

ROLE, REPRESENTATION, RESISTANCE, AND RESPONSE: BLACK WOMEN SENIOR
LEADERS IN PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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For my daughters, Mykah and Tyla

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When I received the call that I had been accepted into Cohort 22 of my doctoral program, I worked very hard to hold back the tears until I hung up. I was thrilled with the news, but it immediately hit me that for the first time in my life I did not have my parents with whom to share the news of this new opportunity and chapter in my life. My parents, Dr. Alvin N. Puryear and Dr. Catherine W. Puryear, guided, supported, and motivated me in countless ways, including in my academic pursuits having themselves earned doctorates and having taught and held leadership positions in higher education. They were, however, indeed with me throughout this pursuit in all that they represented and modeled in their lives and work and through all the wisdom and lessons they imparted to me from their own personal and professional journeys. They influenced and inspired so much of who I am today including as a Black woman leader in higher education, as well as how I chose to use and navigate this opportunity to pursue my doctorate. I am forever grateful to them.

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When I received the call that Dr. Sharon Ravitch had agreed to be the chair of my dissertation committee, I could not believe how fortunate I was. I was already in awe of her and her work from having her as one of my UPenn professors. The experience of getting to know

Sharon and working with her as my chair has been a gift beyond measure. She has been my teacher and guide, my coach and cheerleader, and my mentor and friend. She openly and generously shared her deep knowledge and experience as an educator, expert, and leader in her field helping me navigate the unfamiliar and often intimidating territories of dissertation research and writing. She just as openly, generously, and genuinely showed compassion and care for me as her student, colleague, and friend supporting my growth and helping me have more confidence in my choices, approaches, and voice with my work.

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And most importantly, thank you to my family for their love and support throughout my doctoral program. My daughters, Mykah and Tyla, inspire me to push myself to be the role model for them that I had in my parents, and I am grateful for the ways they help me grow. They rolled with a lot of transition and change in my life with graduate school that affected them as well, and I am so appreciative for having daughters that stood by me with love through it all. My sister, Dr. Pamela Puryear, is always there to stand up and stand in for me when and where I need it. Knowing that means the world to me and brought me so much comfort throughout this process. My partner, Steven Johnson, listened to me and supported me on the good days and the harder ones. He was always ready to help me with the parts of life I was neglecting and to pop into my office randomly to make me laugh, all helping to make life feel a little lighter.

ABSTRACT

ROLE, REPRESENTATION, RESISTANCE, AND RESPONSE: BLACK WOMEN SENIOR LEADERS IN PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Susan C. Puryear

Sharon M. Ravitch

Although notably underrepresented in role and research, Black women bring a strong presence to higher education institutions—leading academic, research, and business operations from senior and executive roles. Black women senior leaders serve as change agents strategically leading their organizations to become better, stronger, and more effective in supporting the health, longevity, and competitiveness of their institutions.

This dissertation study explored how Black women senior leaders experience their place in higher education, including their ability to navigate and lead in traditionally White male spaces of leadership. This research sought to understand Black women’s leadership experiences and practices including challenges and resistance to their leadership and how they address them, and how their social identities inform and impact these experiences. The study used a broad, emic focused qualitative approach informed by the theoretical frameworks of intersectionality, critical race theory, and gendered racism to explore the experiences of Black women senior leaders in predominantly White institutions.

This study found multiple ways Black women senior leaders’ intersectional identities influence and shape their approach to leadership and their leadership experiences. It explored how Black women’s leadership is perceived and responded to in their institutions, including support, allyship, and resistance to who they are and how they lead as Black women. Despite institutional signals of support for advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion, Black women

senior leaders continue to experience significant burdens and challenges unique to their roles and work. The findings from this study inform Black women leaders', both current and aspiring, with considerations for navigating their careers in predominantly White higher education institutions, as well as institutional efforts to attract, promote, and retain diverse talent through representing the realities Black women senior leaders negotiate in their positions.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This was a study of Black women senior leaders in predominantly White institutions (PWIs) of higher education. Black women historically have been, and continue to be, underrepresented in higher education institutions (HEIs) across roles including leadership roles of varying ranks. Although Black people make up approximately 12.1% of the U.S. population according to the 2020 U.S. Census Bureau (n.d.), Black people continue to be notably underrepresented in higher education faculty and leadership. In 2020, only 7% of faculty were Black with Black women representing 4% of faculty (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.). During the same time, only 6% of provosts or chief academic officers (American Council on Education, n.d.) and 4% of academic department heads (Taylor et al., 2020) were Black. The 2017 survey of American College Presidents found only 7.9% of U.S. college and university presidents surveyed were Black (American Council on Education, 2017). This number appears to have improved in the 2022 American Council on Education's presidential survey with 13.2% of survey respondents being Black, although it is important to note these survey figures only represent the respondent pool (American Council on Education, 2023).

Despite persistent underrepresentation, Black women bring a great deal to the institutions they serve, including the strong servant leader presence and values they bring to HEIs where they lead academic, research, and business operations and the people within them, from leadership roles such as deans, provosts, chancellors, and presidents (Pace-Glover & Lyon-Bennett, 2023) . Black women leaders in senior positions are charged to serve as change agents who can strategically lead their organizations to become better, stronger, more effective, and efficient to support the health, longevity, competitiveness, and success of their institutions.

Black women senior leaders bring great value to their institutions through their professional experiences coming up through higher education and other industry ranks into higher education institutions' leadership (Smith, 2021). They also bring great value by virtue of their social identities (Smith, 2021). As women and people of color with life experiences and ontological perspectives unique to how they experience the world, Black women leaders bring tools and talents to promote the successful management and growth of their institutions (Patton & Haynes, 2018).

Speaking further to the varied contributions Black women senior leaders bring to their institutions, their presence and work can challenge historical practices and values that undermine institutions' abilities to be inclusive spaces able to equitably serve diverse populations of students and impact the world through relevant, responsive, and responsible teaching, research, and scholarship (Jean-Marie et al., 2009). Black women senior leaders contribute a great deal to the organizations they lead, serving as important role models and mentors for other underrepresented people seeking to see themselves in positions of authority and leadership in traditionally White and male spaces (Lewis-Strickland, 2021; Whitford, 2020b). The presence of Black women in leadership also serves to challenge normalized images of leaders as White and male (Coleman, 2012).

Despite the talents and generative value Black women senior leaders bring to their institutions, the recruitment, promotion, and retention of Black women into leadership roles is a noted and notable challenge for institutions seeking to diversify their institutions across senior leadership ranks (Cumming et al., 2023). The specious and outdated excuse of the "pipeline problem" is more readily rejected today, recognizing the reality of increasing graduate level educational attainment among women and people of color over the past decades, and the

persisting systemic challenges that institutions need to address that operate as barriers to increasing diversity in senior leadership (Comeaux, 2022, para. 4). In the current moment, higher education institutions are challenged by diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) practitioners and advocates to critically examine institutional cultures, practices, and policies that inhibit their ability to attract, promote, and retain Black women into these senior roles. Connecting this work to the experiences of Black women leaders helps to close the gap between the aspirations and realities of DEI.

Recruitment and hiring practices often cast a narrow net using criteria and assessments that reflect qualities associated with traditional White and male candidates, thus perpetuating inequities and discrimination that hinder an institution's ability to connect with, recognize, and welcome diverse candidates for senior leadership opportunities. Recruitment and hiring are just the first steps of addressing the diversification challenge as institutions must examine and improve their organizational cultures. Authentically and impactfully addressing impediments to diversifying leadership requires institutions learn to identify and dismantle the gendered and racial biases that are foundational to and threaded throughout their ecosystems that continually aggress Black women in micro- and macro-level ways and undermine their ability to persist and thrive in those environments (Gause, 2021). As institutions of higher education grapple with these challenges, they must seek to better understand the barriers and challenges that Black women senior leaders experience in these positions in HEIs because these experiences impact their roles and representation and limit and harm both them and the institutions as well.

Research Questions

To these ends, this dissertation study explored how Black women senior leaders experience their place and their ability to lead in the traditionally White and male spaces of

senior leadership in higher education. To understand this lived institutional and systemic phenomenon, this dissertation study explored the following research questions from the perspectives of Black women senior leaders at PWIs:

1. What is the experience of being a senior leader at a PWI?
2. How does being a Black woman influence leadership approaches and strategies?
3. How do colleagues respond to their roles and work as leaders?

To develop a deep and critical understanding of the experiences of Black women senior leaders in PWIs, this qualitative study explored (a) how these leaders navigate their institutions, remits, and roles; (b) the challenges they face; and (c) the tools, resources, frames, and strengths they call upon to identify, conceptualize, and address those challenges and push forward effectively as leaders. The research explored whether and to what extent their social identities as Black women impact or inform their leadership experience including how they approach leadership and how they choose to respond to challenges and resistances to them and their leadership from their emic—or insider—perspectives as individuals and a group as they language them.

The work of this dissertation study was guided by and grounded in the questions and findings of earlier research looking at the impacts of both race and gender on the leadership experiences of women and of Black women in higher education and more broadly. This dissertation study also used an intersectional lens recognizing the complexity of Black women's identities and the unique challenges they face, navigating both race and gender discrimination and the exponentialized impacts of the interplay of the two in both their personal and professional lives (Crenshaw, 1989; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). Additionally, critical race theory (CRT) provided a framework for hearing and amplifying the voices of the Black women

senior leaders in this study, as they talked about their leadership experiences and social identities, recognizing these experiences sit within social and institutional contexts in the United States, shaped and defined in part by injustices related to both gender and race (Ladson-Billings, 2000).

Significance of the Study

Black women in senior leadership positions in higher education have much to teach the field. An important opportunity existed to understand the experiences of Black women senior leaders in higher education institutions as they navigate their careers and operate as leaders in these institutions. The intersectionality of their social identities as Black women shapes how these women leaders experience these professional spaces and the cultures and climates of their institutions in relation to gendered and racial bias and discrimination that persist in these institutions that were built by and for White upper-class men (Crenshaw, 1989). This dissertation study contributed to more critical understandings of how these intersections of identity respond to and are impacted by the gendered racism so pervasive in institutions of higher education (Essed, 1991) with a focus on PWIs, which have their own unique terrain.

This dissertation study was designed using an emic focused qualitative approach to create the conditions for these leaders to voice their experiences within their own frames and language so that the field can learn, in emic terms, their own terminology and natural ways of describing their experiences and conceptualizations of those experiences (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). This approach enabled an exploration and examination of how they uniquely view, live, make sense of, and experience their institutional environments as Black women.

The study explored experiences, perspectives, challenges, and opportunities related to ways their social identities as Black women are viewed, experienced, and treated in their workspaces along with the histories, values, strengths, and perspectives they bring to their work

and institutions. Additionally, these leaders' experiences spoke to commonalities with other underrepresented groups navigating careers in higher education settings. Sharing these narratives with me as the researcher, also a Black woman senior leader in higher education, contributed to the co-creation of a safe space for these Black women leaders, as research participants, to feel heard and understood with the ability to trust that there would be fidelity to representing their experiences authentically and with the dignity and respect they deserve. My social identity and professional positionality were assets to this research, and are discussed in Chapter 3.

As HEIs work to increase diversity in their student, faculty, leadership, and staff populations, they must focus on how to recruit more diverse members to their institutions as well as how to retain them once they take these positions. This need to focus on recruitment and retention of diverse talent is particularly true with respect to Black women who are underrepresented in leadership positions, especially in PWIs. Strategies for how to grow and maintain a representative leadership team are of greater interest recognizing the importance of increasing diversity to challenge and dismantle the legacies of discrimination, bias and White privilege that persist in PWIs (Gause, 2021). Learning about the range and variation in the experiences of Black women leaders in how they navigate their higher education leadership positions and attempt to assert the authority of their roles to impactfully lead provided important perspectives for understanding how their leadership experience is unique from that of leaders who are not Black women. Understanding their distinct experiences and challenges will help inform how HEIs choose to realign their cultures, values, practices, and policies in their efforts to improve their recruitment, promotion, and retention of Black women leaders for the benefit of their institutions and these leaders who help to uplift them, often at their own expense (Ravitch & Herzog, 2023).

The significance of understanding the current leadership experiences of Black women senior leaders in higher education has become even more salient in recent years. In the wake of the murder of George Floyd in 2020 and the Black Lives Matter movement, there has been a very public narrative with many institutions and organizations signaling their commitment to diversifying the upper echelons of their organizational leadership (Guynn & Fraser, 2023). Higher education institutions have been proudly promoting stories of their “first[s]” for media attention, particularly of Black presidents as the percentages of hires of presidents that are people of color including Black women have been on the rise since 2020 (Lederman, 2022, para. 14). The narrative in these past 5 years of intentional, accelerated diversification of leadership has been one of progress benefiting institutions and the students they serve, and correcting the historic discrimination that has created barriers to the professional ascension of diverse talent (American Association of Colleges & Universities [AAC&U], n.d.; Cumming et al., 2023).

However, and importantly, being hired into these roles at greater rates does not at all ensure Black women senior leaders are being set up with the support, sponsorship, and resources needed to address barriers, challenges, and resistance to their successful leadership. In fact, multiple studies show the opposite is true across sectors (Bailey-Jackson, 2021; Nottingham, 2020). This renewed and public focus on increasing diversity in senior leadership happening within institutions may continue to passively (or actively) nurture organizational ecosystems that tolerate at best, or enable at worst, the persistence of gendered racism, which targets and harms the leadership experiences and trajectories of Black women leaders (Essed, 1991; Jean-Marie et al., 2009). Questions exist as to whether institutions are *checking the box* with respect to diversity or authentically addressing the challenges that persist for Black women entering and

enduring in these senior leadership roles in PWIs. Illuminating these challenges is one major goal of this dissertation research.

In seeking to better understand the leadership experiences of Black women senior leaders in higher education, this empirical study set out to understand both how they personally navigate their leadership and the institutional contexts in which they lead, as well as how those institutional environments and the people in them respond to them and their leadership. This dissertation study asked participants to share how their social identities as Black women influence not only their leadership experience, but also how they view and approach their leadership. It also asked participants to share how they experience their leadership being responded to by others in their institution and the ways they feel supported in their leadership and the ways they feel resistance to their leadership as Black women. How these Black women navigate their roles and work as senior leaders in PWIs, the ways their social identities inform their leadership and how they experience leadership, and what they experience as support and resistance to their leadership including how they respond to it builds an understanding of the challenges and barriers of many underrepresented people and leaders in PWIs including the unique challenges and barriers of participants in this study due to their unique intersectional identities.

Chapter 2, the Literature Review, frames and embeds this empirical work in strategically selected research and theory that frame and conceptualize its core constructs and their relationships in the context of PWIs. The literature covered explores the underrepresentation of Black women senior leaders as part of the persisting diversity problem in higher education along with continued calls to address it. It also explores the experiences and challenges of leadership

for underrepresented Black women senior leaders operating in HEIs as connected to their intersectional identities as women and Black women.

Chapter 2 also explores the literature on senior leadership as a change agent role in higher education management including the challenges this poses for Black women whose identities may not align with the dominant constructs and culture for what leadership looks like in their PWIs. Lastly, Chapter 2 explores the literature on resistance to leadership, the resistance that Black women leaders experience to their leadership, and how they respond to resistance connected to their social identities.

Chapter 3, Methodology and Research Design, outlines the approach to exploring the research questions through a qualitative study. The chapter details the process of participant selection and recruitment including demographic data about the participants, the data collection methods used, and the researcher's approach to data analysis. It also discusses how validity, positionality of the researcher, and other ethical considerations were addressed throughout the research design, data collection, analysis, and writing.

Chapter 4, Findings and Analysis, explores and analyzes the findings of the research. In discussing how participants experience leadership in their PWIs, three overarching areas are explored looking at (a) the influence of social identity on the ways that Black women experience and approach leadership, (b) what support and resistance for Black women's leadership in PWIs looks like and how it is experienced by participants in the study, and (c) how Black women senior leaders process and respond to the resistance they experience to the leadership. Findings in each of these three areas are outlined and analyzed for how they connect to the challenges and barriers these senior leaders face in their roles and work as Black women and within institutional contexts that may signal support for advancing the values and aspirations of DEI, but also at the

same time, enable legacies of gendered racism to persist within their organizational climates and cultures.

Chapter 5, the Conclusion, discusses the implications of these findings, and provides recommendations for both Black women navigating the challenges and barriers of leadership in PWIs, and for institutions seeking to not only diversify their leadership, but also authentically and impactfully address those challenges and barriers to the diverse talent they seek to attract, promote, and retain.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The following literature review explores the persisting diversity issue in higher education and data evidencing the continuing underrepresentation of Black women across faculty, staff, and leadership roles in PWIs; as well as the impacts of both racial and gender-based discrimination, including the intersectionality of the two, on the leadership experiences of Black women in higher education. Chapter 2 also explores the literature on senior leadership as a change agent role in higher education and the significance of that role with respect to organizational change and management including the challenges this poses for Black women whose identities may not align with the dominant constructs and culture for what leadership looks like in their PWIs. Lastly, Chapter 2 explores the literature on resistance to leadership, the resistance Black women leaders experience to their leadership and how they respond to resistance connected to their social identities.

Representation: A Persistent Higher Education Diversity Issue

Achieving equitable representation in higher education and in the context of this dissertation study is defined in two ways. Representation is about ensuring people of different demographic and identity groups are reflected in the institutional population in proportion to their representation in the United States. Representation is also about ensuring people of different backgrounds, demographics, and identity groups are meaningfully and equitably included in social, academic, and workspaces in higher education and given the opportunity to make meaningful, respected, and valued contributions to those spaces. As will be discussed below, the representation of Black Women under both understandings of representation is a persistent issue in higher education, particularly PWIs.

The representation of Black women in higher education has been shaped in part by limited higher education access and the history of discrimination and segregation in the United States. Minority serving institutions (MSIs) such as historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) were at one time the predominant point of college access for people of color for students as well as faculty, leadership, and staff. Limitations in access issues, however, continue to be a major barrier to having representation of people of color in leadership roles at higher education institutions, as these positions require higher education degrees and often advanced degrees (Chance, 2022). The pipeline for Black people in academia leaks at every step of their education and careers in higher education as evidenced by their underrepresentation at varying stations in academia from students, staff, faculty, and leadership in higher education institutions (HEIs).

When considering representation in higher education leadership positions today, it is important to note Black people or African Americans (not Hispanics or Latinos) account for 12.1% of the U.S. population according to the 2020 U.S. Census Bureau (n.d.). Although significant changes have occurred with respect to representation in higher education since the Civil Rights Movement, many access and representation disparities remain for Black people in HEIs. Black student enrollment has seen notable improvement with increases in fall enrollments in degree-granting postsecondary institutions, which has increased the numbers of Black students representing 9.3% of enrolled students in 1990 to 11.7% in 2000 to 13.1% in 2020 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). The increasing diversity of student bodies in higher education is also seen with growing enrollments among Hispanic and Asian populations as well (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). However, it is important to note, despite this growing enrollment, completion rates still lag for Black students at 40% compared to the 64%

completion rate for White students and 74% completion rate for Asian students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019).

Representation of Black undergraduate students, however, notably outweighs that of Black faculty, leadership, and staff of all positions and seniority levels at most U.S. colleges and universities, and the numbers of those groups have indicated persisting and significant underrepresentation. First looking at faculty, in 2016, Blacks made up only 5.7% of all full-time faculty (Espinosa et al., 2020). By 2020, only 7% of faculty at degree-granting postsecondary institutions were Black, with 4% of faculty being Black women (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.).

In 2021 there were approximately 48,000 full-time Black faculty in the United States (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). Given the rate of growth of Black faculty in higher education since the early 2000s when there were approximately 33,000 Black full-time faculty in the United States, it was projected then that it could take over a century for the percentage of Black faculty to be representative of the percentage of Black people in the U.S. population (The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, n.d.). When considering many leadership positions in higher education (e.g., department heads, deans, division heads, presidents) are most often filled by individuals who come up the faculty ranks, these statistics help explain the underrepresentation seen at these levels as well as suggest a significant professional pipeline problem for increasing leadership diversity throughout higher education (Gasser & Shaffer, 2014).

Called the leaky pipeline of women's career development in academia, the challenges women face, which are racialized and exponentialized for Black women, have caused erosion to the system and loss of talent (Gasser & Shaffer, 2014). This pipeline leaks along various points

and from numerous influences on Black women’s careers, which inequitably impact them as compared to their White and male peers. Their professional duties, the cultures and climates of their institutions, the resources made available to them, and the levels of support and inclusion they experience are among just a few dynamics and influences on how Black women navigate and persist along the higher education career pipeline (Gasser & Shaffer, 2014). Gasser and Shaffer (2014) talked about these dynamics and influences as the “socialization and educational and career development processes [that] stack the deck early, especially against women entering traditionally male-dominated fields” (p. 346). The unique personal and career challenges and barriers that women, and particularly Black women face in this higher education pipeline increase their risk of exiting the career pipeline earlier than their colleagues who are not Black women.

HEIs continue to see this lack of representation across other types of positions in higher education including professional staff. A report based on the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources (CUPA-HR) 2018–2019 Annual Report examined diversity among senior administrators in higher education defined as top executive officers; senior institutional officers, academic deans (including assistant and associate); institutional administrators; and heads of divisions, departments, and centers (Taylor et al., 2020). The survey included approximately 51,000 individuals from more than 1,100 institutions. As seen in Figure 1, the percentages of Black women and men in these representative executive positions in 2018–2019 were far below representation in the U.S. population (Taylor et al., 2020).

Figure 1

Senior Administrators by Gender and Race and Ethnicity: 2018–2019

| | Women | | | | | Men | | | | |
|---|-------|---------------------------|--------------------|-------|-------------------------|-------|---------------------------|--------------------|-------|-------------------------|
| | Asian | Black or African American | Hispanic or Latina | White | Other Race or Ethnicity | Asian | Black or African American | Hispanic or Latino | White | Other Race or Ethnicity |
| Chief Accounting Officer/ Controller | 2.5% | 2.9% | 3.1% | 56.1% | 0.7% | 0.7% | 0.9% | 1.2% | 31.8% | 0.1% |
| Chief Athletics Administrator | 0.0% | 0.6% | 0.6% | 18.2% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 6.6% | 0.8% | 72.6% | 0.6% |
| Chief Development/ Advancement Officer | 0.3% | 1.9% | 1.2% | 41.5% | 0.1% | 0.4% | 1.6% | 0.8% | 51.9% | 0.3% |
| Chief Facilities Officer | 0.3% | 0.6% | 0.1% | 7.8% | 0.3% | 1.1% | 2.8% | 3.5% | 82.5% | 1.1% |
| Chief Human Resources Officer | 1.1% | 9.7% | 4.3% | 58.2% | 1.1% | 0.1% | 2.3% | 1.2% | 21.5% | 0.5% |
| Chief Information Officer | 1.0% | 0.6% | 0.5% | 17.4% | 0.3% | 2.8% | 3.8% | 2.1% | 70.3% | 1.2% |
| Chief Student Affairs/ Student Life Officer | 0.9% | 8.2% | 2.2% | 41.2% | 0.7% | 0.8% | 10.8% | 2.2% | 32.4% | 0.5% |
| Chief Student Financial Aid Officer | 0.8% | 5.2% | 3.7% | 56.2% | 0.5% | 0.6% | 2.6% | 2.3% | 28.0% | 0.1% |
| Police Chief/Chief Campus Security Administrator | 0.1% | 2.0% | 0.1% | 6.6% | 0.7% | 0.6% | 11.7% | 4.9% | 71.9% | 1.4% |
| Provost/Chief Academic Affairs Officer | 1.1% | 2.7% | 1.3% | 38.1% | 0.3% | 1.8% | 2.5% | 1.8% | 49.6% | 0.8% |
| Registrar/Chief Student Registration or Records Officer | 1.1% | 4.7% | 3.9% | 58.0% | 0.6% | 0.6% | 2.4% | 1.0% | 27.6% | 0.1% |

Source: Pritchard, Adam, Jingyun Li, Jasper McChesney, and Jacqueline Bichsel. 2019. *Administrators in Higher Education Annual Report: Key Findings, Trends, and Comprehensive Tables for the 2018–19 Academic Year*. Knoxville, TN: CUPA-HR.
 Note: Totals may not add to 100 percent due to rounding.

Note. From *Race and Ethnicity in Higher Education: 2020 Supplement*, by M. Taylor, J. M. Turk, H. M. Chessman, & L. L. Espinosa, 2020, American Council of Education, p. 247 (<https://www.equityinhighered.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/REHE-2020-final.pdf>). Copyright 2020 by American Council of Higher Education.

Additionally, an examination of the hiring pipelines for presidents, provosts, chief academic officers, and chief human resource officers in 2020 found, although women’s representation was growing, they still held less than 40% of executive leadership roles and minorities were only 13% of executive leadership (Whitford, 2020a). Similarly, among midlevel professionals surveyed by CUPA-HR (e.g., professional positions in institutional affairs, student affairs, fiscal affairs, information technology, research professionals), Black people made up only 4.1% of those surveyed (Taylor et al., 2020). Among academic department heads, only 4%

were Black (Taylor et al., 2020). In 2017, Black people made up just 6% of provosts/chief academic officers (American Council on Education, n.d.).

Although diversity of representation at the highest levels of leadership has been on an upward trend over the past decade and a half, the numbers are still far from representative. The American College President Study done by the American Council on Education in 2016 indicated women made up 30.1% of U.S. college and university presidents with minorities making up 16.8% (American Council on Education, 2017). The 2022 survey showed the representation of women increased to 39% with minorities making up 27.9% of U.S. college and university presidents (American Council on Education, 2023).

Since 2020, there have continued to be only very modest increases in the diversity of leadership at the highest levels, including the number of presidents and chancellors hired at U.S. colleges and universities who are racial minorities. Between June 2020 and November 2021, 35.4% of those hires were people of color with 25.3% being Black (22.5% when excluding Historically Black Colleges and Universities; Lederman, 2022). These 2020–2021 hiring statistics are notably higher than the 22% of presidential hires that were non-White between December 2018 through May 2020 (Lederman, 2022). Although women hired declined slightly in that 18-month period after May 2020, the diversity of those hires increased with 27% of those hires being Black women compared to only 21% of those hires being Black women in the 18-month period prior (Lederman, 2022). As of 2023, six of the most elite of U.S. HEIs, the Ivy League institutions, were led by women with Columbia University's recent appointment of its first woman, Nemat Shafik, to lead their institution (Greenberg, 2023).

Although these recent numbers and appointments have garnered media attention, the reality persists that Black people and Black women at these highest levels are still notably

underrepresented as they continue to be across other levels of faculty, leadership, and staff.

Understanding this persisting underrepresentation requires multiple lenses looking not only at the data of underrepresentation itself and the pipeline issues contributing to it, but also at other major factors contributing to the persistence of underrepresentation such as recruitment and hiring, promotion and retention, and workplace culture.

For example, HEIs have been challenged to look critically at their recruitment and hiring processes and the impact they may have on the diversity among their staff, faculty, and leadership. The traditional excuses for a lack of diversity in hiring have been brought into question. So-called “lack of quality” candidates and not enough people of color in the pipeline can be viewed as specious, coded rationales once used to obfuscate the reality the many people and institutions are unwilling and unable to do the intentional work of dismantling White- and male-centric systems and practices that have limited institutions’ abilities to deliver on expressed desires to increase their diversity through improved recruitment and hiring practices (Gasman, 2016).

HEIs are also being challenged to look at how well they are promoting and retaining diverse talent. Historically, organizations, including institutions of higher education that have been established by and for the White majority have maintained the status quo through their policies, practices, and cultures “endowing certain individuals [White men] with power, financial support and privilege . . . those in power set the rules, standardize regulations and maintain the status quo” (Hammonds et al., 2021, p. 77). This systemic discrimination undergirds the challenges that Black women across higher education including senior leadership face as the,

gender and racial biases that permeate the leadership echelons of higher education create challenges and resistance for women who move up and into leadership positions. The resistance faced by women, particularly women of color, undoubtedly contributes to

women deciding not to move into higher level positions and thus, reinforces outdated models of who fits the academic leadership profile. (Gause, 2021, p. 76)

To support those not of the White male majority in their navigation of and ascension through these professional spaces and pipelines, HEIs must recognize and address the systemic privileging and resistance that maintains these institutional spaces to the benefit of some and the detriment of others.

Calls to Increase Diversity Across Higher Education

The underrepresentation of women and people of color in leadership in a variety of professional contexts has been spotlighted in the wake of heightened racial tensions and accompanying civil unrest in the United States with the Black Lives Matter movement and the aftermath of George Floyd's murder. In reaction to this spotlight, for example, among the S&P 100, 14 Black men were named executive officers after George Floyd's murder and 2 years later 19 more were appointed making an increase of more than one third, as most big businesses "pledged to add diverse talent and put more money into racial equity" (Guynn & Fraser, 2023, para. 14).

Calls for increased representation of Black leadership, and that of Black women leaders, have received more attention today across industries, including higher education. Organizations have been challenged to look at their policies, practices, and cultures to take a systemic approach to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in ways that are authentic and impactful for creating environments conducive to the success and belonging of marginalized people (Castillo et al., 2024; Owen, 2009). This challenge to organizations has included critically examining recruitment and hiring to ensure broader marketing of job postings, examining job descriptions for inclusive language, promoting institutional equity statements, having more diverse search

committees, and providing implicit bias training, as well as having more oversight by human resource offices of the hiring process to address improving diversity in hiring in higher education (Gasman, 2016).

HEIs examining their ability to promote DEI have also included looking at practices that may improve promotion and retention of underrepresented faculty, staff, and leadership. HEIs have identified and adopted practices for “improving the diversity climate” such as mentorship programs, more attractive compensation packages, and critical assessment of performance and teaching review processes as efforts and professional investments to reduce the likelihood of diverse talent exiting their institutions or being poached by others (Bradley et al., 2022, p. 6). Institutions are also seeking to “understand what works,” not only with respect to DEI practices, but also the role that “workplace culture” plays in impacting employee experience and related organizational outcomes (Creary et al., 2021, p. 4).

This focus on increasing diversity in higher education is not new, although the spotlight and focus have evolved given the picture of continued underrepresentation among Blacks and other underrepresented groups, as well social contexts. In the 1970s and 1980s, HEIs were particularly focused on increasing numbers of students of color as an outgrowth of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and continuing social activism. At that time, HEIs were seen establishing offices to support this work and this growing student population with the introduction of offices of multicultural affairs and cultural centers (Russell Reynolds Associates, n.d.).

Although DEI offices were at times criticized for being somewhat symbolic, they have evolved over time into offices, programs, and positions reflecting many institutions more public commitment to diversity (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2009). The growth of the Chief Diversity

Officer (CDO) role and executive-level equivalents focused on providing more strategic and integrated direction to institutions in promoting DEI has been an example of this growing commitment to DEI from HEIs. As of 2016, more than two thirds of major U.S. universities had appointed a CDO or equivalent (Russell Reynolds Associates, n.d.).

These positions, as well as many programs, assessments, and climate surveys related to DEI have also highlighted the increasing, but still inadequate, even by their own assessments, commitment of HEIs to DEI including supporting diversifying faculty, leadership, and staff (Cumming et al., 2023).

The Inside Higher Ed *2021 Survey of College and University Presidents* found:

Presidents do not generally believe that the state of race relations on universities or campuses is good or excellent. Though 63 percent report that the state of race relations on their campus is good or excellent, only 19 percent indicate that this is the case for colleges and universities as a whole. Eighty-four percent also report that it has been more important for their institution to address issues around race this academic year as compared to previous years. (Jaschik & Lederman, 2021, p. 7)

This focus on race and DEI is reflected in surveys of students, as well as assessments of current trends in higher education. Hanover Research (2022a), a research and strategic consulting company with a practice area focusing on higher education, found in their *2022 Higher Education Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Survey* of 1,000 undergraduate students in the United States, “DEI is important to students, but more must be done” (p. 4). Among the areas students noted as needing to be addressed included the diversity of faculty with only 69% of students agreeing the faculty and staff at their schools were racially and ethnically diverse, and even fewer agreeing the faculty reflected or exceeded the diversity of students (Hanover Research, 2022a). In their 2022 and 2023 reports on trends to watch in higher education, Hanover Research noted, “Inclusion and support services [to] build connection, acceptance, and success” (Hanover

Research, 2023, p. 14) and “demonstrate measurable diversity, equity, and inclusion . . . results” as areas that higher education leaders and institutions need to be prepared to address (Hanover Research, 2022b, Section 5).

A 2021 assessment of institutional level DEI work involving 83 HEIs highlighted some current activities of many HEIs reflecting their recognition of the need to address DEI across their institutions (Cumming et al., 2023). Although 73% of the institutions stated their mission explicitly noted a commitment to DEI, only 21% said they have met or exceeded their expectations regarding their DEI goals (Cumming et al., 2023). About 49% noted having culturally relevant academic programs and centers and 42% noted having diversity offices and programs (Cumming et al., 2023). Very few, however, just 13%, were doing work to support the retention of faculty of color (Cumming et al., 2023).

Similarly, national higher education associations are participating in efforts to support moving the DEI needle in higher education, indicating their shared interests in and prioritization of DEI. The American Association of Colleges & Universities (AAC&U, n.d.), a higher education membership organization committed to improving educational quality and equity through its programming, research, advocacy, and campus projects, sponsors several initiatives related to DEI such as partnering to establish *Truth, Racial Healing & Transformation Campus Centers* to “prepare the next generation of leaders to break down systemic racism and dismantle belief in a hierarchy of human value” (Initiative section).

In all, there is a continued, evolving, and growing recognition of the need for and commitment to diversify and change via the DEI efforts of HEIs. However, the statistics regarding representation and assessments and surveys of institutions’ climates with respect to

DEI have shown that despite their commitments, institutions are still failing to meet even their own expectations and goals for DEI on their campuses (Cumming et al., 2023).

Many scholars and practitioners have argued racism and discrimination continue to impact representation for people of color in higher education as, “The dearth of college and university senior level administrators, faculty, and graduate and doctoral students of color can also be attributed to discriminatory practices and racism faced at every rung of the ladder regarding their career paths” (Gasman et al., 2015, p. 3). Regardless of one’s understandings and beliefs about the causes, the underrepresentation of Black women in higher education and higher education leadership persists. Even as representation has risen by small increments for Black people, Black women still lag behind Black men and White women with respect to leadership opportunities in higher education (Davis & Maldonado, 2015).

Working to understand the experiences of Black women in HEIs as they operate as leaders and agents of change, particularly in PWIs, is an important understanding for addressing how to improve representation of Black women in higher education leadership. Laura Perna (2023), Professor of Education and Vice Provost for Faculty at the University of Pennsylvania, wrote about the importance of having more data on faculty diversity to answer questions about “the experiences and working conditions that contribute to inequity among faculty” (para. 4).

She wrote:

Also essential are perceptions of the culture and climate for different groups of faculty . . . Indicators may include whether all faculty members perceive that they belong and are treated fairly; that diverse perspectives are valued in faculty hiring . . . and that diverse faculty members have access to opportunities for career advancement and leadership development. (Perna, 2023, para.13)

What Perna (2023) wrote about the importance of understanding the perceptions and experiences of faculty speaks to the importance of knowing and understanding the current state

of DEI in HEIs and whether the promises and goals of DEI work are being realized and impacting the lived experiences of those who have historically not experienced inclusion, equity and belonging in these spaces. It also speaks to the importance of understanding the experiences of Black women in higher education as leaders and leaders of change as higher education seeks to promote improved diversity and inclusion across their institutions including among its leadership.

Black Women's Leadership Experiences in Higher Education Institutions

Even with an increasing focus on diversity in higher education leadership highlighting the underrepresentation of Black women as senior leaders, the research exploring the experiences of Black women and their leadership development in HEIs has been historically lacking (Chance, 2021). However, more work has been done recently looking at the experiences of Black women leaders in higher education, including the challenges they face in their career paths and how they address those challenges (Chance, 2021, 2022). The literature that speaks most closely to these senior leaders' experiences is that which explores the impacts of race on how they experience leadership, the impacts of gender on their leadership, as well as the influence of the intersectionality of both race and gender (Cook & Glass, 2014; Crenshaw, 1989; Diehl, 2014; Eagly & Chin, 2010; Griffin et al., 2011; Lewis, 2016; Lewis-Strickland, 2021; McIntosh, 2019; Padilla, 1994; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010; Tevis et al., 2020; Townsend, 2021).

The Impacts of Race

The literature on the experiences of Black women leaders in higher education has highlighted how Black women leaders have faced and learned to address adversity related to their social identities as Black women (Chance, 2021, 2022; Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Lewis-Strickland, 2021). Themes of adversity (including cultural adversity) and resiliency are prevalent

in these phenomenological inquiries into the experiences of Black women leaders in HEIs (Chance, 2021, 2022). Adversity often is shown to be a motivating force in their leadership journeys helping them build and draw upon their resilience. These responses of resilience are seen “as fuel to overcome adverse crucible experiences, thus developing the necessary skills to prepare them for leadership” (Chance, 2021, p. 601). It reflects a capacity for resilience among many Black people as “Collectively, resilience has been a staple of the Black community when overcoming cultural adversities” (Chance, 2021, p. 603). This resilience and persistence are key strengths supporting Black women leaders’ ability not only to address the challenges themselves, but also to develop as leaders who can navigate and negotiate the many challenges of leadership more generally, as well as the challenges of leadership particular to their experiences (Smith, 2021).

These crucible experiences of adversity take many forms along the career paths of Black women in higher education. For example, a lack of power commensurate with their positions is a prevalent adversity faced by Black women leaders in higher education. Black women leaders often experience a lack of control over their time being pulled into projects without acknowledgement of their contributions (Tevis et al., 2020). This lack of “time capital” is often coupled with a lack of “title-power” in which the authority of their title is not fully conferred upon them by their institutions (Tevis et al., 2020, p. 283). These types of challenges in leadership are situated along with many others that Black women leaders experience in higher education including racial microaggressions (Tevis et al., 2020).

Racial microaggressions were defined by Sue et al. (2007) as:

Brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial

slights and insults to the target person or group and are expressed in three forms: micro assaults, microinsults and microinvalidations. (p. 330)

These are forms of adversity, although not as overt as physical assault or denial of rights and opportunities explicitly due to race, still inflict damage on the personal and professional well-being of those targeted by them. Although microassaults are explicit like the use of racial epithets, microinsults and microinvalidations are often not intentional, but are nonetheless damaging reflecting the biases, prejudices, and unconscious supremacy of those who perpetrate them (Solorzano et al., 2000; Sue et al., 2008). Understanding what microaggressions are and their impacts is important because these more covert and subtle forms of adversity are more easily dismissed as something other than the damaging attacks on those impacted by them and are, thereby, more difficult to identify and root out as discriminatory behaviors in the workplace.

Microinsults are verbal and nonverbal actions that “convey insensitivity, are rude, or directly demean a person’s racial identity or heritage” (Sue et al., 2008, p. 331). Examples of common microinsults experienced by Black women and other people of color include comments on how someone is “not like others” of their race or on how “articulate” they are for their race, or at work implying that someone is a “diversity hire” because of their race or gender (Montañez, 2020, para. 8).

Microinvalidations are actions that “exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings or experiences of people of color” (Sue et al., 2008, p. 331). They are commonly experienced by Black women and other minoritized people in professional settings when other people are given credit for their work or when their experiences with micro- or macro-level discrimination are ignored or dismissed as misunderstood or not intended the way they experienced those incidences (Montañez, 2020).

For employees of any type or rank targeted and impacted by microaggressions, the effect of these persistent and pervasive assaults, insults, and invalidations are cumulative having a significant impact on the target's well-being and their sense of safety, inclusion, and support in the workplace. The weight of these experiences contributes to the diminished tenure of Black university employees who may have difficulty managing the impacts of campus climates where these types of more subtle discrimination are experienced (Orelus, 2020; Pizarro & Kohli, 2020; Townsend, 2021).

A prevalent microaggression experienced by Black women leaders during their careers is stereotyping. Stereotypes are overgeneralized beliefs about Black women, which serve to essentialize and promote negative and limited characterizations of them (Eagly & Chin, 2010). The stigma and damage caused by the stereotyping Black women leaders may face in their workspaces can lead to self-consciousness, isolation, anxiety, and emotional fatigue associated with struggling with the racialized and gendered hostility associated with these stereotypes (Chance, 2022). Although many PWIs actively recruit Black women to serve as leaders, research has found their time is often short lived due to the microaggression of stereotype threats (Townsend, 2021). These slights and insults are often brief and commonplace and not acknowledged or understood as such by those who perpetrate them, only increasing the potential damage of these all too commonplace microaggressions (Townsend, 2021).

Tokenism is another source of adversity prevalent in the experiences of Black women leaders in higher education. When there is underrepresentation or disproportionate representation in a group, those of the majority are dominant and those who are in the minority can be considered "tokens" (Lewis, 2016, p. 109). This tokenism due to their disproportionate representation in HEIs has been shown to impact Black women's career advancement (Lewis,

2016). It is often most evident in PWIs where Black administrators and leaders are less likely to have the support found in professional circles based on race and/or gender. Lewis (2016) also found, like Tevis et al. (2020), that for Black women in particular “Tokens have a high degree of visibility and are universal representatives of their master status (race or gender) for work and social activities, which often results in role overload” (p. 109) where they are called upon to do additional work on committees and projects associated with the identity group they represent. Black women may experience heightened levels of marginalization, isolation, and loneliness in professional settings in which they are the “extreme minority” (Chance, 2022, p. 50) where they stand out and may be under greater scrutiny due to their token status, such as in many PWIs. The continued underrepresentation of Black women in leadership positions in higher education will continue to perpetuate these negative effects of tokenism on their experiences navigating these professional spaces.

Many other sources of adversity and barriers to advancement have also emerged in the literature, including the White privilege of colleagues (Tevis et al., 2020), the challenges of navigating “Black Tax” (Townsend, 2021, p. 587), and a lack of mentors (Chance, 2021). The term “White privilege” was first coined by McIntosh (2019, p. 1) to describe the unearned advantages that White people have because of their Whiteness. McIntosh (2019) described it as:

An invisible package of unearned assets which I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was meant to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools and blank checks. (p. 1)

McIntosh (2019), herself working in higher education at a PWI, highlighted examples of privileges she can count on that her Black coworkers in higher education cannot, writing:

I can go home from most meetings . . . feeling somewhat tied in, rather than isolated, out-of-place, outnumbered, unheard, held at a distance, or feared . . . I

can take a job with an affirmative action employer without having coworkers on the job suspect I got it because of race. (p. 2)

McIntosh (2019) wrote, “In proportion as my racial group was being made confident, comfortable and oblivious, other groups were likely being made unconfident, uncomfortable, and alienated” (p. 2). White privilege reflects the burdens Black women leaders must face, which their White colleagues and peers do not.

The burden of Black Tax is the expectation that Black faculty, leadership, and staff face a higher level of service expectations than do their White peers (Townsend, 2021). Padilla (1994) first addressed this concept as the “cultural taxation” imposed on faculty of color with the expectation that they take on tasks because of their race/ethnicity and “presumed knowledge of cultural differences” (p. 26). Examples of Black Tax are Black employees being asked to do the extra work of serving on affirmative action committees and other committees seeking diverse representation, mentoring students of color, and being the expert or fixer of race/ethnicity related issues on campus (Griffin et al., 2011; Padilla, 1994; Townsend, 2021).

Black faculty and administrators also experience Black Tax as an expectation they have to work harder to prove their competence and to combat presumptions they were a diversity hire or brought in under an affirmative action plan instead of hired based on the merits of their experience (Griffin et al., 2011). The weight of these additional expectations may have an adverse effect on the careers of those upon which they are imposed. This extra work is most often not part of their roles, is not comfortable for or welcomed by these employees, and may not be valued by their colleagues and supervisors with respect to tenure or promotion reviews (Padilla, 1994; Townsend, 2021).

This Black Tax is also related to an “emotional tax” that Black women experience in work settings in which they are set apart and valued differently due to their race and gender (Travis et al., 2016). The work of Travis et al. (2016) has shown how this “emotional tax” can deplete Black employees’ sense of well-being by making them feel that they have to be ‘on guard,’ disrupting sleep patterns, reducing their sense of ‘psychological safety,’ and diminishing their ability to contribute at work” (p. 2). These taxes are literal physical and emotional labors in which Black women leaders must engage in addition to the already heavy responsibilities and burdens of their senior leadership roles and work.

The underrepresentation of Black women leaders in higher education also imposes a challenge in how it limits opportunities for Black women to receive professional mentorship (Lewis-Strickland, 2021). Mentorship is widely understood as a benefit to the personal and professional development of individuals. In professional contexts, an effective mentor can help advance an individual’s career with access to opportunities, people, advice, and guidance, which can provide the rewards of knowledge, experience, networks, and enhanced motivation for career development (Crawford & Smith, 2005). The unique positions and experiences of Black women leaders in PWIs suggest mentors with shared social identities are potentially best positioned to provide the leadership, advice, and guidance most relevant to their unique circumstances (Lewis-Strickland, 2021). Notably, these findings are consistent with what is found more broadly in other organizations in which Black women seek leadership roles. Research on barriers to Black women entering executive leadership in corporate America (i.e., the C-Suite) also finds similar barriers ranging from a lack of existing diversity among peers and supervisors along their career tracks isolating them from support and mentorship opportunities, biases based on race and gender, and the impact of negative stereotypes (Beckwith et al., 2016).

The Impacts of Gender

Literature on women in higher education leadership also touches on these same themes discussing barriers to leadership like tokenism, lack of mentorship, gender discrimination, stereotyping, and workplace harassment (Diehl, 2014). These and other barriers to women in leadership in higher education and other organizations contribute to the glass ceiling effect, blocking the ascendancy of women to more senior levels of leadership. And as they ascend, women also sometimes face the phenomenon of the “glass cliff” describing how women are more likely to ascend to top leadership positions in organizations that are struggling (Cook & Glass, 2014, p. 92).

Speaking to how gender-based challenges to women’s leadership operate and are perpetuated, Dahlvig and Longman (2020) discussed how these barriers play out on various cultural levels from the macrolevel in terms of how society perpetuates gender stereotypes to the mesolevel in which organizations enact gender norms, and on the microlevel in terms of how women see themselves as leaders (Dahlvig & Longman, 2020). BlackChen (2015) asserted the “attitudinal and organization biases against women in higher education tend to exclude women from upper-level leadership positions” (p. 153), requiring an unpacking of these biases to recognize the value that women bring to these spaces and to remove these barriers. Like what has been found about the relationship between adversity and resilience with Black women in higher education, adversity also may play a role in women’s leadership development with findings that “out of adversity comes opportunity or growth if you survive it” (Diehl, 2014, p. 60). Through adversity, women leaders have found meaning in their work, and empowerment to discover new opportunities (Diehl, 2014).

Intersectionality Theory

Although literature on the experiences of Black women leaders in higher education looks at the impact of race, as well as the impact of gender, there is, within some of this research, an acknowledgement and focus on the intersectionality of both gender and race in impacting these women's experiences. Intersectionality recognizes how multiple aspects of identity shape one's reality. Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010) wrote:

Research has historically focused on only one aspect of the lives of women leaders. But simple categorizations along a single dimension do not capture the dynamics of women's experiences. For the past several years, there has been greater focus on the complexity associated with multiple and diverse identities and how they can pose barriers and challenges at work. (p. 176)

Where White women may experience gender discrimination, Black women's realities are impacted by both gender and racial discrimination (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010).

Critical race theory (CRT) also has been used as a framework to explore the dual, exponentialized discrimination that Black women experienced both personally and professionally. CRT was built upon the recognition of the extent to which racism is "so enmeshed in the fabric of the U.S. social order, it appears both normal and natural to people in this society" (Ladson-Billings, 2000, p. 264). CRT calls for the need to "unmask and expose racism in all of its various permutations" in efforts to fight discrimination (Ladson-Billings, 2000, p. 264). As part of this exposure, hearing the voices, experiences, and knowledge of those who are oppressed by injustice is a tool in the struggle for social justice, "thus the experience of oppressions such as racism and sexism has important components of the development of a CRT perspective" (Ladson-Billings, 2000, p. 264). CRT examines the intersectionality of racism and sexism and questions whether and to what extent Black women's experiences with

discrimination are adequately or accurately represented through the lens of gender discrimination (Delgado & Stefancic, 1993).

Similarly legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) has been cited for being among the first to call for recognition of the intersectional experiences of Black women with discrimination writing, “Because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated” (p. 140). The ways in which Black women experience these two types of discrimination are unique to their identities and unique in the exponentialized impacts on both their personal lives and work.

This intersection of racism and sexism as it shapes and impacts the experiences of Black women is referred to as *gendered racism* (Essed, 1991). Gendered racism is a framework that aids in understanding Black women’s leadership experiences in higher education settings (Essed, 1991). This identity intersectionality has also been characterized as the *double jeopardy*, which Black women leaders face in their institutions from which they must transcend to succeed (Jean-Marie et al., 2009).

This transcendence, like resilience, is a source of Black women’s successful navigation of the challenges in their career paths (Jean-Marie et al., 2009). This resilience and transcendence has been talked about in the literature describing how:

Black women working in higher administration are highly educated, ambitious, competent, and have the capability to overcome problems. For those who have ascended within the ranks of higher education administration, these factors have contributed to their success in leadership positions. (Jean-Marie et al., 2009, p. 576)

As the intersectionality of Black women’s identities is weaponized against them in the gendered racism they face because of these identities, at the same time these identities are a source of their

strength and resilience with which they navigate the challenges and barriers in their careers in higher education.

Black Women Leaders as Higher Education Change Agents

Black women leaders are often change agents in higher education. An important aspect of many of the roles Black women leaders play in higher education, particularly in senior leadership positions, is as an agent of change able and empowered to manage and lead in their respective areas of their institutions. Understanding their role as change agents is part of understanding their leadership experiences, as organizational leaders are often called upon to lead change and address ever evolving institutional priorities and challenges.

Higher education today is faced, now more than ever, with external pressures from addressing enrollment challenges with the looming “demographic cliff” to a changing consumer market questioning the value of higher education given its steep price tag (Boekendstedt, 2022, para. 1). Institutions also have internal pressures that may be unique to their organizations, but that are ultimately about staying relevant to the needs of today’s and tomorrow’s students (Boekenstedt, 2022). Change management requires many things, including strong leaders who are change agents able to lead the charge addressing institutional issues.

The concept of the change agent has developed since the late 1950s, including the work of Havelock (1971) and colleagues in the 1960s proposing a new concept of the change agent as “process helper and knowledge linker” (p. 45) whose skills reflected much of what we consider essential today in a leader. Havelock (1971) described this set of skills as including “interpersonal and inter-group relating, consultation, need definition, diagnosis, problem solving, resource acquisition, dissemination, and utilization . . . [skills] . . . needed by educators of the future at various levels and in various role categories” (p. 2). The skills of leadership are

multiple, reflecting the varied and high levels of expertise needed to effectively and strategically manage operations and contribute to the success of one's institution.

Change agents today are seen as people who catalyze and drive forth change in an organization. They can be internal to an organization (e.g., the people charged with overseeing change as many leaders are) or external to an organization (e.g., outside consultants). They are people who “sponsor and promote change initiatives in organizations, actively construct their environment, and act as a catalyst in convincing their organization to support a[n] . . . issue” (Specht et al., 2018, p. 199). They are the leaders at the forefront of identifying challenges and opportunities and developing and implementing strategic and impactful initiatives for addressing them.

Change agents identify strongly with their organizations and are often motivated by the meaning they attribute to the work they do and how it benefits others (Specht et al., 2018). They are found to employ a variety of tactics in moving change initiatives forward, including change through bargaining, connecting with colleagues who share vision and goals, working to address resistance, and addressing territorial boundaries (McGrath et al., 2016). They often have dispositions toward resilience, which support positive attitudes toward change and the change process needed to further their persistence in navigating the challenges associated with managing change (Nikolaou et al., 2007).

Examining these attitudes and dispositions of successful change agents, Specht et al. (2018) and McGrath et al. (2016) conducted studies in international contexts with distinct populations, one looking at 51 university teachers in Germany who implemented changes in their teaching programs, and the other focusing on “collegial leaders” leading change initiatives in a European medical university, respectively. However, Specht et al.'s (2018) characterizations of

change agents “sponsor[ing] and promot[ing] change initiatives in organizations” (p. 199) could be applicable in looking at Black women leaders in higher education institution settings as change agents, as can Nikolauo et al.’s (2007) findings that change agents often display a predisposition toward resilience in their work.

In the U.S. context in higher education, Black women leaders are challenged in some cases by the inability of their colleagues to see them as change agents (Patton & Haynes, 2018). Essentializing, often negative, stereotypes operate as preconceived notions of their abilities and the roles they are positioned to play as leaders in settings in which they are minoritized (Patton & Haynes, 2018). Black women may not be seen as leaders of change because of the “limited societal frames placed upon them” stereotyping them historically as “mammy” caretaker, “Jezebel” manipulator, emasculating “Superwoman,” or more recently through the #BlackGirlMagic hashtag as model minorities (Patton & Haynes, 2018, pp. 6–7). These images dehumanize and reduce Black women through scarcity and deficit lenses as less than. Patton and Haynes (2018) stated:

[These images fail to present] a holistic view of Black women’s lives and experiences. Yet they are used as if to capture the totality of Black womanhood. As a result, Black women become mired in a liminal state that prevents or at least stifles them from being viewed as possible institutional change agents. (p. 7)

Coupling this stereotyping with the limited representation of Black women in leadership positions makes it “overwhelmingly impossible to imagine Black women as worthy beyond their labor” (Patton & Haynes, 2018, p. 11). These findings on the impacts of stereotypes on Black women leaders are also consistent with the work of Tevis et al. (2000) that explored the lack of “title-power” (p. 283) or authority commensurate with their positions that Black women administrators experience in PWIs.

Patton and Haynes (2018), however, put forth an alternative framework for looking at Black women as models for institutional change and advancing racial equity in institutions. They challenge institutions to consider a multidimensional, intersectional view of their institutions allowing:

The voices of those most marginalized to occupy the center . . . Centering the voices of marginalized groups, such as Black women, by learning about them and their experiences, as well as seeking their counsel and inviting them to participate in leadership and transformation efforts is an approach that every institution should employ. (Patton & Haynes, 2018, p. 13)

This framework recognizes the unique talents and tools that Black women bring to their leadership roles connected to their social identifies, which help promote the successful management and growth of their institutions, including the goals their institutions may have with respect to being more diverse, equitable, and inclusive spaces (Jean-Marie et al., 2009; Patton & Haynes, 2018). Despite the challenges Black women leaders may face in leading and having the authority of their positions as change agents recognized, the resilience and persistence they display as leaders as well as the experiences and perspectives they bring to their work as Black women reflect many of the strengths and attributes associated with the role of change agent (Chance, 2021; Nikolauo et al., 2007; Patton & Hanes, 2018; Tevis et al., 2000).

Organizational Change and Leadership in Higher Education

In attempting to understand the experiences of Black women senior leaders in higher education, it is important to also consider how organizational change and management happens and how this may align with the roles Black women play leading within their institutions. The literature on organizational change and the roles of culture and leadership in organizational change and management helps inform this understanding of the connection between organizational change and Black women's experiences as senior leaders.

In understanding organizations as socially constructed systems, relationships and actions oriented toward collaboration and buy-in are shown to be impactful in moving change forward (Curry, 1992; Kezar, 2005). Strategies that promote a focus on changing cultures from ones that “support individual work to the ones that facilitate collaborative work” (Kezar, 2005, p. 831) are believed to help facilitate change. Other strategies include collaborative leadership, senior administrative support, staff development, robust design, and visible actions (Kezar & Eckel, 2002). What is key in all these strategies is the role of leadership in building consensus around change and future vision, addressing resistance, and building on communities of support (Guskin, 1996). In these strategies, senior leaders play a pivotal role in promoting priorities, integrating structures, and building networks to move change forward (Kezar, 2005).

Successful leaders are said to be ones who understand the cultures of their institutions and who can interpret and work with their institutions in ways that are consistent with their culture and identity (Tierney, 1987). Tierney’s work has been heavily cited for the framework it provides to understand and define culture in HEIs as a tool for leadership to help address institutional issues. His case studies of public state colleges found that successful leadership at one institution may fail at another with a different culture (Tierney, 1988). Skills and qualifications are not the only criteria for success, but also how that individual “will fit into the cultural milieu” (Tierney, 1988, p. 16).

Additionally, successful leaders must have the ability to mobilize and direct the behaviors of others (Curry, 1992). This ability is heavily dependent, however, “on the power invested in or assumed to follow the position, and it depends on the ability to influence or persuade members of the organization that the innovation has merit” (Curry, 1992, p. 20). In other words, being able to influence and mobilize others as a leader is directly connected to how that leader is viewed and

responded to by those they are leading, which is in part determined by their positionality and power as defined by the institutional context in which they are leading.

This connection between how a leader is viewed and how their power is conferred onto them by their institution speaks to a challenge that Black women leaders in higher education may face with respect to their being denied the title-power that is needed to catalyze and direct organizational change. Title-power is the authority associated with a particular title or role in an organization (Tevis et al., 2020). The autoethnographic work of Tevis et al. (2020) explored the experiences of Black women administrators in PWIs with their titles not carrying in practice the authority normally ascribed to those titles and roles. These administrators experienced having their positions, voices, effectiveness, and expertise challenged by staff at all levels of their institutions, in ways they did not believe their White and male peers experienced (Tevis et al., 2020).

These strategies and abilities for managing and leading change have interesting implications for considering how Black women lead and the challenges they may face doing so. The extent to which the culture of PWIs impacts a Black woman leader's ability to lead and have the same power and influence as their White and male peers has significant consequences for the leadership experiences of Black women in successfully leading in their institutions (Patton & Hayes, 2018; Tevis et al., 2020).

How Black Women Senior Leaders Address Resistance to Leadership

Addressing resistance often involves operating politically in leading to help others adapt to the uncertainty associated with change or other initiatives put forth by leadership (Delprino, 2013). The work of Delprino (2013) provided strategies for addressing resistance on both the individual and organizational level by "(1) understanding the resistance and sensitivity, (2)

provide communication and education, (3) facilitate participation, and (4) offer and encourage support” (p. 143). This focus on the politics associated with leadership has interesting implications and lends itself to questions about whether some leaders may, by virtue of race and/or gender, have different levels of success or challenge in managing the politics of addressing individual and organizational resistance to leadership initiatives.

The leaders themselves, their approach to leadership and change, and how they are viewed by those impacted can play a role in the successes and challenges of leading an organization. Leadership traits and skills have been looked at as the basis for understanding what makes some people great leaders (Northouse, 2022). There is an ever-present question in considering what makes people great leaders as to whether and to what extent people are born with leadership traits, to leadership ability being something that can be developed or learned (Northouse, 2022). Core strengths and skills often associated with leaders include intelligence, determination, self-confidence, integrity, and sociability with strong problem-solving skills, social judgment skills, and technical knowledge (Northouse, 2022). However, leadership traits and skills alone have not been the basis by which Black women leaders are judged. The leadership challenges they face reflect organizational dynamics shaped by and reflecting gender and race, and not just leadership traits and skills.

Resistance to Black women’s leadership has been associated with many institutional dynamics, including entitlement and privilege of colleagues, racial microaggressions, and lack of diversity among peers and supervisors (Tevis et al., 2020). Stereotypes and biases about women leaders operate as a source of resistance and are exacerbated further by race and ethnicity (Tevis et al., 2020). One of these stereotypes of Black women leaders is that of the “controlling image” (Tevis et al., 2020, p. 283). Tevis et al. (2020) described:

Controlling images are named so because they are widely accepted to be a relatively accurate description of Black Women's personalities, intelligence, and behavior. The images justify the discriminatory treatment of Black women as they frame how others see and value them as a group, and the controlling images remain powerful enough to dictate Black women's relationships and professional experiences. (p. 283)

Black women often face resistance along multiple points of their leadership development and as part of that development they must learn how to exercise "leadership resilience" (Lewis-Strickland, 2021). Lewis-Strickland (2021) looked at the leadership resilience experiences of Black women in PWIs before becoming university deans. She wrote how "the White masculine leadership standard enforcing the hegemonic masculine environment creat[es] challenges for minority populations" (Lewis-Strickland, 2021, p. 30) and Black women leaders address these challenges in a variety of ways as part of their leadership experience. They are resilient leaders described by Reed and Blaine (2015) as showing "the ability to recover, learn from, and developmentally mature when confronted by chronic or crisis adversity" (p. 460). Lewis-Strickland (2021) found the Black women deans in her study exercised and developed this leadership resilience through "effective self-reflection or introspection" to "revisit their values," "identify their purpose," and "speaking up," continually "striving for personal growth," and "utilizing feedback to improve work processes" (p. 37). In these ways, the resistance Black women leaders may face in their leadership journeys are addressed by their resilience, allowing them to navigate these challenges in their careers.

Similarly work that examines Black women's leadership styles also speaks to potential strategies for leading and addressing resistance to their leadership. Black women leaders are often called to demonstrate both the power of their agency as leaders while at the same time demonstrating "the communal qualities of kindness, niceness, and helpfulness" (Sanchez-Hucles

& Davis, 2010, p. 172). Their leadership style has been said to reflect their ability to operate as leaders and activists with:

[A] leadership style that is inclusive, builds consensus, and collaborative . . .
[P]articipants articulated a leadership that is tied to social change, institutional reform, and structures and processes of power and influence—what the Civil Rights Movement was about. Their involvement and ongoing interactions with students, staff, constituents at their institution, and community characterize a social and political activism that is reminiscent of leadership practices of their predecessors of the Civil Rights Movement. (Jean-Marie et al, 2009, pp. 573–574)

Interestingly, some of these same styles of leadership have been found in international contexts in higher education, showing that women leaders employ “soft ways of power management, oriented more towards informal social networks” combining “authority with sensitivity or diplomacy” and more flexible leadership styles (Yáñez & Moreno, 2008, p. 86).

Summary

As institutions of higher education continue to work to address persisting racial and ethnic underrepresentation across their institutions, understanding the experiences of underrepresented groups is a key component to addressing institutional climates, cultures, practices, and policies that are impeding their abilities to recruit, promote, and retain diverse talent. The experiences of Black women in leadership in PWIs highlight many challenges and adversities connected to their social identities with which they must contend in navigating their careers and leadership journeys. As senior leaders in their institutions, they are tasked with being not only organizational leaders, but also leaders or agents of change strategically developing, promoting, and implementing initiatives to address the external and internal pressures challenging their institutions.

The impacts of microaggressions and other discriminatory dynamics and practices create barriers and challenges with which they must contend in negotiating and navigating their careers

as leaders (Chance, 2021; Orelus, 2020; Sue et al., 2008; Townsend, 2021). These are seen in many forms connected to race and gender and the intersectionality of their social identities including negative stereotyping, tokenism, Black/cultural taxation, contending with the White privilege of colleagues, and a lack of mentors with shared social identities (Crenshaw, 1989; Eagly & Chin, 2010; Griffin et al., 2011; Lewis, 2016; Lewis-Strickland, 2021; McIntosh, 2019; Padilla, 1994; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010; Tevis et al., 2020; Townsend, 2021). Leading in the socially constructed spaces of organizations has been shown to require cultural alignment and understanding by leadership, and the ability to mobilize, influence, and direct constituencies within an organization (Curry, 1992; Kezar, 2005; Kezar & Eckel, 2002; Tierney, 1988). These challenges that Black women leaders face impose barriers to their leadership as their titles and positions are shown to not be afforded the same authority as that of their peers, and their expertise and effectiveness are challenged by others in ways not experienced by White and male colleagues (Patton & Haynes, 2018; Tevis et al., 2020).

Black women leaders in HEIs, however, have shown resilience and persistence in negotiating professional spaces in which they must face the weights and barriers of microaggressions and other discriminatory dynamics and practices, including resistance to their roles and work as leaders (Chance, 2021). The cumulative effects of these experiences, however, have individual and institutional impact as the dynamics in these institutions create and maintain professional climates and cultures lacking the support, equity, and inclusion to attract, promote and retain Black women in these leadership roles (Orelus, 2020; Pizarro & Kohli, 2020; Townsend, 2021). Questions remain, however, regarding specifically how Black women senior leaders approach leadership, address resistance to their leadership, and whether and how their approaches and strategies are informed by their social identities. Additionally, empirical work is

needed to better document and track the specific leadership roles Black women senior leaders are occupying in HEIs to follow trends in hiring, promotion, and retention. Also, more information on the career trajectories of Black women could help inform the pipelines that are working or are needed to support their recruitment, promotion, and retention.

Further work to understand the experiences of Black women senior leaders will generally aid consideration of how to address the challenges and barriers they face individually, as well as what institutions must address as they strive to diversify their institutions. This work can also help inform efforts to improve the professional spaces and climates for other underrepresented groups that may face similar or related challenges and barriers.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

To explore the senior leadership experiences of Black women in predominantly White institutions (PWIs), this dissertation study engaged 15 Black women senior leaders from PWIs to talk about their personal experiences leading in their institutions as Black women.

Semistructured interviews were conducted with each participant, as well as focus groups with eight of the participants, to explore their leadership experiences around the study's research questions seeking to understand from the perspectives of Black women senior leaders at predominantly White higher education institutions:

1. What is the experience of being a senior leader at a PWi?
2. How does being a Black woman influence leadership approaches and strategies?
3. How do colleagues respond to their roles and work as leaders?

This chapter outlines the process of participant selection and recruitment, including demographic data about participants, the data collection methods used, and my approach to data analysis. It also describes how concerns regarding validity, my positionality, and other ethical considerations were addressed throughout the research design, data collection, analysis and writing.

Emic Focused Qualitative Approach

This dissertation study employed an emic focused qualitative approach to explore and understand the shared experiences of Black women as senior leaders in PWIs of higher education, as well as the individual meaning making of Black women in experiencing these senior leader roles. The research focused on what all the participants have in common as they experience a shared phenomenon, in this case, navigating their roles and work in the traditionally White and male spaces of senior leadership at PWIs (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The study sought this emic understanding through an inductive approach, “creat[ing] the conditions necessary for participants to offer and articulate their own conceptualizations in language that is organic to them as they describe an account, event, or phenomenon” (Ravitch & Carl, 2021, p. 144). In listening to the layered stories of Black women leaders as conceptualized and languaged in their voices, this research sought to find common themes and divergences of experience in how these leaders navigate leadership in their professional spaces and whether their experiences are informed or impacted by the ways their race and gender are viewed and treated in the workplace.

Participant Selection and Recruitment

The Black women senior leader participants were identified using purposeful sampling as these women, their identities, roles, and lived experiences uniquely positioned them to have knowledge of and deep connection with the phenomenon this study was exploring (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Study recruitment started with individuals I knew through my position as a Black woman senior leader in higher education and through my membership in a Black women’s professional service organization, The Links, Incorporated., as well as through referrals from other colleagues, friends, and relatives. I also was connected to participants through other participants. These connections yielded 15 participants for the study.

Each participant was approached via an email invitation providing information about me, my professional background, race, and doctoral program, as well as details on the purpose of the study, the criteria for participation, and what the commitment to participation in the study required, to ensure that they would be fully informed of and comfortable with all details of participation in the study (see Appendix A). The email included the informed consent form approved by the Institutional Review Board of the University of Pennsylvania (see Appendix B).

The email requested a response and return of the signed consent form and provided my contact information to communicate with me via email, phone, or Zoom at their convenience to answer any questions they might have had about the study and/or informed consent form.

Selection Criteria

Each participant needed to meet the following criteria to be involved in the study:

1. Self-identified as Black or African American.
2. Self-identified as female.
3. Worked currently or had worked in a PWI.
4. Self-identified as someone who was or had been a senior leader at a PWI. This level could include assistant/associate dean, dean, assistant/associate vice chancellor, vice chancellor, assistant/associate vice president, vice president, assistant/associate provost, provost.
5. Was available to participate for the requested time and format of participation.

Throughout the recruitment process, I remained aware of the relational aspects of interviewing and the implications of this from recruitment through the entirety of my engagement with participants. Ravitch and Carl (2021) wrote of the relational aspects of interviews:

Interviews consist of a relationship, however brief. Trust and reciprocity are vital to healthy relationships. These values need to be centralized throughout the interview process—including in the recruitment of participants, engagement in setting up the interviews, the actual interview(s), and any follow-up. (p. 127)

Professional and personal connections to some of the recruited participants had potential implications for the research that needed to be recognized and considered. Preexisting relationships had the potential to impose unintended pressure on people to participate due to the

existing relationship (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). This concern would have been greater with colleagues with whom there may have been hierarchical relationships with differentials in professional power and positionality that could place undue influence on a person's choice to participate. Examples of this would have been if potential participants were junior to me at my own institution or reported to people who were influencing their choice to participate on my behalf. This concern was mitigated, however, due to these participants working at other institutions and there were no relationships between me and them or someone they report to which could have caused undue influence.

There were, however, positive implications of the preexisting relationships for this research as well. This topic is personal for Black women senior leaders. Asking these women to discuss their leadership experiences was asking for their trust and vulnerability in sharing successes and challenges, triumphs and traumas, and experiences feeling supported in their leadership and experiences being attacked overtly and covertly by the discrimination of those they work with each day. This trust does not come easily to those of us who are impacted regularly by biased and discriminatory treatment connected to our minoritized identities in these spaces, and the personal and professional risks associated with sharing these narratives and ceding control of them to another person are real.

Having prior relationships meant there was already a level of trust for the women I knew who chose to participate. For women who did not know me, it was important in my recruitment email that I identified myself, not just as a senior leader in higher education, but as a Black woman senior leader in higher education, to answer the inevitable questions of who I was and why I would be interested in this topic. Identifying myself in this way let potential participants know I was one of them also experiencing the phenomenon of the study's focus.

Interestingly even with this shared identity, and in many cases a referral from a mutual friend or colleague who was also a Black woman senior leader, every potential participant interested in the study not known personally to me, except for one, took me up on the recruitment letter's offer to schedule a call or Zoom to discuss the study. I do not believe that would have been the case if this study did not require the same level of trust and vulnerability to participate. Of the seven participants who did not personally know me, six engaged in a Zoom meeting with me of approximately 30 minutes, and in each case the potential participant agreed to participate in the project.

Participant Demographic Data

Fifteen Black women senior leaders were recruited for this study. This number was chosen because it was appropriately manageable for the scope of the dissertation, while large enough to provide a meaningful picture and understanding of the phenomenon and inform the answers to the research questions (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Demographic and professional background information was collected at the beginning of each interview, including title, highest degree earned, years at their current institution, years as a senior leader in higher education, and total years in higher education (see Table 1).

Table 1*Title, Degree, Age, and Years of Higher Education Experience Data by Participant*

| Title | Highest degree earned | Age range | Years at current institution* | Years in senior leadership | Years in higher education |
|--|-----------------------|-----------|-------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| Assistant provost | Doctorate | 40–49 | 2 | 6 | 14 |
| Vice president | Doctorate | 60–69 | 7 | 20 | 28 |
| Vice chancellor, chief diversity officer | Doctorate | 60–69 | 3 | 4 | 24 |
| Dean | Doctorate | 60–69 | 3 | 6 | 6 |
| Associate provost | Doctorate | 40–49 | 14 | 6 | 17 |
| Vice chancellor | Doctorate | 60–69 | 18 | 10 | 29 |
| Dean | Doctorate | 60–69 | 7 | 16 | 31 |
| Dean, vice provost | Doctorate | 50–59 | 24 | 7 | 24 |
| Vice president | Doctorate | 50–59 | 24 | 8 | 25 |
| Assistant vice provost | Master's | 50–59 | 6 | 3 | 24 |
| Senior vice president, dean | Doctorate | 50–59 | 7 | 18 | 28 |
| Associate provost | Doctorate | 50–59 | 14 | 1 | 22 |
| Vice president | Master's | 50–59 | 5 | 13 | 29 |
| Chief diversity officer | JD | 40–49 | 1 | 8 | 10 |
| Associate vice chancellor | Doctorate | 30–39 | 2 | 2 | 7 |

Note. * Current institution may have been a previous PWI of higher education where participant was a senior leader in cases where they were not working for a PWI at the time of the study.

Table 2 provides breakdowns of the participant group by age range, highest degree earned, institutional areas, and leadership title to provide a view of the distribution of characteristics across the participant group.

Table 2*Distribution of Title, Degree, Age, and Years of Higher Education Experience Data*

| Identifier | Number | Average | % |
|------------------------------|--------|---------|----|
| Age range: | | | |
| 30–39 | 1 | | 7 |
| 40–49 | 3 | | 20 |
| 50–59 | 6 | | 40 |
| 60–69 | 5 | | 33 |
| Highest degree earned: | | | |
| Master’s degree | 2 | | 13 |
| Doctoral degree | 12 | | 80 |
| Juris doctorate degree | 1 | | 7 |
| Years at current institution | | 9.1 | |
| Years in senior leadership | | 8.5 | |
| Years in higher education: | | 21.2 | |
| Institutional areas: | | | |
| Dei | 5 | | 33 |
| Student affairs/success | 6 | | 40 |
| Business | 1 | | 7 |
| Arts and sciences | 1 | | 7 |
| Graduate education | 1 | | 7 |
| Faculty affairs/success | 2 | | 13 |
| Leadership title: | | | |
| Chief DEI officer | 2 | | 13 |
| Dean | 4 | | 26 |
| Assistant vice provost | 1 | | 6 |
| Vice provost | 1 | | 7 |
| Assistant provost | 1 | | 7 |
| Associate provost | 2 | | 13 |
| Associate vice chancellor | 1 | | 7 |
| Vice chancellor | 2 | | 13 |
| Vice president | 3 | | 20 |
| Senior vice president | 1 | | 7 |

Note. Some participants had multiple titles, or their work involved multiple institutional areas thereby affecting the distribution totals.

Data Collection

The data collection methods used for this study included interviews, focus groups, memos, dialogic engagement, and an interview of me, the researcher. The use of interviews and

focus groups was central to the purposes and values of the study. They helped provide an emic understanding of the experiences of the participants, “creat[ing] the conditions . . . to holistically understand and convey the most contextualized picture possible of the people and phenomena in focus, maintaining fidelity to the complexity of participants and their experiences” (Ravitch & Carl, 2021, p. 124). The interviews and focus groups provided the opportunity for participants to share in their own words and using their own conceptualizations, their lived experiences as Black women senior leaders in PWIs and their reflections on the meanings and impacts of those experiences on their personal and professional lives. To understand the experiences of Black women as senior leaders in PWIs and the role their social identities play in how they approach and experience leadership in these spaces, the voices and narratives of these women had to be central. Interviews and focus groups provided the appropriate setting for the sharing of their stories in their own words.

Interviews

The primary data source was semistructured participant interviews. Participants were asked to do a 2-hour one-on-one interview, either in one session or over two 1-hour sessions as convenient for the participant. Thirteen of the 15 interviews took place over one 2-hour session. One participant’s interview took place over two 1-hour sessions and one participant’s interview was one hour only due to her availability. All interviews took place either in person where geographically feasible or by virtual teleconference using the Zoom platform. Seven interviews took place in person and eight took place on Zoom. In-person interviews were conducted in either participants’ offices or homes.

Each of the interviews started with a brief reminder of the purpose of the study, a reminder of the confidentiality provisions as outlined in the consent form, and a confirmation

from participants they had no questions or concerns and they agreed again to participate and to being recorded. The recorded session then began first requesting demographic and professional background information. The formal interview then began as semistructured with a predetermined protocol of questions soliciting an understanding of the experiences and perspectives of the participants with respect to the study's research questions.

The semistructured approach allowed for consistency across interviews, while also allowing the participant to answer the questions in directions permitting them to freely construct their narratives. In providing the space and opportunity for participants to construct their narratives through how they processed the questions and what they chose to share, the interviews captured the desired emic understanding of these women's leadership experiences using their own language and conceptualizations (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). The interview script and protocol are included as Appendix C.

The interviews focused on four main areas of inquiry to help participants reflect on and explore (a) their leadership experience and leadership strategies, (b) the role their social identity plays in how they lead, (c) how their leadership is viewed and received by people at their institution, and (d) what support and/or resistance and challenges they experience to their leadership and how they address it. These question areas were intended to help explore the experiences the participants have had leading as Black women in PWIs connected to their social identities as Black women; how their social identities have influenced their leadership approaches; how others at their institutions have responded to their roles and work as leaders; and how the participants felt, thought about, and responded to the support, challenges, and/or resistance they experience to their leadership as Black women in PWIs.

The interviews were recorded using Otter.ai and the Apple iPhone Voice Memos application, as well as on a digital recorder as a backup when in-person. Interviews on Zoom were also recorded on that platform in lieu of the digital recorder. I reviewed the recordings and transcripts after the interviews to confirm all transcripts' accuracy as verbatim records of the data for analysis.

Handwritten notes were taken during the interviews to capture any questions, impressions, observations, or thoughts that emerged for me during the interviews. Following each interview, I recorded a short reflective memo to capture more fully my impressions, observations, questions, and emerging themes from the interview, as well as to reflect on my role, behaviors, and choices to improve upon my approach to the interviews and the people with whom I was engaging.

Focus Groups

Participants were made aware when recruited that they would be invited to participate in an optional focus group after the completion of the one-on-one interviews to discuss their reflections on their experiences shared in their interviews and any emerging themes I identified through analysis. These focus groups were intended to be a source of additional data, as well as an opportunity to validate information and themes I identified from the one-on-one interviews. These focus groups were also intended to provide potential new networks and resources to the Black women leaders participating, by engaging with peers with shared experiences.

As the one-on-one interviews were close to completion, I invited all 15 participants via email to participate in an optional focus group. The email invitation provided three dates and times for participation with options before work, after work, and on the weekend to try to accommodate varied schedule constraints. The email also invited them to share any questions

related to the research topic that they were interested in exploring in the focus group. Twelve of the 15 participants responded to the email invitation, three of whom noted they were regrettably unable to participate. The other nine provided one or more sessions for which they could be available, and I was able to schedule three participants per session. Email reminders were sent to all participants the day before their session. One participant did not attend, following up later that day having forgotten about the session.

The focus groups were conducted via Zoom for 1 hour. They were also recorded using Otter.ai, the Apple iPhone Voice Memos application, and Zoom. All participants already agreed in their signed consent forms to treat all information shared in any focus groups including the identities and institutions of focus group participants as confidential. Focus group participants were reminded of the shared agreement and commitment to confidentiality at the beginning of the focus group. There was a protocol of questions to help guide the focus group discussion, but the protocol was designed to allow the participants to help shape the conversation as well (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). The interview script and protocol are included as Appendix D.

The focus group sessions focused on three main areas that reflected emerging themes and findings from the interviews. These areas were (a) their experiences with gendered racism or the double jeopardy of being Black and female as a senior leader in a PWI, (b) the emotional labor they do in their role and how they manage it and protect themselves doing that work, and (c) how they feel the experiences of Black women in senior leadership roles in PWIs today compares to the experiences of Black women in these roles just a few years ago. These questions were intended to explore themes and findings that came out of the initial analysis of the one-on-one interviews, explicitly naming and identifying the deductive themes that came out of the inductive questioning in the interviews about their experiences. The focus groups also allowed participants

to not only share their own stories, but also share their reactions to each other's stories, identifying what they saw as commonalities in their experiences and how they understand the dynamics related to their social identities that impact their experiences in their institutions.

Handwritten notes were taken during the focus groups to capture any questions, impressions, observations, or thoughts that emerged for me during the sessions. Following each focus group, I recorded a reflective memo to capture more fully my impressions, observations, questions, and emerging themes from the session, as well as to reflect on my role, behaviors, and choices during the sessions. I reviewed the recordings and transcripts after the focus groups to confirm all transcripts' accuracy as verbatim records of the data for analysis.

Interview of the Researcher

As a Black woman who has been a senior leader in higher education, I came to this work with my own experiences, perspectives, and biases about navigating leadership and change in these institutions. I have grappled with discrimination, bias, and other issues related to and impacted by my minoritized identity in these spaces in my leadership roles. I needed to consciously acknowledge this and sought to identify and mitigate where my positionality and biases may have had influence on my approach to this research. I have been committed to reflexivity in research, which requires researchers, "critically assess and continually reassess your positionality, subjectivities, and guiding assumptions as they directly relate with and shape your research" (Ravitch & Carl, 2021, p. 375).

To this end, early in the data collection process I engaged a Black woman leader in higher education who was not a participant in my study to interview me. I provided her with a shortened version of my protocol that touched on the four major areas of inquiry and asked her to conduct a 1-hour interview of me. We conducted this over Zoom and I recorded and transcribed

the session for my own review and reflection. This session supported my commitment to research reflexivity helping me to make explicit my own reflections on my leadership experiences, approaches, and challenges as connected to my identity as a Black woman.

Memos and Dialogic Engagement

Throughout the research design, data collection, and data analysis processes, dialogic engagement supported my active reflection on and challenging of my choices and perspectives that impacted the research. Dialogic engagement in qualitative research “is a process of seeking out alternative perspectives . . . [which] . . . challenge your own” (Ravitch & Carl, 2021, p. 247) by having other people engaged in the research. I engaged dialogic engagement partners from my doctoral cohort who helped me consider and challenge my “assumptions, biases, preconceived notions, and how each and all of these shape how . . . [I] think about the data and the people in . . . [my] study” (Ravitch & Carl, 2021, p. 248). I used dialogic engagement in developing my research questions, discussing my interview process, how I engaged with participants, and the analysis with my dissertation chair and thought partners from my doctoral cohort.

I used recorded voice memos and my research journal as a space to “capture my reflections and thinking about the ongoing synthesis of data” (Ravitch & Carl, 2021, p. 365) including emergent themes and questions. Following each interview and focus group, I recorded my reflections, observations, and questions from the session. These recorded voice memos were transcribed using Rev.com and reviewed as part of both of my data collection, code development, and analysis. Additionally, I recorded voice memos at different stages of research and analysis, including code development, to capture emerging themes and findings so I would have record of these ideas for later reflection and analysis.

My research journal was another space in which I would track the progress of my research, including questions and reflections, as well as emerging themes, codes, and findings that I wanted captured for later use. Engaging in these various points and exercises of reflection with others and in my writing, including being interviewed as the researcher, helped with capturing and challenging experiences, reactions to, assumptions about, and perspectives on both the phenomenon of study, and what I was learning from participants along the research process from the questions asked and data collected, to the analysis of and writing about the work.

Data Analysis

Given the emic focused qualitative approach to this dissertation study, data analysis was focused “on the experience of the participants in an examination of shared experience” conducted “as close to the data as possible” (Ravitch & Carl, 2021, p. 238) while also focusing on the content of the individual narratives of participants. Data analysis paid close attention to the experiences across the group of Black women senior leaders, as well as to their individual narratives about them as informed by their intersectional identities.

Interviews and focus groups were transcribed verbatim after each session using an artificial intelligence transcription service, Rev.com. I reviewed each transcript against its recording and my interview notes to confirm accuracy. In this process, I began to note key and interesting responses that were both threading through multiple interviews and that seemed unique or divergent from other responses. I also developed lists of emergent themes and findings as I reviewed transcripts, as well as my voice memos and research journal. These developing lists became the basis for the parent codes and subcodes I used in further review of the transcripts of both the interviews and focus groups. The codes and their definitions are included as Appendix E.

The qualitative software MAXQDA was used to code data, compare and analyze data, and capture and render themes and findings. Each transcript was reviewed in their entirety against the parent and subcode lists with data sorted into one or more of the codes. Additionally, emblematic quotes were identified and coded separately for potential use in the writing. As transcripts were reviewed, the codes were refined in wording and description. After all the transcripts were coded, subcodes that appeared redundant or that had sufficient commonality were combined. After all data were coded, they were reviewed by code groups and against the research questions and noted emerging themes captured in my research journal as I was coding. The coded data were then sorted into seven analytical groups, out of which the findings and themes were identified, developed, and analyzed into the three thematic areas and their findings as discussed and analyzed in Chapter 4.

Validity and Trustworthiness

Validity and trustworthiness are defined in qualitative research as the confirmation by researchers that “their findings are faithful to participants’ experiences” (Ravitch & Carl, 2021, p. 166). In this study validity was sought through a firm commitment to being “faithful to participants’ experiences” by continually working to ensure the “quality and rigor” of the work from the design to the data collection and analysis and ultimately the writing of the findings (Ravitch & Carl, 2021, p. 166).

The trustworthiness, a term sometimes used interchangeably with validity, of the findings is supported through this commitment. It is a commitment to the fidelity of the participants’ voices. Multiple methods in qualitative research ensured this validity and ensured what was captured in the research was done so accurately and reflected what was shared and entrusted with me. My goal in the analysis and writing was to provide “thick descriptions” with clear context

and understandings of the data “so that readers can determine the validity of [the] findings” (Ravitch & Carl, 2021, p. 180).

Additionally, trustworthiness required sharing and being explicit about my own positionality in the work and engaging in reflexivity at every stage. As noted earlier, as a Black woman who has been a senior leader in higher education, I had to be conscious of my positionality as a member of this group of Black women senior leaders who led in PWIs and whose leadership experience has been shaped by experiences and treatment connected to my intersectional identity as a Black woman.

My commitment to validity and trustworthiness in the research also was exercised through structured reflexivity practices intended to support the validity of the findings. Structured reflexivity practices are intended to assist researchers in “systematically and critically engaging with our biases, interpretations, and reflections . . . [to] . . . help us produce more complex and ethical research” (Ravitch & Carl, 2021, p. 184). Being interviewed as the researcher, who was also a Black woman senior leader in a PWI, the voice memos, journaling, and dialogic engagement work done throughout the dissertation study were examples of structured reflexivity practices that helped me not only identify and process questions and emerging themes and findings, but also identify my own communication styles, influences, biases, and presumptions I brought to the research that would have the potential to impact the validity of the work.

Lastly, if I had any questions as to the validity of any findings and analysis, I followed up directly with participants to do member checks asking clarifying questions and providing drafts of my descriptions and analyses of stories they shared to confirm the accuracy of my work and to

provide opportunity for them to correct it and provide any additional information or reflections on the topic.

Ethical Considerations

Awareness of potential ethical issues and actively working to protect against them was actively addressed throughout the study. Some potential ethical issues that arise in research and were potential issues in this study included confidentiality and the comfort and psychological safety of participants.

Confidentiality

Although confidentiality can never be guaranteed, protocols were developed and observed to protect the identities of the participants of the study. These included the use of codes and pseudonyms for participants throughout the data collection, analysis, and writing.

Discussions about the importance and meaning of confidentiality were included in the consent form, and explicitly acknowledged at the beginning of each interview and focus group to remind everyone of our mutual agreement and commitment to protecting and preserving confidentiality.

I also practiced active awareness of needing to avoid details in discussions and writings that could inadvertently identify people and institutions.

Comfort and Psychological Safety

The phenomenon this study sought to understand involved experiences and challenges related to people's professional lives and personal identities. Experiences with discrimination and microaggressions are prevalent for Black women in a host of personal and professional settings including in higher education. These topics are often not comfortable for people to acknowledge and discuss and may be in some cases emotionally triggering to reflect upon and share. More than one participant commented on the sessions feeling like "therapy," having

reflected on some experiences and their impacts on them for the first time in their interviews. I was acutely aware of and sensitive to these potential discomforts and traumas for not just the participants, but also myself in the sharing of these women's stories.

Making clear in the consent form and in the introduction to the interview and focus group sessions that some topics may be sensitive for participants given the topic of the study, and that participants were free to not answer any questions or share any information that might cause them discomfort for any reason at any time in the sessions was important to establish and remind participants of the prioritization of their comfort and psychological safety. Additionally, offering the focus groups as optional points of engagement in the study served to not only provide an additional opportunity for data collection and data validation, but also provide an opportunity for networking with and connection to other Black women senior leaders with shared experiences, knowing this type of connection could be a potential source of support, validation, and comfort.

Limitations of the Study

This qualitative, emic focused study sought to capture the perspectives, experiences, beliefs, and meaning participants shared in the interviews, and in the focus groups where applicable. Although this research identified themes and any commonalities in these women's experiences, as well as explored divergences, it did not intend to portray a comprehensive portrait of Black women senior leader experiences in PWIs. It intended to convey a deeper understanding of these particular women's experiences with fidelity to their individual voices. Additionally, the number of participants as appropriate to this dissertation and its emic focused qualitative approach did not support generalizing any of the findings and analysis to all Black women senior leaders in PWIs (Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

In seeking to understand what the experience is of being a senior leader at a PWI for Black women, this study explored various aspects of 15 participants' personal senior leadership journeys in how they have navigated their institutions and roles including the challenges and barriers they have faced and how they have chosen to address them. How they have experienced senior leadership is in part about the institutions themselves and how the institutions and the people in them react and respond to these women as senior leaders. It is also about who these participants are as senior leaders navigating their predominantly White institutional spaces.

The findings and analysis from this study's exploration of these women's experiences are discussed in this chapter in three thematic frames:

1. Theme 1: "Showing Up as Myself:" The Influence of Social Identity on the Ways Black Women Experience and Approach Leadership
2. Theme 2: Support and Resistance for Black Women's Leadership in PWIs: How Institutional Environments That Promote Inclusivity Also Passively Enable Gendered Racism
3. Theme 3: Responses to Resistance: How Black Women Senior Leaders Process the Impacts of Gendered Racism and Respond With Intention

Theme 1: "Showing Up as Myself:" The Influence of Social Identity on the Ways Black Women Experience and Approach Leadership

I feel I'm a different leader because I'm Black and female. People deal with me differently because I'm Black and female. So, there are good things and there are bad things.

—Agnes

In seeking to understand their experiences as senior leaders in PWIs, this study sought to explore whether and how these leaders' social identities as Black women have influenced how they experience and approach leadership. Who these women are is informed by multiple dimensions of their identities including their identities and positionality as Black women. As Black women, they have unique experiences and perspectives connected to their professional spaces in which these identities can be celebrated and appreciated, but also minoritized and subjugated.

Understanding the influence of social identity on their leadership experiences and approaches entailed understanding not only how these women see their own identities, but also how they experience how others in their institutions view them as Black women and the projections associated with those views. Understanding the influence of their social identities entailed learning about the various ways in which these 15 Black women senior leaders use their positionality as Black women as tools and assets in how they lead to advance their work and values to benefit their institutions and the people served by them. Understanding the influence of their social identities on how they lead and experience leadership in their PWIs also involved learning about how they connect to and draw upon the historic and current day contexts that their families and their Black women colleagues and peers have navigated in this country and in their institutions. Who these Black women are as senior leaders and how they lead and experience leadership in their PWIs is a complex amalgam of who they are personally and what they bring of themselves to these institutional spaces in which they are "other."

This first set of findings includes what was learned about how participants' social identities influence who they are as leaders, including how they experience and approach leadership. The following findings are discussed and analyzed as follows:

1. Tensions and interplay between identity self-perception and projections onto Black women's identities.
2. "Showing up as myself:" The power of directness and authenticity of social identity as part of Black Women's leadership.
3. Social justice and equity lenses of leadership connected to positionality as Black women.
4. Social identities as tools of influence in Black women's leadership.
5. "Who you are and whose you are:" the influence of family and ancestry on Black women's leadership.
6. "Sisters of the struggle:" The influence of other Black women leaders on participants' leadership experiences and approaches.

Finding 1: Tensions and Interplays Between Self-Perception and Projections Onto Black Women's Identities

I think that no matter how far we've come in terms of race relations in this country, that people see my color first . . . and then my gender second. They don't see my PhD. They don't see my years of experience. They don't see my character initially. And so, they have already begun to formulate opinions about me and my abilities and that sort of thing the moment they see me.

—Angela

In seeking to understand the influence of their social identities as Black women on their leadership experience and approaches, participants were asked about how they perceive their own identities, as well as how they believe others at their institution perceive their social identities. What participants shared in response to these questions revealed tensions and misalignments between how participants view and appreciate the layers and complexities of who they are as Black women, and their colleagues' views of who they are as Black women and the

sometimes-negative projections associated with their views. The following outlines what participants shared about their perceptions of self, and what they shared about how others in their institution have viewed their identities and what they have projected onto them.

Perceptions of Self

It was important in this study not to presuppose how participants think about their social identities. The study sought to understand participants' self-perceptions of their identities as part of the larger goal of understanding the influence of their identities as Black women on how they experience and approach leadership. These women's descriptions of their identities captured layers and complexities beyond the socially constructed projections of race and gender with which they contend daily in their institutions.

For the purposes of the study, self-perception is defined as how participants see themselves and define what constitutes their identities. This could include what may be physically visible to themselves and others (e.g., race and gender), recognizing that there are exceptions to the visibility of race and gender (e.g., with some mixed-race people or with people who do not present as a particular race or gender). This self-perception could also include aspects of identity that are or can be made invisible to others, but that are considered salient or of value to that person (e.g., their religion, their sexual identity).

Tajfel (1972) introduced the idea of social identity to understand how people view and categorize themselves in relation to others. He defined social identity as "the individual's knowledge that he belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him of this group membership" (Tajfel, 1972, p. 292). There is an element of self-categorization or self-perception in this definition with respect to understanding how that person sees their social identity and the meaning they ascribe to it. How someone sees themselves

relative to their geographic roots (e.g., self-identifying as a southerner) is a self-descriptor that may have cultural significance for that person. For Black women in this study, self-categorizing as a Black woman had deep personal value as a core element of self that influences how they operate in and connect with others in their personal and professional lives.

In terms of how social identity was defined and determined, there was also an element of socially imposed categorization particularly with respect to the social construction of race and gender. Both race and gender are social constructs placing people into categories based on perceived differences that in the U.S. context have been the basis upon which race and gender-based discrimination have been built (Patel, 2022). Race and gender have been historically associated with genetics and biology in furtherance of their use as tools for promoting inequities in power and privilege with the construct of race promoting racism and gender furthering sexism, heteropatriarchy, and binary socialization (Patel, 2022). Even though race and gender are increasingly viewed more as social constructs than firmly biologically based, they continue to persist as signifiers for sorting and classifying people based on phenotype into essentializing categories, which have implications for status, power, and agency in U.S. society (Ibrahim et al., 2022; Patel, 2022). As social constructs, these categories of social identity and the historic and persisting discrimination and disparities in status, power, and agency in the United States have been projected and imposed on Black women in the social and professional contexts they navigate.

To capture an emic understanding of these women's identities, or their self-categorization or perceptions of self, they were asked to share how they describe their identities. This open-ended question was intended to allow each participant to interpret identity for themselves and use their own language for describing it. They were intentionally not asked to confirm their gender or

race, nor asked about any specific demographics that could potentially constitute identity (e.g., religion, marital status). The intention with framing the question this way was to provide the space for each participant to consider and share in their own words how they perceive and categorize themselves and what aspects of their identities they considered salient to share as participants in the study. Although a requirement for participation in the study was to self-identify as female and Black or African American, it was clear from participant responses that this requirement did not necessarily capture all the ways these women think and talk about their identities.

All 15 participants led with describing themselves as a Black or African American woman or female, except for one participant, Josephine, noting her class identity for her came ahead of her gender and race. Fourteen of the 15 women in the study went beyond describing themselves as Black or African American women or females. They talked about other aspects of identity that described who they are and how they are situated in various social contexts. Ten out of the 15 women referenced family in some way that described who they are relative to families they have created or their families of origin. They talked about being daughters and sisters or only children. They referenced whether they were married or single and whether they were mothers or “child-less.”

Five women referenced religion (i.e., Christian or Catholic) and four referenced their sexual identity as either heterosexual or queer. Three of the 15 women referenced class with respect to their family of origin as “not low income” or “below working class,” or their current class status (i.e., upper middle class). Three of the 15 women referenced education, one with respect to being educated and two referencing being first generation college graduates.

Geography also was referenced in answer to the question about identity by three people. Two participants referenced being from the South and one referenced being from the Northeast but that her parents were from the South. Four other participants referenced where they were from in response to other questions in which they talked about the influence of their home of origin on who they are today in professional contexts.

There were several women who also talked about certain traits and skills as part of their identities. They were “relatively young,” “curvy,” “dark-skinned,” “able-bodied,” “scholar,” “womanist leader,” “faithful friend,” “assertive,” having a “sense of humor” and a “sense of caring,” a “progressive thinker,” “coach,” “educator,” and “advocate.” One woman recognized other parts of her racial and ethnic identity noting her Native American and European ancestry. Maria, who served as a higher education senior leader at the state system level, chose several of these identifiers describing her social identity, saying:

So, female, Black. I always say this needs to be nobody’s business, but we are in an era where, I guess I would say heterosexual. Southern, born and raised in the south. I was a girl raised in the south. Grits, <laugh>.I think I have some good leadership skills. I’m a faithful friend, strong family member. An only child, which defines a lot about who and how I meet and greet the world, I think.

Maria touched on several dimensions of self that came to mind when asked about how she describes her identity, including in relation to where she is from, and her place in her family of origin as an only child, which she sees as influencing how she navigates her world.

Grace similarly layered into her self-description different personal and professional identifiers as well as traits and aspects of who she is and how she operates professionally and personally in the world that she sees as salient to her identity. She shared:

I typically talk about being a Black woman, a first-generation college graduate, a preacher’s kid. I’m married, I’m a mother, and then I’m an educator. Sister, because I have four sisters. And I’m a coach. Like those, in any description that

you read of me, you're probably going to see that language. The only other language I might add to that is an advocate . . . I didn't have the language for it even as a little kid, but . . . I have a justice thing and I'll fight for the little person every single time. So, I bring all of that with me to this space. Any space. And the other piece I didn't add to that, that I'll add is that I'm a southerner.

Grace shared in this multidimensional description of her identity who she is and what she brings not only into her work environment, but also the various environments she occupies personally and professionally. She chose to share aspects of herself that she clearly values and chooses to publish about herself, but also that she believes are salient to who she is as a leader being interviewed for this study.

Some descriptions of identities were shorter, touching on fewer of the dimensions outlined earlier with the most direct description coming from Michelle, an executive leader doing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) work, sharing, "It's Black woman . . . If someone says what [are you]? I said, I'm a Black woman." The responses were all varied and nuanced in answer to the question of how they described their identities, and this question provided an important opener for understanding the influence of identity on how these women think about themselves as people and as leaders operating in socially constructed institutional contexts.

Speaking to Jasmine, a dean, about how she describes her identity, additional dimensions of identity emerged as related to power and status in society. She spoke about her identity as a mix of both oppressed and privileged identities, explaining:

I think that all of us are a mix of oppressed and privileged identities. . . . When I talk about race, I have to talk about privilege. But when I talk about privilege, I have to talk about all the kinds of privilege. And so, I describe myself from the vantage point of oppressed identities as a Black woman. But also, from a standpoint of privilege, because I'm an upper middle-class woman, because I'm heterosexual, because I'm able bodied, because I'm Christian. There's all kind of privilege that is conferred because I'm married, right? So, there's all kind of privilege that's conferred from those social identities.

Jasmine was articulating how Black women bring myriad oppressed and privileged identities to the personal and professional contexts in which they operate. These identities influence how they see themselves in those contexts and how they are seen by others in them. These identities are the lenses they bring to those contexts, and they help shape the level of connection they have with others in those contexts.

These identities determine the power and privilege they may have in different spaces and help determine how they choose to operate in these contexts in which their experience is shaped or influenced by their social identities. For example, the intersectional identity of Black women shapes how they are able to experience their professional spaces, given the macro- or micro-aggressions they may face related to gender, racial bias, and discrimination in the workplace. Recognizing, as Crenshaw (1989) wrote, “the intersectional experience [of Black women] is greater than the sum of racism and sexism,” (p. 140) Black women face challenges and barriers unique to their particular oppressed identity. At the same time, as Jasmine reflected, Black women can also navigate their personal and professional lives with the privileges associated with certain identities, like as a heterosexual person not having to suffer under the oppression of the homophobia and heterosexism that may infect some workplaces.

Answering the question about their identities with responses that led with describing themselves as Black women acknowledges the saliency of these particular aspects of their identities in the U.S. context in which they live and work, and the continued legacy of race and gender-based discrimination in this country and its institutions. Fifty plus years after the Civil Rights Movement, Black women continue to navigate persisting inequities in the United States related to race and gender, from disparate treatment in the healthcare they receive, to pay disparity, as well as microaggressions experienced in everyday settings (Chinn et al., 2021;

Equal Rights Advocates, 2023). These experiences highlight the diminished status of Black women compared to White people, particularly White men in the United States and evidences the continued salience of race and gender in this country. Jasmine described this salience, stating:

I think it's important to note that the most prominent [social identities] are race and gender, because our society has dictated that those are the two most prominent ones that taken together with class and the privilege that comes from being upper middle class.

Angela also acknowledged this saliency of her identity as a Black woman in both the United States and global context explaining the language she chooses to use in self-identifying as a Black and African American woman. She commented:

I've told people this so that they understand that I am Black and that is in solidarity with Black people around the world. So, all Black people who've been dispersed because of the African diaspora, but also African American in order to invoke that history in this country because I think that that still is salient now. And that we have to acknowledge that there are still continuing ramifications of that.

Describing themselves first as Black women before also talking about other aspects of identity also acknowledges how these aspects of their identity, in addition to the others, shape their perspectives and choices for how they operate in the social and professional contexts in which they lead. Angela went on to say, in addition to identifying as both Black and African American, she is also, "female cisgender and a mother, a wife, sister. So, all of those things I think factor into how I present and how I . . . act in the world." Similarly, Olivia noted the connection between being a Black woman and how she operates in the world, saying, "So . . . my top three [identities] . . . I think Black, woman, southern . . . that's what I feel because those are kind of the three main identifiers that clearly kind of shape my outlook."

It is important to highlight that leading with the identity of "Black woman," although an oppressed identity in the U.S. context of historical and persisting racial and gender

discrimination, is one that these women shared from a positive place celebrating the strength and beauty of those pieces of identity that make up the tapestry of who they are. The oppression of racism and sexism is projected onto Black women and others similarly subjugated. Those negative associations and projections are external and recognized and rejected as such by Black women who positively internalize, identify with, and embrace their identities and the history, cultures, and communities associated with it. Agnes leads with her identity, not just in answering the question of how she describes her identity, but also in talking about and celebrating who she is at her core. She stated:

I love being a woman and I love being Black. I mean, I love the history of our people. I am proud of the history of our people. I'm proud of the resistance. I'm, I'm proud of the things they have done. So, I think Black and female is my identity. . . . And then depending on the context, if I'm in academia, I could tell you what I am in that role. And if I'm with my children, I could tell you what I am in that role. So even before parent and everything, the thing that brings me joy is I'm Black and female. It is like joyous, just like that. And then of course, being a mother and a wife and a scholar and all of those things. But that's not the core. The core for me is being Black and female. All of these things come out of that core.

For Agnes, this core of being a Black woman is the place from which all other aspects of who she is flows both personally and professionally. From what participants shared, their identities as Black women reflect their connection to other Black and African American people with whom there is shared history and experience in the United States. This identity influences their perspectives and outlooks, and how they operate in their personal and professional lives. However, how they perceive and describe their identities is complex and layered reflecting other self-categorizations and descriptions related to faith, family, socioeconomic status, geographic roots, appearance, ethnicity, and character traits and skills. These other perceptions of self also have great value, meaning, and influence on who these women are and how they operate as leaders.

Participants' self-perceptions of identity, however, were only part of the story in understanding how their identities influence how they experience and approach leadership. How their identities have been perceived by others in their institutions, and associated projections onto who they are as Black women, also have influenced how Black women leaders experience their place and role in their institutions.

Projections Onto Black Women's Identities

Recognizing race and gender are the prominent social identifiers in the United States, the expectation was that participants' social identities would be perceived based on their race and gender. And given these social constructs have existed and persisted in the United States with associated inequities in power and privilege, the expectation was that the projections associated with these perceptions would have some connection to how participants experience leadership in their professional spaces. Understanding the complexities of how these Black women see their own identities versus how their social identities are perceived and projected on to them is an important precursor to understanding the interplay of the two on the leadership experiences of Black women senior leaders in higher education.

The participants described their social identities as Black women, but also beyond that as well, along varied dimensions making up the whole of who they are, how they are known, and how they relate to others in their personal and professional lives. However, their beliefs about how their identities are perceived and projected onto them at their institutions reflected both the opportunities and challenges associated with their social identities in their roles as senior leaders. For the participants, how they are perceived is informed in part by preexisting beliefs and associations that their colleagues have about Black women. These preexisting beliefs and associations are characterizations of others about who Black women are and what behaviors and

attributes are expected of and from them in the eyes of their colleagues. These beliefs and associations are in this way projected onto them and operate as stereotypes that may be couched positively (i.e., the strong Black woman stereotype) or negatively (i.e., the angry Black woman stereotype), but in both cases are essentializing and limiting and fail to appreciate who these women are and what they bring to their work and roles as leaders in practice.

All but three participants explicitly answered they are perceived as Black women. Two of the participants talked about how they are perceived as leaders with respect to the power and respect they receive. One participant, Olivia, noted she was unsure how her identity is perceived, but her answer also talked about her identity as related to perceptions and expectations of others stating, “I’m not really sure to be honest. I don’t think that people think about it very much, except in the ways that it conflicts with what they think I should be doing . . . or how I should be acting.” She felt that as an academic operating in a staff role, her identity as an academic is discounted as it conflicts with what faculty at her institution expected of someone in a nonacademic role.

All participants shared stories indicating they comfortably and openly reference and talk about their identities as Black women leaving no room for doubt or interpretation by others. Three participants shared ways in which they speak about their identities at work with intention. Agnes responded that people at her institution know she is a Black woman because she tells them “every chance I get.” She believes it would be easier for some people at her institution if she was not a Black woman. She shared:

[They] would’ve preferred that I wasn’t [a Black woman] . . . Because . . . I’ve been successful at what I do. And . . . they would want to relate to the things I do. They don’t want to relate to who I am. So, they like the things I do. They like the centers I build. They like the conference[s]. They . . . like what I do. It’s just really hard that it’s me doing those things. So that’s why it would be easier.

For Agnes, she asserts her identity knowing this is what her colleagues see, but that they do not wish to connect to or acknowledge, so asserting her identity is in response and in resistance to that discomfort and rejection of her identity by some of her White colleagues. Clara chose to introduce her identity up front in her interactions with people in meetings and presentations. For her, this is a tool of connection recognizing people are “wired to be tribal.” She explained:

Our brains are wired to first assess, especially for people who have vision . . . we are just wired to scan a room and see who looks most like me . . . and then who moves most like me, who sounds most like me. We do that before we get into who’s got an approach to the world, a worldview like mine. But it’s like, what do you look like? What do you sound like? How do you move? And how do I connect with that? And if people know that yes, I am an African American woman, I’m not Latina or I’m not whatever, the brain doesn’t have to work on trying to assess it.

For Clara, in introducing her identity as a Black woman, as well as other aspects of her identity she believes salient (e.g., where she is from or parts of her professional background), she eliminates the distraction for people of trying to “figure out what I am” to get more quickly to figuring out how they can all connect.

Michelle also talks openly about her identity as a Black woman at her institution. In a similar vein to Clara who, like Michelle, is an executive leader of DEI, it creates connection and in her own words, “cultivate[s] humanity in the work” she does. Michelle continued:

I think they would see me as a Black woman in how I show up. It very much informs how I talk about myself. I’m not afraid to talk about being a Black woman. And I do that by storytelling and shaping my experience. You know, the salience of my identity and how that’s informed social issues, how I think about things, how that influences some of the, you know, again, it aligns with the type of work that I do. So, in that way talking about my social identity very openly has helped to also cultivate humanity in the work.

For Michelle, leading with her identity is a way of asserting her positionality with respect to her work, sharing who she is as a Black woman and how that influences the work she does.

However, this does not negate the reality of what she experiences based on the perceptions and projections of others associated with her social identity. Michelle shared:

I'm very clear as a Black woman that I'm looked at with scrutiny. That there are stereotypes of my, presumptions of incompetence, that there are perceived threats if you are also excellent at something and seeing you as a threat versus cultivating a partner.

For Michelle, she is able to assert her identity as a tool for connection recognizing that there are perceptions and presumptions already at play about her as a Black women in the institutional spaces in which she leads.

Six participants talked about how they believed their identities as Black women were perceived by some members of their institutions in positive ways with respect to how their identities allow them to stand out or connect with people in ways others cannot. These stories involved other underrepresented and marginalized people, like students and faculty who see these women as resources and safe spaces to go to because of shared identities and shared experiences. As an example, for Josephine, her being perceived as a Black woman by others means that there are students and others who can see someone who looks like themselves in authority, and who is also a representative of and resource to them. Josephine shared:

And I can't tell you how many students come up to me and said, "I called my mom because you are up on stage with the administrators." I don't know how many students, female students came up and said to me . . . "thank you because I've been told that I can't be professional and have natural hair." . . . People come to me and [say] "How are you doing this? Like, it's hard for me. There's nobody around that looks like me." . . . Or, "thank you for standing up in that room and doing that."

For Josephine and other participants who talked about their identities as seen by others as points of connection and shared representation, their identities as Black women have unique

meaning for those who otherwise may not normally see people who are like themselves in positions of authority in their institutions.

For Jasmine, being seen as a Black woman is associated with certain protections unique to her status with her institution. Jasmine has been at her institution since she was a PhD student and then joined the faculty over 20 years ago. She considers herself a “known quantity” given her time there. Her being one of the only Black full professors in her school for many years, and one of a limited number of Black women leaders and full professors over the years “in some ways,” she shared, “that insulates me.” But regarding when she leaves her current institution one day, Jasmine shared, “I think I’ll experience my social identities in . . . deeper ways.” However, she also acknowledges the associations with how others see her identity cuts both ways. Jasmine stated:

I think also being a full professor at a PWI insulates me from a lot of garbage. . . . So that’s one side of the coin. The other side of the coin is that I’m absolutely oppressed based on my gender and my race in ways that are insidious.

Seven participants shared responses that included projections and associations by others regarding their identities as Black women that reflected stereotyping and essentialization of their identities. In these responses, colleagues and others in their institutions attached their preexisting beliefs and biases to how they identified the participants as Black women. In seeing there is a Black woman in a senior leadership role in their institution, they make presumptions about who she is, her background, her competencies, her experience, her values, and her worth based on no knowledge or limited knowledge of that leader beyond seeing a Black woman. That lack of knowledge is then filled in with the limiting and negative stereotypes they may have about Black women or other people of color.

For Angela, these stereotypes have come out in the assumptions that people make about her and her background. Angela recalled:

I think that the first thing that people see, especially at a predominantly White institution, is that I am Black. . . . And then when they recognize that I'm a woman, I think that some of the stereotypes that . . . are still in existence about Black women, that's a part of . . . what people see. I've had a student ask me before, that she thought it was really great that I could be a single parent and to achieve what I've achieved. And I thought it was really interesting because . . . I've never been a single parent <laugh>, but . . . it was in her mind that is what Black women are. And so sometimes I just wonder what it is that people still think about women of color and particularly African American and Black women.

The stereotype of Black women often being single parents was an expressed assumption by this student in Angela's earlier example. Angela also experiences projected stereotypes and assumptions with respect to her role at the institution. Angela shared:

When somebody comes into the office and they're looking for the vice president and I walk out, then they say . . . "I wanted to talk to the vice president." [and I say] "You got them." . . . There's always this assumption by folk that you don't belong.

Angela and others have found their social identities perceived and projected upon in ways that stereotype and essentialize them as Black women. The complexity and layers of their identities are left ignored and unappreciated. They will likely not be presumed to be the leaders in the room because they are Black women. They will be presumed to be less educated and to be of a lower socioeconomic status due to presumptions of Black people being poor and uneducated. They will likely be presumed to be "diversity hires" paternalistically gifted these opportunities instead of being highly qualified and experienced professionals, which their institutions are fortunate to bring on board because of beliefs that Black people do not have the same levels of professional experience and competency as others. These are examples of the presumptions that operate as barriers these leaders then need to overcome and work to dispel in

order to dismantle the deficit lenses through which they are viewed, often before they begin their work as leaders in their institutions and despite proven track records of success.

For Grace, she feels her social identity is seen as an “asset” for students, parents, and many stakeholders, but her social identity is not projected upon positively by all. Her social identity is projected upon by some as less than or as a deficit, such that she is fortunate to be in her role at the institution instead of the institution being fortunate to have her and her expertise in the role. Grace commented:

The . . . Black part of it though, what I will say is there are some people who, I think it probably made them a little bit nervous . . . It is still the south, right? And so, there’s some people who are like, “you know, yeah, you should just be grateful you’ve got a spot.”

These stories illustrate the sense of these participants that their identities as Black women are in some ways all that others see, or it defines how people relate to them. This again ignores and leaves unappreciated the layers of these leaders’ identities and often ignores what their roles and expertise may be in favor of what people presume it should be. It is seen in the cultural tax, or Black Tax, Black members of organizations experience being asked to sit on committees or take on tasks related to their racial identity group because they are presumed to have knowledge or expertise related to anything that involves or is related to their race (Padilla, 1994; Townsend, 2021). They are the ones that people turn to whenever there is a reference to anything associated with Black people or people of color because they are often the only person of color in the room. Lena shared:

I feel Blacker in this role than I have felt in any point in my life because I feel like people interact with me that way. . . . I think part of it may be because our team is all people of color . . . our leadership team. All people of color. . . . Like people have said to us, “oh, the Black ladies over there running everything.”

In her more highly visible senior leadership role, Lena has had more encounters with a wider spectrum of people at the university, many of whom never or only infrequently have interacted with or taken direction from a senior leader who is a Black woman. She described how this sometimes manifests itself through their resistance to or avoidance of her, her management, and ideas in ways that her White leadership peers would not experience. This feeling of her Blackness being defining for others or all that they see also shows up for Lena with incidences where she is excluded from social situations, like lunches and happy hours, that her female peers engage in with one another.

For one participant, how her social identity has been perceived was not a question or issue for her. She noted in response to the question, “I’m surrounded by a lot of Black senior leaders.” Pisiform works at a large state school that although a PWI, is notably diverse, including in leadership with Black men and women in executive and senior leadership positions, including the senior vice president to whom she reports. Pisiform is in an environment in which she is one of many Black senior leaders, and not an only or one of few of her racial identity group as the other 14 participants are. She does not need to question how she is seen or perceived as related to her social identity as a Black woman because she is working with and working for Black women and men, relieving her from many of the challenges including heightened levels of stereotype threat and other microaggressions with which other Black women senior leaders in PWIs may contend.

Another participant, at a smaller university, sometimes questions how her identity is perceived. Erica has been at her PWI of approximately 7,000 students for almost 15 years. In addition to her earlier faculty roles, she has been involved in “identity spaces” on committees

and projects, and serves in a leadership role doing inclusive excellence work. Although she knows she is seen as a Black woman, she has had interactions that made her question how that is processed by some people with whom she works. Erica indicated:

With senior leadership . . . so the deans and president, provost . . . I think that they know I'm an African American woman. . . . I met with the dean . . . the other day . . . who was a White woman, and . . . we were talking about retention of faculty of color, and she was like, "Well, you know, I think women of color," and she's going through this long litany of things about women of color at [our institution]. And then the next day she saw me and said, "I'm so sorry. . . . I'm telling you what Black women deal with [here]. And without realizing, oh, wait [Erica] is a Black woman [here], and so she knows these things."

The dean acknowledged that she did not process or acknowledge Erica's identity as a Black woman leader and former faculty member who has first-hand experience with and knowledge of the experiences of women of color at the school. Erica then shared a story of a direct report who similarly seemed to not recognize this part of Erica's identity. Erica shared:

I was talking to the Black woman who reports to me, and I said, "It feels like whenever I give you a suggestion, you get angry with me." And she was like, "You will not use the angry Black woman trope on me." And then she explained what it was. I was like, "I'm a Black Woman. An angry trope, I know what that is. First of all, I'm just saying that you get mad at me when I suggest things to you, and that's what it feels like to me. And so how can we work be[tter]," . . . So I was like, do you not know that I share your identity and that the issues that you have at this institution I have too? And so, I think . . . that it made me wonder . . . does she not see me as a Black woman at the institution?"

Although Erica's social identity is seen as that of a Black woman, the earlier stories suggested the perceptions of her as a Black woman leader also may be influenced by issues of power and privilege associated with her status of being a senior leader. As a senior leader, she was not immediately associated with the challenges of other women of color faculty being discussed with the White woman dean, nor was she believed to be able to relate to or understand

or even be familiar with the negative stereotype of the “angry Black woman,” as experienced by her direct report.

Erica’s experience with presumptions associated with the power and privilege of her leadership status also may relate to the experience of Angela with some people presuming that as a senior leader she has somehow been co-opted by the power structures of the institution. Angela was questioned by a Black male faculty member who disagreed with her position on not requiring all members of a student group to wear a Black Lives Matter emblem. Angela explained:

For him . . . if you’re a Black person and you reach that level, it means that you have compromised your values, and you have . . . been co-opted and that sort of thing. . . . And he could not look at that circumstance in any other way. Except for [him thinking] here I am, this Black woman sell out who’s not supporting these Black students, without thinking that am I supposed to support whatever it is they want blindly because we’re all Black or what? . . . I know without a doubt that was because I’m a Black woman.

Both Erica and Angela’s stories illustrate the nuances of projections on the social identities of Black women leaders and the negative associations and presumptions that can come with respect to their positionality as senior leaders as somehow disconnecting them from their positionality as Black women. The privilege associated with their senior and executive level leadership roles in these cases essentialized and limited their identities to their positional power and invisibilized their identities as Black women. In these cases, there was a presumption they could not simultaneously operate and lead as Black women and as senior/executive administrators, and that being a senior/executive leader somehow removes them from experiencing or relating to the challenges and barriers associated with having an oppressed status.

Participants shared how they believe their identities are perceived by others at their institutions in ways that are both positive and negative projections associated with being seen through socially constructed lenses first and foremost as Black women. The positive projections came mostly from others with shared identities as underrepresented and marginalized, such as students and other people of color for whom these women stand out as models and resources. In these cases, the shared identities as people of color or marginalized people provide a sense of connection and representation and highlights these leader's identities as Black women as assets in the roles and work they do.

In the other cases discussed, however, perceptions of their identity and the limited projections of meaning onto those identities reflect stereotypes and essentialized presumptions of what it is to be a Black woman, including being less than worthy of their roles than others. For a few participants, these negative projections and associations also included presuming they were somehow disconnected with their identities as Black women, due to the power and privilege associated with their positions as senior leaders thereby also discounting those parts of their identities in problematic and essentializing ways.

Asking participants to describe their own identities or share their self-perception of their identities, as well as asking how they believe their social identities are perceived by other at their institutions were important inquiries for understanding the influence that these women's social identities as Black women have on their leadership experience at their PWIs. When looking at what participants shared about their self-perceptions of their identities and the perceptions of and projections onto their identities by others at their institutions, there were tensions in their interplay and a clear influence of both on how Black women experience their places in their institutions as senior leaders.

The women in this study see themselves as Black women, but also along other dimensions of identity making up and influencing the whole of who they are. They identify themselves as Black women, but also identify themselves in terms of their religion, their families, their education, their sexual identities, their physicality, and various personality and character traits. These various layers and complexities added to how they describe themselves with other dimensions to which they ascribe value, and which make up the people they are and bring to their work and roles as leaders.

How these Black women leaders' identities have been perceived and projected upon in contrast is limited in part to the social constructs of race and gender. Although in some cases their social identities are associated positively with what they bring to their institutions such as their ability to connect with other underrepresented and marginalized people in their institution in many cases, their social identities are perceived and projected upon by others with negative associations, such as negative and essentializing stereotypes and presumptions of less professional competence.

Black women senior leaders work to assert the complexity of their social identities as Black women and the experiences and perspectives unique to who they are that are assets to institutions seeking to be more inclusive spaces able to better serve diverse populations of students. However, they are often met with negative perceptions and projections about their social identities they must navigate in their leadership. These racialized and gendered projections shape how these women are viewed and worked with at their institutions. They are the barriers to their leadership that they are forced to work against and through that their peers who are not Black women do not. These barriers have serious consequences for their career and leadership experiences (Gasser & Shaffer, 2014; Townsend, 2021).

Participants in this study, however, use their social identities and positionality as Black women as tools and assets in how they lead to advance their work and to help navigate the challenges and barriers they personally face in their institutions and to advocate for others in their institutions who may face similar identity-based challenges.

Finding 2: “Showing Up as Myself:” The Power of Directness and Authenticity of Social Identity as Part of Black Women’s Leadership

So how you show up makes a big difference [for] acceptance. And that has been a strategy, but that’s not an easy thing to do. And especially as a Black person who is trying to own your womanness in a very male world, trying to own your presence as a Black person in a very White world.

—Clara

For the Black women senior leaders in this study, showing up authentically as oneself as a Black woman is an important aspect of how they lead and how their social identities influence their leadership. Eleven of the 15 women specifically spoke about authenticity or “showing up as myself” in different ways connected to their social identities as Black women. This included communicating their social identities directly with others as Agnes, Clara, and Michelle shared in talking about or referencing their identities as Black women in meetings and interactions with others.

This idea of authenticity and “showing up as myself” represents asserting who these participants are as Black woman, including other layers of their identities, in how they lead and approach their work and roles in their institutions. This can involve rejecting practices and mantles of leadership that are not authentic to who they are as Black women but that have traditionally been modeled by and valued in White male leaders. The phenomenon of taking on behaviors and language not intrinsic to an individual in work and social settings is often about

fitting in, assimilating, or striving to belong in an environment in which one is not of the dominant group (McCluney et al., 2021).

DEI work is increasingly focused on belonging and what can be done to make sure those not of the dominant group are not excluded and experience a sense of belonging as the people they are instead of their needing to present adjusted versions of themselves to fit in. For Black women senior leaders, showing up as oneself can be seen as a rejection of “code switching” or other performative ways of leading not in alignment with who they are as Black women.

Code switching is a term originally used to describe how people move between languages and dialects depending on the context in which they are communicating, which has also been used to describe the “switching on” or adjusting of behaviors or language “to optimize the comfort of others in exchange for a desired outcomes” (McCluney et al., 2021, p. 1). Code switching also describes an “impression management strategy” (McCluney et al., 2021, p. 1) where Black people adjust how they present or perform to mirror language, behaviors, or other attributes of the dominant group in which they are interacting. Black people and other minorities may engage in code switching in professional settings to present themselves linguistically and behaviorally in ways that will mirror the actions, expressions, and even physical presentation (i.e., wearing straightened instead of naturally textured hair) of White people. In code switching, they are “switching off” their racialized identities that may be stereotyped, stigmatized, and considered less professional than those of their White peers (McCluney et al., 2021, p. 2). Because organizational leaders define the culture of those spaces, what is considered professional and what people expect from their leaders can be “coded by norms and values associated with Whiteness” (McCluney et al., 2021, p. 8).

Michelle is the first Black woman executive leader at her over 150-year-old college. She came to the role conscious of the meaning, opportunity, and challenges associated with being this kind of first. One of her strategies was to lead with the fact that she would be a first in discussions with stakeholders during her interviews including with the president. In response to the president's question about whether she had any reservations about the position, Michelle responded:

“Yes.” I said, “Number 1, the fact that I am going to be the first Black woman and what that looks like. And Number 2 is making sure that you really want me because I'm not going to change . . . This is who I am, and I need you to make sure that that's what you want because I will not assimilate. Assimilation is not in my ethos.” And that's the level of which I spoke to him exactly how I'm speaking to you. I was like, what am I going to have to lose? . . . I'm not going to lose anything from being authentic with him because that's what he's going to get each and every time. And it gave me the freedom to not have to code switch and do all the weird performative gyrations.

Michelle chose to be direct and up front with her future president about how she would be showing up as herself in all aspects of her identity, including as a Black woman, which would be a first in executive leadership there. She was making clear that she would not be code switching or switching off her identity as a Black woman in her leadership. Michelle's approach came in part from her reflections on her experiences at other PWIs to get to a place of embracing showing up fully as herself, recognizing the power and effectiveness in doing so. Michelle shared:

I've tried many other approaches where you feel like you have to, you know, say the big words, and show up in a certain way and code switch and it just doesn't work. Because we so often we have to code switch so much, but I'm . . . the best [Michelle] that I could be because I'm being [Michelle]. And when I just show up as my authentic self, that is the best leader that I can be. And I say that when I start to humanize because some people just look at the hierarchical nature of your role and they forget . . . your own humanity. And being a Black woman, you have to help them to see your humanity beyond the role. . . . Because the challenges are

going to come. And so, I think that's one of the things that I cultivate very early is that I'm just going to be unapologetically myself.

For Michelle, not only power and effectiveness, but also connection to others comes in part from this authenticity she brings to her leadership in all her dimensions of self, including as a Black woman. The alternative of having to code switch and show up as less than or other than self is an additional, less impactful, and depleting labor diminishing who Black women leaders are and all that they bring to their roles and work.

Two participants spoke about embracing authenticity as leaders as connected with their social identities with respect to their experiences with attempted modeling of their leadership on the practices of White men, which they ultimately rejected as failed and uncomfortable experiences. This choice to try modeling their leadership styles on that of the White men they observed was partially about figuring out how to lead. One of the many challenges Black women have faced for decades as they have entered the ranks of leadership is the lack of diversity among leadership (Beckwith et al., 2016; Chance, 2021). The lack of diversity in leadership has meant that models from which to learn about leadership and leadership styles have traditionally and persistently been of White men. These two participants early in their careers did not see as many women and people of color in leadership so they did not have access to multiple models of leadership or potential role models whose identities and experiences could more readily map onto theirs.

Maya had this experience of trying to model her leadership after White male leaders when she worked in industry prior to her career in academia. She recalled, "Since the only model of leadership that I had were White men, I would try to lead like that. And it didn't work. I mean, they'd look at me like I was a joke." Clara similarly reflected on how earlier in her career in

higher education she tried on multiple models and approaches she saw in other leaders that did not work for her and which were not well received by others. Clara recalled:

I would be in meetings, again I'm almost always the one and only [Black woman] in that meeting . . . and I was realizing that the behaviors of the White men were to like, get in and interrupt and be assertive. And those were my models. So, I would get in and interrupt and be assertive. And sometimes that would work. But sometimes it wouldn't. And I couldn't understand why. I'm like, if that's working for Jack, why isn't it working for me? And why are people responding hostilely. . . . Okay, so now my model's going to be the person who is the, the head of this meeting who is the true leader of this department. And they are very thoughtful, and very analytic, and they think a lot before they speak. So, I'll try that approach. And it wouldn't work. . . . You know how people react to that? . . . "You're not talking and you're tuning out" . . . and that was viewed as being hostile. Like, "Oh, now you're being passive aggressive."

Clara's early career attempts at emulating the leadership approaches of White, male leaders were negatively received and perceived by others. Those behaviors and approaches attempted by a Black woman were viewed through critical lenses by her colleagues. Those experiences informed reflections and different choices by Clara in her leadership approach. She shared:

It is a dance. How do you be your authentic self? How do you develop your authentic self? You know, I think I'm finally kind of there, but even talking to you, I'm like, hmm, but how do you develop your authentic self that can actually be in relationship to other people to bring out the best in them? And it's just amazing to me how many times people have told me, when you do make those relational connections as a leader, and then people say, "I can't believe we're having this conversation," especially if it's across race and across gender.

For Maya and Clara, trying to model themselves after White male leaders were failed approaches in part for how their leadership was viewed and often rejected as a "joke." Those behaviors were perceived and received by others negatively from them as Black women, even though they were perceived and received positively from White men. Those behaviors associated with White male leaders did not align with what others expected of Maya and Clara, based on

projections onto their identities including stereotypes of how Black women should act or lead. Those White male behaviors also did not align with whom Maya and Clara are as Black women professionals and their intrinsic styles and approaches to working with and leading others.

Clara talked about navigating in her career toward a place of leading as her “authentic self” as a journey and as “a dance” in progress, which captured how several other women in the study talked about the evolution of their leadership toward leading from a place of directness and showing up as themselves with confidence. Participants responded to questions about whether and how their leadership has evolved over time. All participants noted change and growth in general, also referred to as a growing confidence that has come with age and experience. With age and experience has come a confidence in their skills and what they bring to the table, and the confidence to assert their leadership and work in ways authentic to who they are as Black women.

Speaking to this question of how her leadership has evolved over her career, Jasmine described this growing confidence as developing “confidence in your voice and your approach.” Katherine spoke about the fear she had as a brand-new executive leader and the “imposter stuff around all of that.” She shared, “This has taken some growth and development on my part . . . I’m not afraid to say, ‘I don’t know anymore.’ . . . But that was a long . . . journey for me.” Agnes talked about leading from a place where she does not need to make choices in how she leads and what fights she fights in response to institutional pressures for tenure and promotion, “I can’t be promoted anymore. . . . I’m on top of the game. . . . Everything else is icing at this point.” For Agnes, she leads from a place where her priorities, plans, and passions as a leader are her choice, as is how she shows up in leadership.

This theme of authenticity and “showing up as myself” is still a measured and reflective choice taking into consideration the contexts in which Black women leaders operate and weighing the costs and benefits. Grace shared a story of a brief opening talk she was asked to give for a townhall on Zoom attended by hundreds of students, faculty, staff, and trustees regarding racial protests on campus. Grace is an executive leader in the student affairs area and is the first Black senior leader in her PWI’s over 100-year history. The significance of being a first in senior leadership at her institution was considerable on many levels for her and for the institution. There was a weight of the expectations and spotlight associated with holding this inaugural spot and in considering how it should influence how she navigated her role and how, in this situation, she was going to approach these opening remarks.

In thinking about these opening remarks, Grace thought about how she was going to show up with respect to how much of her personal story she was going to share about racism and its impacts on her and her family. She had to consider the degree to which she was comfortable sharing parts of her social identity as a senior leader in ways she had not before at this institution.

Grace shared:

It was a really vulnerable moment where I’m like, I’m about to put some stuff out here that fly in the face of who you know me to be because you know me as this, you know, always put together, wearing suits, beautifully made-up, uber professional Black woman. And for me, it’s a yes and. Yes and . . . here’s the rest of the story. All these other experiences that I have that you’re not aware of, that you can completely disregard because it’s not a part of your existence. And so, in that moment, I chose to go all the way back and talk how my grandmother and her family left Arkansas under the cover of darkness with bullets whizzing past their heads leaving a sharecropping situation, to how my mom and dad were raised in the segregated south and picked cotton and weren’t allowed to go to school because they needed to do certain things to help support the family. . . . How I, in my freshman year of college, my first opportunity to work . . . an office job. . . . I got the job over the phone, but I showed up as [Grace], who turned out to be in the body of a Black girl as opposed to the White girl they thought was going to show up in there and, all of a sudden, the job wasn’t available. And letting them know

how I have to think about and censor and screen the things that I say and who I am and how I show up and think about how it might land for other people . . . almost every second and every minute of the day to the point that it's now automatically become a filter through which I screen my very existence in order to operate on a campus. . . . But there was something about sharing that in that moment that put me in a place of . . . saying, you know, I don't . . . have to always live this way. And so how do I begin to approach this a little differently?

In these remarks, Grace chose to lead with her identity in sharing some powerfully impactful family and personal experiences that influence who she and how she experiences the world as a Black woman both personally and professionally. She also chose, in these remarks, to lead with a vulnerability that Black women leaders must be judicious in exercising given the multiple risks and challenges they already face and navigate in the workplace. She talked about this judiciousness and the need to be aware of when it is okay to “let your guard down” in what one shares of themselves. Grace shared:

And so, as I said to you, it's not like I sit every moment and think about “how's this going to live? How are they going to perceive me as a Black woman?” . . . It's still one of the lenses, but I needed for them to know in that moment that it was more salient for me in those moments than it's ever been. And now I've come back to a little more to center, but center includes some level always looking through that lens because we have to. . . . You can let your guard down a bit, and I can move more authentically in those spaces, but there's still degrees to your freedom and your authenticity. There's always going to be a degrees to it.

This idea of how salient the lens of identity is for Grace is an important part of this theme of authenticity and “showing up as myself” that threads across many of the stories shared by participants in this study. For many of these Black women senior leaders, their social identities are lenses and tools and influences on how they lead and how they experience leadership in their institutions. These lenses and tools have power and are assets they can use to lead more effectively and impactfully in bringing their whole selves to their roles and work. These lenses and tools allow Black women leaders to operate authentically as themselves promoting

connection and humanity in the work that they do. Leading as one's authentic self removes the labors associated with code switching and leading performatively as less than or other than oneself. In addition, leading authentically as themselves provides a lens to their work that helps advance social justice and equity from their unique positionality as Black women providing benefits to their PWIs and the students they serve.

Finding 3: Social Justice and Equity Lenses of Leadership Connected to Positionality as Black Women

The Black women senior leaders in the study responded to questions about the influences on their leadership approach. A prominent theme in their responses was that of social justice and equity, and this was often tied to their own positionality as Black women and marginalized people with the life experiences and challenges associated with that positionality. Eleven of the 15 participants explicitly talked about ways in which they prioritize representing and advocating for others in their institutions and strive to ensure that others do not have to experience the same personal and professional challenges they have had related to their social identities. This was often in connection with underrepresented or marginalized students, but also with respect to other Black women in their institutions junior to them or that may follow in their footsteps in the future.

Being able to use this unique positionality as a Black woman in leadership who relates to, understands, and advocates for social justice and equity is particularly important in PWIs, where underrepresented students, faculty, and staff are facing challenges and barriers related to their underrepresented and minoritized status with more limited power, influence, and voice in their institutions. White senior leaders who are well intentioned and strive to operate as allies will still often be limited in how they are able to connect with the experiences of those in their

communities who are marginalized or not of the dominant group. Underrepresented students, faculty, and staff may also feel less comfort or safety in going to people in power who are not like themselves.

Maya to use her unique positionality as a Black woman senior leader to advocate for and support members of her institution who are underrepresented and facing challenges related to their identities. Maya is a dean at a PWI with a very low representation of Black (including African) students at less than 3% of the undergraduate population. She feels a strong sense of connection to these students and a strong investment in them, recognizing the added burdens they experience related to their identities including the microaggressions they experience on campus because they are Black. Maya shared:

I've had students who have felt like they were about to fail out of here. Because they're not understanding what needs to happen. . . . I shamelessly recruit students into the business school. . . . And we don't care if we have every Black student here studying business. I want you to know that you have a home where you can succeed . . . because I want them to succeed. They can make it here . . . But there's so few of them [Black students], and it's hard here, and the microaggressions are real. . . . I mean, these are . . . 18- to 22-year-olds. They're still forming. They still are . . . trying to emerge from that sense of belonging, to feel like their own kind of agency and efficacy. And so, when others of their peer group think that what they're doing is less than, or that they're not as smart, or they don't know things that they should know, they take that, they internalize that.

In recognizing these microaggressions and challenges these students experience, as well as their heightened vulnerability and isolation, Maya personally connects with these students, making sure they know her and know that they have an advocate and ally in her. She explained:

I've been in enough spaces with our Black students that I'm like, "When you see me on campus, I expect you to speak to me. You need to see me. I need to see you. I make it a point to run around this campus every day. Look up, see me, speak to me, because you know, I'm going to always smile at you. I'm always going to say hello to you. I'm always going to encourage you. And you need that." And I'm noticing now where when I first got here, I mean they'd be heads down in their phone looking at the floor, looking at their shoes, the ground. And now those

students look up and they look at me. And that to me is important. That's really what's changing. I am always thinking about people that look like me in a space like this, so that they can see me and know that they can be me and go even further than me . . . I want them to identify with me.

Maya recognizes the challenges the Black students at her institution face being so underrepresented and navigating microaggressions related to their race. They are often viewed through a deficit lens by others and do not necessarily experience the same sense of belonging that their White peers do. As a Black woman, she understands and relates to what they are experiencing, and recognizes their heightened vulnerability as young, emerging adults navigating these challenges. As a Black woman leader, she is able to recognize and relate to these students and assert and insert herself into their college experience as an advocate and source of support to address the inequitable playing field they are navigating as Black students at this PWI.

Agnes also feels this sense of connection to students of color, as well as other Black women in the academy. She is motivated in her work by a sense of justice wanting to use her experience and power to support their experiences in her institution. Agnes shared:

I am a child of the resistance. That's just who I am. So, at 15 I started building the muscles of resistance . . . I go to bat for people who I feel need me and need justice to be done much more than I'm going to bat for myself. . . . So, when I stand up as a Black woman, I feel I'm standing up for the sisters coming after me, for all of my young sisters that they don't have to do it because . . . I've passed through all of that myself already. But I feel that's reason for me to make sure I show up in my power. . . . I think I do a lot around students of color. In the last 2 days, I've seen three students of color who didn't know me and who walked in and was able to tell me their stories. And I know they wouldn't tell anybody else. And they were heartbreaking. . . . I know if I wasn't in this space, I wondered what would happen to them. So, I think my identity as a Black woman is all of the things we just said for the majority culture. But for the minority culture is a place that they could see themselves. That they could come in and ask me questions, that they could tell me what's happening in their lives. That I don't think they would tell anybody else.

Agnes carries this social justice lens as a part of who she has been since she was a teenager and carries it into her work as a senior leader at her PWI, advocating and supporting

students, as well as Black women coming up behind her in the academy. What she knows they are experiencing in her institution, she has already gone through herself, navigating majority spaces as a minority. She knows she is a resource that her students would not necessarily have if she were not present to be there for them in the ways they need as students of color.

Similarly, Erica sees the power and opportunity in her senior leadership role as a Black woman and uses that to support other Black women at her institution, sharing:

I feel like I am creating opportunities for Black women who are struggling [here]. And that is something that comes easier than other things. . . . I'm creating networks, and I am finding outside coaching for women who are struggling because I don't want people to feel the way I have often felt. So, if in that way using my identity, I think is making a difference.

Erica's identity provides a unique lens for understanding the way other Black women are experiencing her PWI and the struggles and challenges they face as Black women in the institution. Her advocacy comes in helping to create connection and provide additional supports, which leaders who are not Black women and who cannot relate to those struggles may not be able to recognize or perhaps would not know how to address.

This is consistent with some of the literature around professional mentorship and support finding that mentors with shared identities with their mentees in some cases are best positioned to provide support and guidance to them due to their understanding and connection to the unique circumstances and challenges that they face in their industry or professional environment (Lewis-Strickland, 2021). The underrepresentation of Black women in PWIs contributes to the challenges they face at all professional levels due to the associated lack of mentors and the support they can provide. However, for many of the Black women senior leaders in this study, they have been able to use their positionality as Black women to provide advocacy and support

to those like them who may be experiencing challenges and barriers related to their identities and move the needle in their institutions toward becoming more just and equitable communities.

Participants also talked about how their professional experiences as Black women inform how they bring an equity lens to how they operate among their teams, prioritizing giving voice to others, knowing all too well what it is like to feel invisible and unheard as a Black woman in professional settings. Both Katherine and Pisiform shared how these identity-based experiences translate into how they lead with their teams and others. Katherine shared:

The experience of being discounted or not heard or listened to, right, for long enough is probably at the heart of why I want to hear people's voices in the room and why I want to make sure that everybody has had a chance.

Katherine has experienced being unheard in meetings and feeling like she has not been given an opportunity to participate when she has had important contributions to make. At her more senior level with the experience accumulated in her leadership journey, she was able to translate that into making sure that others are given that respect and opportunity. Pisiform similarly prioritizes creating equitable space for people who may not normally be heard or included and whose positionality may be distinct from the majority. Pisiform shared:

I know what it feels like to be on the outside of things. Or to not be thought of as people are constructing big ideas or initiatives about how things could be implemented and what the impact is on other people, on all the people who might be affected. I give space to people . . . I don't know that in other places at the institution there is space for everybody to be able to share or give feedback, have opportunities . . . And so I think that that is what is birthed out of my identities, is the fact that I am consistent and intentional about giving space, holding space for people . . . being able to connect in with people who may have a different opinion or thought process about something than me. To see how that would impact the way that we move forward. It's a big part of how I lead.

Pisiform's personal experiences with being on the outside due to her identity influences her desire to create equitable and inclusive spaces, recognizing that doing so is not only a just, but also an effective form of leadership promoting better outcomes from diversity of thought.

Additionally, there was a strong sense for some participants that if they do not stand up and step in to support others who may not have voice and power and who may be enduring the impacts of microaggressions or other more overt forms of discrimination, then who will stand up and step in because many others in leadership may not be able to recognize, relate to, or know how to appropriately respond to what those people are experiencing in their institutions. This greatly influenced Angela's decision to move from faculty to administrative leadership. She described:

And so, students, marginalized students, whether they identified as Black or whatever . . . their identity, they were looking for support. And so, I found myself in that position supporting students of color and LGBTQ students and, you know, whatever disenfranchised student there might be. And then I ultimately realized that I could be better supportive in administration that I could behind the desk as a teacher.

Angela recognized as a Black woman in the faculty, she had impact, but that impact was greater in administration and in leadership. Her reach is greater at the table at which she is operating allowing for an enhanced level of support.

These lenses for social justice and equity are clearly strongly connected to who these leaders are as Black women, and to what they have experienced both personally and professionally. Their identities inform how they are able to show up not only for themselves, but also for others as advocates and compassionate leaders trying to create spaces that are more supportive and equitable for other marginalized and underrepresented people. Their identities allow them to relate to and respond to the needs of others in ways that their counterparts often

cannot. Agnes summed up this idea, sharing how her social identity informs her being a different leader than many of her counterparts. She shared:

So, I think me being a model for others and being here to support others who look like me is one thing. But I also think I bring a different kind of compassion to leadership. I think I understand issues and challenges differently. I think I understand what it is to not have everything you need. I understand what it is to not be valued in the way that you see others being valued. So, I think it changes my leadership style because I have a different sort of understanding and you bring your entire self to your leadership. And my different understanding, I think allows me to be a different leader.

The Black women senior leaders in the study see their social identities as Black women influencing the social justice and equity lenses that they bring to their leadership in how they prioritize representing and advocating for others in their institutions and strive to ensure that others do not have to experience the same personal and professional challenges they have had related to their social identities. In this and other ways, their social identities are assets, allowing them to be more powerful and effective leaders in institutional areas needing to be assessed and addressed through social justice and equity lenses that may not be prioritized or understood by their White peers. They are able to use their positionality as Black women leaders to provide support and advocacy to those students, faculty, and staff who are impacted by persisting challenges and barriers that uniquely affect the experiences of underrepresented and marginalized members of their institutions. They are also able to use their social identities as tools of influence in other impactful ways as well.

Finding 4: Social Identities as Tools of Influence in Black Women's Leadership

Although all women in the study talked about how their social identities as Black women influence how they lead, eight women specifically talked about how their social identities can be used as tools of influence on others. This idea was prevalent in some of the narratives shared earlier on how these leaders' identities allow them to relate and respond to other

underrepresented and marginalized people in their institutions, serve as mentors and resources, provide support, and influence more positive experiences for them in their institutions.

Participants also discussed using their social identities as tools of influence with respect to the power their identities provide in being able to say and do things their colleagues who are not Black women cannot, and in ways that may influence people and contexts in which they operate. Their positionality as Black women in some contexts gives them the ability to talk about certain topics and issues related to their social identities with the authority of lived experience that cannot be as easily dismissed or disconfirmed. Their positionality as Black women also provides them with a shared connection to many other underrepresented and marginalized people that allows them to be heard more openly by them across differences in power and authority where that power disparity could potentially render their words as paternalistic, uninformed, or inauthentic if they came from someone of a dominant or different identity group.

Speaking to this ability to use social identity as a tool of influence with respect to being able to say things that other people cannot, Josephine shared a story of being able to use her identity to influence students talking about how “I can say certain things to students that other people can’t say.” Josephine has been at her state university for over 20 years, entering as a faculty member and later moving into leadership roles in enrollment and student affairs. She shared an example of her influence on students as a Black woman from her time as faculty dealing with three male students of color, two of whom she had spoken to previously about their disruptive behavior. The third person was a Black student who had joined the other two in exhibiting negative behaviors in class. She decided to call out their actions in class one day. Josephine recalled:

I said, “You don’t sit with them because you are doing okay and they’re going to drag you down with them. . . . Let’s be clear. . . look around, do you see anybody else that looks like you? You see anybody else that looks like me? People, there will be people here waiting for you to fail . . . and you are walking into a stereotype. . . . If that’s what you want to do with your time, do it on your own time. Don’t drag him into it. Because he’s going to be a success. . . . And then you’ll come back to me later and claim that they don’t like Black people and maybe they don’t. But you’re acting exactly like how they want you to act . . . I don’t find you scary because I grew up with people like that. I know 8 year olds that could take you out. But they’re going to be people that are going to see that behavior as threatening. So, you need to decide what, why you are here and whether you are going to win or they’re going to win. You stay out here and think about that for a minute and when you . . . decide you can come back in my class or not.” So, I know that other people wouldn’t have able to have a conversation with them. They wouldn’t have thought about those things. And I also know that they probably wouldn’t have taken it the same way if somebody else had said that.

In the case of the Black student, Josephine went on to share that he was applying to graduate school, and he still talked about that speech she gave him to other people; she said, “Somebody texted me, said, ‘[Jamal] is in here talking about how you called him out’ <laugh>.” Josephine’s story is of a very direct reckoning she had with these young men of color explaining to them the realities of how their presence and actions were potentially going to be viewed and stereotyped given their identities as young men of color in a majority White institution. This reckoning had a clear influence on one of the young men who is going on to graduate school and reflects on the impacts of that calling out.

That calling out would likely not have been received the same way and may not have come with the same intent if not from Josephine. As another person of color, she was not looking at and reacting to these students through a deficit lens connected to their race. As a Black woman, she was reacting to their behaviors particularly within the context of this White institution that would potentially view them and their actions differently than if they were White. As a Black woman, she could understand and relate to how these young men of color would be

viewed and the heightened consequences that could come of their behaviors as young men of color. She was able to use her identity to try to influence their understanding of those contexts and consequences.

This story speaks to the ways Black women leaders' identities uniquely position them to communicate with and influence other underrepresented and marginalized people in their institutions due to shared experiences and perspectives related to their identities. Black women leaders can speak from authentic places, understanding shared challenges and barriers, and they can be heard without concern that their words are colored with stereotypes and biases that other administrators may project onto underrepresented or marginalized students, faculty, and staff. Black women's positionality as senior leaders often means they bring more extensive knowledge and experience of these majority White institutional spaces that can benefit younger, less experienced underrepresented and minoritized people in the institution to help guide and advise their understanding of the contexts in which they are studying and working and how best to navigate those spaces.

Erica also recognizes that she can have some conversations that other people cannot to her positionality as a Black woman leader, although she questions to what extent she is using her social identity consciously as a tool of influence. Erica shared:

I try not to approach all the work I do through the lens of being an African American woman. I think I'm very systems based, and I look at structures and systems and try to create equity for all of them. But I'm sure there are conversations that I can have that other people can't have. And so, I talk very openly about race where I think other leaders can't. But I try not to always lead with [it]. Like the first initiative I did [here] in this role was actually about neurodiversity, because I didn't want the first thing, the first big splashy thing to be about race. But I also know that we've got issues with retention and with recruitment because I've seen those things myself. And so, I do lean into that, you know, when I can. And again, I think it helps me have conversations that maybe other folks aren't having. I have to think more about that. Because I don't think

about it intentionally. . . . Am I using my Black womanness to get stuff done? But I do. I think because [here it] is so relational . . . that's a part of who I am. I think it's probably impossible to separate it, but I don't think about it as much as that maybe.

Erica recognizes her identity as a tool of influence allowing her to identify issues and work to address them in ways that others perhaps do not and cannot. Using her identity as a Black woman as a tool of influence on what she does and how she approaches her work is not necessarily a conscious and intentional approach; however, at the same time her identity as a Black woman is an intrinsic part of who she is. This again relates to the unique positionality of Black women senior leaders in being able to use their social identities as lenses to identify, unpack, and address issues in their institutions that may be unrecognized, not prioritized, or inadequately addressed by their White peers.

Social identity is also used as a tool of influence over people and outcomes in helping to inform the knowledge and understandings of others. Two participants talked about experiences where they were able to use personal stories related to their identities that helped them make stronger impacts and impressions in meetings than they could with just the use of data and scholarship alone. This was an interesting finding, given the context of higher education in which research and scholarship are central to the discovery and dissemination of knowledge, which is part of the mission of higher education. These two participants are leaders in DEI. They shared experiences where the impacts of their personal stories connected to identity made stronger impressions on their audiences than did the scholarship and research related to the topics alone.

Michelle recalled:

So, when the recent Supreme Court decision came up, I felt like the institution was not messaging things in a way that I felt comfortable with. And it essentially was. . . . “Now we can't consider these Black and brown people. . . . We don't know if they're going to be getting into our institution.” And I was like, “Hold up.

My understanding is everybody earned their spot. You know, so they got here on their merit. And so, as a baseline . . . if you had two people that looked exactly alike and they happen to contribute to your overall holistic diversity, that's why." . . . At first it didn't resonate. . . . I tried to use data. That didn't work, nobody's hearing me. So, I finally just said . . . on the third meeting . . . with the president [and] the board chair. . . . "I wanted to share something . . . I got into [Competitive State University] and the perception was, even though I got in on my record, I had a 4.0 GPA, I . . . had people come to me and said, 'oh, you benefited from affirmative action' and treated me like I didn't belong. And so . . . I want to really humanize what some of our students may be experiencing, particularly given the face of this has been around Black and brown students. Even though we all know . . . that the data are presented over the last few decades that White women are the predominant beneficiaries of affirmative action, both in education and in the workplace. We all know that. . . . However, the face of this is that these undeserving Black and brown students are getting unfair advantages. So, we really need to be careful how we're stating this to understand that each of those students got here on their merit. That historically institutions of higher learning were not widening the gates to those [like them] that earned their spot. . . . So, we need to contextualize the historical context of why we're talking about this." And so, I needed to share a personal story about my identity because everybody could argue with the data, but they can't argue with my experience. . . . And so those are the ways in which I share stories in a way that's not condemning, but to give insights and awareness of what that might look like for one of our students here.

Michelle used her personal experience with being stereotyped and presumed to be a less qualified and less capable affirmative action admit helping her college's executive leadership understand the problematic presumptions and understandings underlying and flowing from the Supreme Court's June 2023 decision addressing the legality of race-conscious affirmative action in college admissions. This decision determined that public and private colleges and universities cannot consider race among the factors they weigh in admitting qualified applicants (Jaschik, 2023). She was also trying to challenge her executive leadership's potential perpetuation of these presumptions and understandings that applicants of color are somehow not as qualified, and the consideration of their race is what is gaining them admission. Although she offered data and scholarship to help address these misunderstandings on their part, it was her own personal story

that helped shed light and build awareness on how to understand the Supreme Court decision and its potential impact on the institution.

Clara similarly used personal experience as a tool of influence in her work as an executive leader doing DEI work. Clara was working with a department on how to improve diversity in the recruitment of both faculty and students. To get her points across, she chose to share the experience of her high school son taking the SATs that exemplified the impacts of racial stereotypes of academic competency on student performance. Clara shared:

And at the end of the meeting . . . the co-chair for this faculty meeting . . . actually puts his arm around me and he's like, "You know, you had a whole argument and you were telling us the benefits of diversity and what we need to consider and why we need to change our way of being when we're doing recruiting. . . . The thing that actually is having me shift my thinking and change my mind is the story that I knew you hadn't intended to tell, but the story of your son at the end. Because I would've never thought of that."

Clara was similarly able to humanize her argument with her own personal story, which ultimately had greater impacts than the troves of scholarship looking at diversity and recruitment she offered in her training and meetings.

For some Black women senior leaders, their social identities are able to be used as tools of influence for positive outcomes and impacts in situations where their identities are salient for communicating and representing realities related to social identity that others in their institutions are not equipped to understand, relate to, or know how to appropriately address. Their social identities as Black women enable them to say things and have conversations that their White peers may not be able to particularly with other people of color like underrepresented students.

Their perspectives and words come from a place of understanding and experience that allow them to see and communicate the realities that students of color and other marginalized and underrepresented people in their institution are facing in ways that can be heard and

understood as support for them. Their social identities are also tools of influence for how their own experiences with gender and race-based discrimination can personalize and humanize issues for their colleagues in ways that break through their resistance to data and scholarship, which is foreign to their own life experiences and world views. The stories of the participants show various ways in which their social identities can be used as tools of influence in their roles and work and as senior leaders. Of additional significance is how the roots of their identities influence who they are and how they lead as Black women in their PWIs.

Finding 5: “Who You Are and Whose You Are:” The Influence of Family and Ancestry on Black Women’s Leadership

Having family that would tell you . . . stories [of your ancestors] to reinforce who you and whose you are has been my foundation.

—Maya

In discussing the influences on how Black women lead and experience leadership, there was a prevalent theme of family and the influence of family and ancestors in shaping who these Black women are as leaders and how they approach leadership. The participants’ social identities as Black women are tied to their family roots with their values, world views, motivations, and successes influenced and impacted by and built upon the shoulders of the families who raised them and of generations past. For all the challenges and barriers Black women senior leaders may face professionally related to their social identities, their experience is not unique to them and their generation. Their experiences are ones built upon the legacy of slavery in the United States and the history of discrimination that persists today over 50 years from the end of the Civil Rights Movement. Struggles for equity and justice today draw upon this history and legacy, as well as upon the resistance and strength of ancestors and generations past that have allowed people of color to fight, persevere, and successfully build their lives, careers, and families in a

country that has been inhospitable, hostile, oppressive, and deadly in the worst of times to providing varying levels of previously denied support and opportunity during more socially and politically progressive periods.

Critical race theory (CRT) was born during one of these more progressive periods in the 1990s exposing racism as “so enmeshed in the fabric of the U.S. social order, it appears both normal and natural to people in this society” (Ladson-Billings, 2000, p. 264). CRT is a framework for looking at social systems understanding that “race is a central component of social organizations and systems, including families” (Burton et al., 2010, p. 442). To fight discrimination, the voices, experiences, and knowledge of those that are oppressed are vital tools to “unmask and expose racism” in the struggle for justice (Ladson-Billings, 2000, p. 264).

This framework highlights the power of the voices, experiences, and knowledge of ancestors who have navigated discrimination and oppression in this country as tools that these Black women can draw upon and use as sources of strength and influence in their own roles and work as leaders and in navigating the challenges and barriers they may face connected to their social identities. Reflections on family and ancestry are steeped in history and shared experience related to navigating race and gender-based discrimination that persists today, even if in less overt, yet still damaging and detrimental forms. These reflections on family can also include spouses and children as influences on their leadership as sources of support and people for whom participants want to be strong role models of how to navigate the world as Black people and Black women.

Two thirds of participants made explicit reference to family as connected to identity and leadership. In some cases, these references were not explicitly to race and gender, but about values and culture they connected to their identities. Values are part of the norms and beliefs

instilled in people from their families and the communities with which they affiliate. The cultures with which people connect are defined by these values as well as belief systems, attitudes, knowledge, customs, language, traditions, and other defining qualities of the communities to which they belong, and which help influence and define their identities. For Lena, she connects her parents' Quaker education and the values passed along to her because of it to some of the values underlying her leadership. Lena commented:

So, there's just a belief that everyone matters that . . . just permeate[d] the house. . . . [I've] worked for Quaker organization just coincidentally because they match my values. . . . And I think some of it is like everyone has something to contribute and everyone matters.

A tenet of Lena's leadership is valuing the voices and contributions of everyone on her team and ensuring equity and respect for multiple voices and perspectives. Her perspective connects very much with that of other participants talking about the influence of their social identities on how they prioritize creating space for others who normally go unheard in meetings often because their voices are not as valued as often experienced by women and people of color. Similarly, Maeve, who was raised in the south and works at a liberal arts PWI in the northeast, reflected on the influence of her southern roots and its culture of hospitality on how she leads and connects with people. Maeve shared:

I build relationships. I welcome people in. . . . Part of it is being a southerner too, right? That's what we do. We welcome people, we connect people, we invite people in, invitational, supportive, connective. That's what we do. That's what I do. That's how I was raised. And that's core to how I think about creating a healthy, functioning, thriving community and relationships. I build relationships. And they're not transactional. It's about getting to know people. It's about getting to care about people.

Maeve was speaking about the influence of her southern roots on how she operates as an inclusive person and leader, authentically connecting with others. She brings her roots and her

upbringing and the values of her southern culture to how she leads as a Black woman in her PWI. Both Lena and Maeve shared stories about the values and cultures of their families and communities that influence their identities and how they in turn operate as leaders. Although not explicitly about race and gender, these examples highlight the impact of background and upbringing on how leaders navigate and approach their roles and responsibilities as leaders. Who leaders are can be a product of their backgrounds, which can have a direct influence on how they lead. In these ways, Black women leaders call upon the values and cultures of their families and communities in leading as their authentic selves.

Five participants explicitly referenced the struggles and challenges of their parents, grandparents, and other family members living in times of legally and socially sanctioned discrimination and segregation. Recognizing and honoring the struggles upon which their opportunities were built, and the strength of their ancestors operates as inspiration, motivation, and sustenance in these women's leadership journeys. Josephine talked about this inspiration and sustenance reflecting on her grandmother's life and its influence on her, saying:

When we talk [in this interview] . . . I feel more about, you know, that whole like, ancestors thing. And honoring them and thinking about my grandma who . . . told me the story about . . . one of the jobs she quit as a maid. She quit because they were going to make her take a bath with the dogs. That's the only way she was going to be able to take a bath. . . . And I remember thinking, being in this position, like she'd be so proud if she was [here]. . . . The responsibility to my ancestors is the things that gives me sustenance and gives me warmth when like, the outside world is not giving you that warmth.

For Josephine her grandmother and ancestors are sources of inspiration in her leadership in honoring their strength in how they navigated the challenges of discrimination in their personal and work lives. She recognizes her connection to them and their struggles as she successfully navigates her own career and the challenges she faces in her professional journey.

Similarly, Maya reflects upon the influence of her matrilineal line on who she is and how she leads. She did not know her grandmothers, but the stories of these women were “poured into” her and her feeling of connection to these women plays a role in who she is personally and professionally. One story she shared was about her grandmother in the 1950s, insisting a department store take down a demeaning image of a Black woman. When they would not take it down “she climbed into the window and used her purse to knock it down.” Maya added:

Having family that would tell you those kinds of stories to reinforce who you are and whose you are. . . . I found that I had no language for what my style was. And it wasn't until I started to kind of plumb the depths . . . in the mother line, looking at my mother, looking at my grandmothers, my great-grandmothers, the stories and recognizing, oh my gosh, you know, that's who I am. Oh my goodness, this . . . is where . . . I've come from. And then crafting that into a narrative that said, oh, okay. And there is a model for who I am and how I lead. And so that's what's been kind of the codification, if you will, of how I come, how I show up.

Maya sees a direct connection between who she is as a leader and the strength of these generations of women who came before her. She sees them as models for how she approaches her leadership, and how she shows up as a leader in her institution standing up for what is right and just and standing up for others as shared in her earlier stories. The social justice and equity lenses of Black women leaders that are influenced by their social identities are often born in part from this ancestral influence that shapes who these leaders are as Black women and leaders in their institutions.

Related to this influence of ancestry and family, Grace had a similar revelation on the influence of her lineage on her leadership. Both of her parents were leaders in their community. Her mother, a teacher, was the first Black council person in her town and her father was a pastor and union leader. When she thinks back to who they were and what they did in their community she sees a direct connection to how she operates as a Black woman leader. Grace shared:

I wouldn't have known to call what my dad did as a union rep "advocacy," but yes, absolutely. Or . . . my mom's caring concern for community and how she was highly relational and how she did what she did. . . . At the time I wouldn't have had the language for it. But now I look back and I go, "Oh my God, all this stuff that you claim is yours. It came directly from my roots. It came directly from how I watched my parents serve and lead and advocate and build relationships and build coalitions and manage the things that were under their purview to manage."

Like Maya, Grace can reflect on her parents' lives and how they led in their communities as strong influences on how she leads in higher education. Her identity as a Black woman leader is built upon those ways that her parents lived and worked and what she observed of them growing up. Who many of these Black women leaders are and how their identities influence how they navigate leadership and addressing bias and discrimination within their institutions is a product of past generations and their work and struggles navigating the history and legacies of racial oppression and subjugation in the United States and being leaders and resisters themselves in building their lives, careers, and families in environments of legally and socially sanctioned discrimination. The values and cultures of their families of origin and generations past are an influence and source of inspiration for how many Black women leaders navigate their roles and work.

The influence of family on participants' leadership also was talked about in terms of providing support, advice, and a moral compass against which to measure actions and decisions. Some participants referenced spouses and children as sources of support for their leadership and as their "cheerleaders," but also as motivators and influences for how to lead. Josephine has two young adult daughters. When asked about how she describes her identity, she reflected on her family and honoring her ancestors like her grandparents as part of the responsibility she feels to them giving her the "sustenance" to do what she does. She also talked about her daughters and

the “vision” of them being “the thing that pushes me to make decisions” and take actions that she feels she is positioned to make that perhaps others are not.

Josephine reflected on a leadership antiracism workshop she developed and the question she poses there about determining one’s moral compass as a leader. For Josephine, her daughters are part of that compass. She questions, “Is this a fight that I would want my daughters [to] see me fight or walk away from? If they were in the room, would I embarrass them if I did not say anything?” In the way her grandparents inspired and influenced Josephine, she has sought to represent herself as a leader in ways that will provide a similar model of strength and character for her daughters.

How these Black women lead is influenced by their social identities, which for the majority of participants was talked about in terms of the influence and connection of family and ancestry in shaping and influencing who they are as Black women personally and professionally. This influence of family and ancestry operates on many levels, including the values they bring to their work, how they connect with others, and the sense of responsibility they have to lead as an advocate and support for all, but particularly for other underrepresented and marginalized people.

How Black women leaders experience leadership in PWIs is steeped in the history of gender and race-based discrimination in which these institutions were founded and have grown. Reflections on family and ancestry are steeped in this same history. The women who talked about their family and ancestry recognized a connection to shared experiences related to their ancestors navigating race and gender-based discrimination that persists today. Their lives, leadership and advocacy operate as sources of inspiration and models for many of the participants who honor this legacy and strive to similarly be strong role models of how to navigate the world as Black people and Black women. In addition to family and ancestry, Black

women leaders also find inspiration from other Black women in higher education who serve as sources of support and influence on how one another experience and approach their leadership in PWIs.

Finding 6: “Sisters of the Struggle:” The Influence of Other Black Women Leaders on Participants’ Leadership Experiences and Approaches

Participants were asked about whether the leadership of other Black women in higher education has influenced their leadership. Fourteen of the 15 participants are leading in PWIs where they are or have often been the only Black woman in senior leadership or one of very few Black women or very few people of color. At the time of this research, only Pisiform was working in a PWI where senior leadership was notably diverse with many Black male and female senior and executive leaders, including the Black woman to whom she reported.

Fourteen participants shared ways in which other Black women in higher education have influenced their leadership. These other Black women leaders, however, were not always in the same institution and, except in a few cases, were not senior to them or viewed as mentors. These other Black women leaders were usually at a peer level or were colleagues in other types of administrative roles. As senior leaders in PWIs, all the participants except for Pisiform who worked with and for several Black senior and executive level leaders, were currently working as an only or one of very few Black women in leadership in their institutions. As Black women leaders in PWIs, they are part of a small professional community given the underrepresentation of Black women in leadership in higher education institutions which becomes even smaller when looking just at PWIs. Yet all but one participant was able to share stories of personal connection to other Black women leaders, either in their own institutions, from different institutions in

which they have worked, or through professional conferences and organizations and other networks.

As token representatives of their social identity group, these Black women senior leaders seek, welcome, and appreciate connection with other Black women leaders, not only for the expected benefits of professional networking, but also the support, guidance and understanding from others whose experiences may track to some degree with their own. Research has shown the multiple negative impacts of tokenism or being the only or one of few in the workplace including the marginalization, isolation, and loneliness that comes with being the “extreme minority” (Chance, 2022, p. 50). A lack of professional mentorship akin to what White and/or male colleagues may experience is another challenge and barrier disproportionately impacting Black women leaders in higher education particularly given findings that mentors with shared social identities may be best positioned to provide leadership advice, guidance, and support most relevant to their mentees professional needs and challenges as related to their social identities (Lewis-Strickland, 2021). Connection with other Black women leaders whether purely professional from the distance of a conference proceeding, or a closer and personal connection with a trusted peer in or outside of the institution is a resource and gift in a profession that does not readily provide such a community for networking and mentorship.

Three women in the study specifically noted not having any Black women as professional mentors in their careers. Olivia has a peer network of Black women colleagues with whom she feels she can have trusted conversations about what they are experiencing in their institutions as Black women leaders. They discuss ideas for how to deal with those experiences, but she noted “none of my Black women . . . peers . . . have Black women mentors. So, there’s some deficit

that we are trying to work through. . . . We're mumbling around together. We . . . mentor each other . . . but it's very much peer."

Even in cases where participants did not have an identified Black woman mentor at some stage of their career, they still acknowledged the influence of being able to observe other Black women leaders, even if at a distance like at a conference or professional talk. For Maria the opportunity to hear a Black woman leader speak in her career was always a learning opportunity. Learning about their work, how they work through issues and strategize in their work, their reflections on their work and leadership, as well as observing their styles have been sources of influence and inspiration for Maria, whether she has in person opportunities to hear other Black women leaders speak, or she is learning about and from them in reading biographies of Black women leaders. Maria shared:

Anytime I'm in the presence of a powerful, strong Black woman leader, I'm quiet and I'm just soaking up any and everything that I can from being in their presence. . . . I try to pay attention to the way . . . other leaders lead, but especially other Black women, how they lead and how they step through their work.

Maria recognized the learning opportunities in observing and hearing from other Black women leaders, even if not in a mentoring relationship as those opportunities were more limited given the underrepresentation at her institution.

Several women in the study did talk about having Black women mentors particularly early in their careers in higher education. Katherine talked about a Black woman senior leader mentor she had early in her career with her first job at a PWI. She talked about the role this woman played in helping her navigate the space as a Black woman. Katherine described:

[She was] someone who . . . could help me decode some things. And also, like, tell me what to pay attention to and what to ignore, you know? . . . Because there are a lot of slights and there's a lot of crap that happens. And if you spend your time on all of it, like, that's just where you're going to spend all your time. And I

had other things to think about and other things to do. So, she was a really good mirror and balance for me in that way.

Katherine's mentor helped her in modeling what Black women leaders have to do frequently in identifying challenges for what they are and from where they come, and deciding in which battles to engage in. Katherine importantly noted, however, that she has had good mentors of different races and genders throughout her career who have believed in her and encouraged her. She has had "a lot of people pouring a lot into me and encouraging me."

Understanding the politics of any organization is a challenge of leadership, but how those challenges map onto Black women's leadership experiences can be unique. So, for some participants, having Black women mentors has provided a useful model for how to understand and navigate those challenges. Grace reflected on the mentorship she has received along her career with the most "robust mentors" all having been Black women who could help validate her experiences and help her in processing those experience and thinking through how to manage career challenges related to her social identity. Grace shared:

I look back over my journey and the people that are my most robust mentors have all been Black women. I have certainly White women in my world, but they can't coach me and mentor me and advise me around some of the issues that I have to deal with because of . . . the identities that are intersecting for me in these roles. . . . The kind of conversations that [my Black women mentors and I] would have and how . . . I could just sort of put it on the table, has been a really important thing because they are either a mirror for me in terms of, "No, you're not crazy. Yes, this is happening." So, they're that mirror. But also, they give me feedback, advice, guidance, coaching, on how to handle some of those situations.

For Grace, her mentors have not only provided models and mirrors, but also validation of the reality of her experiences and the impacts they have on her.

For Maeve, her Black woman mentor was her dissertation advisor who later moved into administrative leadership. She became someone she could go to for advice. Maeve reflected

further on the roles of mentors and the importance of having different types of mentors “who can shed light in different ways because nobody’s story maps directly onto your own.” But she also noted the risks and limitations of the guidance and advice from White people, particularly White men. Maeve indicated:

For Black women in my position, there’s going to be a certain amount of calculated risk in certain sorts of moves, particularly those that will be viewed as nontraditional. And there are certain things that White men will advise you that may work for them, that are not going to work for you and your circumstance. And so, you can enlist their advice, but you have got to take it in context of lots of other sources, and your own sense of what is going to work for you. Because one thing that I don’t think a White man will ever understand is the emotional, psychological, and physical toll of working in a realm of white supremacist sexist toxicity. It takes years off our lives as Black women.

How Black women experience and navigate leadership is different than for their peers who are not Black women. Maeve recognizes that those differences can be significant enough to make the advice and guidance from people who are not Black women not relevant, not applicable, or even detrimental due to the lack of understanding of how Black women experience leadership in institutional environments that present challenges and barriers related to their social identities.

Speaking to the influence of other Black women on her leadership experience, Maeve believes the people who have been the most influential in helping her think through her leadership experiences and challenges as a Black woman have been positioned more laterally. These are her “sisters of the struggle.” For the majority of women in this study, creating their own network of support with other Black women plays a vital role in how they lead and persist as senior leaders in their PWIs. These “sisters of the struggle” are trusted friends and colleagues who can relate to and understand each other’s experiences and challenges as Black women leaders in higher education. They help each other process and unpack challenges, validate

experiences, celebrate and recognize successes, and affirm the important work they are doing as Black women leaders in their PWIs.

Similarly speaking to the importance of having this type of network of Black women with shared leadership experiences, Michelle talked about the Black women who play an important role in supporting and influencing her leadership as her “tribe.” These are women both inside and outside of her institution. Michelle shared:

It’s been a great sounding board. It’s so amazing when you don’t have to explain, you could just see each other and understand and kind of have a deep inhale and an exhale. And especially when they’re in leadership roles and you know that they’ve gone through their own stories, their own experiences, and again, knowing that you’re not losing your mind, like these things are real because some of the situations that you’re going through are a lot more subtle and nuanced, and how to choose to sort or dissect them and identify them. Because I think in dissecting and identifying it helps you to make sense of it and also helps you to not internalize. And so, I think having Black women and Black women leaders in higher ed has really helped to shape my sense of being and affirmation in my role in the work that I do.

The influence of Michelle’s tribe is multilayered in validating her leadership experiences and helping her with unpacking them, particularly as connected to her social identity. Knowing from her tribe that the issues are not just about her, but steeped in a larger context of gender and race-based treatment that Black women navigate as part of their intersectional identities helps to process these challenges as part of the institutional environment and avoid the damage associated with internalizing them. This speaks to the heightened importance of these networks and the influence, guidance, and support from other Black women leaders in higher education not only for the expected resources one receives from networking, but also for the well-being and psychological safety they provide particularly in environments where there are threats to that well-being and safety.

Given the overall underrepresentation of Black women senior leaders in higher education particularly in PWIs, it was not surprising that most of the participants in the study did not have stories of having Black women mentors. However, there was among participants a clear sense of the influence of other Black women in higher education on their leadership experience in other ways, if not as mentors. So few participants having stories of Black women mentors connects to the experiences of Black women in leadership in higher education with respect to the consequences of the lack of availability of mentors in these institutions, which disadvantages Black women who then have fewer opportunities to access the rewards that come from the advice, guidance, experience, and sponsorship that can come from mentorship. However, it also speaks to the resilience and resourcefulness of Black women senior leaders in PWIs, in creating connection and networks of support across their professional peer groups and with other colleagues both within and outside of their institutions.

Four participants pointed to Black women mentors as providing guidance and support and models for how to understand, process, and approach issues and situations. Although there was an acknowledgement that mentors could come from others without shared social identities, there was a strong sense consistent with the literature that mentors with shared identities could often provide more relatable and relevant advice given shared experiences navigating similar contexts as Black women (Lewis-Strickland, 2021). These mentors could operate as mirrors of their experiences and could provide understanding of what it is like to navigate these professional spaces as Black women. Mentors with shared identities could provide validation, as well as guidance from their own lived experiences, to help inform how these participants navigate their careers. Black women mentors, as opposed to those without shared identities, also could appreciate the heightened risks and challenges Black women face earlier in their careers

and may face as their careers progress, which require different approaches and considerations than would be used by others who are not Black women.

Fourteen of the Black women in the study found similar types of support among peers, some of whom were seen as “sisters of the struggle” or members of the same “tribe” inside or outside of their institutions. These colleagues could also provide validation, support, and guidance from navigating similar challenges and terrain professionally as Black women.

The findings discussed earlier from the study’s 15 participants provide insights into the experience of being a Black woman senior leader in a PWI generally, and more specifically into how these participants’ social identities as Black women influence their leadership experience and their approaches to leadership. The stories of these 15 women highlight the layers and complexities of how they see their identities as Black women with other valued dimensions to who they are. Their layered identities as Black women inform how they show up as leaders in their institutions. They show up authentically as themselves and bring values, perspectives, experiences, and other personal and professional assets to their roles and work as leaders that allow them to excel in their professional areas of expertise.

In showing up authentically as themselves, they are also bringing tools and talents related to their intersectional identities to benefit their institutions, the students served by them, and the faculty and staff who support them. As Black women and senior leaders, they have a unique positionality providing lenses and points of connection that can identify, assess, and address issues of equity, justice, and inclusion, which may not be seen or prioritized by others in their institution. This positionality can be used as a tool of connection and influence in working with and supporting students, faculty, and staff who are also underrepresented and marginalized. It can also be used as a tool of influence in helping colleagues who are not of these groups to

understand and appreciate issues and challenges they may not be able to recognize, understand, or know how to address.

How these participants see their own identities, in many cases, is in tension with how others in their institution see them and the projections of these others onto who they are based on preexisting stereotypes and biases associated with their identities as Black women. These racialized and gendered projections shape how these women are viewed and how they experience leadership in their institutions due to the challenges and barriers that these negative projections and associations create. However, among other underrepresented and marginalized people in their institutions, their identities represent potential sources of support and connection within senior administration that can be safe spaces for some and be seen as models of opportunity for others who can see themselves in these women and their accomplishments.

In leading in their PWIs and in addressing challenges and barriers in their careers, Black women draw upon the influence and support that comes from who they are and whose they are, reflecting on their family and ancestry and the experiences of those that have come before them steeped in the history and legacies of discrimination that persist today. The lives of family and ancestors are sources of inspiration and influence, as well as models for how to lead and advocate and navigate in spaces that were not built by or for underrepresented and marginalized people and that continue to pose barriers to their inclusion and ability to have equitable experiences and opportunities in those environments.

They also draw upon the influence, support, and guidance of other leaders who share their identities as Black women in PWIs and provide the mentorship, sponsorship, guidance, and support that might otherwise be lacking in environments in which they are the token one or one of few. The experiences of other “sisters in the struggle” can help influence how Black women

leaders approach their leadership and how they understand and process challenges to their leadership validating their experiences as rooted in their environments and not in these leaders themselves.

In seeking to understand the experience of being a Black woman senior leader in a PWI, this study also explored with the participants how their leadership is viewed and responded to within their institutions to understand what both support and resistance to their leadership looks like to them and how it impacts them.

Theme 2: Support and Resistance for Black Women’s Leadership in PWIs: How Institutional Environments Promoting Inclusivity Also Passively Enable Gendered Racism

Understanding the experience of being a senior leader at a PWI for Black women is also in part about understanding the relationships and interactions Black women have with colleagues and others in their institutions, the treatment they receive, and the overall climate in which they work and lead. The levels of respect, inclusion, collegiality, and opportunity, and how equitable their professional experience is relative to their colleagues shape how these leaders navigate and experience their roles and work. Whether institutions actively and authentically promote climates in which high levels of respect, inclusion, collegiality, opportunity, and equity for all as a baseline expectation, or if they allow, tolerate, or enable behaviors, actions, policies, and communication that enable bias, discrimination, and injustice to thrive or persist has significant consequences for Black women leaders and their professional and personal well-being.

This study sought to understand how participants in the study experience these relationships, interactions, and climates, exploring how their colleagues respond to their roles and work as Black women leaders. To explore how their leadership is responded to, participants were asked how they believe their leadership is viewed and received by others at their

institutions, discussing what both support for the leadership looks like and how it is experienced by them, as well as what resistance to their leadership looks like and how it is experienced by them. Understanding how the women in this study feel others in their institutions respond to their roles and work as leaders speaks in part to the how they experience being a senior leader in their PWIs and the climates of their institutions. The degrees to which participants feel support for their work and roles as leaders and what that support looks like and feels like to them provided a picture of what participants believe help them to do their best work and to achieve the success and opportunity they seek in their institutions, within an environment in which they feel respected and appreciated. It also provided insight into what authentic inclusion should look like and how individuals and work environments committed to the values of authentic equity and inclusion behave and operate.

Resistance to their roles and work as leaders in this study was discussed by participants as those behaviors, actions, attitudes, interactions, and communications that Black women experience, which not only do not support and promote them and their work, but also in many ways and cases undermines their work and roles as leaders, as well as other aspects of their professional and personal well-being. Participants shared stories about peers, staff, faculty, or the executive leadership to whom they report (often the president) or some combination of those groups in sharing stories of support and resistance. These stories connected in various ways to participants' social identities as Black women, with these connections highlighted particularly in how their leadership experiences compared to those of their peers who are not Black women.

To develop a full understanding of the resistance these women experience in their institutions from different colleagues from faculty and staff to peers and superiors, as well as the impacts of this resistance on their experiences as senior leaders, it was important to also

understand what support for their leadership looks like and how that affects their experiences as leaders. Understanding support in addition to resistance is important not only because Black women's leadership experiences are often a mix of the two, but also because it is important to understand where that support comes from and what it looks like if institutions are to be able to intentionally and effectively create environments that enable that support to exist, grow, and thrive, as well as to be able to intentionally and effectively dismantle the practices and cultures that enable resistance to persist.

Particularly in this post George Floyd era of increased focus on DEI and promoting diversity in leadership at HEIs, one would expect institutions are doing this work to build support and dismantle the practices and cultures that have allowed gender and race-based microaggressions and discrimination to persist, challenging and undermining Black women leaders' career experiences and trajectories. What was found in exploring the experiences of these Black women leaders is that these environments that support and promote inclusivity often are still simultaneously continuing to enable the gendered racism that has historically and persistently shrouded their leadership experience, often in insidious ways. In some cases, the institutional work of promoting inclusivity through diversifying leadership with the talents of these Black women leaders is at the same time weaponizing their status as token Black women leaders, allowing for disparate and inequitable treatment and expectations of these leaders that challenge their ability to succeed and persist in those environments without significant personal costs, and with these institutions often failing to do the work of understanding their roles and responsibility in allowing these harmful environments to persist.

Support for Black Women's Leadership in PWIs

The following set of findings focused on what support for Black women's leadership looks like in their institutions from different constituencies, including how participants create their own networks of support among other Black women in their institutions where possible.

These findings are discussed and analyzed as follows:

1. Allyship from faculty, staff, and peers as forms of protection and validation.
2. Setting the tone: the influence of supportive executive leadership.
3. Black women leaders coalesce to create internal networks of support and validation for each other.

Finding 1: Allyship From Faculty, Staff, and Peers as Forms of Protection and Validation

What support looks like for a leader can vary depending on what it is they are looking for or need to successfully do their work, achieve their operational and strategic goals, and realize their professional aspirations. For most leaders, support may take the form of buy-in and support for their work and the initiatives they lead, public recognition and appreciation for their contributions, resources for their operations and strategic plans, professional development, opportunities for advancement, as well as receiving respect for and trust in their expertise.

For Black women senior leaders, there is an added layer to what support can look like given the unique professional terrain they navigate as Black women, which often includes challenges and barriers related to their social identities. They may be forced to contend with microaggressions, glass cliffs and ceilings, "Black Tax," harassment, the White privilege of colleagues, and a host of other forms and permutations of discrimination and bias related to their intersectional identities as Black women (Chance, 2022; Diehl, 2014; Lewis-Strickland, 2021; McIntosh, 2019). These challenges and barriers and their very real impacts put Black women

leaders at unique and heightened risks to their careers and their personal and professional well-being. Because of these unique challenges, support can also take the form of the allyship of others committed and positioned to show support for them through their advocacy and efforts to challenge and counter the discrimination and bias these leaders face due to their social identities. Allyship in the workplace is talked about in the DEI literature as the actions of individuals to be collaborators and coconspirators in efforts to promote equity and inclusion and fight discrimination and injustice in the workplace in support of marginalized people (Melaku et al., 2020). Allyship can take the form of supportive relationships that include acts of advocacy for their colleagues who are disenfranchised and burdened by the inequitable treatment they experience at work (Melaku et al., 2020).

Each participant in the study was able to identify ways in which they experience support within their institution. What support looks like varied in part based on from whom they were receiving it. Thirteen participants talked about support that comes from faculty, direct reports, and peers. With each of these groups there are varying power dynamics that are all distinct from that of executive leadership to whom the participants report where they are in a subordinate position of power. With faculty, staff, and peers, the participant was either in a superior place of authority or operating with, at least on paper, equal power with their leadership peer. However, whether in a place of superior or somewhat equitable authority, the women in the study who talked about support from these groups all talked about their support coming in the form of allyship that provides a sense of protection and/or validation of their leadership and leadership experiences.

Participants in the study talked about this allyship in terms of the protection that it offers from members of their institution who work with and for them. This protection was talked about

in ways directly connected to these women's roles and identities, recognizing these women lead at personal and professional risk in ways others do not, given the microaggressions and gendered racism they experience.

Michelle experienced this recognition from both her staff and faculty at her institution of the risks of her role as the first Black woman executive leader at her institution, also leading in the DEI space. Early in her position, faculty and staff expressed and made her feel the protection they were offering to her. When starting her position, she and her husband were taken out to dinner by a group of Black faculty and that welcome set the stage for her experiencing that sense of belonging and protection. Michelle said:

I have not experienced that in any of my other institutions that I've worked at, where that level of personal touch and care and being seen and in a way, I loosely use this word "held," by a group of . . . Black faculty, has been pivotal to sort of navigating some really difficult cultural realities of where I'm at.

Similarly, another faculty person of color reached out to Michelle after having reflected on what it meant to be not just an ally, but a "co-conspirator" in support of Michelle's work and success.

Michelle shared the faculty member's conversation, expressing:

"This is the moment where I need to show up. Because normally" she goes, "I've been here for so many years and I don't really speak up . . . I realize in order for you to be successful here, I have to speak up in this situation from my experiences. I've been here for X amount of years, and I understand actually what's happening here. And in order for you to have runway, you need me to speak up."

All these faculty were already a part of the institution and knew the environment in which Michelle was entering and offered up front the allyship and protection of their support. Their welcome signaled their support and allyship for and with her for the challenging work in which she would be engaging. The faculty person of color recognized the importance of her own voice in validating and supporting the work that Michelle would be engaged in with DEI to provide her

“runway” or the protected time and space to establish herself and her work given the high potential of pushback and judgement that new executives, particularly Black women executives doing DEI are likely to face.

Similarly, Michelle’s staff offered their allyship and protection recognizing the risks of Michelle’s role as a Black woman leading in the DEI space particularly in light of racial tensions nationwide and on their campus. She stated:

I think they were able to recognize the risk of the role and the risk that it has so early on their own and say, “Our job . . . is also protecting you.” Because I kept saying, I’m going to stand in the gap for them. We’re about to go through a really tumultuous time on our campus around a really tough issue. And they’re like, “but our job is also to protect you.”

Michelle, as did other leaders in the study, felt strongly about her responsibility for protecting and standing up for her team as is often considered a hallmark of strong leadership. Her team, however, also felt this sense of allyship and responsibility to Michelle, to offer protection recognizing the risks she faces in her role and because of her identity. Again, her staff, like the faculty who welcomed her, had knowledge of the environment and landscape Michelle would need time to learn and understand. Their allyship in those initial days and months provided protected opportunity for her to establish herself, her work, and her role in this new environment, and the support of leading with community as opposed to in isolation, which is a challenge for Black women leaders operating as an only or one of few of their kind in PWIs.

Allyship in the form of protection in recognition of the risks Black women face as leaders in PWIs also was talked about in relation to peers. This peer allyship is not only a form and expression of protection, but also of validation of the risks and experiences Black women leaders face in their roles in PWIs. Agnes talked about some of her peer deans who recognize the two Black women deans at their institution are at times in various ways treated differently than the

others. Her peers will call out interactions and situations as racist and offer to speak up on her behalf in places and spaces where she may not be heard as a Black woman dean. Agnes shared:

They do know that we are not treated the same way . . . not respected the same way. And in certain circumstances they ask, “Can I help?” And in circumstances where I need them to help, I will call and say, “I need you to say that.” . . . Like the White male who’s a dean [will] tell me to my face. “Do you want me to say something in this meeting? Because I know if I say it, they will hear me. And if you say it, they won’t.” . . . So, he totally gets it.

Agnes’s White male peer offers allyship in the form of both protection in speaking up in spaces where she may not be heard, and with respect to the validation of her experience, recognizing that what she experiences is a result of the gendered racism that permeates the environment in her institution, which impacts her leadership experience.

For Black women in this study who identified support in their institution as coming from faculty, staff, and peers, this support took the form of allyship that offers protection from and validation of the risks they face as Black women leading in environments that allow the persistence of gender and race-based discrimination that impacts their leadership experience. It is the kind of support that is needed due to the unique and heightened risks Black women face as leaders in which their roles and work are more likely to be questioned, their experience and expertise presumed lacking, and their voices less respected or heard.

Peers, faculty, and staff who recognize these risks, offer up their protection, validation, and voice as allies, providing support and protected space for Black women leaders to do their work, having some of the weight and burden of these risks mitigated and challenged by these allies. Similar experiences of support are experienced from executive leadership to whom some of the participants’ report directly or serve under including their institutions’ presidents. The

positionality and power of these individuals makes this support impactful in even broader and significant ways in some cases.

Finding 2: Setting the Tone: The Influence of Supportive Executive Leadership

The Black women in this study are leading at senior levels, which in some cases includes executive levels of leadership reporting directly to a more senior executive, which may include the chief executive or president. The executive leadership to whom they report are or are among the most recognized and influential leaders in the institution. They set the tone and the expectations for how the institution should operate, what it should be prioritizing in its operations, what its culture and climate should look like or aspire to look like, including what will not be tolerated with respect to climate and culture in the institution or in their particular operational sphere of influence.

Research on organizational change and leadership highlights the importance of the leader's role in creating and influencing the evolution of culture in organizations. Schein (2004) captured this aspect of a leader's role in his work *Organizational Change and Leadership* stating, "Culture is created by shared experience, but it is the leader who initiates this process by imposing his or her beliefs, values and assumptions at the outset" (p. 225). It is through the leader's actions and reactions in leading their institution that they embed these beliefs, values, and assumptions into how their leadership team and institution as a whole are expected to operate and contribute to the climate and culture of the institution.

Schein (2004) highlighted several ways leaders shape the cultures of their institutions, which reflects many aspects of what participants shared as examples of how their leaders show support and resistance to their roles and work as will be discussed in this section and later in this chapter. Some of these "primary embedding mechanisms" include (a) what leaders pay attention

to, measure, and control regularly; (b) how they respond to critical incidents; (c) how they allocate resources; (d) how they role model and coach; (e) how they allocate rewards and status; and (f) how they “recruit, select, promote, and excommunicate” (Schein, 2004, p. 246). These actions and reactions all reflect the significance of what leaders prioritize, invest in, signal, and model when it comes to supporting or resisting the leadership of Black women in their institutions, as well as their values and expectations with respect to the cultures and climates of their institutions.

The support from an executive leader to whom these senior leaders report, particularly if that person is the president, was talked about as having a significant influence on whether the Black woman leader felt they experienced support as a leader in their institution. Only four participants explicitly talked about the executive leader to whom they report, who in some cases was the president, as supportive. Those who did identify this person as a source of support discussed the ways this person showed them support and made them feel supported. This support often came in the form of sponsorship of their leadership and role and providing them with opportunities and connections to advance their work and their careers. These opportunities often included projects that publicly showcased their work and expertise to build respect and support for the participant.

As an example of this type of public showcasing of support and providing opportunities for advancement, Lena talked about a former vice president for whom she worked who was also a woman of color who she considered to be supportive in terms of publicly “celebrating people, making sure you were doing work that was interesting to you. And she wanted to always give you projects that would advance you, not projects that were busy work . . . She was supportive.” Lena’s vice president recognized the importance of public recognition, not only as an act of

appreciation and praise, but also for how it promoted the accomplishments and contributions of the person recognized. For Black women in particular, others in their institutions may not be aware of what that leader is contributing and may be less inclined to pay attention to that leader's role and work, due to their own biases and projections and stereotypes of who Black women are and what to expect of them as leaders.

Angela talked about three of her past four supervisors (all but one was a president) as showing support in different ways from defending her and offering protection and allyship in certain spaces like with the board of trustees, trusting her and her expertise, taking her advice, providing resources for her work, and putting her "out there as an expert in [my] area so that people can support and respect what it is that [I] do." These were all actions that showed and signaled their support of her work and role to her, as well as to other constituencies in the institution. She spoke most highly of her current president who is a person of color and who she credits for the types of support noted earlier, as well as for setting a different tone among the leadership team than she had seen under previous presidents. Angela said:

He knows what it means to be a person of color and to be second guessed and to be undermined and that sort of thing. And so, he supports me in a way that I did not have previously. And he has built a team of people who really care about and respect one another.

Angela's president, as a man of color, has been able to tap into his own leadership experience connected to his social identity as a person of color and that influences how he approaches leadership in creating a more inclusive, respectful, and supportive team. His leadership sets the tone for how people are expected to act and interact under his leadership with each other, including with Angela as another underrepresented leader of color. How he as a leader embeds his beliefs and values as a chief executive is consistent with many of the ways that

participants in this study talked about how their own social identities as Black women and the values and life experiences associated with them influence how they lead. As Black women, they have strived to promote inclusion and respect, and advocate for others, particularly underrepresented and marginalized people in their institutions, to address the challenges the institutional climates and cultures pose for them.

With respect to the support executive leadership is positioned to provide to Black women senior leaders, Michelle's president, a White man, was put on notice from Michelle when she interviewed that she was going to need his sponsorship to be successful as the first Black woman executive leader at the institution. He has followed through on his promises of sponsorship in several ways including making sure early on she was connecting with trustees and ensuring she is not silenced and overlooked in executive meetings. Michelle indicated:

When I say an idea and multiple other people like, dismiss me, and then someone else says it like, you know, down line. He has done it at least on three occasions where he's like, "well, just like [Michelle] had said," That happens quite a bit with this group. Fragility. It's all right. But he's really good at trying to recognize it when it's happening. And [he doesn't] sound confrontational, but he'll just say, "Well, you know, I want to go back to what [Michelle] had said earlier." That's how he's doing it. To reset this way.

This is one of the ways that Michelle's president is living up to his commitment to sponsor and support her leadership as a Black woman and first of her kind in executive leadership at his institution. He is trying to point out and reset common and persisting microaggressions that Black women face in the workplace such as not having their ideas heard and attributed to them by colleagues. In so doing he is asserting his own values and expectations for how others should be interacting with Michelle as their executive peer and member of his team. Michelle went on to describe the value of what he does in setting the tone for his executive

team and institution with respect to her presence and role as a Black woman executive leader, saying:

I think [he] sets the tone as the president and . . . I think a lot of our philosophy aligns in the work. And so that helps when, you know, they're listening. Whether he values what I do, the direction I want to go in, and no one wants to be seen as out of step with him.

That alignment of values, sponsorship, and support from her president was a nonnegotiable requirement for Michelle in taking this position as a first Black woman executive at her institution. This relationship and support from the president have proven, in her case and in the case of some other participants, to be a significant influence on the leadership experience of these women in setting the tone and expectations for how others in leadership should be interacting with and respecting these women and their positions. Given their positionality as chief officers, their executive leaders' teams and others in the institution are essentially forced to respond to their presidents' expectations and the values and beliefs they are espousing about what the climates and cultures of their team and institutions should look like with respect to inclusion and equity generally, and how the Black women senior leaders and other underrepresented and marginalized people should be treated specifically.

Pisiform similarly experiences support from her senior executive boss who is a senior vice president and a Black woman. The chancellor to whom her boss reports is a Black man. Pisiform specifically spoke about the support of her senior vice president and president taking the form of professional development and executive coaching and feeling "poured into" so she can "pour out." In being supported or "poured into," she is able to lead from a place of better well-being and balance that allows her to be a better and more supportive leader to others paying forward that support. Her current institution and the support she receives there also makes her

feel like she can be open about her professional ambitions and that she is supported in pursuing them. She feels supported in being open and authentic about her goals knowing she will be supported in realizing them and not undermined in her work to advance in her career.

Pisiform's senior vice president was a big part of why she went to her institution. Pisiform feels for the first time in her career in higher education that she has someone who cares about her professional wellness and balance, and who, as another Black woman, is attuned to the propensity of institutions to overburden leaders, particularly Black women leaders who more often face role overload and additional labor expectations as compared to their White counterparts (Lewis, 2016; Townsend, 2021). Pisiform shared:

There are definitely different things that she's able to call out. We retreat, and . . . we are always checking in on how each other is doing, as much as we're checking in on how each other is working. . . . and to talk through the emotions of what that means for what we're doing . . . so we can be attuned to what people are feeling and . . . just to be sensitive to the changes. . . . She was the first person who cared about, well, at least showed that she cared about me in a way that she kept me from doing things that would be bad for me, but good for the organization. . . . I think in other places I've been they will build a mountain on your back. And she would not let me do that.

Pisiform has an executive boss who supports and sponsors her success, but also supports her wellness and balance in the work that she does helping her to avoid the all-too-common burdens and tax Black women often pay in supporting their institutions at their own expense. Pisiform's senior vice president, as a Black woman leader, recognizes this propensity of institutions to impose these burdens and challenges onto Black women leaders and similar to the participants in this study, her social identity influences how she is able to show support and advocate for Pisiform as another Black women leader in a PWI.

Interestingly, when given the opportunity to talk about what support for their leadership looks like, only four participants explicitly talked about their senior executive leaders to whom

they report, in most cases presidents, as sources of support for their leadership and people who take actions that contribute to them feeling that their careers and roles and persons are supported in their work. It was also interesting, of these four participants' examples, three participants' referenced bosses who are people of color whose own social identities and the influences of them align and mirror to some degree, the social identities and influences and experiences of the participants. This alignment of identity and experience in these cases contributed to those senior and chief executive leaders' abilities to provide support and set the tone and expectations for how their direct reports and their roles are to be respected and supported. Although Michelle's boss and president is a White man, he is also someone who was made aware of the need to operate as a sponsor and has positioned himself as a protective and validating ally to Michelle and to her work, similarly setting a tone and expectations for how she is to be viewed and respected as a leader.

This all speaks to the impacts senior and chief executive leaders have on the organizational cultural of their institutions, due their positionality and ability to embed their values and priorities into the communities they lead. In addition to the various support Black women may receive from the people to whom they report and under whom they serve, Black women senior leaders in this study also find and create internal support networks where and when they can among other Black women in their own institutions.

Finding 3: Black Women Leaders Coalesce to Create Internal Networks of Support and Validation for Each Other

For most Black women senior leaders in PWIs, they are often an only or even a first of their kind in these senior leadership roles in their institutions, making them the “extreme minority” or token leader of their social identity group (Chance, 2022, p. 50). There is an

isolation sometimes described as “loneliness” some Black women experience as they climb to higher levels of leadership in their PWIs where they are less and less likely to see others that look like themselves and share the same kinds of experiences as leaders (Chance, 2022).

Although there may be no other, or very few, Black women leading at the same or more senior levels in an institution, participants’ stories shared earlier in the chapter revealed how some women have their own networks of Black women colleagues they connect with inside and outside of their institutions, referred to by Michelle as her “tribe” and described by Maeve as her “sisters of the struggle.” These were talked about earlier as other trusted Black women with whom they can connect for guidance, advice, and mentorship, who serve as a welcomed source of influence on their leadership and how they navigate their careers. Black women coalescing to create and nurture these networks within their institutions are significant sources of support for their leadership given the shared institutional contexts in which they work.

Six women in the study talked about the impacts of having other Black women leaders within their institution as a source of support for their leadership and leadership experience. This support was described in terms of the personal support and validation other Black women are able to provide to them in the face of challenges and barriers related to their social identities. It was also talked about as a professional resource and network providing information and connections akin to what their White and male peers experience in circles that they are not a part of nor have access to. The impacts of this support are heightened given that these networks and connections are internal, and these women not only share common experiences as Black women leaders in higher education, but also common experiences within a shared institutional context in which they are navigating the same climates and cultures and the challenges and barriers they may present to their work as Black women.

Agnes and Maya are deans at the same institution. They spoke of each other and the personal and professional support they are able to provide to one another within their institution where there are very few Black women in leadership positions. They are able to validate what each other observes and experiences in meetings that may be problematic from their perspectives as Black women leaders, sometimes without even saying a word. Agnes shared:

When I came here, there were no other women deans. . . . I was the only African American woman dean. And when [Maya and I] see each other, we just in 10 seconds know what's happening. . . . I look at her, I go, "Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>." And . . . [She's] like, . . . "Mm-Hmm." I know exactly what that means. And it also makes you know you're not crazy. . . . Like, when you're there alone, there's no checks. I can't turn around to the other person and say, "Did you see what I just saw? Did this just happen? Or am I imagining this?" [Maya] and I just look at each other [and] go "Uhhuh. Alright."

Maya and Agnes have the benefit of working in similar meetings and leadership spaces as college deans and can bear witness to the happenings, dynamics, and interactions that they know are problematic from their perspectives as Black women, whether channeled at them directly or about another matter. They have worked to extend that network of personal and professional support to other Black women in other roles at the institution to create what Maya described as a "community for us so that we could come together, we could talk . . . and kind of feel some sisterhood and allyship." They have worked to connect with other Black women faculty, staff, and administrators, recognizing they are all navigating similar challenges related to their intersectional identities as Black women in an environment in which they are severely underrepresented, and in which gendered racism and other forms of bias and discrimination persist.

Jasmine has often times been an only Black woman dean at her institution as well, but recently two other Black women were brought on as deans. Those women and a small group of

other Black women in leadership in the institution have created a network of support and friendship in their PWI. Jasmine stated:

So, the [group] of us support each other all day long. Like we are just texting furiously all day long, even when we're in meetings together and like, crazy sh*t happens and we're like, "what the f*ck?" . . . But we give each other confidence. We validate each other. . . . Sometimes if you see something crazy, you are like, "Is it me or is it this situation?" And so, when you have . . . a group of sisters who are in that same PWI working environment, seeing the same things validating you, it just adds confidence, and lends credibility to your perceptions. So, I would say I walk maybe with a bit more swagger because I've got a team of folks behind me that are supporting me and I'm supporting them, and we only want each other to be successful.

Networks like Jasmine's group of sisters in leadership provide that support and validation, as well as that professional network that others in the institution may have, to share information and support like what is referred to as the *boys' club* in office environments of usually White men. This group contributes to each other's confidence as leaders, as well as to each other's successes in ways they may not get from their peers who are not Black women. The validation they are able to provide one another in processing problematic work situations targeted at them or reflecting more generally problematic practices, policies, and communications is even more powerful given the shared spaces they occupy in meetings, as well as the shared institutional environment. They are bearing witness to the same contexts and happenings and in doing so they are more confident in recognizing that what they are seeing and experiencing while often impacting them is external to them and not to be internalized as about them.

Maria talked about the support of other Black women in her PWI as that resource and network that provided information and professional support that benefited one another's work in the different operational areas in which they led. Maria recalled:

There was a time that there were five of us who were assistant vice chancellors across the whole system office. There were about five of us that were Black. And I know that because I got us all together for lunch one day. And it was just fun to talk. And our units were very diverse, you know, finance, facilities . . . academic affairs . . . But just to talk back and forth about, you know, how our roles were different. What it did was sort of open up a line of communication a little bit better. Because there are, sometimes you need to know a little bit more about the finances when you're in academic affairs. So, you need to know a little bit more about facilities and the possibilities of facilities when doing your academic buildings and classrooms and dorms.

This professional internal networking group of Black women leaders provided insights and information that benefited Maria's leadership role and work. It was a network she established with intention, recognizing having five Black women in these senior leadership roles was an opportunity to establish connection and a network in a space in which that opportunity was usually rare for Black women, and significantly more common place for her peers who were not Black women.

The internal networks of Black women leaders and the benefits they provide are something that Pisiform experiences regularly being at a PWI with such a notably diverse senior leadership team. For her, the diversity of the leadership team at her institution, including other Black women, means she can have those "golf course" type conversations that White men experience, but in different spaces these Black women leaders occupy informally, doing activities they enjoy like attending galas and inviting each other to new restaurants and spas. So, whereas she acknowledges that most senior leaders are networking with other senior leaders, "If you're a . . . senior leader and you're also a Black woman, there's a group text . . . of "Hey, we're going to meet . . . and talk about this, or whatever." There is also intention, more easily realized, to establish both formal and informal connection among these Black women senior leaders, providing support, information sharing, and friendship and eliminating or lessening the

risks of loneliness and isolation Black women leaders are more prone to experience in PWIs, where they are the only or one of very few Black women in leadership or across their institution.

In PWIs where there may be just one, or a few, or even a notable number of other Black women leaders, Black women are seeking out and coalescing to create their own internal networks of support that their peers who are not Black women already benefit from formally and informally due to their majority or dominant numbers. Black women create and foster these networks with intention where they can to balance against the siloed and isolating impacts of being one of very few in most cases in PWIs and of being marginalized and not part of the boys' network, even in more diverse spaces. These networks of support provide validation of their shared experiences in the specific contexts of their PWIs, and also provide the more traditional benefits of professional networks with information sharing and insights that supports their professional success.

Participants in the study had varied experiences with what support for their leadership looks like in their institution. For 13 of the participants in the study, the support they experience has come from either staff, faculty, and/or peers who provide allyship, protection, and validation for these Black women leaders, recognizing how they operate and lead at greater risk than other leaders in their institutions due to their social identities as Black women.

For four participants, support for leadership comes from their executive leaders to whom they report, including presidents, who sponsor their success publicly highlighting their work and roles on campus, providing protective cover from less supportive constituencies like board of trustees or peer executive leaders, acting against prevalent microaggressions they experience, and working to set a tone and modeling expectations for how they should be viewed and treated as leaders in their institutions. Six Black women in the study talked about their own internal

networks of support with other Black women in their institution, which provide them with validation of what they see and experience in their shared institutional spaces and provide each other with the resources and information often informally shared among their peers who are not Black women.

Interestingly, no participants shared having institutionalized resources that provide them support for their leadership and leadership experience. The support shared comes from individuals who share marginalized identities or from others who choose to operate as allies in their institutions. There was nothing shared in the interviews about actions that come from the institutions themselves addressing policies, practices, or culture or that would provide resources that would impact the experiences of Black women in senior leadership.

Lena did share there is a women of color network at her institution that was institutionally initiated under a former president; however, she noted the network is targeted at administrative assistants and people in junior roles. Whereas Lena will occasionally attend these meetings to show her support for the group, the support she receives at her level of leadership mostly comes from her peers and colleagues providing support to one another, and generally not from executive leaders or the institution.

Understanding what support for their leadership looks like and feels like, and how it impacts their leadership experience reveals some of the ways in which colleagues in their institutions respond to their leadership, role, and work as connected to their social identities as Black women. Understanding what these participants see as support speaks to what they need and seek to feel protected and somewhat less burdened by challenges and barriers they may face related to the legacies and persistence of bias and discrimination in their PWIs, which can reveal themselves in behaviors, actions, attitudes, and communications that promote and enable the

persistence of the gendered racism that uniquely affects Black women. The following explores how others respond to their work and roles as leaders, looking at what resistance to their leadership looks like, how it feels, and how it impacts Black women senior leaders in their PWIs.

Resistance to Black Women's Leadership in PWIs: The Persisting Enablement of Gendered Racism

Resistance comes to us as people and as Black women. We never can tell when that resistance is because we're Black and because we're women because we don't have a counterfactual. We've always been Black; we've always been women. I'm going to keep being Black. I'm going to keep being [a woman].

—Jasmine

Participants were also asked to discuss what resistance to their leadership looks like including how it makes them feel, how it impacts them, and how these experiences relate to their social identities as Black women. Resistance to their roles and work as leaders in this study was discussed by participants as those behaviors, actions, attitudes, interactions, and communications that Black women experience, which not only do not support and promote them and their work, but in many ways and cases undermines their work and roles as leaders and puts their professional and personal well-being at risk. To further explore these experiences with resistance, participants were asked about how they felt their leadership experiences, including experiences with resistance to their leadership compared to those of their peers who are not Black women. What participants shared reflected a tale of divergent experiences within their senior and executive leadership circles in their PWIs.

The experiences of White women and White men in leadership were viewed as distinct from the experiences of Black women. Black women senior leaders experience their peers having different bars and expectations associated with their leadership roles that are in some cases less demanding, more forgiving, and which come with higher presumptions of competence

and experience, and more authority and visibility ascribed with their roles. Even in the face of resistance and microaggressions associated with their gender, White women peers were viewed by some participants as benefiting from many of the same privileges as their White male peers, and as processing and being impacted by gender discrimination differently than the Black women leaders.

The impacts of both gender and race-based discrimination together have an exponentialized and intensified impact on how Black women experience leadership and resistance to their leadership connected with their intersectional identities and the unique forms and permutations of subordination and discrimination with which they must contend in their institutions. Their status as tokens of their race and gender in their leadership circles in their institutions has been framed as part of institutional advancement of DEI objectives. Institutions in this post-George Floyd era have initiated or recommitted to DEI objectives that include diversifying faculty, staff, and leadership to address the persisting underrepresentation of multiple marginalized and minoritized groups including Black women (Cumming et al., 2023).

What some of the stories shared by Black women in this study evidence, however, are the ways in which the token senior leadership roles occupied by Black women can be experienced in practice as weaponized tokenism enabling the persistence of gendered racism in the climates, cultures, and practices of these same institutions. The token status of Black women in these institutions is used in a narrative of progress, while in practice these same Black women are leading under the weight of challenges and barriers to their leadership, fueled by the negative projections and stereotypes of others onto their leadership that show up as various types of microaggressions, negative presumptions, and inequitable expectations and treatment by others particularly when viewed in comparison to the leadership experiences of their peers. In these

ways, their token status is weaponized against them with the often-staggering weight and impacts of these projections and treatment that can have serious consequences for their leadership experiences, careers, and professional and personal well-being.

Several findings emerged as to how the leaders in this study experience resistance to their roles and work as leaders, as connected to their social identities as Black women. These findings are discussed and analyzed as follows:

1. Double standards and inequitable expectations: the divergent experiences and additional burdens on Black women's leadership as compared to their peers.
2. Black women's leadership: tokenism that is weaponized by gendered racism but framed as evidence of inclusion.
3. Executive leadership's influence on the persistence of gendered racism: modeling and enabling of resistance to Black women's leadership roles and work.

Finding 1: Double Standards and Inequitable Expectations: The Divergent Experiences and Additional Burdens on Black Women's Leadership as Compared to Their Peers

All the Black women senior leaders shared reflections on how they believed the experiences of senior leadership of their peers who are not Black women compare to their own. Most of their reflections were about White male peers, as well as men of color, with some reflections on the experiences of female peers who are not Black, most of whom are also White. Black women senior leaders in the study have experienced divergent and inequitable expectations and double standards for their leadership as compared to their White male and female peers. These inequitable expectations and double standards have translated into added burdens on their leadership connected to their social identities as Black women.

The inequitable expectations and double standards are in comparison to their peers who are not Black women and are often characterized by and reflect stereotypes and biases about the competencies of Black women leaders as being less than their peers. These stereotypes and biases also often reflect devalued views of their work and contributions as fulfilling labor needs versus being strategic leadership, which often leads to job stacking and added responsibilities related to Black Tax, and lower levels of authority, leadership respect, and compensation commensurate with the labor expectations imposed on them. These types of inequitable and biased treatment, which are passively enabled in environments that allow the persistence of gendered racism are forms of resistance to Black women's leadership in how these behaviors, actions, attitudes, and related communications impact their leadership experience in needing to lead with the burdens of heightened challenges and barriers.

In talking about how the leadership experience of their White male counterparts compared to their own, eight participants shared stories that specifically involved differing expectations. These expectations took the form of bars for the performance of their White male peers that were less demanding, more forgiving, and which came with higher presumptions of competence and professional experience for how well they do their work and how productive they are often giving them credit where credit may not always be due. There was also a theme of entitlement with respect to how their White male peers are permitted to communicate and carry themselves professionally. White male peers often did not have to be as conscious of their communications and actions as potentially reflecting negatively on them and their work as compared to the Black women leaders who experience higher risks of their communications and actions being more harshly judged through deficit lenses and preexisting biases and negative presumptions about their professional competence, worth, and character.

Jasmine talked about these different standards, bars, and entitlements as the “arrogance and swagger” with which her White male colleagues are able to “walk through the world” compared to how she and her Black women leader colleagues are able to operate. Jasmine shared:

Yeah. I’m shocked at the ways in which White males can be so cavalier with what they do and say. And as Black women, we have to be so careful because what we say is going to always be misperceived. Or has the potential. So, for example, I’m not a social media person. . . . That being said, I have a White male colleague who just recently posted this snide comment to a person who’d been parking in his parking spot . . . And me and my other Black friends were like, “What the hell? Like one, how did he get a parking stop spot number one.” I didn’t know a dean could have a parking spot.” . . . Only the president and the provost have their own spot. . . . But the fact that he would be so, I would be so worried about how I’d be perceived by others. Like what a snobby, arrogant problem to have that somebody’s parked in your parking spot. You know, really this is what you’re posting about? Like, there’s a freaking Israeli Hamas war going on right now and you’re posting about this? And the fact that he just doesn’t even have any qualms with that is just shocking. So as Black women, we always have to be careful about how other people are going to receive what we do and say, whereas we see our White male colleagues just do whatever, and he says whatever.

This type of “cavalier” attitude as seen with her White male colleague in his social media posts, is also observed by Jasmine in work meetings as well. She shared:

It was his first retreat of the deans . . . and he, at this meeting, this man said, “I just, I’ve never been trained in fundraising. I don’t know anything about fundraising. I don’t get it at all. I just don’t, I don’t understand it.” And me and my friends were looking at each other like “you said that out loud? Like, at least we’re going to try to fake it and you know, we’re going to fundraise to the best of our ability and we’re going to lean in and express a willingness to learn.” None of us were taught how to be fundraisers. But that’s a key expectation for a dean. . . . But the fact that he felt comfortable saying publicly in front of the president and the provost, like we were at a retreat with only senior leaders. I’m like, “you said that out loud? Okay. I guess you can be your true, authentic self. Congratulations, <laugh>.” Yeah. Because we can’t, we don’t have that luxury.

For Jasmine and her Black women peers, they do not feel they have the “luxury” of not reflecting on how what they communicate could be construed as reflecting less competence or be

construed as arrogant, or as a poor reflection on character. This is a burden of heightened consciousness she and her peers need to practice in considering their communications and actions daily.

Jasmine feels the challenges of her role as dean are exacerbated by her being a Black woman in the role. When she took on the role, she reached out to her predecessor who was a Black man who had advice for her taking on this position. Jasmine said:

Because he knew I was going to catch hell as a . . . Black woman. And so, he was like, “Don’t let the bastards grind you down. You’ve got this.” So, I take words like that of inspiration because I know that, you know, my role is already hard, and it’s just got this added layer of maybe stigma because the leader is a Black woman. . . . I deal with people who probably give me grief in ways . . . they would absolutely not give me grief if I were a White male.

Being a Black woman is an additional challenge to an already challenging position of being a senior leader, in Jasmine’s case a dean. For Jasmine, it means that she experiences the weight of judgment and “grief” from others in her institution that would not be leveled against a White male who would be operating under a different set of expectations and evaluation. She and her peers face a heightened risk and vulnerability to resistance in the forms of their leadership being judged and pushed back on by members of their institution in ways that their White male peers are not subjected. This entitlement on the part of those resisting them is enabled by the ways it is tolerated and accepted as normative behaviors and attitudes.

These double standards for Black women’s leadership were also discussed by Angela. She shared her experiences and reflections on how certain leadership behaviors of her White male colleagues are viewed and received positively but are seen negatively and pushed back on by others when she exhibits them. Angela stated:

Where a White male can come into a situation and that he can be assertive and he can be verbose and he can be, you know, confident. Then I have to mediate that a

little bit because if I come in and I start . . . a conversation, then I'm intimidating. If I am confident in whatever decisions I'm making, then I'm arrogant. . . . I know that I can't always do things the way that other people can.

Angela has to weigh and mediate her behaviors with this added consideration of the stereotypes and gendered and racialized negative projections that will be ascribed to the same behaviors that are accepted, valued, and normalized as behaviors of successful White male leaders. Needing to operate and lead conscious of these realities adds additional layers of reflection and sensitivity for Black women senior leaders in choosing how to approach situations, how to communicate, and how to present themselves, recognizing that responses to them will be ascribed values and reactions that are projections onto their identities as Black women. Black women leaders are weighed down in this way by a double standard that puts them at marked disadvantages in their leadership.

In talking about the exponentially greater burdens and expectations she manages as a Black woman senior leader as compared to her senior leader colleagues who are not Black women, Grace described the additional work and time pressures that she is under to deliver the high quality work that she holds herself to and that her institution expects which is a different level of expectation than she sees for others. She described her colleagues who are not Black women as being able to work with a certain level of "casualness" and "mediocrity" which is not how Black women senior leaders can work and still achieve the same levels of success. Grace shared:

I carry more burdens than they do. My portfolio is heavy anyway, but it is inherently more heavy because I have to look at things through a variety of different lenses. I am called into service more than they all are for things that are directly within my sphere of influence and things that are not . . . There's always a bit of a pause before I open my mouth to say something, to think about how it's going to land. . . . There's just a different level of freedom, if I can say that, in terms of the things that just how they operate. So, for instance, there are a couple

of colleagues at the table who regularly miss deadlines, who don't . . . work with the same degree of integrity or . . . their work ethic is just not the same. And I'm flabbergasted . . . and so, there's there the expectation that I will consistently deliver a high quality product because there's a part of me that wonders if I ever deliver something subpar, what the outcome of that will be. . . . I would say that I spend more time on task because I try to do everything with a degree of excellence. I try to always hit the deadlines. . . . So, for the first time, Susan, in years, I found myself pulling like all-nighters . . . and I'm like, "this is madness." And then the same breath I'm hearing about other colleagues who [are] not hitting any of [their] deadlines. [They] actually went out to a football game this weekend, like on Saturday, and then [they] went golfing on Sunday and [they're] not getting any of [their] stuff done. . . . So, in that way, I think it's very, a very different experience. There's a casualness with which they approach the work sometimes almost a mediocrity with which they approach the work. Whereas what's been instilled in us, and I have lots of Black female colleagues, their excellence is just expected. It's what, it's been ingrained in us. I don't hear us use this language nearly as much. We had to be twice as good to be half as much. And yet it undergirds everything that we do, it is ever present. It is like the signpost that sits off to the side that just gently blinks at us. So, while we don't walk around saying that anymore, it is so deeply in us that that's how we move in these spaces. So absolutely. There's a different level of energy and it's not all of them, but there's a different level of energy with which many of my senior level colleagues approach the work.

These double standards and divergent experiences Grace described on how she operates compared to many of her colleagues reflects the old trope of Black people having to be twice as good in what they do as compared to White people to succeed. This trope reflects the heightened scrutiny that Black women's work receives from their colleagues due to the negative presumptions and stereotypes about their experience, competence, and attitudes with which they often must contend in the workplace, in addition to the shorter runways and less forgiving reactions to their work as compared to the leeway their peers receive. With greater expectations and higher bars for performance comes greater burdens and labor for how Grace and other Black women senior leaders need to operate as senior leaders.

Lena echoed this phenomenon of differing expectations and performance bars in her experience with Black women having to prove competency where competency is presumed for her counterparts and with the bar for their work performance being different. Lena shared:

Definitely [for] me as a Black woman, you have to prove that you have, you probably have had to do the job uncompensated for a while before you actually get the job. And that's one piece of it. Whereas I've seen White males get a chance because people believe in them, you know? Whereas I think if you are a Black woman, or probably a Black male, but I'll say a Black woman, I think your bar to prove that you can do work is higher.

Lena's observation and lived experience is that of Black women needing to prove their expertise and ability where expertise and ability may be presumed for her White male counterparts. She is also observing that while Black men may also face those same burdens, the burden is exponentialized for Black women. This is consistent with the heightened risks and challenges that Black women face due to the intersectionality of their identities and the double jeopardy they face with gendered racism.

Other participants also talked about the higher bars and added burdens for Black women with respect to the presumptions of competence attributed to their White and male colleagues that are not presumed of them. Interestingly for Michelle, these presumptions of competence extended to her Black male predecessor to an extent that was not afforded to her in the beginning of her time in the role. Michelle commented:

I think he had a lot more presumptions of competence that he didn't need to overcome in the beginning. . . . He had a little bit more of a runway to be successful here in the beginning. So, but there was also a larger cohort of Black men here. And so, they, and just mostly the senior staff were men at the time.

Similar to Lena's observation of differences in the experiences of Black women and Black men, Michelle also believed differing expectations and bars for performance transcended race in this case, with the power and privilege associated with being male extending to

Michelle's predecessor. Given a larger cohort of senior level men at the institution, her predecessor may have benefited from gender-based networks of support and positive associations and presumptions associated with gender mitigating some of the impacts of negative projections and stereotypes associated with race.

Agnes talked about racialized and gendered presumptions as requiring her to continually acquaint people with who she is and what she has accomplished professionally. She is not afforded the benefit of the doubt or presumptions of competence and experience her White male colleagues receive even after her many years at her institution and despite her distinguished career and widely recognized name and achievements. Agnes stated:

Here, you're not around people like you. And you stand out. So, every single day, you know, you are only as good as your last record. . . . You always feel you have to come back into the same room with the same people and acquaint them with what you have done. . . . It takes them longer, I think, to trust that I have all of the stuff I had. I think if I wasn't [a Black woman] they would anoint me with those things without seeing it here. I had to show it. . . . If I was a White man, they would anoint me with all those things. They would assume I have everything. . . . It's a subtle difference, but not so subtle because then I have to show it and prove it. . . . It's like they can't hold who we are in our totality. So, they hold some pieces, and some pieces fall away. . . . Because they forget. Apparently. I don't know. I didn't forget what they did.

Agnes's peers who are not Black women are "anointed" with presumptions of credentials and experience that Agnes has to continually remind her colleagues of about her. She may stand out because of her race and gender, but her numerous professional accomplishments do not stand out and carry forward with her among her colleagues at her institution who need to be continually reminded of who she is and the talents, experience, and credentials she brings to her role and work. Her White and male peers do not experience this same burden in that even if people do not recall their credentials and experience, they are presumed to have them without having to continually prove them or remind people of them.

Lena went further in talking about how her peers who are not Black women not only do not have to prove themselves and their competencies and experience, but also get credit attributed to them for things they may not have done. She described how she has seen numerous times where people who are not Black women get credited for things she has done or things she knows someone else has done, noting, “There’s a rush to credit those people and there’s a hesitancy to credit us.” This connects with the experience described by some participants with support looking like public acknowledgement and appreciation of their contributions and successes with the flip side of this being the resistance of not only denying Black women recognition and credit for their work, but also presuming those contributions must be associated with their peers and colleagues who are not Black women.

Many of these divergent experiences reflect a level of privilege among their White counterparts in being able to navigate these professional spaces unaware of their identity-based privilege because their privilege is presumed, and a given of who they are (McIntosh, 2019). This compares to the hyper awareness all the women in the study talked about to some degree in professional spaces, knowing they are viewed, perceived, and judged differently at work where they are the token one or one of few of their identity group. Clara described this hyper awareness in her attempt to explain to a White woman peer how her presence is reacted to differently in workspaces due to her identity as a Black women. Clara shared:

I think as a Black person and as a Black woman being in those leadership positions in higher education . . . there has really never been a time when I can afford to not be aware of who I am and who I’m representing in a space. And the few times that someone has tried to convince me, “Oh, you can just sit down and just be you,” I can’t. . . . White people in this space, they don’t have to be hyper cognizant of their identity. Most of the time I am hyper cognizant of my identity anytime I walk into any of those meetings, actually anywhere I go. But in particularly, when I have been in these institutions, you know, when I go to the bathroom, when I’m walking into any kind of room, I am hyper aware that they’re

seeing a Black woman walking into this room and assessing absolutely everything that I do. . . . I've shared with people in terms of building their own awareness. . . . So, [Laurie], who was the White woman who was in leadership and who was very resistant, I'm like, "We're both going to walk into this room, but I want you to see, I just want you to look around you and see when I walk in and where I sit, how people are looking at me. And pick another person, another White woman and see the way she walks in, and the way people react . . . It's going to be different. And see who attunes and how they attune when I ask a question because it's going to be different."

This hyper awareness of self Clara described is a burden that Black women leaders carry, which their White peers do not have to carry as part of their White privilege (McIntosh, 2019). It is also one of the burdens of tokenism in recognizing that Black women leaders are constantly representing their identity group in their work and presence. They are being not only judged against the stereotypes and preconceived beliefs about Black woman, but also working to contribute to what little, in some cases, people believe they know and understand about Black women due to their being an only or one of few Black women leaders with whom they work.

Two participants explicitly acknowledged that their White female colleagues also carry burdens associated with their gender, but from their perspectives the burden is a singular focus as opposed to the complex and exponentialized burden of the intersectional discrimination and challenge that Black women face. For Maria, she saw her female colleagues as having the "luxury" of focusing on the feminist implications of their leadership experience compared to White males, whereas Maria has to deal with issues affecting her as a woman and because she is Black.

For the Black women in this study, they view their leadership experiences as distinct and divergent from that of their peers who are not Black women. Their White male and female counterparts operate in environments that privileges their leadership with different expectations and lenses on their leadership that ascribe positive presumptions regarding their competence,

experience, and contributions. Their peers do not operate with the same burdens and expectations of having to constantly prove these same things. For some participants they see their peers as being able to work with lower bars for their performance not feeling the pressure of outputs and deadlines that Black women feel reflecting the trope of having to be twice as good at the same job. Black women in the study have felt the need to continually remind people of their credentials and accomplishments whereas their colleagues are presumed to have the backgrounds and experience commensurate with their roles.

Black women leaders are also operating under the burden of having to police their own behaviors and styles knowing the critical lenses being used to evaluate their actions and communications. What is accepted as normalized and professional attitudes and behaviors for White males in speaking up in meetings and exhibiting confidence is often seen as arrogance or demanding behavior in Black women who have to be hyper cognizant of how they act, communicate, and are perceived in professional spaces and interactions. Despite Black women leaders in higher education being more highly sought after in this post George Floyd/Black Lives Matter period of increased focus on diversity in leadership, the resistance they face to their leadership brings into question whether institutions are able to exercise true inclusion or are setting up Black women to have their social identities weaponized against them in the resistance they face (Cumming et al., 2023; Gasman et al., 2015; Lederman, 2022).

Finding 2: Black Women's Senior Leadership: Tokenism Weaponized by Gendered Racism but Framed as Evidence of Inclusion

The resistance Black women senior leaders experience can be seen as a form of weaponized tokenism, which frames their roles as evidence of advancing DEI, while at the same time enabling the persistence of gendered racism through multiple permutations of

microaggressions that undermine their authority, provide inadequate supports for success, question their competence, and deny and invalidate their experiences with resistance as discrimination. Black women's leadership positions are celebrated in PWIs as evidence of successfully moving the DEI needle; however, in many cases at the same time their tokenized status as an only or one of few representing their identity group can be weaponized or used against them in how they experience this resistance connected to their intersectional identities and the gendered racism that continues to be enabled in these spaces.

The efforts of PWIs to focus on DEI initiatives, which include diversifying senior leadership, have led to some institutions having more Black women leaders and, in some cases, perhaps their first Black woman senior leader in their history. However, the Black women in these positions are still facing the types of microaggressions that Black women have historically faced in higher education and other industries such as stereotype threat, Black Tax, and tokenism (Lewis, 2016; Townsend, 2021).

All the women in this study, some of whom are a first Black woman senior or executive leader in their institutions and one of whom had her role created as part of intentional efforts to promote DEI in her institution, shared stories of these various types of microaggressions and resistance to their leadership. In the context of an institutional focus on DEI, the roles of these women and the resistance they face in their work takes on a form a weaponized tokenism unique to and focused on their positions as senior leaders in which they face attacks that undermine their authority and create roadblocks to their success. This weaponized tokenism in some cases also takes the form of invalidating their experiences as resulting from discrimination with institutions denying or ignoring the persistence of gendered racism in their environment, and the impact of it on these leaders' experiences. As an example, in recent years, there has been an uptick in the

number of DEI positions and operations across industries including in higher education, as well as evidence of a trend of exits from these roles for a variety of reasons including a lack of authentic and meaningful support from institutional leadership to enable these roles and operations to do impactful work (Buchholz, 2023; Knox, 2023).

Pisiform discussed what is described as the glass cliff phenomenon of organizations, promoting women into top leadership in cases where the organization or unit is struggling, what is needed to turn it around is significant, and the chances of failure are higher (Cook & Glass, 2014). She sees this in higher education particularly with newer positions in areas like in DEI, which are struggling to make changes in institutions whose climates and cultures have been built on generations of exclusionary and discriminatory history and practice. Pisiform said:

I feel like the positions that have existed, or that Black women have been promoted into have been areas that either have never existed before. So, it's going to be an uphill battle no matter what. Or they're fixing something. It's never walking into some sort of maintenance mode job. It's something that has been mismanaged and now needs to be managed. And so being able to right a burning ship demonstrates a considerable amount of capacity. But it takes a toll.

Pisiform has observed how Black women leaders are less likely to walk into turnkey operations, and often are coming into situations that are challenged, that need to be built, or that need to be fixed. Black women leaders are already operating in environments where the expectations are inequitably higher with the added burden of operating in response to negative presumptions associated with their identities as Black women. Adding to that burden is being hired into these senior roles in operations that require added capacity to develop or fix them and where the odds of success are less for any leader, considering those challenges.

As token leaders in both established and new roles, Black women leaders stand out as the “extreme minority” facing the pressure of representing their social identity as Black women

(Chance, 2022, p. 50). Whereas their holding these positions is framed as evidence of inclusion and progress, this token status still comes with related challenges enabled by the gendered racism that persists in these spaces as unaddressed aspects of the existing cultures and climates. The resistance Black women in this study face as senior leaders in their PWIs can be viewed as weaponizing their token status, attacking them and their roles in ways that create resistance or significant barriers and challenges, which attempts to undermine their success and which they have to struggle against to address and overcome.

Resistance as Undermining Authority. All women in the study have had experiences with resistance in the form of actions by either their staff, faculty, peers, and senior/chief executive leadership, which question, attack and undermine their authority. Two participants shared specific stories of this type of resistance occurring very early in their positions, reflecting the influence of biased presumptions about their leadership before they had opportunity to establish who they are as leaders and people.

Angela had an experience early in her employment at her institution with staff who were unhappy with reporting to a person of color. They reacted by making up baseless claims about her in response to their feelings about reporting to a Black woman. Angela stated:

I had a couple of people who were really unhappy, to have a person of color to be their leader. And ultimately both of those people left. One of them, he filed a complaint against me. And ultimately the investigation demonstrated that he had, I'm trying to remember how they put it, but he had an "irrational anger" for anything that it was that I had to say. . . . And then the other person . . . she said that I never supported them. I never did anything. All I ever did was sit in my office and watch Netflix or something to that effect. And <laugh>, of course, it's easy to determine that that wasn't true.

These employees' discomfort with reporting to a Black woman rose to what was described as "irrational" feelings, such that they were willing to lie and take extreme actions to

undermine Angela's role and authority. These employees saw reporting to a Black woman as a threat reflecting their discriminatory presumptions and concerns about reporting to a person of color. The choices to file specious complaints were extreme acts of resistance to Angela and her position of leadership, potentially putting her position and reputation at risk. Somehow these employees found these courses of action to be reasonable and acceptable based on unfounded concerns about reporting to a person of color who was new to the position. These concerns had no basis in their experience working for Angela, but were preconceived concerns related to her identity as a Black woman.

Michelle had to contend with undermining actions from an executive leader peer leading in a different area of the university, but who still perceived Michelle as a threat. At the first board of trustees meeting Michelle attended, this peer, when introducing Michelle to trustees, feigned forgetting Michelle's title and suggested that Michelle's title was less than what it was in an attempt to diminish her presence. Michelle recalled:

And so, when she would introduce me, she would touch my back and be like, "this is such and such," and give me all their accolades. And then literally, no joke, turn over to me and go, "This is [Michelle]. Um, what's your title? Director of D? Wait, what is it again? Oh gosh. I forgot your title. What is that again?" Oh, she did it three times. Because they heard that she was so threatened because she is used to cultivating and carrying that room. Because I'm new and I'm the person of color and they want to know who I am . . . she could not handle that. So, she had to publicly try to embarrass me.

Michelle's peer tried to publicly undermine her authority and status based on her perception of Michelle as a threat to her own positional power in executive leadership. Michelle's status as a new executive leader and a first Black woman in executive leadership was something potentially of interest to the trustees, thereby threatening the peer's status in the room. The peer found it to be reasonable to attempt to diminish Michelle's presence, overtly signaling

her early and preconceived judgment of Michelle as a threat due, as least in part, to her social identity.

All other participants in the study had some experience with staff, faculty, peers, or senior/chief executives resisting them and their roles as leaders through questioning their authority, roles, and competence and trying to diminish them professionally in the eyes of others. This sometimes took the form of attempting to cause the Black women to internalize this resistance and question their own authority and competence. Clara described this as having White leadership peers working to “gaslight you, try[ing] to make you feel like you’re not effective at what you’re doing, you’re not good at what you’re doing.” These are cases of peers questioning and diminishing Black women leaders’ work, judgement, and leadership with specious criticisms intended to have them second guess themselves in ways that could undermine their confidence and sense of effectiveness.

This type of gaslighting and diminishing of a Black woman’s qualifications as a leader was experienced by Jasmine when a faculty colleague attempted to dismiss Jasmine’s appointment as a dean as coming down to just her race. This faculty colleague said directly to her about the appointment, “Yeah, [he] put you in that role because he wanted some more Black people in the dean’s office” diminishing and invalidating all of the experience and expertise that Jasmine brought to the position that she had earned. Such a statement being made directly to a Black woman leader could also have the potential effect of undermining that Black woman’s confidence in their own qualifications, if they were to internalize such a baseless statement and clear microaggression leveled against them.

Such experiences with faculty and others feeling entitled to speak to and interact with Black women senior leaders with a lack of respect for their experience and role, and as if they

have some authority over them or are positioned to judge their qualifications and expertise was also experienced by Grace. She described:

And so, I've had people come into my office . . . with an energy as if they're in charge. And they're going to bring me down a notch or two in my space, in my office about things under my purview. And they will talk to me as if I don't know what I'm doing or as if I weren't smart in some set of decisions or choices that I made, or that I wasn't well considered.

This type of resistance in the form of questioning authority and expertise reflects an entitlement that others in the institution feel to interact with Black women senior leaders in ways that do not respect their work, roles, and identities based on the biases with which they stereotype and prejudge them as less than their counterparts who are not Black women. These are but a few examples of the various ways Black women senior leaders in this study have experienced resistance to their roles and work from others in their institution in the form of questioning, attacking, and working to undermine their authority at the institution in subtle and direct ways.

These types of microaggressions and forms of resistance undermining authority also take form in how some Black women senior leaders' positions are not given the expected types of institutional support and levels of authority that accompanies other similar positions. Tevis et al. (2020) described this as a lack of "title-power" (p. 283) or not being given the authority commensurate with their title as is afforded to their peers. This lack of title-power effectively attempts to diminish Black women leaders' authority in ways that are evident to their peers and others in their institution and potentially limits the impacts of what they are able to achieve in their roles due to the public signaling of their leadership and work as less important than that of others.

Agnes has led and spearheaded many major initiatives at her institution and had a recent experience of her title-power being diminished when at the inception of her initiative she had a co-lead appointed without any prior discussion or request for her concurrence with having a co-lead and who that person would be. The co-lead assigned to her is a peer White male dean. He was one to let her know that the president appointed him. Agnes was not given the courtesy of hearing this from the president or having any input. She was comfortable with the person with whom she would be co-leading and did not hold him responsible for how the appointment was handled. However, she recognized how this was handled as unique to who she is as a Black woman and the effect of these actions as attempting to diminish her position and role. Agnes commented:

And I thought, would they do that to somebody else? . . . So, I feel there's a way they go around us in general, make decisions that we may actually be okay with, but by not including us in the decision making, they disempower us in opposition. And I feel it's a way that they're disempowering by not informing or not sharing information.

In Agnes's example, she may have been okay with having the co-lead, but the actions of her president attempted to strip some authority and power away from Agnes by choosing not to engage Agnes in that decision. Despite Agnes's power and position as a dean, the president felt entitled to dismiss her input and did not show her the respect of providing notice to her of the appointment. Agnes believes it would have been handled differently if she were not a Black woman.

Maeve believes her last promotion was one established with no intention of giving her the authority and responsibilities she was seeking in that new role. Maeve knows the limitations placed on her authority and responsibilities are different from how her supervisor treats her White male peer and the authority and responsibilities he is open to giving him. The impact of

hollowed-out authority associated with the promotion had potentially real consequences on Maeve and her desire to have certain leadership experiences and to gain particular types of expertise that she wanted and needed in line with her career goals. Maeve shared:

I've got this fancy new title that I was promised a year and a half ago, finally came to fruition a year and a half later. And it's meaningless. It's empty because he's given me no responsibilities that I've asked for around strategic planning, around budget and finance. That's what I need. . . . I have seen him treat [my White male peer] very differently . . . he's putting all sorts of trust in him to do lots of things.

Maeve sees her promotion as “meaningless” for the lack of authority and responsibility that has come with the promotion she was explicitly seeking at her institution but was withheld from her and entrusted to her White male colleague.

This type of hollowed out authority has been experienced by Black women in the study in these and other forms, including having basic and expected responsibilities stripped from a participant's role. Erica worked with a committee of staff and faculty to hire into a position that would be appointed by her vice president but would be reporting to Erica. During the selection process there was a faculty candidate the committee really wanted, but that Erica had notable reservations about based on previous interactions with him and his lack of experience. When she told the committee she would share her concerns with the vice president, they pushed back on her and the validity of her reasons for not supporting this candidate were questioned.

Ultimately, Erica did go to the vice president with her concerns. The vice president said he agreed with her but ended up appointing this person for the role reporting to Erica, thereby supporting the decision of the rest of the committee. In this situation, Erica questioned, “Did I sort of erase myself?” from that situation in not pushing further for this candidate to not be appointed. However, it was the committee and the vice president who were comfortable

diminishing and ultimately erasing her authority and expertise in not giving full consideration to her assessment of a role that would operate under her purview and of a candidate with whom she had history and experiences to inform her assessment. This reflects a type of resistance Black women in PWIs can face with their positionality as leaders not being afforded the respect and authority normally commensurate with their senior leadership roles.

Resistance as Job Stacking and Inadequate Infrastructure Support. Another permutation of resistance to their leadership is seen in cases where Black women leaders are not given adequate support for their roles in the forms of financial and personnel resources that normally accompany comparable senior leadership roles. Resistance and barriers to their leadership also take the form of additional responsibilities being added onto their positions, without additional pay or resources essentially stacking onto roles that are often already overburdened by the Black Tax of additional responsibilities related to their race (Townsend, 2021). In both ways, Black women senior leaders' roles are undermined by limiting the resources they need to do and oversee the important work for which they are responsible. They are left with less time and opportunity to operate strategically as leaders, given the lack of infrastructure support and additional responsibilities added to their positions, and their career and personal well-being are threatened by heightened responsibilities and less support as compared to their peers who are not Black women.

Maria counsels other Black women leaders about this phenomenon of job stacking and inadequate support they are prone to face in PWIs. She explained:

We already make less money than [White men and women] make. . . . I met a young, Black female. Last month [she] got a very nice position working at one of the institutions. And I said to her, "I want you to be mindful what they generally do to women of color. They'll give you that great position. You will not have support staff and you'll suck it up and get it done. Try not to let that happen to

you.” . . . And she looked really funny, and she said, “I don’t have an assistant.” I said . . . “So the time that you spend doing your own travel, making your own appointments, and all of this is time lost from you imagining, visioning, and connecting.” And she said, “Oh my God.” . . . The second thing they do to us is a promotion. You have a job, and we add another job on top of it. So now you’re doing, in essence, two jobs. . . . That double job stacking happens to Black women, “We’re going to give you a promotion. Susie just left. You get Susie’s job and we’re going to pay you an extra \$10,000. Congratulations.” And . . . it is literally two jobs that one person is doing.

Maria has seen this phenomenon of added responsibility without commensurate increases in pay and support in her career in higher education and that its persistence is something other Black women need to look out for. As Maria pointed out, this job stacking and under resourcing undermines a Black woman senior leader in being able to do the full job of leadership as time is taken from being able to act strategically, network, and operate at their more senior level by the burden of having less infrastructure support and other resources typically afforded to others.

This phenomenon of inadequate resources was experienced by other women in the study, such as Erica whose position was a newly created one and no budget was established for it. She is forced to make requests from her supervisor’s budget account knowing that this budgetary situation is different from that of her peers. She recognizes that they have their own budget accounts, “and it gives them a little bit more autonomy than I’ve got.” That autonomy is a direct reflection on the authority ascribed to their roles that Erica has been denied in her peer position.

Additionally, Lena talked about the phenomenon of job stacking being experienced widely by Black women leaders in higher education. The prevalence of it was discussed at a conference she attended. She explained, “There was one session that was for Black women leaders, and it was like, ‘raise your hand. If you’re doing two to three jobs.’ [And] 75% of the room raised their hand.” Although this was not data from a more extensive survey, the majority

of the attendees' acknowledging this phenomenon reflects this as a reality faced by many Black women leaders.

Resistance as Exclusion and Silencing. Other common microaggressions and forms of resistance discussed by participants which add to the uphill battle and burden of leadership at the senior level and which contribute to the undermining Black women leaders' roles and work, included behaviors and actions of others that render Black women effectively invisible and unheard in meetings. This can include, in many cases, not inviting them to meetings and discussions that include their senior and executive peers. This invisibility also includes overlooking, undervaluing, or ignoring the contributions of Black women in meetings and also attributing those same ideas to other people who express them after they have been said by Black women in that same space. Additionally, when Black women leaders are seen and heard in professional settings, the lenses through which they and their contributions are viewed are often colored by persisting stereotypes and tropes that essentialize and stigmatize them and their contributions.

The experience of being excluded from meetings that peer leaders were invited to was discussed by Clara. She experienced, on multiple occasions, learning of executive leadership teams meetings her peers would be invited to, and she would not. She responded to this by asking her peers to let her know when meetings were happening and to speak up about having her invited. She noted the irony in this request, stating to her colleagues, "It's kind of interesting because I'm your inclusion person and I'm being excluded." Clara also experienced this resistance to her inclusion in meetings, not only among her executive leadership team, but also with faculty meetings. Clara shared:

Well, there were just so many convoluted things, but it was always that resistance. And I knew it was because they had the hardest time having women in that room, and they had the hardest time having Black people in that room. And I'm even trying to think right now, if there was ever another Black woman in that space with me. There was a Latina woman, but she was constantly marginalized in that space. I mean to the point where they'd had these meetings, there's this big oval table, and then there's seats around the sides. Yeah. I think that's where she was sitting. So first I had to have special entry to get into the room, and then if I got in the room, I could never sit at the table.

Clara was experiencing resistance to her inclusion in spaces where senior leaders should be welcomed. She was then rendered less visible in power and presence in her literally being denied a seat at the table as a Black woman leader. As an executive leader, she was often the most senior person in the room at those faculty meetings but was still relegated to the periphery of the room when she was invited. This type of resistance to her leadership overtly diminished and attempted to render her and her role invisible through her exclusion, and also signaled the diminished perception of her and her role by where she was physically placed in these meeting spaces even as the most senior person in the room.

Five participants noted experiencing a very common microaggression of being unheard in meetings in the form of their comments being ignored or glossed over when said by them, but then sometimes having those same comments acknowledged when repeated by someone else, often a man. Katherine experiences this, as well as her comments being left out of the meeting notes requiring her to repeatedly edit those records to capture her contributions that are consistently left out of the record.

In addition to experiences with invisibility in not being included or heard in meetings, five participants shared experiences when they were being heard or asserting their presence and contributions, but these assertions were received negatively as aggressive and angry, feeding into negative and essentializing stereotypes and tropes of Black women as the “angry Black woman.”

When Maria tried to address situations where she felt she was not being heard, in trying to speak up and asserting her voice, she was sometimes accused of being angry or responding with anger. She noted the challenge of asserting one's voice as a Black woman, but not letting what is being said be silenced by the negative characterizations of colleagues. Maria explained:

Well, the first couple of times that I was, you would speak up for yourself. You know, people want to say, "Well, don't get mad." "I'm not mad. I'm simply expressing my opinion. I'm telling you what I think. And because what I think disagrees with what you're saying doesn't mean anger. I'm simply expressing." So, the angry Black woman. But yet not letting that silence the point that's being made.

Being characterized as "mad" for expressing a position or opinion in a meeting that may not align with someone else's is an all-too-common response Black women face in professional settings. What may be received as productive engagement and discussion when expressed by someone else, can be seen as defensive, argumentative, or emotional when coming from a woman, particularly a Black woman. This can have a chilling and silencing effect on the person being characterized this way, which reflects the burden of this type of resistance on the leadership of Black women in spaces where they are underrepresented.

Although this microaggression may be common, the impacts of this treatment are exponentialized when considering that as senior leaders these Black women are in roles in which their contributions have important and high stakes for leading their areas of operation in their institutions. Silence should not be an option, and successful and responsible leadership is predicated on being able to contribute to the discussions and having that front row seat at the table that is too often denied disproportionately to Black women in spaces in which their leadership and authority is undermined, undervalued, and not given the respect commensurate with that of their peers who are not Black women.

Resistance as Institutional Denial of Gendered Racism. Even in the face of these multiple forms and permutations of microaggressions reflecting the persistence of gendered racism within the climates and cultures of these institutional spaces, Black women senior leaders often must contend with the added insult of individual and institutional invalidation of their experiences. This invalidation can take the form of individual or institutional denial that any resistance Black women face as leaders has a connection to their social identities or from institutions wanting to distance themselves from the responsibility of acknowledging or addressing the root causes of the resistance. Sometimes this invalidation of the persistence of gendered racism within an institutional ecosystem is intentional and often it is out of denial and ignorance. This invalidation and denial become an additional burden on Black women senior leaders. Invalidation and denial of their experiences forces them to contend with weighing whether and how to address this invalidation recognizing the impacts of the resistance they face to their leadership are significant and the invalidation and denial only serves to allow these types of resistance to persist.

This invalidation and denial often is in the form of attributing the resistance Black women leaders face in their institutions as being related to something other than gendered racism. Race and gender-based discrimination are difficult for those not subjected to it to identify and relate to due to their own positionality and privilege connected to their race and gender. Josephine shared a story of a White woman colleague who questioned why Josephine needed to get her identification (ID) before they walked together to a pep rally. Josephine's life experience and experience on a university campus informs her need to always carry her ID, recognizing her status as belonging on campus will be questioned, and her status as a senior leader might not be

presumed by anyone on campus that does not know her personally. At PWIs, the presumptive image of a senior leader is not that of a Black woman.

Her colleague's response to Josephine explaining this need to carry any ID was, "I never thought about that. It never occurred to me. I walk around here without my ID all the time." Her colleague operated with the privilege of her Whiteness and did not need to consider how her colleague Josephine's experience navigating campus is different for her based on her social identity. That difference comes with a set of burdens and challenges for Josephine to which her White woman colleague will never be able to relate. In sharing and explaining her experience with needing to carry her ID, Josephine was trying to inform her White woman colleague about how and why Josephine needs to navigate that institutional space differently due to her identity as a Black woman and how the legacy and persistence of gendered racism in the institution impacts her experience in that space.

Similar to Josephine's experience with ignorance and denial of the distinct experiences Black women have operating in their PWIs, Angela also shared a story of needing to educate her peers about the existence and persistence of microaggressions in their institution. This occurred at a university townhall in which Angela participated with her executive leader colleagues. During the townhall, questions were posed to all the executive leaders, and of the nine of them who each had an opportunity to respond, eight were able to speak without interruption. Angela, the only Black woman executive leader, was interrupted multiple times by several people in the audience. None of her colleagues recognized this dynamic as microaggressions directed at Angela. Angela described:

Afterwards, my peers and I, and a couple of other folks from university ministry were talking and I said that, "despite the microaggression." They're like, "What microaggression?" Okay. Most people don't recognize that we have nine people

sitting up here. Every one of them was asked a question. Every one of them was given an opportunity to speak without interruption, except for me, that's a microaggression. "Well, no, that's, you know, it's just that they were really passionate." "Well, they were pretty passionate about the budget too, but they still let the CFO speak." . . . I'll give them the grace to say that because they're a White male who that doesn't happen to, he doesn't have that experience. And so, all he could see was their passion and not see their disrespect. But we're going to be colleagues for a while, so I'll help him a little bit later on.

Angela's colleague in this example did not have the experience and perspective to recognize this microaggression as resistance to her leadership as a Black woman, but he also was not able to accept her assessment of the situation based on her lived experiences as a Black woman subjected to these types of behaviors in her professional life. This type of individual level denial and invalidation not only reflects that individual's perspectives and experiences, but also the climate and culture of the environment in which these types of resistance and microaggressions as experienced by Angela would not be recognized as such.

Angela attributes some of this denial of the operation of gendered racism within the climate and culture of the institution to the culture of her institution being a religiously affiliated PWI, which is seen by some as invalidating the potential for discriminatory behaviors to coexist in an institution built around religious faith. Angela shared:

I think it's particularly weird on a [religious] campus because people feel that somehow, they're better than that or above that or whatever. And there's just this, I don't know, there's this religious position, they think absolves them of any wrongdoing. . . . But no, you are still, you know, you're still having racist practices and you're still doing these microaggressions and you're still doing this, whether or not you believe in social justice. . . I've had my share of conversations with [those in the ministry] who . . . said that it is not the responsibility of the church to minister to Black people. . . . So, you can't tell me that because you have a religious faith that you're not racist.

This sense that institutions that espouse values aligned with social justice, inclusion, and equity seem to be presumptively absolved of responsibility for enabling the persistence of

gendered racism in their communities is not an uncommon phenomenon in this study. By virtue of a religious culture, or an institution's public adoption of and commitment to DEI values, institutions may view themselves as progressive and inclusive, despite how underrepresented and marginalized people are in practice experiencing their places and spaces in these institutions. There may be a fundamental misalignment between words and actions, and how institutions describe their cultures and values and what the cultures and climates are in practice with respect to authentically practiced inclusion and equity and active dismantling and rejection of policies, practices, behaviors, attitudes, and communications that enable the persistence of bias and discrimination.

With respect to this institutional misalignment between espoused values and the climate, culture, and behaviors exhibited in practice, Erica witnessed the evolution of her institution in promoting DEI while at the same time believing this commitment negates the prevalence and persistence of inequities in experience for underrepresented and marginalized members of the community. Erica has been at her institution for almost 15 years. Within her 1st week on the faculty, she had an experience she viewed as racist that was immediately denied as such by a White woman colleague. She was walking across campus and a student called her a b*tch as the student drove by her crossing the street. Erica recalled:

So, I went, and I complained to someone who I knew in the school and, I said, I "It was racist." And she was a White woman, she said that, "That's not racist, that was gendered." I said, "No, that wouldn't have happened to you. Well, who do I report it to?" And the response was, "No, there's really no one to report it to. Those things don't happen here." I was like, "But they did happen, right?"

The denial and invalidation of Erica's experience from her White female colleague was layered, denying the incident as connected to race, but also denying that such types of discriminatory behaviors could happen at that institution. This story happened almost 15 years

ago and since then the institution has progressed to having positions, committees, and offices dedicated to DEI related work. Interestingly this same colleague who denied the incident as racist became the institution's first chief diversity officer.

Forwarding to the time of this study, although at Erica's institution there are offices and positions that do DEI related work, including Erica's position that focuses on equity initiatives, there are still significant blind spots among senior leadership in recognizing how bias continues to operate in the institution, and denial of how Erica's experience as a senior leader is different from that of her peers who are not Black women. When she was promoted into senior leadership, she was not given an office in the suite where the rest of her leadership peers sit. She was given an office that did not feel as nice to her, and the suite was almost all Black employees. For her, this was "not a good look" and she expressed her desire to be in the other suite, but that was denied. She shared:

Even though I said I didn't want to be over there, and they didn't listen to me, they don't see it as being race. But it feels [like race] . . . right? And so as I'm talking and gathering this information from colleagues who are leaving or who are on the job market, I'm like, yeah, I understand that. I get it. I get it.

Erica is a senior leader tasked with advancing equity initiatives, but her institution and her colleagues in senior leadership are engaging with her in ways that represent the challenges that her work is meant to address. The institution sees itself as having progressed to a place of embracing DEI work with positions and programming, but the persistence of bias and unequal treatment operates unrecognized and unacknowledged for what it is and for how it is impacting Erica's leadership experience and the experiences of her colleagues who are seeking other opportunities elsewhere.

Institutional denial and invalidation of Black women senior leaders' experiences with resistance to their leadership and the impacts of these forms of gendered racism on their careers is strongly exemplified in these leaders' experiences with and observations of how their institutions respond to exits of Black women leaders and other underrepresented professionals. Participants shared stories of when they have considered leaving their institution or the stories of other Black women colleagues who have considered leaving or have left their institutions in part or in whole due to the challenges they have faced connected with resistance to their work and roles as Black women leaders. Exiting may remove and save a Black woman leader from the toxicity of the environment she has been navigating, but exiting may come at a cost and exiting does not necessarily ensure the institution will be aware of the role it has played in the exit.

Angela talked about advice and support she received from a well-intentioned board member when she shared the challenges she was facing working with a difficult president. She shared:

It happened with my experience when I was having difficulties with the president, that the chairman of the board, who's a nice guy, he said, "If you want to leave, then, I mean, I can help you. You know, I can help you find another place because . . . you're great. And I said, "Nope, I'm not going anywhere." . . . They tell you "If you're not happy, why don't you go someplace else?" But do you know what that does to that person? If they leave, they're going to start over, that their salary is affected by time on the job, that they may have to take a lesser salary, they're going to lose vacation, they're going to lose retirement pay. And I said, "And it sets people of color back every time they have to make a transition because an institution won't change. So, you should stop telling people who are experiencing these kind of things to go, but you need to say, how do I make this place better so that you feel you can stay?" And he said he never heard that before. . . . The institution needs to understand how they need to do better instead of always telling people to move on.

In Angela's view and experience, leaving an institution puts the costs of the challenges and barriers created and fostered by an institution on the backs of the Black women leaders

targeted and impacted by those challenges and barriers. Her board chair's reaction exemplifies an all-too-common reality that institutions do not look inward to see if they have played a role or are responsible in any way for the exit of Black women and other people of color from their institutions. Instead, there is often the narrative and explanation that this talent cannot be retained because they leave for better professional opportunities instead of also trying to escape inhospitable professional environments. Maya described this institutional denial of responsibility for Black women leaving their leadership positions, stating:

And every time every one of my colleagues that I've witnessed has gone on to something bigger and better. And of course, the system as it is, you know, chalks it up as, "Oh, well, they went to a better opportunity," never stopping to think that there was something about the system that caused them to be looking for the better opportunity in the first place.

This institutional denial is a form of enabling the persistence of practices, cultures, and climates that negatively impact Black women leading in PWIs by choosing to attribute the challenges these women experience that may lead to their exits to something other than what they have experienced in and from the institution itself. Despite questioning their retention issues with professionals of color, institutions may still avoid asking the harder questions to understand what their underrepresented and marginalized professionals are experiencing at work that may be contributing to them seeking healthier professional environments with more support for them and their work as leaders, and fewer challenges and barriers to their leadership success.

Fourteen of the 15 participants in this study are at PWIs where they are a first Black woman senior or executive leader or are one of few Black women leaders in their institutions at any one time. They, as many Black women in PWIs, stand out as tokens of their social identity group and their positions can be lauded as evidence of progress in their institutions' efforts to diversify and represent their prioritization of DEI at all levels of their institution, including

leadership. However, this token status often comes with a high price given the persistence of attitudes, beliefs, practices, climates, and cultures that reflect gender and race-based discrimination and inequities upon which most of these institutions were built and which most institutions have not successfully dismantled and rejected from their organizations. The persistence of gendered racism takes multiple forms and permutations of microaggressions that show up as actions and attitudes of resistance to Black women leaders in their roles and work. This resistance undermines, questions, and attacks their authority and shows up in ways that denies them the support, resources, and experiences they seek for professional success and growth.

In effect, Black women leaders' tokenized status is weaponized against them, framing them, who they are, and how they lead as the challenge and not the institution. The resistance many of these Black women face to their leadership deprofessionalizes and dehumanizes their roles and work framing them through a deficit lens as leaders who still need to be policed, who need to continually prove their worth, and who should be grateful for the opportunity to do what they do at their institutions instead of showing respect and appreciation for the talents, experiences, and multiple assets they bring to their roles and institutions. The challenges and barriers they face may be denied and invalidated as forms of gendered racism; thus, the resistance they face is their issue and not an institutional one. If and when the leadership experience at that institution becomes untenable, their exit is not looked at as reflecting upon the institution and its failure in supporting these leaders and addressing the root causes of their inequitable treatment and leadership experience. There is often no work conducted to understand if there is a retention problem and why.

The gendered racism that may operate in the institution may be as invisible as these leaders often find themselves. The pervasiveness and persistence of these various types of resistance and the gendered racism to which they are connected speaks also to the powerful influence of senior and chief executive leadership. The power of their influence on whether Black women senior leaders experience and feel support for their roles and leadership is just as significant with respect to the influence of this most senior leadership on how Black women leaders experience and are impacted by resistance to their leadership.

Finding 3: Executive Leadership's Influence on the Persistence of Gendered Racism: Modeling and Enabling of Resistance to Black Women's Leadership Roles and Work

In this study, four participants talked about support for their leadership taking the form of support from the senior/chief executive leader to whom they report, often the president. In the cases where participants felt that support, it was seen as having a strong influence and impact on how those Black woman leaders were able to navigate their work and roles. That support from a senior/chief executive leader offers sponsorship in publicly showcasing their talents and expertise, asserting the authority of their roles with others, facilitating access to people and resources to support their work, providing them cover from threats to their leadership, and most significantly as a senior and chief executive leader, setting the tone for how these Black women senior leaders should be included, treated, and respected in their work and roles.

This same influence can be make-or-break when it takes the form of resistance to Black women's leadership that weaponizes their token status setting up barriers to their work and success, modeling disrespect and biased and inequitable treatment, perpetuating negative stereotypes associated with their social identities, and invalidating and denying any responsibility

as a leader for how their actions undermine their direct reports and contribute to and enable the persistence of gendered racism in their institutions.

The actions of these senior and chief executive leaders are among the most visible of any leader and set the tone for what actions and attitudes are acceptable among their leadership teams and in the cultures and climates of their institutions. Nine participants shared stories of executive leaders to whom they report, including presidents, whose resistance to them and others like them was visible. For Olivia, the only Black woman on her team, her supervisor's attitude toward her was obvious to her peers and a topic of conversation regarding "how much she does not like or value me." The public and obvious devaluing of Olivia and her work by her boss is notable to Olivia's peers and stands out according to Olivia as she is the only Black person on the team.

This type of open and public bias was also exhibited by the senior executive to whom Maeve reports. It was obvious and evident to her, as well as to others who not only observed his reactions to and interactions with her, but also because he would talk about her negatively to others. Maeve shared, "I know exactly what he thinks of me. I know exactly how he's characterizing me to others. I know exactly what he's doing when it feels like I'm being undermined and sidelined." He actively and publicly characterized Maeve using negative stereotypes and tropes of her as angry and difficult, attempting to undermine her authority and reputation on campus including with the president. He asserted these things about her in an institution she has been with for almost 15 years, where she had successfully built community, connection, and respect for her leadership. His actions sought to tear down this positive reputation and all the social capital she had built there by weaponizing her social identity and painting her as the angry Black woman. Maeve said:

Never before this current boss have I been so classically stereotyped as I have been with him. So, if I ask questions, I'm characterized as angry to my face. And then I try to correct like, "Actually no, I'm not angry. I'm just asking questions for clarity." And I also happen to be direct. So, I guess the combination of asking questions . . . and being direct is perceived as yelling, as angry, as all of these things. . . . He goes around and he talks about me to other people. About [me] being angry. And the good thing about it is that, again, 14 years of social capital, people know me . . . and they also have evidence to the contrary because I have a reputation of exuding positivity and warmth. . . . So, he said this to the president. And the president asked about it.

Maeve's executive supervisor models disrespectful behavior and perpetuates these negatives stereotypes and tropes as weapons against Maeve and her leadership, and in doing so publicly and from his senior executive position of leadership, he is actively contributing to a culture that condones this type of race and gender-based treatment. Combined with his disparate treatment of Maeve and other women on his team, this resistance to her leadership has consequences not only for Maeve's experience as a Black woman leader in her institution, but also for other women and people of color.

Maeve's executive supervisor reports to the president, who from Maeve's perspective has also modeled poor leadership in cosigning her boss's characterizations through his silence and lack of action and response to it. Maeve and her boss had a charged interaction after he undermined work she had done to promote a woman faculty member into a more senior role. He had informally signed off on the promotion and then reversed his decision in Maeve's absence, based on a differing assessment of this candidate for promotion from some White male faculty. This was not the first time he had denied a woman promotion in his role.

Maeve, on the advice of colleagues, informed the president of the heated exchange they had when she learned what her boss had done and why. She did not necessarily expect the president's intervention but wanted him to be aware of what had happened from her perspective.

When she reached out the president via email, he said he would get back to her, but never did.

She expressed:

And even if it was just to say that “I’m not going to intervene, but I want you to know that you’re a valued member of the team.” That would’ve been enough. That would’ve been enough. But it let me know everything that I needed to know about this administration. He is entirely too laissez-faire. . . . And I think he knows [what’s going on] on some levels, but he doesn’t know the depth of the f*ckery that is happening in academic affairs right now. . . . I’m not going to stay, I’m not going to let somebody like this incompetent [man] and his idiot boss derail my career ambitions . . . At the end of the day, I do expect the president to hold his people, his direct reports accountable for the outcomes and the things that are happening in the space. And I expect the president to kind of, not necessarily get in the weeds, but at least know what’s going on within the organizations, to have his finger on the pulse. . . . We’re a small institution. So whatever circle that you have as a leader, informing you of what’s going on, you better make sure they’re really well informed and really do have their fingers on the pulse and they’re not snowing you, which kind of feels like what might be happening right now.

What Maeve described was both active and passive enabling of race and gender-based discriminatory and biased behaviors by the most senior leadership on the campus and a form of invalidation and denial in turning a blind eye to those behaviors. In a small institution where a Black woman senior leader has been a known entity for many years, these types of disparate treatment do not go unnoticed and send harmful signals to the institution about what are acceptable forms of treatment of Black women and other underrepresented people.

Eight other Black women in the study also talked about how the resistant behaviors of presidents and other senior executive leaders toward them set a dangerous tone and precedent for how they could be treated as Black women leaders by those executives as well as their peers. Angela talked about two of her former presidents who contributed to a toxic environment for her and other women in leadership. One president, “really did set the tone so that no woman was

treated with respect.” Another president was oblivious to his race and gender-based biases and the microaggressions he leveled against her. Angela shared:

So, the White president was just totally unaware of his biases. And so, he would tell me that I was intimidating, and he would tell me that I should defer to, he actually would tell me that I should defer to people. That the provost wanted to mentor me, but I seemed too confident. He said all the time . . . “I know what you’re saying is true, but I don’t like the tone of voice that you use, and so you need to speak differently.” And then I would tell him, that’s tone policing. Let’s talk about what that means. So, he was a challenge [and] ultimately was invited to step down from his position because of the way that he treated women. And so, while his treatment of me was racially tinged, he just, he was a misogynist. And so that was the way that he regarded me and my leadership. And he kind of set the tone in some ways for my peers that if he didn’t respect me, they didn’t have to.

The microaggressions with which Angela had to contend were not just leveled directly at her, but also were public signals to others about what was acceptable in how she and in these cases other women could be treated in senior leadership. These were direct and public forms of resistance, creating additional challenges with which Angela and her female colleagues needed to contend as leaders in their institution.

In some cases, the resistance from executive leadership and presidents can be less direct, but still with consequences for the leadership experiences of Black women senior leaders reporting to them, and their ability to effectively do their jobs. Erica was moved into a leadership position focused on equity initiatives by her president. Erica appears to have the symbolic support for this work and her role by virtue of the public commitment to DEI of her institution. However, this support has limits in its symbolism with her president putting restrictions on what Erica is able to do in her role in ways that effectively undermine the ability of her work to fully address equity issues at the institution.

Erica is directed to do things that make the work she does more “palatable” to the board of trustees and others who may be uncomfortable with more authentic and impactful approaches

to identifying and dismantling historic practices that have promoted inequities. Erica commented:

[The president] gave me a lot of money to work on equity initiatives . . . and she says, “Well try not to make people feel guilty,” Or, you know, “Do you have to use the word privilege?” I’m like, “Yeah, I do. Yeah.” . . . But at the end of the day, she doesn’t want the word privilege in a document. I can’t put it in there. And so, I find ways around it, right? I find ways to make the work I’m doing palatable to our board of trustees. And it is frustrating . . . And it’s frustrating because some things we move very quickly on. We wanted a nursing program. We have a nursing program, right? . . . So, there are things that we do quickly, and then things that go slowly. I think that largely it’s what the president wants.

Erica’s president resists letting Erica do work in the ways that Erica knows as a professional are effective and appropriate in her field of expertise, but the resistance is couched among symbolic words and actions that, at the end of the day, limit the impacts Erica is seeking to make in her role and work as an institutional leader. These limitations cause Erica to experience frustration, to be questioned about her effectiveness by colleagues who cannot understand the challenges this resistance from her president poses, and cause her to question herself as to whether she goes far enough in pushing her desired programming in an institution that resists her and the work she is trying to accomplish. Erica stated:

[The president says] “Don’t use the word privilege.” You know, it took us years to be able to use social justice publicly, or equity . . . You would’ve thought I said, now we’re going to put a unicorn in the middle of campus. Like, it was a whole thing. And so, you know we’re never going to be the first school that does anything. So, I can keep pushing or I can stop the pushing. [It] is often looking like me banging my head against a wall. . . . I just feel like I’m not trying hard enough.

Facing this type of persistent resistance to one’s work can be frustrating and potentially internalized over time when the resistance creates barriers to successfully executing the work one is charged with and feels passionate about doing. Experiences such as these pose not only a challenge to Black women’s leadership and their careers success, but also to their well-being,

given the potential emotional toll these types of resistance can pose as well. These are but a few examples of how the resistance that Black women face in leadership when from their senior and chief executive leadership can pose some of the most significant barriers and challenges to their leadership experience in their institutions. These most senior and visible leaders of institutions have tremendous influence on whether and in what ways Black women are supported in their leadership or whether the challenges they face as Black women become further condoned and entrenched when modeled and enabled by the chief officers of the institution.

The findings from the study's 15 participants provide insights into the experience of being a Black woman senior leader in a PWI generally, and more specifically into how these participants feel others in their institution respond to their roles and work as leaders. In exploring these questions, participants talked about both what support for their leadership looked and felt like and how it impacts their experience as leaders, as well as what resistance to their leadership looks like and feels like and the impacts of that resistance.

Every participant shared stories of support with 13 of them talking about the support they receive from peers, faculty, and staff in the form of allyship that provides protection and validation to these women who lead at heightened professional risks given their identities as Black women and the microaggressions and gendered racism they may be subjected to in their PWIs. Only four participants shared stories of feeling the support of the senior and chief executive leadership to whom they report in both the expected forms of sponsorship, promotion, and resources, but also in forms specific to their vulnerable statuses as Black women leaders such as ensuring their voices are heard in meetings; making sure their contributions are publicly acknowledged, appreciated, and attributed to them; and sending clear messages to their leadership teams and the institutions as a whole about their values and expectations for how

these Black women senior leaders and other underrepresented and marginalized people are to be treated and are to be supported in having equitable and inclusive experiences within the institution. Interestingly three of the four participants reported to people of color whose own leadership experiences likely map to some degree against their own with their social identities influencing their advocacy and work to establish more authentically inclusive climates and cultures within the institutions they lead. Six of the participants talked about the support they experience with internal networks of Black women with whom they interact who also provide support, validation, and guidance to one another within the shared institutional environments they navigate.

All the participants also shared stories of the resistance they experience to their leadership and how it impacts them. Resistance was talked about as the behaviors, actions, attitudes, interactions, and treatment that Black women senior leaders experience that not only do not support them and their work, but in many cases undermines their work and roles as leaders putting them at heightened professional risk. The connection between this resistance and these leaders' social identities as Black women were highlighted in exploring how their experience as senior leaders compares to that of their peers who are not Black women.

All the participants in the study shared reflections on how they felt their leadership experience is divergent from that of their peers, in some cases because of additional challenges and burdens from the treatment they receive connected to their social identities, double standards and inequitable expectations on their roles and work, the negative stereotypes and presumptions with which they must contend, and the overall tax on their professional and personal well-being this all places on them as Black women senior leaders. What is striking about these challenges that Black women face in PWIs are the manner in which institutions will frame having Black

women in senior leadership as evidence of their success in advancing their DEI agendas, yet these leaders are still facing resistance fueled and enabled by the persisting legacies of gendered racism in these institutions that were not built by or for them and in which their leadership does not align with images of leadership that are normalized as White and male. So, while their presence may be celebrated as evidence of inclusion, these Black women's token statuses as one or one of very few of their kind in these institutions can be weaponized or used against them in how they experience this resistance to their leadership as connected with their social identities.

This resistance takes multiple forms in the actions, attitudes, interactions, behaviors, and communications with peers, staff, faculty, and the senior and chief executives to whom they report. This resistance takes the forms of actions that question, attack, undermine, and diminish their authority publicly, and in some cases failing to give them the title-power commensurate with their roles as senior leaders. This resistance takes the form of additional labors and responsibilities often paired with inadequate resources to do the work they are charged with potentially undermining their success and adding inequitable burdens to their roles and work as compared to their peers who are not Black women. This resistance is also experienced as exclusion from meetings and invisibility or silencing with their contributions being ignored, attributed to others, or characterized negatively based on stereotypes and negative projections onto them associated with their identities as Black women.

This resistance is also experienced through individual and institutional denial and invalidation of the existence and persistence of gendered racism in these institutions and its very real impacts on the leadership experience of these Black women senior leaders. This denial and invalidation reflect both ignorance and bias of those who perpetuate it, and the false belief in some institutions that in espousing values aligned with social justice, inclusion, and equity they

cannot simultaneously be enabling the persistence of gendered racism. This ignores the reality of the lived experiences of Black women senior leaders and other underrepresented and marginalized students, faculty, staff, and leadership who say otherwise.

Lastly, and most significantly, for nine participants, the resistance they experience to their leadership that has significant impacts not only on their leadership experiences but also the cultures and climates of their institutions is the resistance they experience from the senior and chief executive leadership to whom they report. The positionality of these leaders is the most visible of any leader and sets the tone and expectations about what behaviors, attitudes and actions are acceptable thereby impacting the cultures and climates of the institutions they lead. Microaggressions, stereotypes, and other actions that undermine and diminish the authority, respect, and success of Black women leveled at them by these most senior leaders have a tremendous effect on the leadership experiences of these Black women leaders, as well as the climates and cultures of the institutions they lead. In seeking to understand the experience of being a Black woman senior leader in a PWI, this study also explored with the participants how they process and respond to the resistance to their leadership connected to their social identities as Black women.

Theme 3: Responses to Resistance: How Black Women Senior Leaders Process the Impacts of Gendered Racism and Respond with Intention

In seeking to understand the experience of being a senior leader for Black women in PWIs, this study explored with participants not only what the resistance to their leadership looks like as connected to their social identities, but also how they process that resistance and how they choose to respond to it. This discussion of the impacts of resistance associated with gendered racism on their leadership experience and whether, when, and how they choose to respond it,

also included consideration of whether to persist in or exit these institutional environments given the resistance they face.

The resistance Black women senior leaders face in PWIs connected with their social identities carries numerous and significant challenges, barriers, and burdens on top of the expected responsibilities of senior leadership. These additional burdens have costs both professionally and personally for many Black women leaders with respect to the additional stresses associated with those challenges that can impact Black women's physical and emotional well-being, as well as their career paths and how easily or not they are navigated.

The experiences of the women in this study have shown how their leadership compares to their peers who are not Black women with less support and more resistance to their roles and work in multiple forms and permutations including microaggressions and discrimination that undermine and create barriers to their leadership and careers. The differences in the performance bars, expectations, support, resources, presumptions, and privilege (or lack thereof) afforded to Black women as compared to their peers who are not Black women puts these leaders at significant disadvantages and place the burdens of additional types of labor, including professional, emotional, and physical labor, to do the already straining work of their senior leader roles.

Additional work is often required due to the Black Tax of additional responsibilities connected with serving their institutions as Black women, and the impacts of colleagues' presumptions of less competence and experience that Black women have to manage and navigate professionally (Griffin et al., 2011; Townsend, 2021). This is often paired with the additional taxing work of the emotional labor that Black women take on to manage and mask the emotional

toll of navigating the needs, expectations, and actions of others in their workplaces in relation to them and their work as Black women leaders (Vigil et al., 2023).

The Impacts of Resistance and Gendered Racism

Twelve participants explicitly referenced actual, or what they recognized as potential, impacts of the resistance they face on their emotional, psychological, and physical well-being. This was talked about as the additional stress that participants and their Black women leader peers carry with them that manifests itself in their work and lives in varying ways from affecting sleep, influencing how they engage with others, causing them at times to struggle against internalizing the resistance as somehow connected to their own shortcomings, and having direct effects on their physical health. The connection between workplace stress, discrimination, and disparities in health for racial and ethnic minorities has been well documented with higher rates and incidences of hypertension, diabetes, depression, and other health conditions affected by stress (American Psychological Association, n.d.).

The buildup of the stresses that come from managing the emotional labor of their work, as well as the impacts of discrimination and microaggressions was discussed by Clara as a prevalent reality for Black women doing DEI work in higher education. Clara talked about how Black women must work to not to let that stress build to the point where they feel they have to “spew it back out,” which is counter to the bridge building work she seeks to do. Clara shared:

The problem with chief diversity officers is you’re constantly taking in nastiness and sometimes that nastiness isn’t filtered out. You carry it and you start spewing it back out. Because you’re like, “I’m tired of bridging building. I’m just going to spew it back right up at you. We’re at the same level. Why am I subjugating myself to build a bridge?” . . . But unfortunately, that does not work. <laugh> It doesn’t work for Black women because eventually that brimstone comes back at you.

Clara was describing the emotional labor and stress of managing the impacts of resistance to her leadership in the DEI space needing to manage her own emotions to effectively do her work as a DEI executive. She recognizes her positionality as a Black woman and the hyperawareness she carries with her of how her identity is viewed and perceived, as was shared earlier in the chapter, putting additional pressure on her to manage and mitigate her responses to the resistance and “nastiness” she is subjected to in her work. For Black women leaders, their responses to this type of resistance may be received as fitting the trope of the angry Black woman, judged as aggressive, and dismissed as inappropriate or unfounded.

The stress caused by resistance and gendered racism at work was also described as emotional and psychological, in terms of its potential to impact how Black women feel about themselves, their work, and their approach to their work at times. Some participants talked about the stress and impacts of persistent resistance making them feel “more guarded,” “less confident,” and less interested in engaging with colleagues at times. Some participants acknowledged needing to resist internalizing this resistance and the inclination to question if the treatment they experience is somehow their fault or something they have brought on themselves, or question why they are not able to handle the stress and resistance better.

Several people noted the feelings of loneliness that can accompany becoming more senior and more tokenized along their career paths. All of this adds up to what Agnes described as a worrisome and consistent “baseline stress” for Black women leaders. She shared:

And what I worry about for women of color . . . [is] the cost of leadership. It costs us more. It just cost us so much more because we have this baseline stress, these baseline things, plus what everybody else has . . . It’s consistent. It’s always running and calling it baseline. But for some people, it’s probably not baseline. It probably feels like hell every single day before anything happens. Like you walk in with the stress of all of these things of having to prove yourself . . . Nobody likes to do that.

Agnes was talking about that constant pressure and weight that some Black women in the study referenced as carrying with them in addition to the expected weights of leadership that their peers who are not Black do not carry. These pressures and weights are not only emotional and psychological. The physical impacts were also broadly discussed as a concern participants have had for themselves and for other Black women moving into and up the ladder in leadership in PWIs. Agnes explained how “the stress of racism and sexism . . . actually changes your brain” according to research. Maria has reflected on this physical toll calling it out for other Black women coming up in leadership behind her. Maria shared:

And I failed at addressing it. So, I’m calling it out to everybody that’s coming up behind me to be aware. And here’s where the high blood pressure comes in. Here’s where the health issues come in. And in order to protect yourself, you have to think about it. But if you don’t know that this can possibly come down the road to you, you’re not prepared when it lands in your lap. So, these are things that I’ve experienced. These are things that my friends have experienced. And so, I’m saying to those coming behind me, “Be aware and . . . push back and do it in such a way that it protects you, not wears you out, not potentially shortens your lifespan.”

Maria was recognizing what other participants talked about as the very real physical costs of the stress of not only the weight of leadership, but also navigating professional spaces in which Black women leaders often experience a persisting barrage of microaggressions and resistance to their roles and work connected to their social identities.

Maeve described this cost as “the emotional, psychological, and physical toll of working in a realm of white supremacist sexist toxicity. It takes years off our lives as Black women.” Here, Maeve was describing the potential toll of gendered racism for Black women in senior leadership in PWIs in contributing to stressors that have very real health consequences.

This study sought to understand not just the impacts of resistance to their leadership, but also how Black women senior leaders process and respond to this resistance as part of how they

experience leadership in PWIs. In speaking with participants about how they process and respond to resistance including their personal litmus tests for whether, when, and how to respond, the following findings emerged:

1. Staying grounded in self: Understanding resistance as projections
2. Weighing the costs and benefits for self and others: Calculating whether and how to respond to resistance
3. Fighting for your seat or walking away from the table: Exiting as a response to resistance

Finding 1: Staying Grounded in Self: Understanding Resistance as Projections

As discussed earlier in the chapter, discussions of identity with participants highlighted a tension between identity self-perceptions and the projections of others onto Black women's identities. Although participants' self-perceptions are complex with numerous dimensions connected to their identities as Black women influencing how they navigate their personal and professional lives, the projections onto their identities in their professional lives may have disparaging associations (e.g., negative and essentializing stereotypes and presumptions) that create challenges and barriers to their professional work and roles.

The impacts of these projections and the resistance and microaggressions that stem from them have consequences for Black women's careers and well-being, particularly over time due to their often consistent and persisting nature in spaces where Black women are recruited for their talents and experience, but in which underlying climate issues associated with gender and race-based bias are not addressed. Participants in the study talked about how they think about and process resistance to their leadership and the costs for their professional and personal well-being.

Twelve of the participants specifically talked about perspectives and strategies they employ to understand the resistance and protect themselves from the damage it can do to their well-being, recognizing the tolls of the labor, including emotional labor, of leadership as a Black woman in these institutional settings. One strategy was working to stay grounded in themselves and who they are, taking away the power and intended negative impacts of those projections onto them. In staying grounded in self, Black women protect themselves from the risk of internalizing these projections.

This strategy for protecting oneself from internalizing negative projections was discussed by Maeve. Maeve talked about recognizing the projections of her boss about who she is and how she leads as intended to make her feel like she needed to change who she is as a professional and leader. Maeve shared:

What I have been getting from my new boss about how I need to shift and change, I don't recognize myself in that. So . . . I ignore it because it's projection. I know myself and because I know myself and what I do and how I engage others and how I feel like others engage me based on the feedback that I get, I know a lie when I hear it about myself. I know projection when I see it about myself. So, I feel like I'm very grounded in who I am and what I do. Because I'm deliberate about it. I'm intentional about it. Because I have to. Because I'm a Black woman.

Maeve rejects internalizing her supervisor's projections of her needing to "shift and change" who she is because of her grounding in her knowledge of self. Her self-awareness is a tool and measure of protection against the messaging from him that her professional self is something less than what she knows it to be. These projections are examples of the weaponization of Black women's social identities literally attacking and attempting to diminish Black women leaders, their work, and their confidence in who they are. Staying grounded in self is a protective armor against that weaponization.

Agnes talked about this self-awareness as “liv[ing] in your power” and recognizing your own value and that the projections of others are attempts to diminish who Black women are and the value they bring to their work and roles. Agnes shared:

And you have to live in your power. You have to stand in your power. This is not about, you know, being arrogant. . . . This is about knowing what you do well and having some understanding of it and not letting people make you feel differently. I also don't think you should be boastful, but I don't think that you should allow people to somehow denigrate what you're doing or denigrate to you. And you have to know that. And I think as Black women, because the world doesn't exactly value us in the way we should be valued, we start having imposter syndrome and feeling that we are not valued and we're not valuable and we shouldn't be there. I totally know that any one of us who make it to this point in leadership, not only should be here, but we should be far away advanced from wherever we are because nobody lets us in. Nobody does us a favor. It's because you have done a good job that they promote you into these places and spaces.

Agnes here called out some of the intended negative impacts of resistance and negative projections onto Black women as contributing to imposter syndrome and questioning of self when resistance and projections are internalized. In living in their power, Black women are asserting that awareness of their value to deflect those intended impacts of how their identities are weaponized against them.

Another strategy for processing and deflecting the impacts of resistance and protecting themselves from the tolls and emotional labor of their roles and work as Black women senior leaders was calling on the support and guidance of family, friends, and other Black women leaders. As discussed earlier in the chapter, the influence and support of other Black women leaders, family, and allies provides validation, inspiration, guidance, and protection to these Black women leaders as they experience resistance and work to process it.

The support and influence of other Black women leaders in and outside of their institutions was noted earlier in the chapter as a particularly powerful source of inspiration and

validation of participants' experiences and challenges leading in PWIs, due to the commonalities in their experiences within and across institutions. Angela described the value and protection of those connections "because it is so taxing emotionally, and ultimately physically, that just having those sounding boards sometimes makes a big difference." Those sounding boards operate as points of release and safe harbors for Black women senior leaders as they work to process their experiences with resistance and manage the tolls of these experiences.

The impacts of resistance on Black women leaders in PWIs are multiple from the day-to-day challenges and barriers imposed on their role and work as leaders, which can have both professional consequences for their careers and personal consequences for their well-being. They face the labors of the increased and exponentialized challenges of leadership as Black women, as well as the emotional labors of navigating leadership managing their own emotions and the feelings, expectations, and projections of others onto who they are and the work that they do.

The Black women senior leaders in this study talked about these known impacts on themselves and other Black women in similar positions, and ways they think about and process resistance and these projections as not to internalize them in the ways that are intended. Staying grounded in self and recognizing their own power and value in the face of those projections is a strategy employed by Black women to deflect those projections and avoid internalizing them. Calling on the support and validation of family, friends, and other Black women in similar roles also provides relief and strength in not only processing resistance, but also in responding to it.

Finding 2: Weighing the Costs and Benefits for Self and Others: Calculating Whether and How to Respond to Resistance

If you are silent about your pain, they'll kill you and say you enjoyed it.

—Zora Neale Hurston

Black women senior leaders in this study recognized many impacts of the resistance they experience to their leadership. There are potential tolls on their well-being from the labor, including emotional labor, of navigating the barriers and challenges to their leadership, and potential tolls on their careers and how they navigate their career paths. There are also recognized potential tolls on their institutions from the impacts of the persistence of gendered racism on others in their institution with whom they work or who may be under their purview, as well as for those who may follow in their footsteps into senior leadership.

As discussed earlier in the chapter, the participants' social identities as Black women influence many of the ways they lead and approach leadership, including how they advocate for others and pursue and promote social justice and equity in their institutions for all, and particularly for other underrepresented and marginalized people who do not operate from the same position of power as Black women in senior leadership roles. The influence of their social identities on how they lead also contributes to how they weigh the costs and benefits of responding to the persistence of gendered racism and other forms of bias and discrimination that are leveled at them or others within the institution.

The participants responded to questions about whether they had a personal litmus test for weighing whether and how to respond to actions, comments, and dynamics that they view as resistance to their leadership as Black women. Several women commented with some version of the familiar phrase, "pick and choose your battles wisely," recognizing the costs of some fights may outweigh the benefits due the potential negative impacts on themselves and their work. This practice of picking and choosing battles recognizes the resistance they face is a challenge and barrier in their leadership, and that the time, efforts, and potential consequences in addressing resistance are additional challenges they take on in their already taxing leadership roles.

The Question of Whether to Respond.

I don't just say anything at any time to anybody about everything. Because I mean, you've got to choose your battles as a Black woman. . . . And you can't pop off every time there's a microaggression, every time there's a racial injustice. I mean, you wear yourself out if you do that. So, I'm deliberate, and I have been deliberate and intentional about when I'm going to speak up. So that when I do speak up, people listen.

—Maeve

The question as to whether to respond to actions, comments, and dynamics that represent resistance to their leadership was weighed by participants with various considerations. Six participants considered the negative precedent setting of letting certain actions, comments, and dynamics transpire without comment. Almost considered a “teachable moment,” they talked about the need to speak up and call out mistreatment or misbehavior, so it does not become the norm with that person or for others to see and emulate. Katherine talked about it as “teaching other people how to treat you” particularly when there are patterns emerging in how people interact with her. Katherine shared:

I have learned in these years is if you let that kind of thing go too frequently, you teach people how to treat you and you let them teach other people how to treat you. And I just am not anybody's doormat. Right? So now that doesn't mean that, you know, like I'm swinging my fist all day long because that's just stupid. You know? That's a lot. But there are times, and I can feel it, like, it like bubbles up in me and not like out of an angry place, but oh boy. Like if I don't say something and correct it, we're going to take a bad turn.

Katherine recognized here that allowing mistreatment to become a pattern sets the stage for continued mistreatment not only between her and the other person, but also that others can see and pick up on as well. This also recognizes and reflects the power leaders have for modeling behaviors and expectations regarding how people interact with and treat one another. This power can potentially influence the behaviors of others and ultimately what is considered acceptable

and unacceptable within the institution, particularly with respect to the inclusion and treatment of underrepresented and marginalized community members.

The consideration of precedent and patterns in deciding to respond to resistance and other behaviors associated with gendered racism was also discussed by Angela. Angela talked about this not just in terms of how people interact with her, but for how it perpetuates microaggressions and discrimination in the institutional environment that can get worse over time and that may have increasingly concerning consequences over time. She quoted Zora Neale Hurston's statement: "If you are silent about your pain, they'll kill you and say you enjoyed it," noting how at some point people need to be told about the impacts of the things they say and do toward underrepresented people, "because what you're doing damages people. And that this is what perpetuates the kind of microaggressions and racism that people experience."

Angela went on to describe the potential damages of not speaking up sharing a story about a DEI workshop at her institution where one woman talked about being described as "intimidating" because she is tall, but Angela wanted people to understand why she as a Black woman cannot accept that same labeling of being "intimidating." Angela explained:

I said, she can accept that kind of a definition or a description because people will say she's intimidating because she is tall. But I can't accept that description because people will say I'm intimidating because I'm Black. And it's that kind of racism that gets Black people killed. And so, I can't accept that. And so, every time somebody asks me or says I'm intimidating, I ask, "What behaviors am I engaging in that intimidate you? Or why do you feel intimidated?" So, let's put the responsibility where it lies.

Angela took into consideration both the individual and larger implications for not addressing what people may say or do that reflects stereotypes, bias and discrimination in actions, comments and dynamics addressed toward her or others. There is potential damage that can result on both an individual and institutional level in allowing the perpetuation of the gender

and race-based bias inherent in certain actions and statements by not addressing and responding to them. In this case, her response was to engage the person making the statement by asking them to explain and justify it, to highlight the root of it as their own projection and not grounded in who Angela is and how she leads.

Angela recognizes that people make “mistakes” in the things they say and do and sometimes they need to be extended grace “because everybody hasn’t had the experiences that I’ve had so they’re not going to recognize the microaggressions the way that I do.” However, she does not extend that grace to “the point of moral inertia” if not addressing these mistakes has potential consequences beyond that incident.

Four participants specifically referenced their career stage as a consideration in whether to respond, reflecting the security they have at their more senior level of experience. At this more senior stage, Black women senior leaders have more career opportunities and less reliance on a particular position or institution. Agnes described this more senior stage as one that provides more options and ease in responding to resistance because you are not seeking tenure or perhaps you have fewer constraints or considerations for where you are working with respect to career opportunities and family. Being at a more senior stage of career also provides more confidence in one’s leadership and in responding to others. Agnes shared:

You have to get to that level of strength and grit and understanding and the ability to stand up. And it doesn’t happen when you are young. It doesn’t happen when you have kids to feed, and you probably can’t afford to lose the job and all of that.

Career stage represents where challenges may lie for younger professionals or others with less power due to their positions in their institutions and their sense of having fewer options and choices for addressing microaggressions and other gender and race-based treatment. This is why for several participants the choice of whether to respond to resistance is often based on not only

considering the impacts on themselves, but also considering the impacts on others as well who may not have the same security or power to respond in light of the potential consequences of push back or retaliation. These others may be staff or colleagues who are also potentially subjected to those same types of microaggressions, but are more career vulnerable.

Maeve discussed weighing many of the aforementioned considerations of power and position, consequences, and impacts in determining whether to respond to resistance, as well as acknowledging the costs of taking up battles including how “exhausting” those battles can be.

Maeve shared:

I was still careful . . . guarding my social capital and my reputation. Which you have to do when you're early career and when you're earning tenure. But it was a little different than it is now. As a senior leader if it is individualized and just solely impacting me as an individual, I let it go . . . depending on who the individual is. With my boss, he has said a number of things to racially micro aggress me. A number of things over the past years and fricking exhausting. But I know that he is not open and will not respond too positively to a calling in no matter how gentle. And it's not worth it. Because he has too much power over me and how I'm going to live my life and how I'm going to function in my space. So, if it is a matter of just individual kind of one-on-one microaggressions that are just so freaking exhausting, the way I deal with it is I don't address it with him, but I complain about it to trusted colleagues. . . . And depending on what it is, sometimes document it. . . . But if it's going to have a broader impact that's going to affect another person who is more vulnerable and which will have also consequences and repercussions for the department or the unit or the university writ large, then I feel an obligation to do a calling in and to voice concern because it's bigger than just him saying some stupid sh*t to me. And so that's when I choose, that's when I have chosen. And it's cost me, it has cost me, it has cost me.

Whether to respond to actions, comments, and dynamics that are targeted at Black women as leaders or that affect not only Black women leaders, but also others in the institutional environment as well, involves multiple considerations as to whether that particular battle is one to engage in recognizing that there are costs to responding as well as to not responding. For Black women in this study, there is a clear recognition of the costs of responding from the literal

exhaustion noted by Maeve for the time and efforts it takes away from focusing on the already heavy responsibilities of their roles and work, and the potential of additional consequences and blow back from responding.

There are serious consequences to not responding as well in terms of what it signals and teaches to others about how the leaders themselves can and should be treated, as well as what is acceptable generally for interacting with other underrepresented and marginalized people in the institution. However, some participants acknowledged the costs to them professionally are in some ways less given the power of their seniority, giving them the ability to speak up on behalf of others and in the interest of quelling the perpetuation of microaggressions and gendered racism in their institutions.

The Question of How to Respond. In picking and choosing battles, there is the question not only of whether to respond, but also of how to respond when experiences with resistance and gendered racism warrant a response. All participants talked about different ways they have chosen to respond to the actions and comments of others they experienced as resistance to them in their roles and work as senior leaders. These responses were both direct and indirect means of identifying and calling out the behaviors and their impacts. There is a clear calculus here as well, determining what type of response will hopefully address the issue while also balancing the choice to respond and manner of response with other considerations of the context, working relationships, and striving to ensure that the message is heard and not dismissed or invalidated as an overreaction or reflecting preexisting stereotypes of Black women as angry or intimidating.

Consistent with how some participants talked about processing resistance and microaggressions, some participants talked about approaches they take to responding to microaggressions to force the perpetrator to consider what they have said and its impacts versus

allowing the impacts to fall solely on them. Jasmine shared a story of having a colleague offensively state that she was given a position because of her race. The experience was shocking, and she did not know how to respond in that moment, but after processing it, she has an approach she now uses in similar circumstances in which she turns the comments back onto the offender to put them in that discomforting space instead of her. Jasmine recalled:

When I was in my previous role, I had a faculty member, a colleague, literally say to me, “[He] put you in that role because he wanted some more Black people in the dean’s office.” And I was just stunned that she would say that to my face. I was so stunned. I moved on in the conversation and then spent all this time kicking myself because of it and preparing for the big comeback. Now I’ve kind of landed on this space of just always just throw the question back at them. “What would make you ask that? Hmm, that’s interesting. Why would you say that?” And so let them feel that discomfort instead of me just internalizing.

Not knowing how to respond in the moment is not an uncommon phenomenon, but in experiencing these types of microaggressions over time, the Black women leaders in this study have built toolkits of potential responses and strategies for addressing resistance and microaggressions. For Jasmine, this type of situation is not an everyday occurrence, but its impact on her contributed to her developing an approach to turn these situations around on the offender instead of letting the impact of the offense solely sit with her.

Five participants shared stories of another person, often a White male, repeating something they said earlier that was only engaged with at the meeting after the other person said it. This is a common example of a recurring microaggression and form of resistance that undermines a Black woman leader’s role and work that is often a regularly occurring phenomenon in their institutions. The participants who talked about these incidents often had one or more responses they use that varied in directness but are all aimed at calling out the behavior.

Maria shared how this happened repeatedly to her and other women and she just got to the point of calling it out directly in meetings. Maria recalled:

I just start calling it out. So, what do I have to lose? “That was my idea. That’s what I said. I said X and you said this, and you said that, but now it’s a great idea. I’m just look, just trying to get some understanding here of how decisions are made.” . . . Very few men come behind you and do it again when they get called out. But most women suffer in silence and they’re angry and they go home.

Maria arrived at a place in her leadership where she no longer was going to “suffer in silence,” recognizing, as discussed earlier, the power and impact of her positionality as a senior leader and having less to lose by confronting this recurring behavior. Maria learned that calling out the offense directly decreased the chance of those incidences recurring because the offender learned she was willing to name it publicly.

There is still a calculus, however, that Maria and other Black women in the study make looking at context and how to respond to resistance and offenses in meetings. Maria shared how her own emotional state influences her choice to speak up. She may choose not to speak up in a meeting if something offensive is said if she is feeling anger in that moment. It does not mean that she does not respond, but she may take a less direct approach of having the conversation outside of the meeting to address the issue just with that person. Maria explained:

I try not to speak if something makes me angry. I’ve been at the table and things have been said and it made me angry. And I try not to speak at that moment because the anger is usually palpable. When people at the table are angry, I try to address it at a different time. Or maybe that’s something I pull you aside and say, “you know, when you said X, this is what it meant to me. Was that your intent?” So maybe it’s something you handle differently than addressing at the table. And so, all of those things I think you have to consider when you’re at the table.

Seven participants talked about using a less direct or less public approach to addressing resistance in consideration of the politics of the environment, how important the relationships are to maintain professionally, as well as considering how the type of response may not help the

situation if seen as justifying preexisting negative stereotypes of Black women as angry or intimidating. Angela, in talking about when she chooses to address resistance and microaggressions, discussed recognizing her role and responsibility in not letting those behaviors lie and build, while also recognizing where people make mistakes and may need a chance to catch up in understanding the behaviors as racist or sexist. She does similar calculations in deciding how to respond and the purpose of that response, recognizing how she responds could reinforce the negative stereotypes people hold of Black women thereby losing the intended impact of her response. Angela stated:

I have to decide whether or not I'm going to be very direct, because sometimes it's viewed as being intimidating. But sometimes it's necessary. Or whether or not I'm going to be leading in terms of helping to lead someone to a particular kind of decision or an awareness.

Angela was conscious of the different implications for how the type of response she had would land and the need to be flexible in how she chose to respond, given a variety of considerations of context, the people, the relationship, and her goals and intentions with responding.

Participants shared various ways of responding, all with different considerations that are context driven by who is involved, what was said or done, whether the situation is egregious, how the participant felt in the moment, and what the longer-term implications are of whether and how they choose to respond. In these ways, the women demonstrate agency in not only whether to respond, but also how to respond with a complex and layered calculus for whether and how to address resistance to their leadership as well as other behaviors and dynamics that have implications for the institution's climate and culture.

The calculations and choices of whether and how to respond are about looking at costs and benefits within the situation. Understanding how the Black women senior leaders in this

study approach these calculations and choices reflects a great deal of agency and recognition of the options they have for whether and how to respond to protect themselves personally and professionally, as well as to protect others and work toward addressing climate and culture issues in their institutions.

Finding 3: Fighting for Your Seat or Walking Away From the Table: Exiting as a Response to Resistance

Another option that at least half of the Black women leaders discussed in addressing resistance to their leadership is the choice of whether to stay or leave their institutions. This choice incorporates the multiple considerations discussed earlier, from looking at the impacts of resistance and gendered racism on their professional and personal well-being, weighing the costs of benefits of their options for responding to and managing resistance and gendered racism, and recognizing the additional options available to them at the more senior stages of their careers.

In this choice, however, exists a tension in recognizing what their roles as senior leaders in their PWIs represent historically in decades of intentional work, struggle, and advocacy to increase diversity in these institutions at all levels including senior leadership for Black women and other historically underrepresented people. Whether they are the first of their kind in their roles or one of the few over time to lead in their institutions, they have broken through persisting historic barriers to get a seat at the table of leadership. Persisting through the challenges in these roles that have been historically denied to underrepresented people has been seen as a responsibility for people of color and other underrepresented people to try to maintain those seats and open other opportunities for underrepresented people. It is also described as fighting or working from within to maintain and create opportunities and to improve the cultures and climates of organizations as authentically inclusive and equitable.

Five participants in the study talked about weighing options for leaving positions and this tension with which they and other Black women leaders they know have wrestled, between fighting the resistance and microaggressions they experience at work to maintain their seat at the table and working from within to improve the culture and climate of their institution for other underrepresented people versus protecting themselves recognizing the potential consequences to their own professional and personal well-being. In fighting from within, they are taking on the challenges and barriers to their roles and work as leaders often in institutions that are not willing to do the same hard work to support and protect them and others by looking critically at how to dismantle those practices, systems, and cultures that are enabling various forms and permutations of gendered racism to persist.

Michelle talked about this tension between staying and going playing out among her “tribe” of trusted Black women friends and colleagues from whom she was getting advice on whether to stay or leave a previous position. It was the first time she had seen such a clear divide in the advice she was getting from this group of advisors who understood and related to her situation. Michelle shared:

[Some women advised] “You gotta protect your mental health, your family. . . . This is not worth, no job is worth that. And don’t allow one job to define who you are and not allow them to make you assimilate to succeed there.” And some are like, “Work within the system so you can transform other people and show them that you can still be yourself. Straddle it,” you know? So, it was just this weird, it was weird camps.

Michelle was getting opposing advice representing two very real and legitimate perspectives on how to respond to the resistance she was experiencing at a former institution, which had her questioning personally whether to protect and maintain her seat at the table and fight the fight from within, or to protect her own professional and personal well-being and exercise the choices and options she had to pursue new opportunities.

Olivia also talked about this divide and how she and her trusted group of Black women colleagues talk about staying or leaving positions and institutions that are continually putting up barriers to their roles and work. Olivia shared:

But like for me, what I hear a lot about the Black women trope is like you just gotta keep fighting, keep fighting, and you know, like that's supposed to be like what Black women do. You just work harder. And, really trying to disentangle that and going, there's a difference between working hard and fighting for stuff and banging your head against a brick wall. And we have to get better at deciding what is worth the time and the energy for the fight. And when is it time to recognize that it, that situation is depleting you and it's time to move on. And so, we talk very openly about when it might time to do something different.

Olivia and her Black women colleagues are questioning the more traditional perspective of working through the challenges experienced by Black women in leadership, recognizing the costs may be too great professionally and personally and there may be futility to those efforts in situations and circumstances where the efforts may not lead to any meaningful headway or change.

Erica also noted this futility as part of what is inspiring her to leave her institution, saying:

If I can't change the system, I have to get out of the system. I found it really ironic that a big part of my job is talking about retention, and I'm looking for other jobs because I felt so disrespected.

Responding to resistance for some Black women leaders in this study is also about considering whether exiting is the better choice over following the more traditionally perpetuated notion of staying to maintain and fight for an opportunity historically not afforded to Black women. It is another consideration in weighing the costs and benefits for self, as well as recognizing that creating change in an institution's culture and climate cannot be done just on the backs and efforts of those negatively impacted by it. As Erica and others in the study noted, the

system cannot always be changed by that person, or efforts to do so may be like “hitting your head against a brick wall,” as noted by Olivia, which results in further damage to self.

The findings discussed earlier from the narratives of the 15 Black women senior leaders in the study provide insights into their leadership experiences in their PWIs, looking at how they respond to the resistance they experience to their leadership as connected to their social identities as Black women. The resistance to their leadership is part of the challenges and barriers they face in leadership unique to their social identities as Black women. This resistance has real consequences for their professional and personal well-being with the stress and burdens it adds to the already heavy weight and responsibilities of senior leadership.

Participants in the study talked about these added stresses and burdens as manifesting themselves in their lives and the lives of their Black women leader friends and colleagues in various ways that have potential emotional, psychological, and physical impacts. Aware of these potential impacts, Black women senior leaders process and respond to resistance and the impacts of gendered racism operating in their institutions thoughtfully and with intention. They work to stay grounded in self and in their power recognizing that the resistance, bias, and discrimination they may face is a projection onto their role and work as leaders and not a reflection of shortcomings on their part. They work to deflect the harm that can result from internalizing those projections and the weaponization of their identities as Black women. They call upon the support and influence of other Black women leaders familiar with the challenges and barriers they face, as well as upon the support and protection of family and allies as they process resistance and determine whether and how to respond to it.

In deciding whether and how to respond to resistance to their leadership, the women in this study exercise their agency in weighing the costs and benefits of responding thinking not

only of the impact of responding on themselves, but also on others in their institution and on the institutional environment more generally. For some participants, the choice to respond was about the egregiousness of the behaviors, actions, or dynamics leveled at them or which they observed, recognizing that in not responding, those behaviors, actions, or dynamics may be seen as acceptable or be normalized for others to emulate. Not responding to resistance and other behaviors reflecting race and gender-based bias and discrimination was recognized in some cases as having potentially serious consequences in perpetuating the offending behaviors and further entrenching and enabling the persistence of gendered racism in the climate and culture of the institution. However, participants also recognized the costs and burdens of responding are not insignificant, particularly given the prevalence of them, and part of their leadership challenge is deciding in which battles to engage.

In picking and choosing battles, participants also needed to consider how to respond to resistance when a response is warranted. Several considerations emerged from participants' stories about how they respond both directly and indirectly to people and situations. As in deciding whether to respond, participants also weigh the context, the people, the relationships, and the goals and intentions of their responses in deciding how to respond to and call out resistance to their leadership and other biased and discriminatory actions, attitudes, behaviors, and communications.

Lastly, in processing resistance to their leadership and the impacts of gendered racism on their work and roles as leaders, some Black women in the study have grappled with whether to fight to remain at the table of leadership or walk away. This choice represents a tension between two legitimate options. The first option is using the power and influence of their positionality as senior leaders in their institutions to fight from within for not only their own hard earned and

deserved role, but also to ensure the decades of struggle and advocacy for these career opportunities to be open to Black women is recognized, protected, and advanced in working from within to continue dismantling the practices, systems, and cultures that continue to pose challenges and barriers to the authentic and equitable inclusion of Black women in these leadership spaces. The second option in tension with the first, is that of choosing to exit these sometimes-toxic institutional environment recognizing the potential consequences to their own professional and person well-being and recognizing they do have more career choices and options available to them at these more senior stages of leadership.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

This dissertation study sought to understand how Black women senior leaders experience their places and roles in traditionally White and male spaces of senior leadership in predominantly White institutions (PWIs). It sought to understand from the perspectives of 15 Black women senior leaders in PWIs how Black women's intersectional identities influence their leadership approach and experiences, as well as how they are responded to by others in their institutions. It explored how these leaders navigate their roles and institutions, the support and resistance they face in their leadership, and how they process and respond to that resistance that challenges and burdens their leadership and careers in ways unique to the leadership and careers of their peers who are not Black women.

PWIs are publicly promoting their goals for becoming more diverse, equitable, and inclusive spaces where underrepresented professionals feel an authentic sense of belonging and have equitable experiences and opportunities to those of their majority peers (Cumming et al., 2023). However, these same institutions are experiencing continued challenges in attracting, promoting, and retaining diverse talent in their faculty, staff, and leadership positions, including Black women in the senior echelons of leadership. This begs the question as to whether institutions are merely "checking the diversity box" or doing the more difficult work needed to authentically and impactfully address the underlying and persisting challenges Black women senior leaders face in their work and roles in PWIs.

In sharing the stories and experiences of the 15 Black women senior leaders who participated in this dissertation study, this work sought to shine a light on these challenges. It sought to give voice to the stories of these talented, powerful, inspiring, and resilient leaders for the benefit of other Black women and marginalized individuals facing similar challenges, as well

as to benefit institutions that desire to dig more deeply and with greater understanding into how to do better and be better in serving, supporting, and valuing the diversity in their faculty, staff, and leadership.

The Persisting Vulnerability of Black Women in Higher Education Leadership

This research project took place during a time of particular vulnerability for Black women in higher education. In 2020, with the murder of George Floyd and the growth of the Black Lives Matter movement, the United States appeared to sit up and take very public notice, once again, of the legacies of discrimination in this country and how deeply embedded racism is in our culture and institutions with literal life and death consequences. We began to see both the public and private sectors committing and recommitting to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) values and goals, including in their leadership (Cumming et al., 2023; Guynn & Fraser, 2023). Higher education was no different as an uptick occurred in the number of women and people of color taking on presidencies of colleges and universities, including some of the country's most elite with diversity efforts following suit in other senior and executive roles as well (Lederman, 2022). The talent in these groups to take these roles has always been there, but the doors were opened wider to them with intention and purpose. These were signals of hope, promise, and opportunity that were met with cautious optimism, recognizing the history of race and gender discrimination and social justice work in this country.

This publicly spotlighted and targeted promotion of women and people of color in higher education, however, has not addressed nor negated the persisting realities of workplace discrimination and its very serious consequences for these groups. In the fall of 2023, the consequences for Black women's professional and personal well-being were highlighted with two tragic deaths of Black women higher education presidents. Joanne A. Epps, president of

Temple University, and Dr. Orinthia T. Montague, president of Volunteer State Community College, both passed away unexpectedly in September 2023. These were two beloved and respected Black women leaders, and their passing impacted many, not only in their institutions and those influenced and impacted by their careers, but also Black women and other women of color across the country who could connect with their positionality as Black women leaders in higher education.

Although the causes of their deaths were not publicized, their passing spurred speculation of the role stress may have played impacting their health and well-being. News stories and social media posts of both personal anecdotes and research on the unique challenges and burdens women of color administrators in higher education face were spotlighted (deGregory, 2023; Thomas, 2023). The cumulative impacts of microaggressions, stereotyping, hostility, resistance, and marginalization experienced over the span of educations and careers in higher education institutions (HEIs) were written about by women of color exhausted by these experiences and in fear of what these presidents' deaths represented with respect to the impacts of work-related stress on women of color.

In the case of President Epps, the trauma associated with her passing was exacerbated by the circumstances surrounding it. During a memorial service taking place on campus, President Epps collapsed on stage. Her limp body was carried away by an officer in front of a crowd of students and attendees and she was taken to the hospital where she was pronounced dead. A short prayer was said after she was removed from the service, and the program continued. The choice to move on with the program sent a painful message to Black women and others on campus shocked at the decision that the collapse and death of a Black woman was not reason enough to stop the show. The trauma from seeing this beloved president collapse and not

knowing whether she would live or die was very real for many people at the event, particular women of color and others struck by what that decision signaled about the respect and value placed on this Black woman leader's condition and life. (Womack, 2023)

I recall working on my interview protocol in a local café and reading articles about the deaths of Presidents Epps and Montague and feeling that same sadness, anger, shock, and fear of women of color like me thinking about these dedicated, talented, and accomplished Black women senior leaders and the impacts their work and roles likely had on their health and well-being. In sharing their reactions to these leaders' deaths, women of color often noted how their institutions were not only often unaware of how the pressures and discrimination within these environments affected women of color, but also continued to either give lip service to or ignore the disparate treatment and impacts experienced by women of color in these professional spaces. As I read through these posts and articles, I felt my own sadness and fear, recognizing and relating to the truths of these women's experiences and feelings from my own lived experience as a Black women senior leader in higher education.

In 2024, the disparate treatment and experiences of Black women in higher education leadership was in the news again with the very public attacks on the character, scholarship, and leadership of Dr. Claudine Gay, the first Black president of Harvard University. She resigned in January 2024 just 6 months after the start of her presidency amid controversies and attacks affecting many universities and presidents across the country, including Harvard. These attacks were escalated against her, bringing her scholarship and her qualifications and fitness to lead into question.

Dr. Gay weighed the costs of the very public attacks on her leadership and the impacts on her and her family and chose to resign from the presidency. Although the contexts surrounding

her resignation were complex and she acknowledged missteps and mistakes in aspects of how these political situations were handled, she also openly noted the racial aspects of the attacks against her and her leadership. Dr. Gay (2024) wrote in a New York Times guest essay about her resignation, “It is not lost on me that I make an ideal canvas for projecting every anxiety about the generational and demographic changes unfolding on American campuses: a Black woman selected to lead a storied institution” (para. 10). She called out the racial stereotypes and negative presumptions about Black talent and competence that were projected onto her as a Black woman in leadership from those whose biased beliefs and images of university leadership were threatened by her presence in Harvard’s highest executive role.

Just a week later, Black women in higher education were again shocked to learn about the suicide of Dr. Antoinette “Bonnie” Candia-Bailey. Dr. Candia-Bailey was the vice president of student affairs at Lincoln University, an HBCU, and her own research focused on the challenges to Black women’s career advancement in senior level administration in higher education. She tragically took her own life after being terminated by the university’s White male president whom she had accused of harassing and bullying her.

These are but a few stories that, in addition to those of the participants, illustrate the continued vulnerability of Black women in senior leadership despite the signals of and commitments to inclusion and advancement seen in recent years in higher education and other industries. An important question remains: What can be learned not only from these very public tragedies and events and the public reactions to them, but also from the experiences and stories of individual Black women leaders that reflect not only their own journeys, but also the contexts, cultures, and climates of HEIs?

The following are some implications of the findings of this dissertation study, both for Black women in leadership in higher education and other underrepresented and marginalized people whose experiences in leadership mirror those of Black women leaders, as well as for institutions that seek to more authentically and impactfully address their challenges with attracting, promoting, and retaining Black women in senior leadership.

Implications and Recommendations for Black Women Leaders

The stories and reflections of the 15 dissertation study participants over 30 hours of interviews and three focus group sessions provided insights into how Black women experience their roles and work as senior leaders in PWIs, how their intersectional identities as Black women influence their leadership experiences and approaches to leadership, as well as how they experience and respond to both support for and resistance to their leadership. There were many aspects of these women's experiences that mirrored each other, as well as nuances to every woman's stories reflecting their unique contexts and perspectives. All of these women's stories were rich with wisdom from their vast professional experiences and thoughtful reflections on who they are as Black women leaders in higher education, how they have navigated their professional journeys, and on all the many contributions they have made and will continue to make within their fields.

The findings of this dissertation study were informed by this rich wisdom that includes implications and recommendations for Black women leaders, both aspiring and current, and for the institutions that wish to attract, promote, and retain this talent. Looking first at implications and recommendations for other Black women in higher education leadership, the following three recommendations emerged from the findings:

1. Find a network of Black women leaders for support.

2. Seek institutions with senior/chief executive leadership that practice their commitments to impactful DEI work and values.
3. Recognize the multiple options and opportunities for addressing resistance.

Recommendation 1: Find a Network of Black Women Leaders for Support

The findings in Chapter 4 pointed to the multiple influences and types of support other Black women in higher education have provided to the majority of participants. For the women who shared stories of these influences and supports, these connections, these “sisters of the struggle” and members of their “tribes” are trusted mentors, peers, friends, and colleagues who share or have shared similar experiences and challenges in the same institution or in other institutions currently or at other stages of their careers. Their support, guidance, friendship, and empathetic ears help in processing the challenges these women face in their leadership journeys, avoiding the pitfalls of internalization, and strategizing whether and how to address these challenges depending on the costs and benefits of doing so.

In having a “tribe,” Black women have the benefit of their own network, not only for all that was described earlier, but also for the other benefits of mentors and networks such as access to professional opportunities and influential people, and information sharing that their White male peers are likely to have with minimal efforts due to their numbers and dominance in the institution. This community of support helps counter the professional and social isolation that is a serious reality and risk of being an only or one of very few of one’s identity group in their institution or leadership team.

What was shared about having other Black women leaders as mentors or as part of one’s network highlights this as an importance consideration and objective for other Black women in or aspiring to leadership positions in higher education, and PWIs in particular. Connecting with

other Black women in higher education, whether at one's own institution or others, through intentional networking and outreach, and at professional conferences and associations targeting Black women or particular practice areas of higher education are all ways to try to develop this network and identify and connect with people with whom Black women in higher education can receive and provide support, networking, and community to each other.

Although finding one's "tribe" or professional networks of support does not necessarily preclude people of other identity groups, the findings of Chapter 4 suggest— in addition to the support that may come from allies and others who are not Black women who offer and provide mentorship, support, and guidance—connections with other Black women leaders offer unique resources that often more closely mirror and map onto the experiences, needs, and interests of Black women senior leaders.

Recommendation 2: Seek Institutions With Senior/Chief Executive Leadership That Practices Their Commitments to Impactful DEI Work and Values

Chapter 4 outlined several findings related to what support for and resistance to their leadership looks like for the participants. The influence of the senior/chief executive leadership to whom participants report was talked about as having a significant impact on whether and how some of the participants felt support for or resistance to their leadership. The people to whom they report, particularly if this person is the president, was talked about by several participants as having great influence on the climate of their institutions and how those women were viewed and treated by others, particularly by their peers.

These most senior leaders set the tone and expectations for how these participants, and other underrepresented and marginalized members of leadership, are to be viewed and treated. Their support in forms such as publicly showcasing their work and contributions, providing

personnel and budgetary resources to support their operations, and ensuring their voices and work are heard, acknowledged, and respected are but some of the ways executive leadership for some participants actively practiced their commitments to the work and values of DEI.

These stories of support from the people to whom some participants reported highlighted the importance of Black women leaders or aspiring leaders seeking institutions and people to report to who authentically practice their commitments to the values and work of DEI, and who understand or seek to understand what the Black women leaders reporting to them want and need to experience support for their leadership and careers. Black women leaders, in weighing opportunities, should not be afraid to ask questions about what institutions and their senior/chief executive leadership not just say but also do in practice to advance their institution's DEI work and values, to support diverse leadership and others from underrepresented groups in experiencing genuine inclusion and work experiences equitable to their peers, and to identify and address persisting bias and discrimination.

Black women leaders should be prepared to share with prospective employers and supervisors what support looks like for them in their work and careers as Black women, and to see what institutions and supervisors are prepared and committed to providing. If these questions and topics are not well received, or if institutions and individuals are in denial of underrepresented people having different experiences and challenges, that alone may provide insight into what the workplace culture and climate may be in practice.

Recommendation 3: Recognize the Multiple Options and Opportunities for Addressing Resistance

Chapter 4 discussed the participants' personal calculations or litmus tests for whether and how to respond to resistance to their leadership recognizing that there are costs and benefits that

need to be weighed in determining whether the battle is worth the fight. The calculus can be personal and driven by particular relational and institutional contexts. The calculus also takes into consideration that some of the costs and consequences can fall directly onto the Black women leaders who take on the additional burdens of and potential consequences from responding to the resistance they experience or the bias and discrimination they observe impacting other, often more vulnerable, people in the institution.

Chapter 4 also discussed the option of exiting as a response to resistance and highlighted this as an option with a particular calculus unique to some Black women leaders. This unique calculus involves a tension between maintaining one's seat at the leadership table and fighting from within to address the resistance they experience and observe to improve conditions for themselves and others, versus exiting in one's own best interest given the very real consequences of resistance and discrimination on Black women's professional and personal well-being. This tension recognizes Black women's roles and work as senior leaders in PWIs represent decades of intentional struggle and advocacy to open up these opportunities to qualified and historically excluded diverse talent. Persisting through the challenges and resistance to their leadership as Black women has been seen historically as a responsibility for maintaining those opportunities and creating more for other underrepresented people. However, Black women today are justifiably questioning that perspective given the very real costs from the toxicity and stress uniquely targeted at and experienced by many Black women in senior leadership.

As talented and experienced professionals with valuable assets for the institutions in which they work, Black women leaders have options not only for whether and how they respond to resistance and bias in their workplace, but also for whether they choose to stay or leave their institutions for new opportunities and institutional environments that may be more supportive of

their careers and well-being. The tension between staying to fight or leaving are both legitimate options that each recognize their presence and persistence in these institutions, as well as their exercising their options to seek better opportunities are both testaments to the legacies upon which their careers and opportunities have been built and to which their work and presence have contributed. Black women senior leaders are never stuck or beholden to their current situations. They have and should always recognize the agency and positionality they possess to exercise the many options and opportunities available to them in addressing resistance.

Implications and Recommendations for Institutions

Turning to implications and recommendations for institutions seeking to attract, promote, and retain Black women in senior leadership, the findings of this study highlight considerations for how to think about and do the challenging and critical work of understanding institutional climates and cultures and how environments are experienced by underrepresented and marginalized people, including Black women. Three recommendations that emerged from the stories and themes from the interviews and focus groups include:

1. Create opportunities and safe spaces for developing honest, shared understanding of Black women's experiences in senior leadership.
2. Support senior/chief executive leaderships' understanding of their roles and responsibilities in driving institutional culture, climate, and expectations with respect to Black Women's experiences in senior leadership.
3. Track data and look inward for explanations and solutions.

Recommendation 1: Create Opportunities and Safe Spaces for Developing Honest, Shared Understanding of Black Women's Experiences in Senior Leadership

Although Black women senior leaders in the study talked about leading openly and authentically asserting their identities as Black women, and using their social identities as tools of influence in how they lead and contribute to their institutions, they still experienced degrees of institutional ignorance or denial of their leadership experiences with resistance and bias related to their social identities. Institutions committed to authentically and impactfully advancing their DEI work and values need to consider how to challenge this ignorance and denial with efforts to develop understanding and provide validation of and response to the challenges that Black women encounter in their leadership.

One of many difficulties in this work is how to do so in ways that recognize and protect the vulnerability of those already targeted and in the minority. When Black women senior leaders are an only or one of few, getting honest and open feedback about their experiences and those of others like them puts those individuals at risk of judgement and retaliation. Expecting those individuals to come forward on their own and to be heard puts the onus of the problems and solutions on the backs of those impacted. Institutions need to consider how to create opportunities and safe spaces for developing shared understanding, validation, and response to what Black women senior leaders and others similarly situated experience in their institutions.

What that work can look like needs to be driven by the context and makeup of an institution. Using multiple approaches may help yield an actionable portrait of the culture and climate of the institution. Surveys that solicit the experiences and perceptions of all members of an institution regarding their experiences within and observations of the institutional environment with respect to inclusion and equity practices are useful tools. Engaging outside,

independent evaluators and consultants to help develop strategic assessment plans, facilitate courageous conversations, and use methods of story-based inquiry for transformative change are but some approaches that could help institutions examine their persisting discrimination and equity issues in ways that also address vulnerability concerns and the impacts of internal bias (Ravitch & Kannan, 2022; Singleton, 2022). University systems may want to consider doing evaluation work across campuses, recognizing that although there could be variation at each location, the findings should have relevance for all campuses.

HEIs as institutions committed to research and scholarship should also be looking at existing research on these issues and considering how this work may reflect dynamics on their own campuses. Lastly, exit interviews need to start being data sources and not the perfunctory black holes where exiting employees' feedback seemingly goes nowhere. Tracking data from exit interviews and pooling it as not to reflect any one experience may provide information and highlight trends of which institutions should be aware.

Recommendation 2: Support Senior/Chief Executive Leaderships' Understanding of Their Roles and Responsibilities in Driving Institutional Culture, Climate, and Expectations With Respect to Black Women's Experiences in Senior Leadership

The findings of Chapter 4 highlighted the important role senior/chief executives play in driving the cultures of their institutions by setting the tone and expectations for how the Black women leaders on their teams are to be viewed and treated. The extent to which college and university presidents, trustees, and other senior executives understand their responsibilities and the impacts of their actions or lack of actions is worthy of exploration. Anointing CDOs and their offices with moving the campus forward in promoting DEI may not be sufficient efforts on the part of a president or other highly visible leader. The findings from this study suggest the roles

and responsibilities of presidents and other senior executives needs to go beyond words and symbolic actions, and that there are concrete actions that these leaders can take in modeling how to include, respect, value, and promote the work and contributions of underrepresented leaders and others in their institutions, and to address the microaggressions and other forms of resistance they experience.

Recommendation 3: Track Data and Look Inward for Explanations and Solutions

As institutions that are expert in collecting and using data, HEIs need to assess the degrees to which they are strategically using data to drive their understandings of and initiatives in advancing DEI. Relying on anecdotes and perceptions of those in the majority provides limited and biased pictures and understandings allowing the persistence of ignorance and denial about how underrepresented and marginalized members of the institutions, including Black women senior leaders, are experiencing their places in the community.

Tracking and assessing data on the identities of applicants, including those interviewed and to whom offers are made, as well as yield along the various points of recruitment, in addition to looking at lengths of tenure are baseline information all institutions should be tracking. Looking at diversity trends among different constituencies (i.e., faculty, staff, leadership), as well as different academic and operational areas is additional information that should be tracked to see any patterns within and across groups. Pairing this information with exit interview data could provide more complete pictures of the realities of diversity within and the experiences of underrepresented people across an institution.

In trying to make sense of the data, institutions need to resist the persisting tendency to look outward, focusing on traditional excuses for their persisting lack of diversity, such as blaming pipelines and the need to expand recruitment outreach to include HBCUs and

publications that target underrepresented groups. Institutions need to start looking inward at what these candidates and their employees are experiencing when they visit or join these institutions, as well as why this talent chooses to look for other positions instead of chalking up their exits to finding new and better opportunities elsewhere. Recommendation 1 provides ideas for how some of this introspective work could occur.

Study Limitations and Implications for Future Research

As a dissertation study, there are limitations to the scope of this type of work. Although this study has identified themes and commonalities in these women's experiences, as well as explored divergences, it has not intended to portray a comprehensive portrait of Black women senior leader experiences in PWIs. It has sought to convey a deeper understanding of these 15 Black women's experiences from their own perspectives, languaged in their own voices and with their own conceptualizations of their experiences. The number of participants appropriate to this dissertation does not support generalizing the findings and analysis to all Black women senior leaders in PWIs. This research was conducted to add to the building narratives and understandings of the leadership experiences of Black women in higher education.

There are many directions and areas of further inquiry to take this type of work, based on the existing literature and research including this dissertation study. There is significant within group diversity among Black women and a limited sample size cannot do justice to this diversity reflected in the many additional layers of identity among these participants and other Black women senior leaders in higher education. Just a few of the additional areas for potential research and inquiry include:

- How does age/generation influence how Black women senior leaders approach and experience leadership in PWIs?

- How do Black women senior leaders' experiences in PWIs vary as related to other marginalized identities they may hold such as LGBTQ+?
- How do Black women leaders' identities and backgrounds as voluntary immigrants versus being descendants of involuntary immigrants influence their leadership approach and experiences?
- How do the leadership experiences of Black women vary across different sizes and types of institutions such as public, private, and mission-based institutions including HBCUs?
- How does support for and resistance to Black women's leadership look across different functional areas and roles?
- Does support for and resistance to Black women's leadership in PWIs look different for Black women presidents?

As Zora Neale Hurston famously wrote, "If you are silent about your pain, they'll kill you and say you enjoyed it." May research continue to give platform and voice to the experiences of others who historically and currently experience pain imposed by challenges, bias, and discrimination connected to who they are and their marginalized status and positionality within HEIs. May this work not only support those individuals and groups, but also the institutions that seek to do better and be better in becoming the inclusive and equitable institutions they aspire to be.

APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

Via Email

Hello Ms./Dr. _____,

I am contacting you regarding my dissertation research study is currently titled *Black Women as Senior Leaders in Predominantly White Institutions of Higher Education: Experiences and Challenges Impacting Roles and Representation*. The following paragraphs contain information about the purpose of the study, the criteria for participation, and what is involved to participate with the hopes that you may be interested in volunteering as a participant.

I come to this project as a Black woman senior leader in higher education. I most recently was the Associate Vice Chancellor for Research Administration, Integrity, and Development at the University of Massachusetts Lowell, and I have worked in higher education for over 15 years. Currently I am a doctoral candidate in the University of Pennsylvania's Executive Doctoral Program (EdD) in Higher Education Management in their Graduate School of Education conducting this work under the supervision of my dissertation chair, Dr. Sharon M. Ravitch.

If you are open to and interested in learning more about participating in this research study, please let me know and I will contact you to schedule a call or Zoom to discuss your participation further and answer any questions you may have. In addition to this email (REDACT), I can also be contacted at REDACT. I greatly appreciate your consideration of this and am glad to have had the opportunity to introduce myself to you!

With thanks,

Susan Puryear

Purpose: This research study is being conducted to understand the experiences of Black women as senior leaders in predominantly White institutions (PWIs) of higher education and the challenges they may face related to their identities as Black women. It seeks to understand the strategies they may use to effectively lead and to address resistance in their roles working in institutions where senior leadership is traditionally White and/or male. It seeks to contribute to a better understanding of how Black women view and experience their careers in senior leadership roles in PWIs through the sharing of their stories.

Participation Criteria: Participants in this study will:

- Self-identify as Black or African American.
- Self-identify as female.
- Work currently or have worked in a PWi.
- Self-identify as someone who is or has been a senior leader at a PWi. This level could include Assistant/Associate Dean, Dean, Assistant/Associate Vice Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, Assistant/Associate Vice President, Vice President, Assistant/Associate/Vice Provost, Provost.

Your Participation: The study involves participating in an interview which should last between 90–120 minutes that can be done as one or two sessions. There is also an opportunity to participate in an optional 1-hour focus group.

Interviews may be conducted in person in cases where this is preferred by the participant and logistically feasible for both the participant and the researcher. If not, these interviews will be conducted via Zoom. Focus groups will be conducted via Zoom.

Interviews and focus groups will be recorded for the study use only. No identifying information (yours or that of your institution) will be used in any of the transcripts, analysis, or

writing of the research. Pseudonyms will be used throughout the research study, and in subsequent writings.

In addition to participating in the interviews and optional focus group, the participants may be contacted after these sessions with brief clarifying questions or requests to validate findings.

Interviews and focus groups will occur in October and November 2023 with potential brief contacts with participants for questions and confirmations on the data in November and December 2023.

APPENDIX B: UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Research Study: Black Women as Senior Leaders in Predominantly White
Institutions of Higher Education: Experiences and Challenges
Impacting Their Roles and Representation

Principal Investigator: Dr. Diane Eynon, REDACT

Interviewer/Researcher: Susan Puryear, REDACT

Thank you for agreeing to participate in Susan Puryear’s doctoral study on the experiences of Black women as senior leaders in predominantly White institutions (PWIs) of higher education. In advance of your participation, we seek your acknowledgment that you have been informed of and understand the following terms of your consent to participate in the research interview:

- The study will involve participating in an interview lasting between 90–120 minutes that can be completed in one session or broken into two sessions as convenient for the participant. The interviews will be recorded with your consent to ensure accuracy.
- Participants will be invited to engage in an optional focus group with other participants. This will last 60 minutes. The focus group will be recorded with your consent to ensure accuracy.
- The interviewer/researcher, Susan Puryear, will treat all the information shared as confidential. No identifying information including institutional affiliations will be used in any of the transcripts, analysis, or writing of the research. Pseudonyms of the

participants' choices will be used throughout the research study, and in subsequent writings.

- You further acknowledge that you understand that protecting your privacy and confidentiality is of the utmost importance to this study. All data will be kept securely under the researcher's sole control and access on their personal local storage device and cloud storage account. Any identifiers associated with the data will be destroyed following completion of this study and dissertation approval and degree conferral. Data will not be shared with others for future research.
- However, you understand that total privacy can never be guaranteed. Your personal information may be given out if required by law. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Pennsylvania (UPenn) will have access to your records.
- You understand that no one—including your employer— other than the study researcher, her dissertation committee and UPenn research thought partners from her cohort will receive any information about what is shared during this interview. The shared data will not contain identifying information.
- In the spirit of confidentiality, you agree that you will treat as confidential any information collected during the interview or focus group that may reveal the identity of any other research participant or participant's organization.
- You understand that the researcher, Susan Puryear, seeks to conduct the interviews and focus groups in October and November 2023 with potential brief contacts with participants for questions and confirmations on the data in November and December 2023. This timeline may be extended as needed.

- You understand that you are not expected to directly benefit from being in this research study. You may experience discomfort in discussing issues and challenges related to your professional life and personal identity that may include experiences with microaggressions and/or overt discrimination. Your psychological safety is a priority. You do not have to answer any questions or share any information which may cause you to experience unwelcomed or uncomfortable feelings.
- You confirm that you are participating in this study of your own free will and are not receiving any compensation for your participation.
- You understand that if you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about your experience with this study, you may contact UPenn’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) at REDACT for assistance.

When you sign this form, you are agreeing to take part in this research study. This means that you have read the consent form, your questions have been answered, and you have decided to volunteer.

A copy of this consent form will be given to you.

Name of Participant [**print**]

Signature of Participant

Date

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today. As you know, I am a doctoral student at the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education. My dissertation research focuses on the leadership experiences of Black women senior leaders in predominantly White institutions of higher education (PWIs).

Your candid responses during the interview will help me understand the unique and shared experiences of Black women as senior leaders at PWIs looking at the challenges we may face related to our identities as Black women and the strategies we use to lead and to address resistance we face working in institutions where senior leadership is traditionally White and/or male.

My dissertation seeks to cultivate a more critical understanding of how Black women view and experience their careers in senior leadership roles in PWIs through their stories and reflections. The hope is that this will contribute to institutional understandings of how Black women experience senior leadership in organizational ecosystems in which they are underrepresented or minoritized. This will inform PWIs on how to realign their culture, values, practices, and policies to improve recruitment, promotion, and retention of Black women leaders to benefit their institutions and these Black women leaders who help uplift them often at their own expense.

I will ask about four overarching topics with related follow-up questions to help you reflect on and explore your leadership experience and leadership strategies, the role your social identity plays in how you lead, and how your leadership is viewed and received by people at your institution, and what support and/or resistance you experience to your leadership and how you address it.

Please feel free at any time during the interview to ask any questions for clarification. I will record the interview and take notes to best capture the nuances of what you share.

Before we begin, let's review the Informed Consent Form to go over the main points of the form and obtain your verbal agreement.

To review, I want to reiterate that all information shared during this interview will be treated confidentially. No names will be shared from the interviews in public-facing documents. Only my UPenn dissertation committee and research thought partners from my doctoral cohort may view the deidentified data in support of my dissertation study. No other organization or institution, including your own, will receive any personally identifiable information associated with this interview or any data from the study.

Also, no compensation has been offered or is being provided for your voluntary participation today.

Unless you have any questions, will you verbally assert your understanding of that agreement? [pause for verbal assent] Thank you!

I sincerely appreciate you taking the time to participate in this study. Do you have any questions before we begin the interview?

Are you ready to begin? I am starting the recordings now . . .

Do you consent to participate in this interview? Yes No

Do you consent to video and audio recording the interview? Yes No

Before we begin, I want to ask you about a preferred pseudonym and some demographic items:

- Pseudonym:
- Total years in higher education:
- Total years as a senior leader in higher education:

Age range:

- 30–39
- 40–49
- 50–59
- 60+

Highest Degree Earned/ing:

- Bachelor's
- Master's
- Doctorate

“First I’d like to talk to you about what your experience has been like as a senior leader at X through this first set of questions . . .” [30 minutes]

1. How long have you been at X and how would you generally describe, in a few minutes, your leadership experience there?
2. How would you generally describe your leadership approach at your institution? Your leadership strategy?—Has it changed over time or stayed steady? Why? Do you have an example or story of a leadership moment that illustrates your leadership approach or strategy?
3. What influences your thinking about how you lead at your current institution? [Probe: people, mentors, experiences, organizational structure, politics, dynamics . . . who, how and why]
4. Have you always worked at a PWI? Are there any particular aspects or characteristics of your institution that influences your leadership strategy or approach?
5. [If they have been at another type of institution as a leader]. . . Was your leadership approach or leadership strategy different at the other institution? What do you think accounts for those differences?

6. How is your leadership approach and strategy viewed by other people at your institution? [Probe which other people and why, dynamics, patterns] Do you have any stories that reflect how others view your leadership approach?

“Next I’d like to talk about any ways in which your social identity influences your leadership strategy and experience as a senior leader in your institution.” [30 minutes]

1. How do you describe yourself? How do you describe your identity? [Probe: How do you see the different parts of your identity?]
2. How is your social identity perceived at your institution? [Probe by whom and how and why they believe they are seen in that way]
3. What is the diversity of senior leadership at your institution? What is the diversity of the team that reports to you?
4. Do you believe your social identity plays a role in how you lead? If so, how and in what ways? Do you have any stories or examples that illustrate how your social identity influences how you lead?
5. What are some of your leadership approaches and strategies that are influenced by your social identity? How did they develop? Are there environmental factors (org, culture etc.) influencing your leadership approach? Mediating experiences?
6. Are there ways the leadership of other Black women in higher education have influenced your leadership approach?
7. In what ways do you find your leadership approaches and strategies to be successful at your institution? [Probe why, example?]
8. Are there times in which you feel your leadership approaches and strategies are not as successful as you want them to be? [Probe why, example?]

9. How do you think your experience as a senior leader at your institution relates to those of your peers who are not Black women? [Probe - example]

“Next I’d like to talk more about how your leadership approach and strategies are viewed and received by others at your institution.” [20 minutes]

1. How would you characterize the support you receive as a senior leader at your institution? What does that support look like? Feel like? [Probe- by senior leadership, by subordinates/team, example?]
2. Do you experience resistance to your leadership? If so, what does that look like? Feel like? [Probe - by senior leadership, by subordinates/team, 2 examples]
3. What are some of the reasons for resistance to your leadership?
4. Are there any connections between that resistance and your social identity as a Black female? If so, please describe and give an example.
5. How do you think your experiences with resistance relate to those of your peers who are not Black female leaders? [Probe - examples]

“I’d like to talk about how you address resistance to your leadership.” [20 minutes]

1. How do you approach resistance to your leadership? [Probe: Ask for an example of resistance and then get them to explain why they see that as resistance.]
2. Do you address the resistance directly? If so how? If not, what approaches and strategies do you use? [Probe - examples?]
3. Does your social identity as a Black female play a role in how you address resistance? If so, in what ways? [Probe - 1–2 examples . . . if I get stories about this early on then ask for additional examples.]

4. What have been some influences on how you address resistance to your leadership approach?
5. Are there ways other Black women senior leaders' approaches to addressing resistance have influenced your own thinking about and approaches to addressing resistance?
6. Do you have any stories or examples that illustrate your experience as a Black female senior leader addressing resistance?

Is there anything else you'd like me to know to understand your leadership experience, including ways you have seen and addressed resistance to your leadership as a Black woman senior leader at a PWI?

APPENDIX D: FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

Thank you for participating in this focus group discussion for my dissertation research. All of you are senior leaders in higher education and have generously participated in this project that examines the leadership experiences of Black women senior leaders in predominantly White higher education institutions. Everyone here has already done a one-on-one interview with me exploring your leadership experiences and strategies, the role your social identity plays in how you lead, and the kinds of support and/or resistance to your leadership and how you address it.

The purpose of today's session is to explore your perspectives with each other. I have some questions to facilitate individual reflections and group dialogue. The goal is to hear from each of you on each question and for you talk with each another in the process of sharing your experiences and perspectives.

Please feel free at any time to ask any questions for clarification on these topics. This session will be recorded, and I will take notes to capture the nuances of what is shared.

Before we begin, I'd like to reiterate the shared commitment captured in the consent form to treat all information shared during the interviews and focus groups as confidential. Everyone participating in this focus group has agreed to treat as confidential all information shared including the identity of participants and their organizations.

Before I begin recording, does anyone have questions?

I'm beginning the recording now.

So, thank you again. Let's begin with each person introducing themselves. Share your name, role, and institution, as well as how long you have been with your current institution.

Q1. I've shared in the chat a quote on "gendered racism" from Philomena Essed's book "Understanding Everyday Racism, an Interdisciplinary Theory" in which she coined the term

“gendered racism’, now widely used to describe how the sum of racism and sexism impacts the experiences of Black women. This has also been referred to as the “double jeopardy” of being Black and female which Black women face in leadership roles.

In the chat: “Black women are systematically confronted in their aspirations with obstructions from Whites, who often attribute incompetence to them. One can place the problem of underestimation in a gender context as well as in a racial context, but it is analytically difficult to determine in detail the specific impact of either gender or race. For these and other reasons it may be assumed that many, if not the majority, of the personal experiences of racism in the lives of these Black women are forms of ‘gendered racism’” (Essed, 1991).

I’d like to start out by asking each of you to share a recent experience with gendered racism or ones that connect to gendered racism or the double jeopardy of being Black and female as a leader in higher education. Please briefly share the experience, how you chose to respond or chose NOT to respond and why, and how that experience made you feel. [Put the question in the chat.]

I’d like to have each person speak first, and while others are sharing, please jot down for yourself any questions or reactions you may have for others about their experiences.

[After everyone shares, open things up for their questions and discussion]

Q2. Next, I’d like to discuss how you process these experiences and the stress and emotional labor associated with them. I’ve put in the chat a definition of emotional labor.

In the chat: Emotional labor in the workplace is the invisible, often taxing work of managing or masking your emotions in interactions with others to meet their needs or protect their feelings, and to adhere to the expectations of you and your role as shaped by the culture and structure of your institution.

I'd like to ask each of you to talk about how you describe the emotional labor you do in your leadership role. What does it look like and feel like? How do you manage it or protect yourself in doing that work? [Put the question in the chat.]

Again, I'd like to have each person speak first, and while others are sharing, please jot down for yourself any questions or reactions you may have for others about what they've shared.

Q3. How does the senior leadership experience of Black women in PWIs today compare to what black women have experienced in the recent past in these roles? Do you have a sense of how things may look different today for Black women in these roles compared to even just a few years ago?

Q4. Participant Question(s)

“One topic I am interested in hearing about is other leaders’ responses to resistance and if they make about how and when to respond.”

APPENDIX E: CODES AND DEFINITIONS

| Codes and Subcodes | Definitions |
|---|--|
| Emblematic quotes | Include quotes that may be notable for title or other references. |
| Focus group | Codes from focus groups |
| Change/evolution of BWL's (Black woman leader/Black women leaders) Leadership Experiences in recent years | Are things comparable or different now than in recent years past? |
| Emotional Labor Discussion | Stories about emotional labor and its impacts |
| Gendered Racism Discussion | Stories about experiences with gendered racism |
| Leadership approaches | BWL's leadership approaches |
| With Superiors | How BWLs approach leading with their superior: Data driven, clarity on roles |
| With Staff, Faculty & Students | How BWLs approach leading with their employees and students: Giving voice to others, maternal, exacting |
| With Peers | How BWLs approach leading with their peers: Bridge Building |
| Leadership typology | Leadership types and styles: Servant leadership, transformational, collaborative, agile |
| Leadership strategies | BWL's leadership strategies |
| Evolution of leadership strategies | How BWL's leadership strategies and approaches have evolved: trying out and failing with other approaches modeling white men for example. |
| Communication Strategies | How BWLs use communication styles, practices: Storytelling, data, appreciative inquiry, performative, finding common ground |
| Expectations for Self | BWL's expectations for their own actions and role: Professionalism, learning "rule book," being authentic |
| Institutional | Strategies related to systems, policies, and practices: Establishing policies and practices |
| Relationships | Strategies related to building and managing relationships: Identifying allies, building social/political capita, setting boundaries |
| Influences on leadership and on approaches & strategies | What influences BWL's leadership approaches and strategies |
| Personal/identity | Personal influences on leadership tied to self and self- evolution, identity, family, personal background: spirituality, ancestors, age, previous work experiences |

| Codes and Subcodes | Definitions |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Institutional | Influences from BWL's institution such as people, culture, policy, practice: students, other Black women coming up in leadership, being a first/only |
| Social justice | Influences that are about how systems and people are impacted/affected: Social justice |
| Academic/scholarly/practitioner | Influences from leadership literature and best practices: mindfulness |
| Other BWLs | Influences of professional Black women mentors and peers: advice and models from other BWLs |
| Forms of resistance and challenge | What does resistance to BWL's leadership and challenges to it look like and feel like |
| Microaggressions | Indirect or subtle discriminatory and disparate treatment as connected to race and/or gender: stereotyping, Black Tax, tokenization |
| Between women | Undermining treatment from other black women: competition, territoriality |
| Misogyny | Treatment specifically reflecting gender: paternalism of others |
| Invisibility and isolation | Treatment intended to make the BWL invisible and unheard: not being invited to meetings |
| From superiors | Actions of supervisors and/or president that undermine BWL's ability to do her job successfully: under resourcing (money or personnel), job stacking |
| From peers | Actions of peers that undermine BWL's ability to do her job successfully: Taking credit for BWL's work: Taking credit for BWL's work |
| From staff, faculty and students | Actions of staff and faculty that undermine BWL's ability to do her job successfully: Picking fights, filing complaints |
| Others' actions & beliefs general | Beliefs and presumptions of others that undermine or undervalue BWL: Presumed incompetence, being doubted, having to prove self, expectations of BWL as grateful |
| Institutional | Institutional systems and culture that challenge BWL's ability leadership experience: Being policed/reviewed, forced to have cosigners or cochairs, denial of racism/sexism: |

| Codes and Subcodes | Definitions |
|--|--|
| Related to being a first, only or different identity | Implications of being a first, only, or different identity at an institution and its effect on BWL's leadership experience: hyper consciousness of identity. different experiences and leeway than non-Black, male counterparts. |
| Addressing resistance and challenge | How do BWL address resistance and challenges to their leadership? |
| Indirect or nonresponses | BWL choosing to not respond or address resistance & challenge directly: choosing not to speak in meetings, making mental notes of behaviors. |
| Direct responses | Addressing resistant behavior directly with the person or persons |
| Modeling | Actions modeling how to treat others or how to be treated: compliment sandwich, kindness to difficult people, giving grace, examples for other Black women. |
| Personal beliefs, practices, values underlying responses | How BWL internally process and manage their responses to resistance: not personalizing attacks, recognizing they have other options |
| Resources | People and institutional resources BWL utilize in addressing resistance: allyship, cosigners |
| Litmus test | How BWL determine whether and how they will respond to resistance: litmus test to decide whether and how to respond |
| Strategies | Strategic tools and tactics used to address resistance: 1:1 responses vs. groups |
| Style of approach | How BWL posture themselves and temper their responses to resistance: not speaking when mad, using humor, giving grace |
| Impacts of resistance and challenge | How does resistance and challenge affect BWL? |
| Personal | How resistance and challenge impacts BWL personally (physically, emotionally, cognitively): physical tax, emotional tax |
| Professional | How resistance and challenge impacts BWL's professional experience and career trajectory: needing to leave, behaving/operating differently like pulling back |
| Forms of support | What support looks and feels like for BWL |
| Personal | Support that comes from outside the institution or from within oneself: God, personal, family, belief systems, values. |

| Codes and Subcodes | Definitions |
|---|---|
| Other BWLs | Support from other BWL: having a tribe of support, validation, advice, models |
| Supportive actions: Superiors | Actions of supervisors and/or president that support BWL's ability to do her job successfully: resources, sponsorship, providing cover |
| Supportive actions: Peers | Actions of peers that support BWL's ability to do her job successfully: allyship |
| Supportive actions: Staff and faculty | Actions of staff and faculty that support BWL's ability to do her job successfully: providing cover, information |
| Institutional support | Institutional systems, resources, and culture that support BWL's leadership experience and success: Financial Support |
| Other influences on leadership experience generally | What else influences BWL's leadership experiences at their institutions? |
| Personal | Influences related to self and career |
| Institutional diversity | Impact of diversity of institution on BWL's leadership experience: Being a first or only vs. having a diverse leadership team, experiences of other marginalized people at the institution. |
| Institutional characteristics | Impact of institutional size, affluence |
| Institutional culture | Impact of institutional culture and sense of belonging: values of institution, openness to new things |
| Institutional priorities | Impact of institutional priorities with respect to diversity and belonging |
| Institutional leadership | Impact of presidential leadership on BWL's leadership experience |
| Emic descriptors/identity markers | How BWL describe themselves and their social identities |
| Others' perceptions of BWL's identity | How BWL's believe other at their institution perceive their identity |

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