racial comments are made, and those at the table do not recognize that the women in this study are African American. For instance, Judy shared her experiences of invisibility:
I have heard these comments made time and time again, oh, when I see you I don’t see color. Oh but, yeah, in their minds they are feeling you’re the exception rather than the norm. Typical stereotype kind of a question, or avoidance type of question. Or things like, I don’t think in terms of you as being African American. It’s like, well, what is your thinking of what an African American administrator is like, you know? So I think in their minds they make me [W]hite to be able to deal with me better. People don’t understand from my perspective that saying to me, I don’t see your color, that that is not a positive. That is a negative because my color is who I am. My color makes up who I am and that is very important for me. So if you’re telling me that you don’t see my color, does that mean that I’m invisible to you?

This was especially troubling to Judy, who is fair-skinned, and who shared with me that she is bi-racial. She identifies as African American, and is offended when others do not see color. And in the case, although she has fair-skin, she experiences all of the challenges of African American women regarding race.

Race is very much a part of who the women in this study are, and whether it is avoidance of race by others or trying to fit these women into neat categories based on stereotypes. Just as Judy shared her thoughts on those who don’t see her color, Abigail insisted, “I think they see me in lots of different ways. And I do believe that race is powerful. You know, I don’t have the luxury of walking into the room and not being noticed. You know, I just don’t.” And as the “only one,” the women in this study try to survive in their positions as “invisible” and in isolation.
It’s Lonely at the Top

The women in this study are the first to serve in their current roles within their institutions. With being “firsts” comes the issues of isolation and being the “only one” within their institutions and among other senior- or executive level administrators. Judy sums that thought well by saying, “It is lonely at the top. It truly is because you lose connections, . . . pretty isolated.” For these women, and especially as they are very much relational in their leadership approaches, making and maintaining connections is challenging. When discussing her position as a senior-level administrator, and the leadership and organizational culture changes taking place at her institution, Michelle commented, “That’s why it has been more difficult, because there is no one to go to, you know, there is no one.” Judy also indicated the frustration with the lack of connections and acknowledging the fact that personal strategies must be employed to be able to balance the isolation with a sense of self, and self determination: “I think knowing that you’re the only one takes a lot of enjoyment away from you, but knowing who you are within yourself and your capabilities can help balance some of that.”

When discussing her role as an African American woman executive administrator of her institution, Abigail told several stories about her experiences being in the room with very few people of color at meetings, or those executive meetings with her counterparts across the system where all of the members in the group are men. She had to leave the room to “get a pen, because mine stopped working,” and on her way back she acknowledged her status:

As I was coming back, the conference room is an all glass window, and I looked into the conference room. And what I realized, I'm looking at a [W]hite man,
[name]. A [W]hite man, [name]. A [W]hite man, [name]. [name] who is Puerto Rican, and [name] who is Chinese, all men who are the presidents of other colleges, and the vice chancellors. And I realize I’m the only woman in the room and the only Black person in the room. And I didn’t realize that—I had been in a meeting for an hour, so it hadn’t touched my consciousness until I went out and looked back into the fish bowl.

At that moment, Abigail realized the enormity of her position, as well as her isolated status of being the only African American among the members of this meeting, and the only woman. Her fish bowl story is one that many of the women in this study experience.

The issues of being the “only one” pose additional stressors in the lives of these women, as they are called upon by their institutions when situations or programs involve race. The women in the study suffer from “race fatigue” (Harley, 2008), which affects their abilities to move forward with their own divisional and professional goals, because they are called upon multiple times to address or work with an issue or program which involves African Americans or other groups-of-color. Judy offered her insight on race, and how being the “only one” is an annoyance:

It is difficult because I obviously stand out. It is difficult because people sometimes seek you out for the stupidest reasons like, you know, I can’t even give you an example now, but since she’s the only African American administrator, go talk to her.

The women in this study conceptualize the issues of race and isolation, not only as it relates to being the “only one,” but also they understand that this solo status is indeed a position which holds a tremendous amount of responsibility. Michelle continued her
feedback on race and being the only one, but provided these humble words to reflect the enormity of her role:

Because there [are] so few of us, I think there is a perceived difference because of the anomaly of it. I think in terms of differences, I have to choose what I say, how I say it very carefully, because right or wrong I am representing a whole gender of African American women, and so what I say may get then projected on to other African American women.

African American women administrators are an anomaly, as evidenced in the interviews and observations made during this research. The women in this study are very aware of this, but as Michelle described, also aware of “representing” a positive perception of African American women who have been misperceived and labeled in their roles as leaders, and women in general.

**Misperceptions and Labeling**

During the interviews, when probed about the perceptions relating to race and gender, the women in this study had insightful responses about the issue and challenges of misperceptions of them as African American women, and the labeling attached to such unrealistic images. While Michelle was discussing her advocacy for students of color on her campus, especially issues of inequity and social justice, she shared with me the misperceptions that people may have, “Being the only female African American administrator, yeah, that’s—it’s like I have taken—I think I have taken on a different perception now. Now I am the angry Black person that plays the race card.” In their eyes, through advocacy for students of color, Michelle has been labeled with the negative image of an angry Black woman. Michelle’s incident is far from being an isolated
incident on her campus, as other women in the study have shared the same concerns. Judy commented, “They probably have some images of us that are less than, you know, totally positive.” And not only are the women in this study labeled for their commitment and advocacy for students, in their everyday administrative duties, what may be an essential characteristic for men or White women, becomes a negative trait for an African American woman who then in turn is labeled with less than favorable descriptors.

Tiffany, for example, shared:

I think that folks are more willing to label a Black woman with things such as, oh, you’re a bully. Oh, you’re a—you know, they want to give us those labels and they’re more willing to do that than they are with other folks within the leadership teams. So in some ways I think it has impacted me in that way that having, having—being tenacious and having a clear commitment and focus and drive, can be misconstrued. And we tend to get labels of, you know, you look at a man and say, oh well, he is just very driven. Well he, you know, that’s just who he is. But when it comes to a Black woman you start to hear those labels that come out and it is usually, you know, well I just—you know, I find her difficult or, you know, I’m afraid of she will say no. You know, so it is—there are a lot of dynamics that play out in some very interesting ways.

In discussing misperceptions with Michelle she, too, shared the feeling that if she were not an African American women, she would be labeled with a much more positive personal characteristic and not considered as an administrator who was “different”:

I know we have had angry women who were [W]hite. And again I don’t think, and these are my perceptions, I don’t think they perceive that person to be
different. I think, you know, you know the code words, well she’s just aggressive. And you know, she’s just a go-getter, and she’s this, she’s that. But for me, yeah, I think they say angry Black woman.

Another iconic image in which the women in this study disclosed, was the role of “Sapphire” (McDemmond, 1999), which is very much similar to the angry Black woman label, but more related to one who is controlling. Paula acknowledged that although it is not directly spoken of among colleagues within her institutions, she shared:

I know that it’s lurking there. . . . all of the sort of iconic imagery that goes along with Black women. And then you get things like, well, she’s micro-managing and controlling. She’s this; she’s that. Either she fits in one category or another . . . . You know, because we are supposed to have tempers and shriek like Sapphire and all of that. It’s subtle but it’s there.

Abigail talked about her experience of being the object of a negative rumor which labeled her as a controlling Sapphire as well:

I congratulated [institutional colleagues] on some stuff they were doing and challenged them on some other stuff. By the time I left, the rumor was Abigail was there ranting and raving when actually that was not the case. So that is what they projected, kind of twisted the Sapphire thing, so I think they see that. I think they see kind of what I call that, you know, kind of strong a-sexualized woman who does not need to be taken care of, right. And so she’s strong, she can take it, you know, that kind of stuff.
Negative imagery, assumptions, and in Abigail’s case, a rumor, of a controlling Black woman are central to the unique set of challenges that African American women administrators face.

It is interesting to point out that none of the women in this study identified the imagery and caricature of “Mammy” (Bradley, 2005), the slow, nurturing, and submissive image of an African American woman. These women held important positions of power within their institutions, which related to their tenacious nature, and how their communication styles were very direct and targeted. However, when observing these women interacting with their teams and support staff, they were nurturing, yet very much directive in their approaches. Through these observations, it was clear that the women in this study were in charge. Abigail commented about her communication style as an African American woman and said:

I tend to be pretty direct. I’m not very shy about articulating a perspective and tend to have a lot of courage or, you know how they say your strengths are your weaknesses, you know, my strengths are I’m not afraid of anything. You know, I believe in speaking up and speaking out. And I believe in speaking truth to power.

Tiffany also commented about her communication style, and how negative labeling can occur due to the nature of the ways that she addresses, and resolves, issues on her campus and among her leadership team:

I think also because we tend to, as African American women, be fairly direct communicators and say, this is what I need, and this is, you know, or here is a
concern, and this is what I—that gets, there’s a certain lack of comfort in hearing
that from us. So we tend to, you know, get some of those labels.

In observing five of the seven participants in this study, I noted how all of them had very
direct communication styles. The communication with their leadership teams was direct;
however, they were laced with a sense of humor, affirming comments such as Judy’s
use of “very good” or Abigail’s response of “you’re onto something,” and they each
maintained eye contact with their team members. They each remained on-point with their
agenda’s, and in Susan’s meeting, she even enjoyed the “planned” hoax with two of her
managers on the entire leadership team. And just as quickly as they all laughed, her
direct nature allowed them to flow back to the agenda at hand and accomplish goals for
the institution.

Some of the women in the study understood their roles in protecting the resources
and staffing in their organizations in this turbulent time of budget challenges within the
state of California and declining fiscal support for the three public systems of higher
education. But coupling the racial dynamic of being African American, there were
misperceptions based on how adamant these women “fought” for their constituent groups
on their campuses. Abigail held a very prominent role in her career for the organization
in which she was a senior-level administrator, prior to advancing to an executive-level
role. She shared with me the experience of that moment in her life when she thought she
was doing the “right thing”; however, in her tenacity, she was labeled as something much
different:

When I step back I realize there is huge racial dynamics that were going on, you
know, because of the way people view African American women. So they were
willing to put me out there and see me as this kind of warrior woman, whereas when I look at the way they work right now with the [current person] who is a [W]hite woman, they come to her defense and in some ways protect.

The images and roles change based on race and when it comes to African American women, they are commonly mistaken when paired with a White woman, as senior- or executive-level administrators. Abigail told the story of attending a regional leadership function, as the executive leader of her campus, with a White colleague, and the impact of her being “marginalized” and not acknowledged in her leadership capacity based on perception and assumptions of others also attending the event:

They immediately walked over to the [W]hite person and said, you must be Abigail, because they knew the [executive administrator] was [named] Abigail. They walked off to the [W]hite person and said, you must be Abigail. And they said, actually no, that’s Abigail. So those kind of little . . . different experiences, you know. They, I think many of our [W]hite counterparts, or non-Black counterparts enjoy the credibility on the surface just because of what they present. [While I] fill the whole host of stereotypical views, as well as a whole host of perspectives that they project.

It is with great intention that these women acknowledge the misperceptions that others hold of them, and their deliberate actions to offset the negative labeling and pressure of living up to and beyond expectations as African American women administrators at predominantly White institutions. In furthering her responses on being seen as an “angry Black woman” and the stereotypical misperceptions and labels, Michelle said:
I think there is a real perceptual issue around being careful not to fit into certain stereotypes that people have of the angry Black woman. So if I get upset or disagree, I have to make sure I don't fit into the angry Black woman syndrome which is, you know, typical stereotype. I have to make sure that I’m as articulate as the others or more articulate than the others.

The women in this study were very aware of the need to work hard in their positions as senior- and executive-level administrators, but even more so, the necessity to do more than their White or male counterparts because they are African American. Judy sums this point when she shared:

I might be in a meeting that is very controversial and I have to stick up for my constituency group or stick up for myself because I feel that I am being personally attacked; they see me as an angry black women. And I think it can be anywhere along that spectrum that I am perceived. What I strive to do is always have myself perceived as a professional, as someone who is intelligent and articulate, and someone who is hard working and caring. But, you know, we can’t be all those things all the time.

As African American women, the need to present themselves in a positive light, although misperceptions and negative labels persist, is essential. They also realize that in order to combat the negative labels and assumptions that they are not worthy of their leadership positions, they must work harder, be more articulate, and prove themselves as senior- and executive-level administrators at predominantly White campuses on a daily basis.
"You just have to work hard all the time. Some days I go home and I think, you know, I worked like a dog today." Judy shared the sentiment that the women of this study underscore, and that is the need to work harder to prove oneself and to overcome barriers of misperceptions based on race and gender as administrative leaders at predominantly White institutions. Tiffany, who has been in her senior-level administrative position on her campus just under 4 years, shared her heartfelt, and at times emotional, experiences of having to work harder just to prove her capabilities, but acknowledging to commitment that she has to students:

It is a challenge and that whole notion about a chilly climate, that is very real because what my experience is, that what often happens is we—we are questioned more. We are—there is a greater level of scrutiny. And somewhere we have to fight to justify our existence so much that that can take the joy away from the journey, and the job. And senior administration for years has been pretty much, you know, in higher ed, it is, it is pretty much a [W]hite male phenomena, and they seem to enjoy it very much so. But I think from my perspective, as a Black woman, it has been so difficult to get here. Such a hard road to get here, but a rewarding one. But there are times when I look back and, you know, when—being here I say, wow, I’m not having any fun and that is that, that is a challenge some days because I’m not enjoying the privilege and the benefits of being a senior manager in the way that I perceive some of my colleagues to be.
In describing how challenging it can be to continually work harder than her colleagues, and to prove that she is capable of the senior-level position that she holds, Tiffany goes on to say:

You know, it is like drinking out of a fire hydrant. My experience as an African American woman has been very different. The fire hose just never stopped going off. It is feeling like I have to continue to prove myself and to really be treated with the respect that others enjoy.

The necessity to work harder takes a toll on these women, and as Tiffany states, it is difficult for these African American women to truly enjoy all aspects of their positions like their White counterparts, who are privileged to enjoy their status and their work.

Related to the necessity to work harder than others, the African American women in this study also lack the respect of their positions as compared to male or White female administrators. These women face intentional marginalization by others within their institutions, as Tiffany describes:

In an organization for an African American woman can be daunting. And folks often want to put us in a box. And so when we go in and we are trying to affect change, there’s often a lot of push back. I find that there is a lack of respect from some people. There is a lack of respect where the leadership, for leadership when an African American woman is at the helm, and when the campus leadership does not say, I fully support this person, you know. So there can oftentimes be a bit of a quandary.

Cynthia echoed this quandary, and lack of respect by also commenting:
Certainly I found time and time again when I would make a comment, that somebody else would maybe say the same thing that I just said, but he was just the enlightened one. And there were times that I would come back and then other times I would just not say anything.

In addition to the lack of respect that many of the women in this study experienced, they shared examples of numerous settings where colleagues would attempt to undermine their authority and voice. For example, while observing Judy at a planning meeting with several campus colleagues, and the only African American women, a White male asserted his opinions while attempting to suppress the input from Judy. When I asked Judy about the observations in which I made, and the exchange that took place during this meeting, Judy shared with me:

When [going] into these meetings, be prepared and understand what the meeting is going to be about. . . . there are going to be people in the meetings who are going to speak in the direct opposition of which you make at the meeting, and [you have to be] mentally and physically and emotionally prepared for that . . . . You’ve got to figure out what steps they are going to be taking so you can figure out what steps you want to take, but it is also very much a game of power.

As a strategy to overcome these types of hegemonic tactics, Judy felt that the use of evidence, framing responses that relate to the broader institutional goals and constituent groups involved, and working “two steps ahead” were essential in articulating perspectives, while maintaining positional power as an administrator and as an African American women without being labeled as an “angry Black woman.”
There seems to be a fine line that these women walk on within their institutions, between being advocates for their students and constituent groups and being labeled as an “angry Black woman,” to knowing when their misperceptions may become problematic in their leadership abilities. They each understand that they have a purpose and that they are leading the way for future African American women who aspire to leadership positions in higher education, and specifically at predominantly White institutions. Indeed, they work harder for themselves and those who will benefit from their leadership. Abigail poignantly summarizes the unique challenges of being an African American woman senior- or executive-level administration at predominantly White institutions:

> When old people say, you don’t go acting like a fool because then people think all Black people act like a fool. But what I mean by that is that I know that I don’t have the luxury of being mediocre, that other African American women that want to come after me are, they are counting on me to have been successful.

Truly, they love their jobs and their contributions to the institution of higher education. And while they face multiple obstacles and challenges along the way, as African American women, they have developed key strategies to deal with the problems to be successful.

**Treasures in the Trials**

Through all of the challenges faced as administrative leaders at predominantly White institutions, the women in this study showed incredible fortitude and commitment to survive through the challenges and struggles, yet remain positive in understanding that challenges only lead to better outcomes in the future and to those that are important to them. Judy was very much in tune with the struggles that she faces on a regular basis at
And those were hard, hard decisions to make, hard times to live through, but looking back on them, you know, all those things that we go through, good or bad, very difficult, it becomes a part of who we are and it makes us better or worse for where we’re going forward.

Perseverance and a sense of humor were consistent among the women in this study, as they identify challenges as moments of understanding the situation and growing professionally, as Cynthia summarized:

Treasures in the trials. And then it has dawned on me, because you can find treasures in your trials, but sometimes it is real hard and it is going to be, you know, I’m gonna have to have a glass of red wine or two to really have it be revealed.

The women in this study are motivated to persist and grow in their positions, as they have a commitment to students, a strong desire to have an impact within higher education, utilize professional experience and growth through mentoring and modeling, and the greatest, the support of family, friends, and a reliance on faith to thrive and survive.

**The Real Seduction: Students and Impact**

“If there is a seduction in my work, it’s that, the palpable sense of making a real difference, you know. The motivation is really the students.” Paula shared the overall commitment that these women have for the students in which they serve. From their humble beginnings, the women in this study from counselors, teachers, advisors, and nurses to achieve the status of senior- and executive-level leadership, and the
responsibility of keeping the beneficiary of education in mind—the student. While observing and discussing the numerous pictures of children and students on her bulletin board in her office, Cynthia shared with me:

It is like I’m doing it for the babies. Because it is about making sure that they have the opportunities that I have been given, because I believe I stand on their shoulders. I’m very much connected to the generations that have gone before me. Cynthia also had a plaque on her wall near the pictures which stated, “Whatever the virtues I must be nurtured all the time.” The students nurture the spirit of these women and give them the fortitude to stay in their administrative roles and progress professionally. Tiffany embodies the notion of virtues and nurturing when she said:

I think what motivates me most to do the work are students. And regardless of how far I have been able to progress as a professional, I’m still very much committed to and understand why I come to work every day and it is—it is really because I know that there’s an opportunity to make a difference in the life of a student, and I know how critical it is for people to be there, to have that safety net for them because every day they are making decisions about whether to stay or to leave. And we may not know their stories, but we need to be here to hear them and to help them, you know, make good decisions. It is not about power or positional power, but it is really, it is a calling and we are here to serve. And we have to remember that because we have a responsibility to students. I try to meet with them, and hear their stories, and be visible because that makes a difference for me because it inspires me and it affirms why I’m here.
Michelle also commented on the commitment to students: “That’s what keeps me coming back every day. So that is my motivation.”

In addition to the commitment to students, the women in this study want to have an impact within higher education to make a difference, and is another method in which their passion and “calling” to serve students compels them to keep going. When discussing her decision to advance in administration in higher education, Tiffany found that, “I could really have an impact in higher education. This is really what I’m passionate about.” Along with the having an impact within institution of higher education in general, Abigail enthusiastically shared her reasoning for advancing into administration as a way of marrying two real issues:

I got involved in leadership to be able to try to address things in broader ways. I was very interested in antipoverty strategies but I couldn’t afford to quit and go work on it because then I would need some myself. So the dean of [occupational programs] allowed me to do both, work on antipoverty and remain employed. She understood the impact that she could have as a leader, but what was most important to her was remaining truly in touch with her core values and the dedication to the issues of social justice and inequities, and pleasantly keeping herself employed. Abigail also summarized her leadership growth to have greater impact when she said:

When I started recognizing that as a vice president I could have a tremendous impact on the institution and as the president even more. So those are the things that kind of lead me to move up and to keep pursuing administration.

Similarly, Susan, in speaking about her career which also began in instruction and the [healthcare industry], found the similarities between healthcare and serving students a
perfect match by sharing with me, “It has [her career] always been service focused, nurturing, and so it was a very good fit.” And the strategies of impact, passion, and commitment, that these women have used to remain in their positions and advance, most certainly have served them well in their current and progressive roles as senior- and executive-level administrative leadership positions at predominantly White campuses. Their focus is on students, and they have utilized a number of colleagues, supervisors, and friends as strategies to get through the rough times, but also to further advance through mentoring, mirroring, and “learning the ropes” of higher education administration.

**Mentoring Strategies**

As the number of African American women in administrative leadership roles is relatively low, the women in this study have found it particularly helpful to recognize the importance of having mentors to assist in developing their careers, as well as having someone recognize and support their efforts to grow professionally. For example, Judy shared with me her experience of being mentored from her senior-level administrator to advance in her career, and said, “My vice president was my immediate supervisor, whole heartedly supported me going after a position and so did my president. In fact, they were mentoring me to go and apply for positions.” The women in the study acknowledged and commented on the fact that their mentors were supervisors primarily; however, the research participants did recognize their own initiative in seeking out mentors to guide them as they progressed in administration. They were able to learn something new that was not necessarily a part of their portfolio or career paths. In a light hearted conversation with Susan on mentors while advancing in her professional career, she said:
My biggest sources of support have been, people who have acted as mentors to me have really been my bosses. They have made it possible. I have had—even when they didn’t want, I had one person who didn’t even want to be my mentor, never. Would you want to be a mentor? And then ended up mentoring me, and after I learned so much I said, see you mentored me anyway.

Having supervisors and senior administrators, who were typically White male or female as the women in this study responded, they were very much empowered by the opportunity to have someone recognize their potential, to ask questions, and to identify mentors who would show them the ropes and assist the women in the study to advance professionally. Judy had such an experience with a White female supervisor, and another White female she met when she was working on her graduate degree and working for a nonprofit community agency, and told me:

There was another woman I met in [central California], she had come into our organization to do some training. . . . she became my chair for my Master’s degree. And so we worked very closely together on that, and then we socialized and I would go to her on a regular basis for advice. These both were [W]hite women. They were not women of color. I happened to live in a town, in a working environment where there weren’t women of color to mentor me.

In this example, Judy was not just able to gain a mentor, but a friend as well due to her limited access to African American women or women of color in general in her area. Abigail had a similar experience, though with a White male, who mentored her to advance into administration. She said that:
[David Price], who is a [W]hite male [and a president] who said to me, you need to be a vice-president. . . . he said, well, I want you to get a couple of job descriptions and take a look at what’s required for a vice-president of instruction, and then I want you to make a list of everything you don’t have and give me the list. And so I did not know what he was up to. I gave him that list and he took that list and then assigned to me everything that was there.

Abigail benefitted from being mentored by an executive-level White male, as White men within higher education created and know the rules, as well as the successful skills needed to advance. Michelle paralleled Abigail’s experience of being mentored by a White male, but she also was able to gain further expertise in her career from a White female in advancing to senior-level administration. When asked about her biggest sources of support both personally and professionally, Michelle responded:

  Professionally, I would say the previous president, who I mentioned, has been, has been one of my strongest, best mentors during my tenure here. Before that, the [W]hite male president was a huge mentor. In fact, he was the one who encouraged me to get a Master’s and beyond.

As you can see from these two scenarios, both of these women were mentored and empowered by non-African American female administrators to “show them the ropes” professionally and educationally, and the women benefitted from their expertise and guidance to successfully advance in their careers as senior- and executive-level administrators at predominantly White institutions. The women in this study, who had White male or female mentors, did not have any negative experiences or conflicts with the relationships. Their only comment, as shared by Judy, was that many women in this
study had desired another African American woman to mentor them; however there were none available to serve in that role.

The void that many of the research participants identified in the retention strategy and power of mentors was that lack of other African American women to serve as their mentors. As noted earlier in this chapter, all of the women in this study are the firsts in their positions at their perspective institutions. They did not benefit from the nurturing relationship or leadership development opportunities directly from African American women, and for some of the research participants, people of color in general. Judy, whose career path was the most diverse and nontraditional, in addition to being the most regionally isolated, had shared with me her experiences of attending an African American women educational administrator empowerment conference, and how much she enjoyed the mentoring of more senior administrators and the ability to mentor younger “up and coming” professionals. However, in her personal experiences she regretted not having African American or women of color to mentor her:

I wish that I would have had more women of color to mentor me. But it didn’t happen that way. [They] were [W]hite women. They were not women of color. And I happened to live in a town, in a working environment where there weren’t women of color to mentor me. There weren’t people of color who, regardless of what their hue was, who helped me or mentored me.

Judy was incredibly strong and had been able to overcome so many odds in her career, along with the sacrifices that she made along the way with moving several times to maintain employment to be able to take care of her son, of which she calls a “latch-key kid.” And in order to advance to a senior-level position, she also moved away from her
husband and commutes “home” during the weekends. Truly a story of inspiration, without the benefit of having women of color to mentor her or in her environment, and overcoming the odds in a very racist regional location within the state of California where she began her career in higher education.

As mentioned earlier, Cynthia also commutes “home” and lives separately from her husband. With her travels around the state in different positions and at multiple institutions, Cynthia was able to benefit from a number of mentors, including African American women:

So I have had male and female mentors across the spectrum of race and ethnicity, across the age spectrum, and that has been another key factor in just knowing that the support has been there, and that they have traveled a particular pathway, may not have been the same, but they learned something from it and they were willing to share.

Mentoring for the women in this study was a very empowering strategy for their success. Having the initiative to identify mentors, ask questions, and seek support from those that recognized their potential, has helped these women along in their careers. Paula was able to best articulate the benefit of mentors by sharing her view that, “My view is the world is full of teachers. And probably I have many mentors. Because of asking questions and sitting down with people and so, you know, the world is full of mentors.” Paula serves as a mentor to many women around the state and the nation. She recognized an important element which the women in this study all agree upon, and that is the notion of identifying successful characteristics in other professionals, asking questions, and
modeling the behaviors that have led these individual mentors to successful advanced careers in higher education.

The availability of professional mentors, who were African American women, was a challenge for the seven women in this study. They wholeheartedly benefitted from the expertise of White male and female administrators, yet there was a void in making professional connections and mentoring opportunities with other African American women administrators along their careers. Two of women in this study did share that they received, and currently receive, indirect professional advice and guidance through their membership and association with Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., an historically Black Greek organization. These were essential networks of educated women who have professional careers in a number of professions and industries. Another opportunity for mentoring with other professionals was experienced by one woman in the study, Judy, who shared with me the day of her interview that she had just returned the day prior from a 3-day conference in southern California which is focused on the needs of women of color in higher education. Judy shared:

It was so important for me to attend this conference here, so much later on in life, you know, I mean I was one of the older women there. There were much younger women there. But it just touched me deeply because these women, the younger women, were getting mentoring, and knowledge, and experience that I should have had 20 years ago, but it wasn’t available to me. But I gobbled it up and, you know, and appreciated it as if I had been 20 years younger.
From Judy’s example, and also the membership of Black Greek sororities, the women in this study took advantage of non-traditional ways of receiving mentoring and professional guidance, as well and learning from each other.

**Mirroring Others**

“So I have extrapolated, from the potpourri of people coming into my life, different elements.” Cynthia shared with me an intentional strategy of success, and identifying the “treasures in the trials” of being a senior-level administrator at a predominantly White institution, the value in identifying successful people and mirroring the behaviors, characteristics, and their leadership styles, in order to personally advance in their careers. Just as the identification of, or being identified by professionals to serve as mentors, being able to model appropriate and successful strategies for career advancement was key for the seven women in this study. After changing professional careers, and entering the field of higher education, Judy shared:

And as I was being introduced to the [system of higher education], and I was seeing people in the different levels of the [institution], and I was meeting [senior-level administrators] and other [upper-level administrators] now, I had been always, always been one of those kinds of people. I look at people who are in the positions that I aspire to or have educational levels that I aspire to have. In assessing those individuals, I use them as sort of a measuring stick as to whether or not I can earn the degree or do the job.

Judy went on to share a specific example of her experiences mirroring and learning from a senior-level administrator at the institution in which she was working at the time:
Having working in close proximity to her, talking to her on a regular basis, listening to the things that she said to me, they were mentoring for me. And they were inspiring for me because I saw her do things that I thought, I can do that. And just as important it was for the women in this study to identify other professionals to mirror successful behaviors, the research participants were keenly aware of characteristics and behaviors that were not going to benefit them in their career and those in which they felt were inappropriate and potentially problematic to mirror. For example, in describing her mentors and those in which she modeled her professional behavior after, Michelle shared with me an experience earlier in her career on the East coast about the negative characteristics of an African American executive-level woman administrator whom she was observing, and said, “She showed me what I did not want to be. And, you know, I hate to say it but she did. She was rough, rugged.” While this administrator certainly did not model approving behaviors, Michelle, along with the other women in this study, was keenly aware of characteristics, not just title, that garner success.

And one of the things that many of the women in this study identified, was that mirroring and mentoring was a critical component to professional success; they were also very much self reflective in their roles, professional goals, and “self-talk” strategies to overcome some of the obstacles in being an administrative leader at a predominantly White institutions. As Judy disclosed during our conversation on strategies utilized to stay in her position and advance, she shared:

A lot of self talk and some meditation. You know, and then I am constantly evaluating my own self. And constantly telling myself what I need to do, just, you
know, I guess it never stops, so when I don’t have anybody else to direct, I direct myself.

The power of self-talk and self-direction was a perfect strategy for the women in this study. The women in this study know themselves internally, in terms of both personal definition and professional desires for advancement. For example, during my interview I asked Michelle if she would consider the next administrative level which would be president, and she commented:

That is just not my calling. Knowing my personality, my work style, my learning style, who I am, it’s just not my calling. When you’re president you have to be everything to everybody all the time. And I just don’t want to do that. Now, I was a single parent, and I raised two boys. One is 21 and one is 22, and that was enough pulling on me as a person. And I [feel] that I don’t need to go to a job and have 500 people doing the same thing. And again, it is not my makeup.

Clearly, Michelle understood her professional goals and limitations, and reflected on her perseverance to raise two boys as a single parent that she felt was enough in her lifetime. Conversely, Susan acknowledged her drive and expertise as the most senior administrator within her institution, and knew the benefit of garnering support and permitting others to evaluate her expertise. When sharing about the introduction of a new president at her institution when she was in a senior-level administrative position, Susan said:

It is always interesting to me because when you get someone new as your boss, as your supervisor, and they’re coming in new to the [institution] and they find this person sitting here, well, you’re just this little African American female person.
They don’t know a thing about you . . . So it is interesting to always be creating that next relationship with your boss, to help them to get a sense of who you are.

The seven women in this study were self-reflective, knew their limitations and advantages, such as Susan.

Consistent with the choices of individuals to mirror, the women in this study were selective in identifying and sustaining relationships which were supportive, empowering, and provided balance in their lives. For example, during the interview, Judy shared with me and described an individual whom she mirrored, then became a mentee, and ultimately, developed a “social relationship” with. This was essential to her success, and related to the experiences of the women in this study. The participants did recognize the importance of others who had helped along the way, those that could potentially assist and promote them individually as they progressed in their careers, and also supported them through struggle and “trials.”

**The Circle of Support: Staying Connected**

Family, friends, and faith were strong elements in the retention strategies for success used by the women in this study. In observing each woman’s office and work environment, they were filled with pictures of spouses, children, and friends, along with cultural elements such as African and African American art and figurines, and inspirational books on life journeys and faith. When sitting in Judy’s office eating sandwiches for lunch prior to the formal interview, I noticed a number of motivational and inspirational books on the side table next to a cozy red loveseat. She was reflecting on the connections that she has with friends, families, and colleagues, and calmly shared that with these relationships, “Our souls get fed.” The women in the study each had at
least one picture on their desks, which were situated in such a way that whomever was in
the picture, was watching over them and that these women could glance over at while
working on their computer for strength and guidance to get them through the day.

As we were sitting in her office and enjoying the scenery out of her large office
windows, Susan shared with me the importance of having people in her life as a way of
making it through tough times and the value of close relationships. She said:

You make time for people who are important to you. So I never let my job stop
me from seeing good friends, stop me from going out to dinner or lunch with
people, stop me from going to a social event. I spend 14 years at [this institution]
before coming [advancing to my executive-level position]. And I think those
relationships with people [at the institution] were very helpful to me because
whenever somebody hears something negative about me, I always have some
people who will call me and say, well, that don’t sound like you. What’s going
on? [Susan], tell us what’s going on. And that has saved me a lot.

Like Susan, Cynthia recognized the importance of friends and her “inner circle” to
provide the support and “trust” needed to survive in her position:

There are a lot of friends, there are a lot of relationships, but then there is only so
much, only so many that you’re allowed in the inner circle, and the inner circle
comes after they have shared experiences, shared relationships, shared you know,
down turns. I mean there is a sharing that has come, and through that sharing you
then developed that sense of trust.

The circle of support for the women in this study was at the core of their success
strategies. Cynthia described her friends who recognized when things were getting tough,
and would suggest to her that, “You know, you need to be taking care of yourself, and you need to go get a massage, and let’s go shoe shopping. You know, you’ve got to take some time out.” Michelle also acknowledged through the circle of support, friends, and the impact that they have in helping these women have a sense of balance in their lives, as she shared, “I have other friends that are able to keep me grounded. So I’m clear on work and life balance.”

Even with their busy schedules, and multiple projects which seemed to never end, the research participants always stayed connected to ensure that their “souls were fed” and to keep their systems of support available. As Abigail shared, “I find that overall the thing that kind of makes a difference is for me to stay connected. Every once in a while I connect with some other people who are in similar circles.” Paula echoed, by saying that, “I try to stay connected with people, and all of that provides a sense of support for me.”

The circle of support for the women in this study also included the strength of family in being able to persevere through challenging circumstances at work, yet remain balanced and committed to the impact that they have for students in higher education, and also their professional growth. Of the four women in this study who had spouses, they relied on them heavily for support and validation. Cynthia’s spouse, although they live apart during the work week, “is such a cheerleader. . . . , he is just my very best friend.” It is important for Abigail to have humor in her life, and the love and support that she received from her spouse. She and her spouse have been married for 15 years, and she chuckled and said, “We laugh because we can’t keep up, but 15 years.” Abigail also when on to say about her spouse, “And [we] are both each other’s source of strength.” And although Susan is recently widowed, she reflected on the support and stress releases
that she enjoyed from her spouse. She smiled and shared, “We loved to dance, my husband and I. We used to go out dancing every other weekend.”

The trend of family support in the “trials” of being an African American woman administrator at predominantly White institutions spilled over to other women in the study, who relied on siblings, aunts, cousins, and parents to assist and guide them through tough situations. Tiffany shared, “I try to really work on building my personal and family relationships, and try to maintain those despite the frenetic pace of work.” And also in reflecting on the importance of family and balance, Tiffany also shared a family emergency which had recently occurred, and said:

And there’s nothing like a health crisis here or there to make you remember what’s important, and so when those things happen it is like, hey, you know, I need to remember that life is for the living. You don’t know that you’ll have tomorrow, so you need to just make time today. Even if that means you don’t get all 17 things on your to-do list done, you need to go home.

And through the nurturing of family and reflecting on how her job is hard sometimes, Cynthia commented:

Certainly my mother and my father and my, you know, my aunt in terms of how you get through the hard times. You know, when I think about my grandmother it is like, you ain’t got time to be tired, you know, because she knew tired!

Some of the women in this study came from large families, and discussed the value of having siblings to support them, as well as parents. Michelle shared with me: “So my mother, I definitely would say, [and] my own faith, has girded me when times get hard.”

The importance of the circle of support with friends, family, and the foundation of faith
are certainly strong elements in the lives of the women in this study to overcome barriers and to be successful in their careers as African American women senior- and executive-level administrators at predominantly White institutions.

In rounding out the staying connected through the “circle of support,” the women in this study also relied upon their faith to carry them through, and to provide support and guidance along their career. As described earlier, many of the women in the study had artifacts of faith, meditation, and devotion in their offices. And being the “firsts” in their positions as African American women senior- and executive-level administrators at a predominantly White institution, there are many challenges which they face that need the protection of faith and their personal spirituality. When talking about systems of support and challenges faced in her position, Tiffany quite simply commented, “So, for me, I really need to be prayed up.” Tiffany, along with the other research participants relied on faith to build a wall around them, to protect and guide, especially with the challenges that are faced daily. As the women in this study have been challenged about their abilities, and their need to work harder as African American women, Cynthia shared with me a situation in which she was giving a presentation to a group of all White students during her earlier career, and dealing with the students who said that they had never had an African American faculty before, along with giving her doubting glances. She said, “They began to question, you know, my legitimacy of being there. So I turned to the blackboard and I said, Lord, you better reveal to me right now what to say and how to deal.” Cynthia stood on faith to guide her to be strong and remain the true professional that she was, because the situation of being questioned on her legitimacy as a faculty member was daunting.
The women in this study were quite tenacious during their interviews in describing many challenging and successful experiences in their careers as African American women leaders. Throughout their interviews, multiple references to “God” were made, from the simple exclamation by Abigail of “Oh God, I’m not ready, I’m not ready,” when describing her path to executive-level leadership through the support of one of her mentors. Cynthia also talked about the value of faith in understanding, and functioning within the unknown in her career, and how trust in one’s faith is a certainty to move beyond the tough times. She shared:

And I’ve learned to be in the gray because I know at some point it’s gonna clear. And it requires a deepening of faith, that you are going to be guided and you’re gonna be brought to where your next, whatever it is. And so I have—I have just trusted that, but it has been a long hard road.

Cynthia’s reference to her faith guiding her and gaining clarity in her journey is representative of many of the women in this study. Many times during the interview, the women referred to “the calling,” as spiritually stating that it is God’s will that I am here, as an administrative leader in higher education. As Michelle talked about her desire to soon retire from her position as a senior-level administrator, and the encouragement to move into executive-level administration, she commented, “That is not my calling.” And Michelle was very direct in making this point, and believing in her faith that she is where she was meant to be.

As spirituality and faith are at the cornerstone for the women in this study, their abilities to stand on faith to carry them through challenging circumstances, to stay in their
positions, and understand their calling, Cynthia quite eloquently summarizes faith and her career by saying that:

It is spiritual. I’m supposed to be here. That is in a spiritual sense, and I believe that is part of what I see as I have asked, what am I supposed to do? I don’t care what situation I’m in, what is it I’m supposed to do? And the words that came to me are light and love. Regardless of [any situation], it is about light and love. And so, oh my gracious, the work is, you know. Well you know, it is just crazy making some time.

Summary of Findings

This chapter presented the phenomena and experiences of African American women senior- and executive-level administrators at predominantly White institutions in the state of California. The data were organized by themes and subthemes which emerged through the document analysis, interviews, and naturalistic observations of each research participant, and related to each research question. Through the lens of Social Constructionism, Womanist Theory and Black Feminist Thought, Critical Race Theory, and a leadership framework, the analysis of the data focused on bringing voice to the unique experiences of African American women administrators at predominantly White institutions, and on understanding their perceived challenges and retention mechanisms, or strategies utilized to succeed and advance in their careers.

The seven African American senior- and executive-level administrative leaders gave testimony on their path to leadership, as well as their relational leadership styles and philosophies. Most of the women in this study entered into higher education administration by “accident” or based on an assessment by others, including supervisors,
who encouraged them to advance in their careers. The descriptions of leadership styles primarily focused on the power of relationships as administrative leaders, and how those relationships not only advance their careers, but are an intricate part of who they are individually, which are very much purpose-driven, values-based, and committed professionals. The women in this study identified multiple challenges inherent in being an African American woman working at predominantly White institutions. Race and gender-related challenges were emotionally shared, through not only body language and facial expressions, but expletives which were voiced during the interviews. As African American women leaders, other challenges faced included the isolating issue of being the “only one” and not having the benefit of other African American colleagues on their campuses to network with and receive, and give, support. The insidious nature of labeling and misperceptions was quite challenging for the women in this study, which they had to work harder in their careers to dismiss the assumptions.

Though the women in this study faced many challenges, they possessed a host of retention strategies and coping mechanisms to successfully continue and advance in their careers. The research participants placed a high value on the role of mentoring, while noting that they did not have the benefit of African American women to mentor them, yet acknowledged the benefit of having diverse mentors and allies to move forward and advance. They were also very perceptive in identifying individuals whose positive characteristics as administrative leaders were worthy of being mirrored. The women in this study learned a great deal about administrative leadership by extrapolating the successful elements from others and incorporating them into their own styles and actions. The most powerful strategy was staying connected through the “circle of support,” in
which the women in this study relied on the support of friends, family, and faith to help them in balancing their personal and professional lives, in addition to calling on their faith to protect them in circumstances faced as being an African American at a predominantly White institution.

The findings show that these seven African American women senior- and executive-level administrators have foundational leadership paths and styles, faced multiple challenges related to leadership at a predominantly White institution, yet remain resilient through the use of success and coping strategies to ensure their success and continued advancement within higher education. Chapter 5 will further elaborate on the connections between the findings, the literature, conceptual frameworks, and will provide suggestions for future research.
The purpose of this chapter is to further expand on the phenomenology studied in order to understand and consider the broader implications of the leadership experiences of African American women senior- and executive-level administrators at predominantly White public institutions in California. This study explored the leadership experiences of seven African American women senior- and executive-level administrators, and their perceptions as leaders. The participants for this study were comprised of African American women who currently held senior-level administrative roles, such as vice-president or vice-chancellor, and executive-level leaders in roles of president or chancellor; served in their roles as administrative leaders within one of the three public systems of higher education in California, the California Community College, California State University (CSU), and the University of California (UC) whose campus has White as the first or second largest student demographic; hold a doctoral degree, or currently in a doctoral degree program; and identified themselves as African American women.

This chapter begins by providing a brief summary of the study, including the qualitative methodology used, data analysis processes, and a summary of the key findings in this study. The five research questions are then discussed to consider the parallels, consistencies and inconsistencies, with the published literature in addition to an analysis based on the identified theoretical frameworks. It is followed by the implications for practice for both institutions of higher education, predominantly White institutions specifically, and for African American women who hold, or aspire to, leadership roles in higher education. The chapter concludes with the study limitations, and
recommendations for future research on African American women administrators at predominantly White institutions.

Summary of Study

This study emerged from a personal desire to understand the leadership experiences of African American women administrators at predominantly White campuses, along with discovering the lack of empirical insight and a paucity of published literature on this topic. The scholarly research pertaining to the experiences of African American women senior- and executive-level administrators is significantly absent in the literature on their experiences related to leadership styles, support networks, and how African American women are perceived within their institutions. The literature focused primarily on issues related to the role of mentoring relationships for African American women administrators, and the retention of administrators of color in general. Additionally, there was minimal literature which provided empirical insight into the leadership experiences of senior- and executive-level African American administrators, as the published literature only provides analyses regarding mid-level managers and the role of mentoring, and the retention issues relating in general to administrators of color in higher education (e.g., Guillory, 2001; Harley, 2008; Holmes, 2003, 2004; Howe-Barksdale, 2007; J. F. L. Jackson, 2001, 2002; Miller & Vaughn, 1997; Moses, 1997; Mosley, 1980; Patitu & Hinton, 2003; Penny & Gaillard, 2006; Watson, 2001).

Consequently, we know little about African American women senior- and executive-level African American administrators at predominantly White institutions who have advanced and persevered through their professional careers as educational administrators.
Furthermore, this study endeavored to bring voice to the leadership experiences of African American women senior- and executive-level administrators at predominantly White institutions, though at the potential cost of revealing the negative conditions in which these women experience their leadership roles, in addition to the emotion involved. As noted in the beginning of this dissertation, Mosley (1980) admonished:

[T]hose research and other educational organizations which spend so much money doing research and reporting on the status of Blacks and women in higher education cease their practices of hiding the disgraceful condition of Black females in higher education by either ignoring their plight or hiding them under categories of minorities, Blacks, or women. (p. 308)

And further, Howe-Barksdale (2007), in her study on African American women administrators, acknowledged the “high costs” of revealing the experiences and realities of African American women in leadership roles within higher education. Truly, this study is in response to the admonishment made by Mosley (1980), and through purposeful methods of confidentiality of the research participants, the high costs to the women in this study will be minimized.

The significance of this study is that it brings to the forefront and acknowledges the unique experiences of African American women senior- and executive-level administrators at predominantly White institutions, through the primary research question “What are the unique leadership experiences of African American women administrators in higher education?” and the identification of five key research questions:

1. What strategies do African American women administrators in higher education possess and utilize in their retention and progressive success?
2. How do personal and/or professional support networks impact the success of African American women administrators in higher education?

3. How do leadership positions which lack legitimate power and decision-making have an impact on African American women leaders in their trajectory to senior administration in higher education?

4. What leadership meanings do African American women ascribe to their experiences as administrators in higher education?

5. How do the experiences of African American women administrators in higher education differ by institution type?

This research will contribute to the body of literature on African American women administrators by providing empirical insight on her experiences through these purposeful research questions based on the literature, and the exploration of experiences through the research methodology.

Qualitative research methods were used to examine the leadership experiences of African American senior- and executive-level administrators at predominantly White institutions in California. Specifically, a phenomenological approach guided the collection and analysis of data through the “lived experiences” (Moustakas, 1994) of the research participants, and to identify the “essence” (Creswell, 2009) of their unique leadership experiences as African American administrators. For this study, it was my aim to bring voice to the experiences of these women to uncover, understand, and share what it is like to walk in their shoes as senior- and executive-level administrators at predominantly White institutions. And to achieve this goal, this study utilized document analysis procedures through review of each participant’s professional resume and
curriculum vitae, facilitation of two semi-structured individual face-to-face interviews with all participants, and direct naturalistic observations with five of the seven participants. Due to the sensitive nature of their leadership team meetings with the state budget crises and bargaining unit negotiations, along with scheduling restrictions based on location, I was unable to observe two of the women in this study. Both the interviews and observations took place in the private offices of the seven women in this study, at their perspective campuses in southern, central, and northern California.

A number of techniques, relating to qualitative research methods and phenomenology, were used to analyze the data collected from the document analyses, interviews, and naturalistic observations of the seven women in this study. Triangulation through the use of multiple data collection processes was utilized, which lent credibility to the study, and ensured validity of the data analysis (Creswell, 2009; Groenewald, 2004). I first utilized “epoche” (Moustakas, 1994) to understand the data from the women in this study and to see things as they appeared through their words, free of my own prejudgments and preconceptions. Through epoche, I spent a considerable amount of time and attention concentrating on the data, and being present in this study. Epoche and a phenomenological attitude shift (Patton, 2002) was also attained through peer-debriefing, and personally experiencing the data collection methodology as experienced by the women in this study. I then bracketed my own preconceptions and entered into the research participants’ world (Groenewald, 2004) to gather each of their experiences, feelings, and perceptions through the data collected. I used a strict protocol for coding the data collected. Open coding, through a line-by-line coding strategy of the data collected and transcripts, was facilitated to develop broad themes in the data. Focused
coding followed, and allowed for further definition emergent themes from the data. Axial coding completed the process to develop categories and subcategories, and to be disaggregate into concrete themes that emerged. The use of ATLAS.ti (Version 6.211), a qualitative data management software program, was used to assist in sorting and linearly arranging the primary emergent themes which developed in this study. This process began with 688 codes, and finalized with 10 subthemes and four primary themes on the leadership experiences of African American women senior- and executive-level administrators at predominantly White public institutions in California.

After the 10 subthemes and four themes were solidified, I then identified descriptions of what the seven women in this study experienced, and how they experienced the phenomena of being an African American woman senior- and executive-level administrator at a predominantly White institution. Table 2 (Chapter 3, p. 88) presents the emergent themes, and resulting subthemes which essentially captured the essence of the participants’ shared experiences. The seven African American women in this study discussed the factors that led them into administrative roles in higher education. Many of the participants found that their paths to leadership were strictly “accidental,” as their intentions were not senior- or executive-level administration. Some of the participants, for example, did not understand the field of higher education or divisions within, such as student affairs. The women in this study also identified others who saw potential in them and encouraged the women to pursue additional leadership responsibilities and positions early in their careers. These individuals included higher level administrators and supervisors, as well as colleagues. Two of the women in this
study were self-directed and had intentional paths to leadership through the instructional track.

The leadership styles and philosophies identified by the women in this study were grounded in the context of purpose, relationships, and values. The participants did not perceive their leadership styles as prescriptive. Rather they focused on the impact of relationships and their core values and purpose through a holistic view of leadership. The women in this study understood the complexities of an institution of higher education and the need to be multi-dimensional in their approach rather than static. The women in the study also highly acknowledged the power of relationships as leaders within their institutions. Relational leadership results in garnering support from other colleagues to avoid potential problems, and they intricately understood the impact of having strong teams through valuing integrity and trust. The participants in the study did reflect on how challenging it can be to nurture and develop relationships within an organization, because higher education is not static and people within the organization constantly change.

The seven women in this study faced a set of unique challenges as African American women senior- and executive-level administrators at predominantly White institutions. These challenges are multi-dimensional and affect every aspect of their experiences as leaders and their abilities to lead. The dynamics of race and gender were perceived to be a large challenge for the women in this study. Race remained salient for all of the women, as the ways that they perceive themselves, as well as being perceived by others is based on race first. Many of the women in this study had feelings of responsibility to identify, speak up, and challenge racial inequities which may have occurred at their institutions. The participants also discussed their consciousness of and
the impacts of microaggressions, which many of them face on a daily basis, and how the constant racialized comments take a personal toll and the effects of their self-reserve. Second to race, gender was experienced by the women in this study, as hegemony, with White men in particular, prevails at predominantly White institutions. The women feel that they are treated inferiorly as females, from a simple handshake to the misperceptions of expertise in functional areas in which men dominate. Another challenge experienced by the women in this study is their status as the “only one.” All seven of the participants are the firsts in their senior- and executive-level administrative roles at their respective campuses. And although relational in their leadership styles, the women in this study find that it is a challenge to make and maintain connections with other African American women administrators, because they are isolated as the only one. The participants shared many scenarios in which they found that they were the only ones, and that these situations create additional stressors, as they are called upon to represent, attend, or troubleshoot areas within the institution that pertain to items relating to African Americans, or people of color in general. The challenges and stressors experienced by the women in this study also include the impact of misperceptions and labeling of African American women. The most insidious misperception and label discussed with the participants was the issue of being looked upon as an “angry black woman.” Because many of the women in this study are vocal on issues related to social justice and equity, they are not shy about challenging the systems of domination within their institutions and voicing their dismay. These situations which an “angry black woman” emerges, as misperceived by others within their organization, comes when advocating for students of color, or simply challenging comments regarding other institutions of higher education with
predominantly African American students. The label of “angry black woman” is similarly related to “Sapphire” (McDemmond, 1999) when the women in this study must be assertive and direct in their communication approach, and especially in challenging situations such as the budget crisis within the state. The women in this study are marginalized through these negative images and misperceptions, which also relate to their need to work harder than their non-African American female counterparts to prove themselves professionally.

The final theme in this study examined the retention strategies which the women in this study utilized to overcome the challenges of being African American senior- and executive-level administrators at predominantly White institutions. The participants had an incredible amount of fortitude and commitment in their positions. All seven of the women in this study had a profound commitment to students and the desire to have an impact in higher education. Their motivation to stay in their roles and advance professionally was primarily the desire to see students succeed, and make their experiences as students meaningful. Students nurtured the spirit of the participants. The women also felt that they could have an impact in higher education to be able to affect policy and challenge systems of hegemony in broader ways. Although the women in this study did not always have the full benefit of being mentored by other Black women senior- or executive-level administrators as they progressed professionally, the participants recognized the impact and importance of mentoring. They took initiative in identifying mentors, regardless of race or gender, as the benefits of having someone show them the ropes of leadership were necessary for their career advancements. And along with mentors, the seven participants were perceptive in identifying other professionals to
mirror and emulate positive professional characteristics and model that behavior for their own personal successes.

The final retention strategies used by the women in this study was a circle of support, which involved their families, friends, and their standing on faith to persevere through the challenges of being the first, and only, senior- or executive-level administrator at their institutions. Four of the women in this study were married, and relied heavily on their spouses for support along their careers. Two of the women were distant from their spouses and had made significant sacrifices to advance in their careers. The participants found support in their friends who were available in times of frustration and also were motivational to the women in this study to take time out for themselves. And a consistent finding among the women in this study was their reliance on faith and prayer to provide a sense of comfort, the strength to persevere, and the trust in their faith as a “calling” to be a higher education administrator.

The seven women in this study spoke positively about their experiences as African American women senior- and executive-level administrators at predominantly White institutions. Despite the unique set of challenges for the women as leaders, particularly those related to race and gender, the participants in this study were very determined and stood strong on their sense of purpose, core values, desire to have impact, and significance of relationships. There were moments within this study that were very emotional for these women, and one or two more than others. The constant struggle and need to “fight” were troubling, along with the exhaustion of having to work harder than other colleagues within their institutions. And while there was an emotional price of being an African American woman senior- or executive-level administrator at a
predominantly White institution, the “treasure” was their own perseverance, professionalism in adversity, and the benefit of committing to student success and having an impact.

**Discussion**

The unique leadership experiences of African American women senior- and executive-level administrators at predominantly White institutions has been minimally present in the published literature. While there is a sparse amount of literature which supports the finding of this study, there are inconsistencies that have been discovered. As noted in Chapter 2, most of the published research has primarily focused on African American women mid-level administrators and faculty, as well as African American men and administrators of color in general; little is known specifically about African American women senior- and executive-level administrators at predominantly White institutions. A different approach was taken for this study, and new insights emerged that are noteworthy. In this section, I will interface the research questions and dominant themes that emerged, with the literature and theoretical framework which guided this study.


As noted in the review of the literature, there is a paucity of literature specifically addressing the retention of African American women administrators in higher education. And while J. F. L. Jackson (2001, 2002, 2004) and J. F. L. Jackson and Flowers (2003) conducted a number of studies relating to the retention of African American executive
leaders in higher education, they lacked the focus to conclude insights relative to African American women senior- and executive-level administrators. Aside from the importance of mentoring and support networks, which will be discussed in the next section, there remains an unaddressed inquiry in the literature, the retention strategies utilized by African American women administrators at predominantly White institutions, and further, how African American women use their strategies to position themselves for success within the academy. Scholars do maintain that African American administrators struggle in their positions due to the chilly climates experienced, which not only hinder their career advancement (Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007; Farris, 1999; J. F. L. Jackson, 2001, 2002; Holmes, 2003; Moses, 1997; Smith & Crawford, 2007; Turner, 2002), but oftentimes, African American women become very much disenfranchised by their institutions that they choose not to stay and move on to other careers (Smith & Crawford, 2007). This can hinder the retention and professional advancement of African American women administrators at predominantly White institutions. The findings in this study do not support the literature with regards to African American women leaving their positions due to disenfranchisement or their inability to no longer fight hegemony within higher education. One research participant did voice concerns with new leadership at the helm at her perspective campus; however, though she was frustrated with this new leadership, her commitment remained with the students for whom she advocated on a daily basis, and her desire to use her expertise and tenure as a senior-level administrator to further impact higher education through consulting.

There were two new insights which emerged in this study, relating to the retention strategies used by the seven African American women senior- and executive-level
administrators who participated in this study. The first noteworthy insight that emerged in this study was the unwavering commitment for students by these women, and their purpose-driven goal of having an impact within institutions of higher education. The women in this study shared their experiences in working with students and advocating on their behalf, in addition to recognizing that students are the center of higher education and within their roles as senior- and executive-level administrators, they can truly make a difference for students who will be the beneficiaries of the participants’ dedication to student success. As the women in this study summarized, students are the reasons that they come back to work every day. And this is especially true for many of the participants because of their commitment to social justice and equity. There was also a strong desire to have an impact in higher education, by which they could come from their positions as senior- and executive-level administrators, where power and decision-making are central.

Through a social constructionist paradigm, the women in this study understand the subjective realities of their position as senior- and executive-level administrators, in addition to being African American women, within a dominant ideological culture. The women in this study, who have made the commitment to students and dedication to make a difference within the hegemonic system of higher education, certainly have defined their situations and created their own realities to use commitment to students and impact as strategies to resist dominant power which serves only to place them in the margins or force these women to leave. Additionally, within the constructionist paradigm and the social construction of reality, Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) and Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) coined “symbolic violence” in education as a way for the dominant ideology to
maintain their status and positions, and deny this same privilege, and power, to African American women administrators. This strategy also is central to critical race theory (CRT), and is best exemplified by the CRT tenet of the commitment to a social justice agenda to eliminate all forms of oppression, while empowering minority groups (Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1999, 2009; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solorzano et al., 2000; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001), which can be further generalized to students within the three public systems of higher education in California.

The second new insight that emerged in this study, relating to the retention strategies utilized by African American women administrators, is the approach of mirroring. Mirroring for the seven women in this study is separate from the strategy of mentoring, as with mirroring the individual being modeled after is unaware of their doing so. The participants in this study took strategic steps to personally identify successful administrators, or colleagues, who exuded the positive characteristics, leadership styles, and behaviors needed to advance to senior- or executive-level status within higher education. The women in this study extrapolated and modeled those particular behaviors along their careers, and were able to benefit from those behaviors. In describing the professions from which they modeled and extrapolated behaviors, the women in this study identified those individuals as both men and women representing all race and ethnic groups. They did not specify other African American women to model their behaviors, primarily due to the limited number of available senior- and executive-level administrators available to mirror.

Within a womanist and Black feminist epistemology, the women in this study used the approach of mirroring to model successful behaviors, as African American
women have an agenda which includes self-definition and self-determination (Collins, 2001), and is key for identifying those behaviors that match their personal characteristics and goals. The women in this study keenly identified behaviors by an executive-level administrator that were negative, and not representative of who she was personally and how those negative behaviors would not serve her well in advancing her career.

**Research Question 2: How Do Personal and/or Professional Support Networks Impact the Success of African American Women Administrators in Higher Education?**

Holistic support networks (Watson, 2001) and mentoring opportunities (Crawford & Smith, 2005; J. F. L. Jackson, 2001, 2002; J. F. L. Jackson & Flowers, 2003; Johnsrud, 1990; Mosley, 1980; Myers, 2002; Nichols & Tanksley, 2004; Penny & Gaillard, 2006; Searby & Tripses, 2006; Watson, 2001) are essential strategies for the retention of African American women administrators in higher education. The seven women in this study found that these were necessary for their success in their senior- and executive-level leadership roles at predominantly White institutions. They indicated that a circle of support was crucial in navigating their daily realities as administrators, and they relied on family, friends, and faith to guide them through challenging circumstances and to validate them. Scholars maintained that relationships with family members and spirituality are strong support structures for African American leaders (Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007; S. Jackson & Harris, 2007; Myers, 2002; Nichols & Tanksley, 2004; Simpson, 2001; Smith & Crawford, 2007; Turner, 2002; Wolfman, 1997). The women in this study strongly identified family, especially spouses for women who were married, as a necessity to survive the enormous responsibilities of their jobs, in addition to having familial
support to offset the emotionally draining challenges faced at predominantly White institutions. All of the participants ardently believed in their faiths. From being “prayed up,” to calling on God in challenging situations, the women in this study were able to persevere in their positions and advance professionally. As the published literature noted, the value and commitment to spirituality allows African American women to persevere even in the most trying situations (Harley, 2008; Howe-Barksdale, 2007; Nichols & Tanksley, 2004; Simpson, 2001; Wolfman, 1997).

Womanist Theory, a variation of Black Feminist Thought, brings to the forefront the effects of relationships and empowerment on the lived experiences of African American women senior- and executive-level administrators at predominantly White institutions. A womanist epistemology addressed the intersection of survival mechanisms linked to family, spirituality, support networks, while overcoming systems of oppression through empowerment and self-definition (Rasak, as cited in Coleman, 2006). Indeed, the women in this study identified their socially constructed realities of challenges in their leadership roles, and perseverance through the consistent support and validation from family and faith, and other mechanisms of support to continue and advance. Collins (1998, 2001) acknowledged that the concrete experiences of African American women in surviving systems of oppression, is central not only for understanding their oppression, but also in being able to understanding their self-determination.

The womanist tradition also parallels the support which the women in this study experience from mentoring relationships along their professional careers. Scholars acknowledge that mentoring is an important component in the success of African American female leaders (Crawford & Smith, 2005; J. F. L. Jackson, 2001, 2002;
The literature found that African American women administrators may experience negative interactions, competition, or sabotage within their mentoring relationships (Brock, 2008; J. F. L. Jackson, 2002; Nichols & Tanksley, 2004; Searby & Tripses, 2006). This was especially related to women-to-women mentoring relationships, and the lack of female or “sisterly” support (Holmes, 2003; Myers, 2002; Nichols & Tanksley, 2004). None of the women in this study experienced such negative or sabotaging mentoring relationships in their careers. The participants maintained their support networks, and sisterly support, through nurturing relationships. And also two of the women identified sisterly support by their membership in historically Black Greek sororities.

As new insights emerged, related to mentoring was the discussion by the women in this study who recognized that mentoring does not need to be facilitated through other African American women, specifically, to be professionally helpful. The literature acknowledged that it is a challenge to match African American women administrators with each other, due to the minimal numbers, at best, in which African American administrators are seated (Crawford & Smith, 2005; Holmes, 2003; Holmes et al., 2007; J. F. L. Jackson & Flowers, 2003; S. Jackson & Harris, 2007; Johnsrud, 1990; Smith & Crawford, 2007). Mentoring can be a benefit globally, to the mentee, mentor, an institution, and globally (Penny & Gaillard, 2006); however, as identified by the women in this study, they have been able to benefit professionally from mentors of each gender and from multiple racial and ethnic groups. The senior- and executive-level
administrators in this study understood their anomalies of being African American women administrators at their levels, while acknowledging that the information that they needed for their progressive success, indeed, would come from those that “traditionally” hold the power and privilege within higher education and possess the “secrets” or knowledge and skills needed for professional success within the academy. And this critical information could only be obtained through mentoring relationships with White men, White women, and other persons of color.

Juxtaposed to an epistemological theory, mentoring by others to African American women at predominantly White institutions, is related to the symbolic construct of power (J. O’Brien, 2001) and how the women in this study have been able to re-define their definition of the situation and to use “power” to elevate themselves. Hegemony exists within higher education; however, while the women in this study must negotiate a system of historical oppression, it is quite empowering for these women to understand the nature of their power, to get power, and to know the institutional “secrets” to succeed.

Research Question 3: How Do Leadership Positions Which Lack Legitimate Power and Decision-Making Have an Impact on African American Women Leaders in Their Trajectory to Senior Administration in Higher Education?

Scholars maintain that there is an overrepresentation of African American women administrators in low-status fields (Watson, 2001; Zamani, 2003), and disproportionately found in areas such as nursing, education, continuing education, and home economics (S. Jackson & Harris, 2007; Wolfman, 1997). Rolle et al. (2000) noted that African American women become administrators in areas who primarily focus on the needs of
minority students, and other programs which address the needs of underserved student populations. Further, departments, such as minority affairs, are less mainstream and do not hold equal power as other departments within an institution (Crawford & Smith, 2005; Guillory, 2001; J. F. L. Jackson, 2001; Mosley, 1980; Smith & Crawford, 2007). Amey et al. (2002) and Crawford and Smith (2005) contend that women and people of color are disproportionately housed in the areas of student affairs, which can lead to dead-end career paths (McDemmond, 1999).

The seven women in this study represent senior- and executive-level administrators, with a diversity of functional areas within higher education. Three serve as chief student affairs or student services officers, one as chief academic affairs or instructional services officer, and the remaining three, who currently serve as the chief executive officers of their institutions, hailed from the area of academic affairs and instructional services. And while the women who participated in this study are equally represented across the academy, the initial pool of potential study participants were overwhelmingly from student affairs or student services at the senior level. However, consistent with the literature, six of the five women in this study began their careers in low-status areas such as counseling for low-income students and families, to nursing, which McDemmond (1999) classified as dead-end. Essentially, the seven African American women senior- and executive-level administrators in this study have beaten the odds and are at the helm of their institutions creating policy and making critical decisions for their campuses.

A CRT lens was used to analyze the issue of low-status positions, and how the unique leadership experiences of African American women senior- and executive-level
administrators presents a story on racial permeance for the participants, and how they individually, and collectively as group of research participants, used determinism to reach their goals, although their paths were not easy. And as the majority of the women in this study were in positions of limited administrative power, such as programs for underserved students, to the healthcare industry, they persevered. Critical race theorists Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) noted, “The story of one’s condition leads to the realization of how one came to be oppressed and subjugated and allows one to stop inflicting mental violence on oneself” (p. 57). And while the women in this study are successful leaders within their predominantly White institutions, six of the seven had paths which are marginalized as indicated in the literature, were able to reflect on their identities as African American women, and understood the steps which they needed to take to advance in their careers through determinism and perseverance.

**Research Question 4: What Leadership Meanings Do African American Women Ascribe to Their Experiences as Administrators in Higher Education?**

The leadership experiences and meanings defined by the seven women in this study were derived from the “comfortable conversation” that I had with each of the participants to hear their voices and to bring to light their experiences as senior- and executive-level administrators at predominantly White institutions. And while their voices were singular, their experiences were a collective, based on their leadership styles and the challenges in which they faced as “firsts” and “only ones” in their roles as African American women senior- and executive-level leaders. The literature was clear in highlighting the fact that there remains a paucity of African American women who hold administrative positions within higher education (Amey et al., 2002; Crawford & Smith,

In conceptualizing the meanings of leadership based on the ascribed experiences of the women in this study, Kouzes and Posner (2002) found that the challenge of leadership was simply in having purpose and maintaining relationships. They contend that:

No matter what term is used—whether purpose, mission, legacy, dream, goal, calling, or personal agenda—the intent is the same: leaders want to do something significant, to accomplish something that no one else has yet achieved. What that something is—the sense of meaning and purpose—has to come from within.

(p. 112)

The women in this study had purpose, were committed to social justice, and their leadership styles were defined by who they were internally, and to the commitment to build and maintain relationships to increase their effectiveness as leaders. The seven participants each voiced their personal ideologies and authenticities as leaders, which they ascribed to their success. They found that their set of leadership skills and abilities were grounded in core values, sense of purpose, commitment to social justice, garnering trust, and in recognizing their personal responsibility to affect change in higher education as senior- and executive-level administrators at predominantly White institutions. In further
conceptualizing the meanings that these women ascribed to their leadership experiences, their socially constructed reality was that the value of relationships within their organization far outweighed their image (Bensimon, 1989) as administrative leaders, because the positive power of relationships was a true indicator of their success as leaders. As one participant in the study noted: “Relationships [are] 90%, and 10% being vision, communicating with people, listening, . . . . The business of emphasizing relationships . . . is really the center of my own leadership.”

In their analysis of a conceptual framework of leadership based on frames, Bolman and Deal (2008) contend that each of the four frames have their own image of reality. The women in this study felt that their leadership styles and philosophies were along a continuum, which allowed for multiple images of leadership to be portrayed based on the task at hand or the particular goal which they were attaining for their organizations. This was especially true for the women in this study, as the state budget crisis in California was not only challenging, but a moving target for the participants to constantly observe and maneuver based on cuts to classes, personnel, and the indefinite holds on many capital projects that were underway. However, as African American women who were grounded in their personal values as leaders and purpose-driven in their approach, the women in this study utilized Bolman and Deal’s (2008) human resources frame consistently in their work. The women felt that relationships were essential and aligned to their core values, which led to their success as leaders within the academy.

The women in this study voiced their desire to be servant leaders in general, and utilize multiple frames within their institutions, from structural to symbolic. Unfortunately, most of the participants in the study had to consistently use a political
frame to advocate for their constituent groups, along with having the political savvy to strategize within organizational politics. This was a challenge for them as institutional leaders, but more so, because of their identity as African American women and the challenges experienced based on race and gender within predominantly White institutions.

According to critical race theorists, the presence of an African American woman in a senior- or executive-level administrative leadership role at a predominantly White institution does little to challenge the dominant ideology present in the academy. Further, the literature contends that having an African American woman administrator in a leadership role, is simply tokenism (Bradley, 2005; Holmes, 2003; Moses, 1997; Watson, 2001), as African American women tend not to be integrated into the fabric of an institution. For the women in this study, they faced multiple challenges relating to race and gender, one which was their experiences as being the “only one.” All seven of the women in this study were the “firsts” in the current positions held. And during the interview, they voiced the experiences, perceptions, and challenges of being the only African American woman senior- or executive level administrators. The participants were ardent in sharing with me the multiple situations where the feelings of isolation were overwhelming. Not only the need to communicate with other African American women, the participants talked about their being the only one in a meeting full of men, standing out, being perceived as an anomaly or an artifact, and the stress of having to represent for their race or people of color in general. The women in this study, as the “only” African American senior- and executive-level administrators, experience microaggressions consistently in their roles at predominantly White institutions. Some
of the women in this study talked emotionally about the toll that racialized comments and
innuendos take on their personal reserve, and self-esteem. These comments and racial
moments make the women in this study constantly be on guard, to not only expect them,
but be prepared to respond to these covert, disempowering, moments and experiences.

Microaggressions propagate racism and do not allow the women in this study to
fully experience the privilege of their positions, but they feel that it is their responsibility
to do so to advocate for other African American women, and African Americans in
general; they must advocate and protect themselves from further racialized assaults.
Critical race theorists also acknowledge that, by speaking out against microaggressions,
it is challenging the dominant paradigms to show how social constructs of oppression,
racialized comments, impact people of color (Howard-Hamilton, 2003). It is equally
important for many of the women in this study to be acknowledged as African American
women, and they are offended when they perceive that others do not recognize race.
Ladson-Billings (1998) asserted that race neutrality in education denies the social
constructs and the realities that people of color experience in their everyday lives. The
women in this study who do stand up and out by responding to microaggressions, run the
risk of being permanent outsiders (Ladson-Billings, 1998), as African American women.
Collins (2002, as cited in Howard-Hamilton, 2003), from a Black feminist epistemology,
validates this study by her assertion that the responsibility of African American scholars,
or intellectuals, is to produce faces about the African American woman’s experience to
clarify, and understand an African American woman’s standpoint for other African
American women.
In concluding the discussion on the perceptions related to challenges faced by African American women senior- and executive-level administrators at predominantly White institutions, the issues of labeling and misperceptions are prominent in the experiences of the women in this study. The perceived negative images and stereotypes of African women are socially constructed, and can be burdensome for the women in this study, though the caricature of “mammy,” the silent, gracious, and submissive care-giver (Bradley, 2005; Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007; Holmes, 2003; Johnsrud, 1990; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Myers, 2002; Watson, 2001), was not voiced or perceived by the seven participants. However, many of the women referenced the labeling of an “angry Black woman” or “Sapphire,” the abrupt, domineering, threatening, and loud caricature of African American women (Bradley, 2005, Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007; Harley, 2008; Holmes, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2009; McDemmond, 1999; Myers, 2002; Patitu & Hinton, 2003), when they needed to speak up in disapproval of an issue pertaining to their campus or when they needed to advocate for students. The women in this study all acknowledged and agreed with the published literature, that African American women do have a style of communication that can be misconstrued in negative ways, and misinterpreted based on the negative constructed images of the dominant culture. They were offended that their direct communication styles and need to advocate for students or resources on their campuses was mislabeled as being “Sapphire” or “an angry Black woman.”

While the African American women senior- and executive-level administrators in this study assumed all of the traditional leadership responsibilities related to their positions, their expertise and equity among other colleagues within their institutions were
largely ignored, and many of the women in this study felt that they had to work harder in order to prove themselves. Scholars maintain that African American women have to work harder in their positions at predominantly White institutions (Holmes, 2003) compared to their White male, male, and White female counterparts, and further feel that they are questioned and must validate their effectiveness, credentials and expertise in an effort for others to acknowledge them in their leadership roles (Holmes, 2003; Nichols & Tanksley, 2004; Myers, 2002; Watson, 2001). One woman in this study perceived and characterized her necessity to constantly prove herself while under contentious scrutiny “like drinking out of a fire hydrant.” Critical race theory challenges the dominant ideology in education, which advances the notion of a deficit theory (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). African American women must prove on a regular basis that they are in their leadership capacities due to their professional abilities and educational credentials. The dominant ideological culture already makes the assumption that African American women operate based on a deficit, and are not equal to those who are traditionally in leadership roles within higher education, White men, men, and White women. The seven women in this study have done well to advance through salient hegemony within the institution of higher education, and from a womanist epistemology, and as discussed earlier in this chapter, the possession of strength, survival through relationships (Howe-Barksdale, 2007), nurturing support, and self-definition and self-determination (Collins, 2001), allow these women to persevere and succeed.
Research Question 5: How Do the Experiences of African American Women Administrators in Higher Education Differ by Institution Type?

There remains a gap in the literature and empirical research which addresses institutional experiences in higher education of African American women administrators including community colleges, 4-year universities and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU; Amey et al., 2002; Harley, 2008; Holmes, 2004; J. F. L. Jackson, 2004; S. Jackson & Harris, 2007; Miller & Vaughn, 1997; Moses, 1997). The “comfortable conversation” and document analysis in this study did not reveal new insights into the differences in the experiences of African American senior- and executive-level administrators at predominantly White public institutions in California and those at other institution types. Even though the three major public systems of higher education were explored through the voices of the women in this study, they all perceived and experienced their leadership, along with the associated challenges, similarly across all systems. All seven women in this study had a strong commitment to students and desire to make an impact within higher education. And although they each shared perceptions and experiences based on their particular institution type, no one system emerged as different or an anomaly. The women in this study, collectively acknowledged hegemony within higher education, at varying degrees, and the salience of race as African American women administrators. Within an epistemological framework of social constructionism, subjective definitions remained for each of the participants, in addition to a CRT framework and the legitimization of affect by people of color through their experiential knowledge and in understanding systems of oppression. Finally, in closing the discussion on the African American women administrator in this study, from a Black feminist
framework, the experiences of individual women are unique, though there are intersections of experiences between and among African American women, which is significant and validated.

**Implications for Practice**

The findings of this study suggest several practical implications for institutions of higher education who are incumbent on strengthening their leadership teams through the placement of African American women in senior- and executive-level administrative roles, especially at predominantly White institutions, and who are committed issues of diversity and equity within the academy. Implications for practice are also made for African American women administrators at predominantly White institutions, and those African American women who aspire to senior- and executive-level leadership roles.

**Institutions of Higher Education**

Colleges and universities would be richer, diverse, and more inclusive environments if they would align their institutional practices with strategies to enhance the development and advancement of African American women who currently serve in senior and executive administrative roles, and those who aspire to advancing within the academy. Institutions of higher education have defined mission and vision statements, along with related institutional values and strategic priorities. Institutions with missions that claim commitment to diversity and inclusion need to foster the leadership of African American women. Given the lack of African American women in advanced leadership roles, there are strategic steps which institutions of higher education and specifically predominantly White institutions must adopt.
Leadership development academies. Institutions of higher education should develop leadership development academies to advance their institutional mission and strategic priorities as it relates to diversity, inclusion, and advancement of traditionally underrepresented groups who serve in the capacity of administrative leaders. Many institutions miss the opportunity to recognize the potential of current employees, ideally African American women, who are stuck in low-status and low-wage positions, yet possess enormous abilities and skills to advance to higher-level administrative leadership roles. Institutions can create “grow your own” programs, which have a focus aligned to their mission and strategic priorities of inclusiveness, equity, and professional development. One of the executive-level administrators in this study began a “grow your own” program for potential faculty of color, by allowing them opportunities to shadow tenured faculty, gain the experience of facilitating a class session, in addition to meeting on a regular basis to learn critical tools necessary. Her hope was to increase the number of faculty of color, in which many African American women could participate, given the geographical region of this particular campus in southern California. A large consortium of community colleges in southern California, the San Diego and Imperial County Community College Association (SDICCCA), facilitates a similar program to increase the number of faculty of color through hands-on internships and mentoring, in addition to providing educational seminars which focus on academic instruction, pedagogy, validation theory, and teambuilding. Specific leadership development academies are needed to focus directly on the skills, knowledge, credentials, and capacity needed to advance to executive leadership within institutions of higher education. These
opportunities are sorely absent, and especially needed for African American women and other women-of-color who aspire to advance to administrative leadership roles.

**Diverse recruitment strategies.** The notion of a “good ol’ boys network” (Searby & Tripses, 2006) exists, and the beneficiaries are primarily White men, White women, and men. African American women are not included in this network to not only know about positions which may available where they possess the necessary credentials and experience, but know the intricate details of a very competitive application and interview process for senior- or executive-level administrative positions. There is a tremendous impact for institutions of higher education by recruiting and hiring African American women administrators, to advance the institution and to support students who may see these women as aspirational role models. There should be a focused effort by institutions to advertise and recruit potential African American women administrators from a number of professional and social organizations, and publications that have a large followership or membership of African American women. Additionally, institutions could benefit from participating in professional conferences where a large number of mid-level and rising senior-level administrators participate, and offer to African American women participants an opportunity to learn first-hand about the application and interview process. These workshops could be co-sponsored by the organizations’ Black Caucus, or similar type ad hoc committee.

**Increase in retention and persistence rates of students.** The presence of African American women senior- and executive-level administrators on college and university campus will have a tremendous impact on the retention and graduation rates of students of color, and in particular African American students. As noted in the diverse
recruitment strategies, placement of African American women at the helm within organizations will be viewed as a motivational and inspirational tool for aspiring leaders, and students. And from the discussion on the positive characteristics and particular styles of African American women in Chapter 5, such as nurturing, direct communicators, relational, and spiritual, these same characteristics may be present in many African American students at predominantly White institutions. Their sense of selves will be validated by seeing African American women in roles of leadership, advancing the goals of the institution. What more powerful way to retain and graduate African American students, and other-students-of color, than to show them that success is a reality and to aspire to reach their individual professional goals. Institutions each have specific goals related to retention and persistence, and in particular the focus of closing the achievement gap of African American students, and the recent initiative through President Obama’s “College Completion Initiative.”

**African American Women Administrators**

There are important implications for African American women administrators, current and future, at predominantly White institutions. The seven women in this study were instrumental in providing critical implications for practice from their responses given during the interviews on their “sage wisdom” for current and up-and-coming African American women administrators in higher education. Their advice is golden, especially in considering their senior- and executive-level status, and the participants’ true desire to inspire and promote other African American women.

**Participation in professional associations.** The women in this study highly recommended that African American women participate in professional associations
within their regions, specific to their divisions within higher education, or those associations specializing in a specific functional area, such as facilities management. As the participants in this study used mirroring as a retention strategy, and also benefitted from mentoring relationships, participation in professional associations is key to obtaining essential approaches for success. Additionally, the skills and knowledge gained would benefit up-and-coming African American women tremendously.

**Participation in formal mentor programs.** As a success strategy, African American women administrators must participate in some type of formal mentoring program. Many times these formal programs are offered through professional associations. As indicated in this study, the participants benefitted from mentoring in general, although many of the women in this study had a desire to have been mentored by another African American woman. Mentors are critical to professional success. One participant in the study questioned whether African American women truly understood how to develop, nurture, and serve as mentors. Formal mentoring programs would benefit both current and future African American women administrators.

**Creation of a leadership statement of purpose.** During the interviews with the women in this study, a question was posed regarding their personal leadership philosophies. And although the women gave exceptional responses regarding their leadership as a process and the power of relationships as a leader, it was difficult to truly understand what their leadership philosophies were, other than what may have been present in a leadership book, or standing on their core values to lead. One participant in particular has an incredibly powerful leadership statement of purpose, which she shared she had been working on over time. An implication for practice for African American
women administrators of all levels would be to develop a concrete leadership statement of purpose, similar to a mission statement, which would define who they are as leaders. Additionally, having a leadership statement of purpose would be critical for African American women administrators, as the question “What is your leadership philosophy?” is a standard question asked in interviews, and could be a deal-breaker to win the leadership position.

**Implications for Future Research**

The implications for research evolved after careful reflection on this study, and the elements which I felt were either missing or could have been expanded on, or from my own desire to want to know more. As noted in the review of literature, there is a void in empirical research to bring voice to the unique leadership experiences of African American women administrators at predominantly White institutions (Guillory, 2001; Harley, 2008; Holmes, 2003, 2004; J. F. L. Jackson, 2001, 2002; Howe-Barksdale, 2007; Miller & Vaughn, 1997; Moses, 1997; Mosley, 1980; Patitu & Hinton, 2003; Penny & Gaillard, 2006; Watson, 2001). The recommendations for future research will assist in further addressing this research gap.

**Core Leadership Styles and Positional Power of African American Women Administrators in Higher Education**

After considerable thought and reflection on the leadership experiences of the African American women administrators in this study, the question which remains is how do the core leadership styles of African American women administrators in higher education impact their positional power, and leadership effectiveness, within the academy. Essentially, how can African American women position themselves as
administrators within the larger context of the institution of higher education to utilize their core leadership styles to impact and affect institutional growth and student success. This study did not fully capture enough data to sufficiently answer the question. Future research to include with this data set, would be the analysis through survey data and focus groups to understand African American women administrators’ core leadership styles and target how they use their positional power, and further to explore how African American women who are currently in administrative leadership positions and those aspiring to senior- and executive-level administration can position themselves for success.

Impact of Performance Evaluations on African American Women Administrators

When reading through and reflecting on the informal and formal interviews with the women in this study, I pondered on how do African American women senior- and executive-level administrators at predominantly White institutions experience their performance evaluations from the chief executive officers, or institutional governing boards, and what is the impact on self-perception and their professional success. There is a need to study the impact of performance evaluations on African American women administrators. The senior-level administrative evaluation processes include assessments from other colleagues within an institution, as well as those employees who are direct reports, known as “360 evaluations.” And at the executive level, these administrators are evaluated and their leadership assessed through governing boards, constituent groups within the organization, and may also include face-to-face interviews of faculty and staff to obtain direct responses on the performance and execution of institutions goals. A study examining the impact of these types of evaluations on African American women
and the events to their self-perceptions as leaders would generate knowledge to assist current and future African American women in administrative roles.

**Leadership Perceptions and Experiences of African American Women Administrators Within a Single System of Higher Education**

This study aimed to share the story of African American women administrators from the three public systems in the state of California. The experiences of the women in this study were parallel, and there was no distinct characteristic or experiences based on institution type. Future research would be the question to understand the perceptions of African American women and their leadership experiences based on a single system of higher education. The questions could be posed in such a way to address this focus. However, the challenge to this suggestion for future research would be the limited number of African American women in senior- or executive-level leadership roles within a single system of higher education, as experienced in this study where one particular system of higher education in California had only two women who met the study criteria.

**The Implications of Career Advancement to Chief Executive Officer Leadership Through the Student Affairs or Services Track**

The literature discussed the overrepresentation of African American women administrators in the division of student affairs or student services (Amey et al., 2002; Crawford & Smith, 2005), which provide oversight to programs which are traditionally low status (McDemmond, 1999; Mosley, 1980; Watson, 2001; Wolfman, 1997). And as two of the women in this study shared when posed the question regarding the ideal track to CEO status, the participants felt that the instructional or academic affairs track was ideal. However, the remaining participants felt that advancement to executive-level
leadership could be attained from either student or academic affairs. The recommendation for future research would be to research the characteristics, experiences, and strategies used by African American women administrators who have executive-level administrative responsibilities, whose background in higher education was predominantly in the area of student affairs.

**Closing**

This dissertation study aimed to bring voice to and examine the leadership experiences of African American women senior- and executive-level administrators at predominantly White public institutions in California. The hope of this study was to uncover the perceptions of leadership and challenges faced as African American women in the hegemonic system of higher education. Although this study was an incredibly deep and personal endeavor, I sought to bring voice to the leadership experiences by the women in this study, which experience both successes and adversities, and to document their stories from a phenomenological empiricist lens. This study intended to identify the “essence” (Creswell, 2009) of the seven women who participated in my dissertation, and with this small number of participants, to explore their realities through extensive and prolonged engagement (Creswell, 2009; Moustakas, 1994).

The seven women fearlessly and humbly shared their stories with me, which demonstrated an enormous amount of perseverance, dedication, purpose, and empowerment. It is my hope that the findings and implications identified in this study will be used to further empower and advance an increasing number of African American women who possess the credentials and have the skills to climb the ladder to executive-level administrative leadership at predominantly White campuses. As identified in this
study, that climb can be challenging, yet very much rewarding personally and for students who will benefit from advocacy adamantly voiced. I consider the women who participated in this study, the “seven wise women” as their advances professionally are trail blazing for those African American women who aspire to higher levels of administrative leadership. As the researcher in this study, I personally benefitted from the direct expertise, support and guidance in which these women shared.

As the title of this dissertation indicates, leadership through the lens of the seven African American women senior- and executive-level administrators at predominantly White public institutions in California, provides a framework of understanding their perceptions and experiences as educational leaders. Earlier in this dissertation study, I highlighted a statement made by an early pioneer who began examining the plight and experiences of African American women administrators. Myrtis Hall Mosley (1980) strongly admonished:

[T]hose research and other educational organizations which spend so much money doing research and reporting on the status of Blacks and women in higher education cease their practices of hiding the disgraceful condition of Black females in higher education by either ignoring their plight or hiding them under categories of minorities, Blacks, or women. (p. 308)

Through the lens of the women in this study, readers of this dissertation will be able to understand the negative challenges faced by African American women administrators at predominantly White institutions. But what the reader will truly walk away with is a sense of hope and empowerment. These were remarkable women.
REFERENCES


*Journal of Higher Education, 71*(1), 75-89.


Appendix A

San Diego State University IRB Approval

Current Protocol Expiration Date: 10/12/2011
Submit your report of progress no later than 9/12/2011
See below for further information on Protocol Maintenance submissions and
NEW IRB REQUIREMENTS!

October 12, 2010

Student Researcher: Marsha Gable
Faculty Researcher: Dr. Frank Harris, UI
Department: Administration, Rehabilitation & Post Sec Educ

Protocol Title: Leadership Through the Lens of African American Administrators at Predominantly White Institutions
Contract/grant number: N/A
viiIB Number: 543055
Risk Level: Minimal
Regulatory Determination: Approved per 45 CFR 46.110, Category 6 & 7

Dear Marsha Gable:

The referenced protocol was reviewed and approved in accordance with SDSU’s Assurance and federal requirements pertaining to human subjects protections within the Code of Federal Regulations (45 CFR 46; 21 CFR 50). This review is valid through October 12, 2011, and applies to the conditions and procedures described in your protocol. Please notify the IRB office if your status as an SDSU-affiliate changes while conducting this research study (you are no longer an SDSU faculty member, staff member or student).

Please note your expiration date. To request continued recruitment, data collection and/or data analyses, a Report of Progress must be submitted prior to the expiration date of your study. A lapse in approval requires that all research with human subjects be suspended until approval is obtained and may result in a temporary hold on funds, if your study is funded. The investigator will be out of compliance with federal regulation and university policy if human subjects continue to be involved in this project without a valid IRB approval.

The approved consent form has been uploaded to your protocol file within the viiIB system, within the Supporting Documents section. This document bears the IRB’s stamp of approval. Print a copy of this stamped form to use when documenting informed consent from research participants. Changes may not be made to the consent document without prior review and approval of the IRB. You are required to keep signed copies of the consent document for three years after your project has been completed or terminated.
The list below provides you the file-name(s) of the current IRB approved and stamped consent form(s) that have been uploaded to your protocol:

- Gable2_Informed Consent_IRB STAMPED 2010.pdf

Please note the following:

a) For studies requiring consent translation: The SDSU Institutional Review Board (IRB) does not verify the accuracy of the translated document. IRB approval of this document for use in subject recruitment is based on your assurance that the translated document reflects the content of the IRB approved English version of the document.

b) If recruitment will take place through an outside agency or organization, confirm with that institution that you have permission to conduct the study prior to initiation of any study activities.

c) Approval is contingent upon the completion of the SDSU human subjects tutorial (found at: http://www-rehia.sdsu.edu/yra/login.php) by all members of the research team. This certification must be renewed every 2 years.

d) If any changes to your study are planned, you must submit a modification request and receive IRB approval prior to the implementation of study changes. To submit a modification request, access the protocol via the WebPortal, on the protocol Main Page, you will need to click on "Modifications" under Protocol Maintenance and enter a report. Once you have filled in your responses on the report form, click "submit".

NEW REQUIREMENTS!

- To document your modification in detail, access your currently approved protocol in the "Full Document Viewer." Copy and paste the document into Word and use "track changes" to document revisions to your protocol. Save the file (Name_Modification_Date) and upload it to your protocol file. When approved by the IRB, this document will be the current version of your approved protocol.

- If a change to the approved consent form(s) or other uploaded document(s) is being requested, changes must be documented using the "track changes" feature in Word. Upload the revised form to your IRB protocol file. This form will be reviewed by the IRB. If you do not have a copy of your approved consent form in a Word format, request a copy from the IRB office.

e) The SDSU IRB requires investigators to report any problems that arise during the course of an IRB approved research study. Serious adverse events or unanticipated problems that are life-threatening or have resulted in serious injury or death must be reported to the IRB.
Immediately whenever possible or within at least 48 hours from the onset of the incident. All other problems must be reported to the SDSU IRB within 5 days. To complete and submit an adverse event report, go to the Protocol Main Menu, click on “Adverse Events” under “Protocol Maintenance” and follow the instructions. For more information and consultation, contact the IRB office directly via email at: IRB@mail.sdsu.edu or telephone: 619-594-6622, Monday through Friday from 8:00AM to 4:00PM.

f) To submit a request to extend IRB approval, log in to your WebPortal account and access the protocol. On the protocol Main Page, click on “Progress Reports” under Protocol Maintenance and enter a report. Once you have filled in your response on the report form, click “Submit”. You should receive an automated email verifying IRB receipt of your Report of Progress.

**NEW REQUIREMENT!** Within the description box of the report of progress form, indicate which, if any, consent form(s) you are requesting to renew. Refer to the Consent Form Development section of the protocol and provide the IRB with the specific file names and date(s) of upload of the consent document(s) you are requesting to renew.

For questions related to this correspondence, please contact the IRB office (619) 594-6622 or e-mail irb@mail.sdsu.edu. To access IRB review application materials, SDSU’s Assurance, the 45 CFR 46, the Belmont Report, and/or any other relevant policies and guidelines related to the involvement of human subjects in research, please visit the IRB website at http://pra.sdsu.edu/research.php.

**Graduate Students:** This notification may be used as documentation to register in Thesis 799A. Attach a hard copy of this notice to your Appointment of Thesis/Project Committee form prior to submitting the completed form to Graduate and Research Affairs - Student Services Division.

Sincerely,

Jeannie Nichols
Chair, Institutional Review Board

Amy McDaniel
Regulatory Compliance Analyst

Chayna Washington
Regulatory Compliance Analyst
Appendix B

SDSU/IRB Stamped Informed Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT FOR NON-MEDICAL RESEARCH

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

A Study on the Leadership Experiences of African American Women Senior-Level Administrators at Predominantly White Institutions in California

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Before you give your consent to volunteer, it is important that you read the following information and ask as many questions as necessary to be sure you understand what you will be asked to do.

This study is being conducted by Ms. Marsh Gable, a doctoral candidate in Educational Leadership at San Diego State University. This study is being supervised by Dr. Frank Harris III, a professor in the Administration, Rehabilitation & Post Sec Education department at San Diego State University.

You were selected as a participant for this study because you can help me to understand the leadership experiences of African American women administrators because you meet the following criteria: (a) African American (b) female or “woman” (c) currently serving in a senior- or executive-level administrative position (d) permanent and not considered interim or temporary (e) within the area of student services or instructional services (f) position held at either a California community college, California State University, or University of California (e) possess a completed doctoral degree. Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to capture and examine the leadership experiences of African American women senior- or chief executive officer-level administrators at predominantly white institutions in California.

PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate in this study, the principal investigator will request your professional resume or curriculum vitae, ask you questions about your leadership experiences as African American women at predominantly white institutions during one informal face-to-face interview that will last approximately 60 minutes; observe you at your campus to gather observations data about you in your leadership role at your institution, interactions with other administrators and other members of the campus community for a minimum of 2 hours; a follow-up formal interview in-person, or via telephone or Skype that will last approximately 60 minutes. You will also have the option of journaling your thoughts or past experiences over the course of one week, to add to the data collected in this study. The PI will provide a journal for you, and will collect after one week. The journal will be returned to you at the completion of the study, and all information noted will remain confidential. Your interview will be audio-recorded for the purposes of data collection and analysis. You will also be asked to review the typewritten transcript from your interview and make any changes you would like to make.

POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

Institutional Review Board

Approval Expires 10/12/11
Study Number: 543055
Potential risks and discomforts of participating in this study include sharing your perspective on possible sensitive issues, such as gender, race, leadership experiences, and support networks. Participation in this study also requires that you be audio taped, which may create some anxiety or discomfort. You do not have to answer any question you are uncomfortable with. If you begin to feel uncomfortable for any reason, you may discontinue your participation either temporarily or permanently without consequences.

**POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**
You will benefit directly from your participation in this study beyond having the opportunity to share your experiences with the principal investigator. Potential benefits to society include awareness of how African American women experience leadership at predominantly white institutions; providing models for mentoring and support networks; and to empower aspiring senior- and executive-level African American women administrators.

**PAYMENT/COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPATION**
You will not be compensated financially for your participation in this study. There are no costs to you for your participation in this study.

**CONFIDENTIALITY/PRIVACY**
The interview will be audio taped and transcribed for data analysis and writing the findings of this study. If you choose to decline audio taping the interview, you may still participate in the study and the principal investigator will take interview notes by hand. You will have the opportunity to review your interview transcript and make any changes to the statements you offered during the interview. The audio recording, hand notes, and transcript will be stored under password protection on the principal investigator's home office computer to prevent access by unauthorized personnel. Once the audio tape is transcribed, it will be deleted and the hand taken notes will be destroyed. The transcript will be maintained under password protection on the principal investigator's home office computer for up to three years after the end of the study. During the observation, notes taken by the principal investigator will be kept confidential and used for data analysis and writing the findings. As a participant in the study, you will have the option of privately journaling your thoughts, reflections, and past experiences over the course of one week to be used as part of the data analysis and findings. The journal will be returned to you after the conclusion of this study.

Your name and any other identifying information will be coded from the information you provide before it is analyzed. The code book for this study will be stored separately from the transcripts in a locked file cabinet in the principal investigator's home office. Code names and quotations from the interview and/or observation will be used in this study, specifically in the data analysis and findings chapters. Any information that is obtained from this study that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be revealed only with your permission or as required by law. If you choose to have your identity revealed within the study, check the "opt-in" box at the bottom of this form. If you disclose illegal or dangerous behavior during the interview (e.g., any kind of abuse or serious harm to self or others), I must report this information to the appropriate university and law enforcement authorities.

When the results of the research are published or discussed in conferences, no information that can potentially reveal your identity will be included, except if you chose to "opt-in" to disclose your identity. Federal regulations require that the Institutional Review Board (IRB) periodically review all approved and continuing projects that involve human
subjects. To ensure that your rights as a subject are being protected in this study, it is possible that representatives of the Institutional Review Board may come to this research site to inspect study records.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION
Participation in this study is voluntary. Your choice of whether or not to participate will not influence your future relations with San Diego State University or the San Diego State University Foundation. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to stop your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are allowed.

CONTACT INFORMATION
If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact an IRB representative in the Division of Research Affairs at San Diego State University (telephone: 619-594-5622; email: irb@mail.sdsu.edu). You may also contact Ms. Marsha Gable, Principal Investigator, at 760-743-6061 or m.gable1@cox.net

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE/RIGHTS OF PARTICIPANT
The San Diego State University Institutional Review Board has approved this consent form, as signified by the Board's stamp. The consent form must be reviewed annually and expires on the date indicated on the stamp. Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this document and have had a chance to ask any questions you have about the study. Your signature also indicates that you agree to be in the study and have been told that you can change your mind and withdraw your consent to participate at any time. You have been given a copy of this consent form. You have been told that by signing this consent form you are not giving up any of your legal rights.

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT

Your questions have been answered to your satisfaction, and you agree to participate in this study. You have been given a copy of this form.

( ) I "opt-out" of having my identity revealed. ( ) I "opt-in" to have my identity revealed.

Name of Subject

Signature of Subject Date

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

SAN DIEGO STATE UNIVERSITY
Institutional Review Board
Approval Expires: 10/12/11
Study Number: 546035
Study Title: A Study on the Leadership Experiences of African American Women Senior-Level Administrators at Predominantly White Institutions in California

I have explained the research to the subject and answered all of his/her questions. I believe that he/she understands the information described in this document and freely consents to participate.

Name of Investigator

________________________________________
Signature of Investigator

________________________________________
Date

[Institutional Review Board Information]
San Diego State University
Approval Expires: 10/12/11
Study Number: 543655
Appendix C

Interview Guide

The following questions were asked of each participant. Each question design was guided by the literature review on the leadership experiences of African American women administrators at predominantly White institutions, and through the researcher’s own personal experiences and insight. Although some questions may indirectly address more than the research question, interview respondents were asked to elaborate on their responses. Additionally, all listed questions were not covered during the formal interview, based on relevance and the extent to which other questions elicited emotional responses or critical information for the study from a participant. The researcher asked respondents to elaborate on specific questions based on the data gathered from the document analysis conducted prior to the semi-structured informal interviews, and notes made during naturalistic observation.

1. What is your personal philosophy on administrative leadership in higher education?

2. Tell me about the personal factors in your life journey that led you to pursue a career as an administrator?

3. What strategies do you utilize to successfully continue in your position, seek advancement to the next level, and motivate you to stay in administrative leadership roles in higher education?

4. In the article, “Black Women in Academe” (1997), Yolanda Moses states that “Despite a demonstrably chilly climate on many campuses, many black women enjoy their jobs in academia.” What do you enjoy most about your job in academia?
5. Describe your experiences as an African American woman administrator. How do you perceive it to be different than your non-African American woman or male counterparts? How do they perceive you to be different? Do you feel that race and gender play a significant role in how you are perceived as a leader?

6. Tell me about your biggest sources of support, professionally and personally? How do you balance the demands of your position with the demands of your personal/family life?

7. Do you have, or have you had, a mentor? If so, describe them (gender, ethnicity, position, etc.) and how have they impacted your career in higher education administration. Was it a good experience?

8. What would you say is the ideal pipeline, or career path, to senior-level administrative positions in higher education? The research has shown that African Americans, and people of color in general, are clustered in positions of low status and power. How would you categorize leadership positions in departments such as TRIO, EOP, minority/diversity affairs and/or vocational training programs?

9. Bolman and Deal (2008), authored seminal work on organizational leadership, describe four frames within an organization—structural, human resources, symbolic, and political. Thinking about your institution and your leadership philosophy, describe which best exemplifies your approach to leadership?

10. What do you see as some of the biggest challenges of being an African American woman senior- or executive-level administrator at this institution?
11. What sage wisdom and advice do you have for up-and-coming new African American women professionals?

12. Additional questions from the observation.