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The Lived Experiences Of Single Black Mothers In Higher Education Leadership

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THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF SINGLE BLACK MOTHERS IN HIGHER
EDUCATION LEADERSHIP

By

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BA (Mississippi State University) 2004
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A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Affiliated Faculty of

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For the degree of Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to provide a better understanding of the experiences of single Black mothers in higher educational leadership roles. Utilizing the Strong Black Woman framework, the mothers exposed the three major themes: unyielding strength, assumption of multiple roles, and self-sacrifice and five additional sub-themes emerged flexibility, mentorship, support systems, emotional stability, and barriers. This study provides insight into the lived experiences of single Black mothers in higher educational leadership. One-on-one interviews were held with participants to examine their lived experiences to answer the primary question: What is the lived experience of single Black mothers who hold leadership roles in higher education? Issues relative to women, mothers, and single mothers in leadership positions have been studied and provide some insight into their experience. A desire for higher educational leadership positions persists for single Black mothers as the sole providers of the home. Based on the literature documenting an increase in single-parent homes as well as an increase in single Black mothers who want or need to enter the workforce, this study provides greater understanding about the lived experiences of these women in leadership roles in higher education.

University of New England

Doctor of Education
Educational Leadership

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The structure of most American families has changed in regard to who holds primary responsibility for career and home (Malone, 2011, p. 1). Today, half of married women work full-time, and two-income families are now the majority. In addition, Malone (2011) reported, “63% of working mothers have children younger than 6 years old and 77% have children between the ages of 6-17” (p. 1). Where mothers were once praised for staying at home and being the *good* mother dedicated solely to their children and home, they are now subject to criticism for working outside the home and undergo *cognitive acrobatics* in order to fulfill the balance of home and career (Malone, 2011, p. 2).

Additionally, the pressure for financial security has changed, according to Loubert (2012), the percentage of women working outside the home was 59% in 2009 representing an 18% increase since 1970 and expected to increase another 9% by 2018 (p. 374). More specifically, in order to counteract the negative stereotypes that state, “Black single mothers may experience a lack of time and financial resources; mothers are motivated to work against the negative perception” (Elliot, Powell & Brenton, 2015, p. 353). As the need to work outside the home increased, more women entered the workforce. Women accounted for approximately 28% of all chief executive officer (CEO) positions and 21% of Deans of Instruction or similar titles at the community college level (Eddy & VanDerLinden, 2006, p. 4), which shows the growing demand for jobs and more desire for financial resources for all women in higher education leadership roles. While joining the workforce was presumed a positive margin of growth, finding their position of power in leadership was difficult (Eagly & Chin, 2010).

The structure of American families continues to change with single mothers who now account for 28.3% of households according to the US Census Bureau (2012), and Dabney (2013) determined that single-parent families are becoming more common in society than the traditional nuclear, two-parent family (Dabney, 2013, p. 1). As the heads of the household, single mothers operate as the decision makers, primary care providers, and disciplinarians, all while managing their own emotional needs (Dabney, 2013). Additionally, single parents have the full responsibility of the complete management, function, and supervision of the homes, which research suggests to be challenging for single parents (Dabney, 2013, p. 2 & 4). While a positive margin of growth has been evident for women; in order for single mothers to be given a fair chance at upward mobility in the workplace, equal opportunities in relation to discrimination had to improve (Wilson, 2012, p. 92). According to Eagly and Chin (2010), women struggled to be recognized as valuable leaders in male dominated positions (p. 217). Additionally, women were pressured to lead with warmth and friendliness, but criticized for taking charge—a characteristic common amongst their male colleagues (Eagly & Chin, 2010, p. 218). Even though women made strides in garnering respect, they lacked the encouragement from their family support system needed to fulfill their roles, (Eagly & Chin, 2010). According to Jackson and Harris (2007), “this lack of encouragement exists even though women who earn doctorates are more likely than men to desire an academic career” (p. 122). This lack of encouragement led to women feeling depleted and feeling that they had no support in trying to manage their careers and home life (Jackson & Harris, 2007, p. 122).

Single Black mothers who were pursuing careers, often called *welfare leavers*, found improvements in psychological well-being when they were employed including self-esteem, feelings of being a better role model for their children, and increased self-efficacy when the

burdens of everyday living such as worrying about childcare and transportation were taken care of (Ciabattari, 2007, p. 6). According to, Jones, Zealot, Foster, Sterrett, and Chester (2006) the demographic of single Black mothers, specifically a *dyad* which describes the mother-child relationship, constituted a rapidly growing sector representing the Black community. Single Black mothers between the ages of 22 and 44 increased from 25% compared to any other racial group in 2002 to 50.4 % in 2009 (Abrams, Maxwell, Pope, & Belgrave, 2014, p. 7). Yet despite higher rates of employment, single Black mothers are also far more likely to be raising children in poverty (Elliot et al., 2015, p. 353). For Black mothers, overcoming the challenge of being considered a mother due to being Black has been difficult; even with the birth of their own children, Black mothers were not valued as mothers, due to the color of their skin and their perceived inability to maintain competence according to society; leaving Black mothers to be the target of scrutiny and blame (Elliot et al., 2015, p. 352).

Birthed of necessity and created to endure physical and mental oppression, Black women have made strides (Abrams, et al., 2014, p. 8). Today, Black women emerge from a variety of education, socioeconomic, and familial backgrounds (Abrams et al., 2014, p. 8). Even though Black women have gained representation in higher education leadership roles with the first Black female president to head a national research university in 1999 and the first Black woman to head an Ivy League institution in 2000, there remains a lack of in-depth literature regarding Black women in higher education leadership roles and their lived experiences (Jackson & Harris, 2007, p. 119).

Statement of the Problem

There is a lack of research about the experiences of single Black mothers, specifically those in higher educational leadership positions (Eagly & Chin, 2010, p. 216). Issues relative to women, mothers, and single mothers in leadership positions have been studied and provide some insight into their experience (Eagly & Chin, 2010; Elliot et al., 2015; Jackson & Harris 2007; Loubert, 2012; Turner, 1985; Wilson, 2012). While the desire for higher educational leadership positions persists, there remained an underrepresentation of women and ethnic minorities (Eagly & Chin, 2010, p. 216). There was little information as to why the phenomenon occurred. Based on the literature, as single black mothers attain leadership positions in higher education, their lived experiences need to be documented and understood.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to provide a better understanding of the experience of single Black mothers in higher educational leadership roles. The unique challenges faced by single Black mothers needs to be better understood because they are a rapidly growing population. One-on-one interviews with single Black mothers who hold leadership roles in higher education highlights the lived experiences of this target population.

Research Question

Given the lack of research on the experience of single Black mothers in higher educational leadership roles, this study sought to capture the authentic stories of single Black mothers regarding their experience constructed around one primary question: What is the experience of single Black mothers who hold leadership roles in higher education?

Conceptual Framework

SBW functions both as a cultural symbol and a cognitive framework that aids Black women in organizing and interpreting information and experiences (Abrams, et al., 2014). Utilizing the Strong Black Woman (SBW) framework allowed for the single Black mother to be viewed through the lens of three themes: “unyielding strength, assumption of multiple roles, and self-sacrifice” (Abrams et al., 2014, p. 4). An attempt to understand the complexities of the perceived roles, responsibilities, and experiences of oppression of the single Black woman was the foundation of the Strong Black Woman schema (Abrams et al., 2014, p. 2).

A phenomenological approach to this study within the framework of the Strong Black Woman allowed for an understanding of how ubiquitous the SBW construct is in the Black culture (Abrams et al., 2014, p. 3). Additionally, the SBW framework was used to highlight its three components, which were unyielding strength, assumption of multiple roles, and self-sacrifice.

Significance

The significance of this research was to shed light on the lived experiences of single Black mothers in leadership roles in higher education. Employers, women in leadership, and single Black mothers would benefit from an understanding of the challenges and opportunities of balancing single motherhood with careers and how the unique status of being a single Black mother affects the experience. Single-parent families are rapidly growing in the United States, in particular, single Black mothers accounted for 56% of the population (Jones, Kincaid, Cuellar, & Parent, 2012; Massey, 2015; U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). However, despite growing diversity among leaders, there remained a gap in literature specifically about the lived experiences of

single Black mothers in leadership roles within higher education that this study filled (Eagly & Chin, 2010, p. 216; Jackson & Harris, 2007, p. 119).

Potential Limitations

Within this qualitative study, limitations included the small and select sample size of single Black mothers in higher educational leadership roles. The focus on single Black mothers' limits information on the experience of mothers within other cultures. Furthermore, the select sample of single Black mothers in higher education leadership excluded the experience in other career fields not addressed in this study. This study was also limited to the self-reported data of the participants (Wilson, 2012, p. 106). In addition, the participants' responses may have been framed by the questions they were asked. A larger sample size could have resulted in some additional themes that were not mentioned in this small sample.

Definition of Terms

Gatekeeping: Gatekeeping is an effective technique that keeps qualified women and minorities from not being considered for hiring (Jackson & Harris, 2007, p. 121).

Glass Ceiling: "The overall experience for black women with the belief that the glass ceiling representation of barriers is responsible for women's inability to climb the higher rungs of academic success" (Jackson & Harris, 2007, p.121).

Higher Education Leadership: For the purpose of this study higher education leadership positions will be those postsecondary leadership roles that include School President or senior management positions one, two, or three levels removed from the President (Vice President, Dean of Students, Athletic Directors, and Senior Women's Administrators, etc.).

Strong Black Women (SBW): “Characterized as a woman capable of carrying the world with the grace of a lady and the grit of a warrior; possessing unyielding strength, assumption of multiple roles, and self-sacrifice” (Abrams et al., 2014, p. 11).

Single Black mothers (for the purpose of this study): Women who are single Black mothers who are raising children under the age of 18.

Conclusion

Mothers found themselves raising children alone due to having children out of wedlock, becoming a widow, or divorce. As such, these women were taking on the sole responsibility of caring for the home while pursuing a career. Becoming a single-parent was by no means a new phenomenon, but Black women are more likely than any other group to raise their children alone (Elliot et al., 2015, p. 353). Single black mothers have historically endured difficulties of striving to want more in an effort to better their lives (Elliot et al., 2015, p. 352). This qualitative phenomenological research served to capture the lived experiences of single Black mothers in higher educational leadership roles as a means to bring attention to a growing need in the workplace for equal representation and opportunity for upward mobility.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to provide an understanding of the experiences of single Black mothers who pursued and obtained higher education leadership roles. The literature progression was purposeful in exposing, through extensive research, the lived experiences of women, mothers, and single mothers in regard to higher educational leadership. This literature review began with a discussion of mothers who were in higher educational leadership positions along with the perceptions and challenges of mothers and women in leadership followed by single mothers in similar positions. Finally, the chapter brings attention to single Black mothers who are in higher educational leadership positions by examining the characteristics of single Black mothers and their strength and resiliency using the framework of the Strong Black Woman framework (Abrams, Maxwell, Pope, & Belgrave, 2014).

Women in Leadership

Women in leadership roles have progressed from the perception of former President Richard Nixon when he stated, “I don’t think women should be in any government job whatsoever...mainly because they are erratic” (Eagly & Carli, 2008, p. 1). Women were stepping outside of the traditional roles of staying at home tending to the needs of the house and kids and pursuing deeper education and career goals in higher education because they wanted to be defined as more than a mother; work provide[d] a sense of value in who they [were] (Eddy & VanDerLinden, 2006, p. 10). The representation of women has changed in that women now account for approximately 28% of chief executive officer (CEO) positions and 21% of Deans of Instruction or similar titles at the community college level (Eddy & VanDerLinden, 2006, p. 4).

Since the prime pathway to the presidency remained from the provost or the senior academic affairs administrator, it is likely the future will show more women heading community colleges (Eddy & VanDerLinden, 2006, p. 10).

Perceptions of Women in Leadership

Society's perception of leadership and leadership qualities fall under more masculine characteristics such as ambitious, dominant, and confident, and embody agentic and competency qualities (Eagly & Chin, 2010, p. 217). As leaders, women are perceived as warm, kind, and empathetic; all qualities that are positive but lack the aggressive characteristics society feel leaders should embody (Eagly & Chin, 2010, p. 218). Despite advances for women over the past 20 years, the masculine traits of leadership portrayed by men continued to be the defining factors of what society perceived as good leadership and explained why women were hesitant to pursue top-level leadership positions (Leberman & Palmer, 2009, p. 307). Masculine qualities such as being objective, competitive, logical, independent, aggressive, ambitious, and responsible were in contrast to societal perceptions of women leadership such as being supportive, collaborative, more transformational, positive, and valuing rewards (attributes that are dismissed by male leaders) (Eagly & Chin, 2010, p. 219; Leberman & Palmer, 2009, p. 308).

Due to the negative stereotypes of women in leadership, women learned that using their voice to take a stance in leadership could have negative repercussions in which people may resist and resent them in their leadership role; this could cause women to restrain from leadership positions (Eagly & Chin, 2010, p. 218). For example, when in a mixed group of men in same-level positions, women became less interested in leading and succumbed to being followers (Eagly & Chin, 2010, p. 218).

Furthermore, women who were in top-level positions had the pressure of performance more so than their male colleagues (Eagly & Carli, 2008, p. 3). According to Eagly & Chin (2010), there has been growth for women in leadership, but their ability to do their job was not easily recognized, and they were judged less favorably in comparison to their male colleagues.

Challenges for Women in Higher Education Leadership

As women pursued leadership roles in higher education, there were three barriers that hindered their progress: (a) lack of mentorship (b) lack of networking opportunities (c) lack of resources (Jackson & Harris, 2007). First, there was a lack of mentorship. When women were hired in their respective careers, they were often left to fend for themselves (Jackson & Harris, 2007). Oftentimes working in a male-dominated profession, women found themselves on the outskirts of mentorship opportunities and not taken seriously (Jackson & Harris, 2007).

(indent)Secondly, the lack of networking for women presented a barrier in the representation for women was scarce, which presented a mindset of “we don’t hire the competition” (Jackson & Harris, 2007, p. 122); so instead of reaching out and providing a bridge for other women to cross, they found themselves on an island by themselves (Jackson & Harris, 2007). Third, lack of resources brought forth a burden for women who often found themselves in a position where upward growth became difficult (Eagly & Carli, 2008). While they were looking to pursue more in their careers, they often found themselves given little-to-no opportunity for growth (Eagly & Carli, 2008, p. 1). This oftentimes resulted in increased cost of living and decrease in finances, which made the balance of work and home difficult (Malone, 2011).

Challenges for Mothers in the Workplace

Mothers subjected themselves to *intensive mothering ideology*; an ideology where mothers were scrutinized for working outside the home and having passions beyond the home

(Malone, 2011, p. 1). Working mothers constituted more than half the population and constituted 63% of working mothers who had children younger than 6 years old (Malone, 2011, p. 1). With this growing trend, mothers had to find a new balance of family and work, which Malone (2011) depicts as mothers doing *cognitive acrobatics* to fulfill the demands (p. 2).

While mothers worked outside the home proved acceptable, due to the growth of single-parent homes it did not come without challenges (Leberman & Palmer 2009). Working mothers were encouraged to work but were still expected to maintain the same job performance and work expectations as prior to having children (Leberman & Palmer, 2009, p. 308). Furthermore, mothers who worked underwent scrutiny for pursuing their own dreams and aspirations while being a mother—deemed as selfish and behaving like a man—finding a win-win balance impossible (Leberman & Palmer, 2009, p. 308). While some mothers expressed work allowed them to be better mothers, Leberman and Palmer (2009) suggested those mothers were the exception and not the norm, and most mothers expressed extreme guilt in trying to find the balance (p. 308).

Black Women as Leaders

Women in general had difficulties in higher educational leadership roles but Black women also had circumstances they had to endure while pursuing top-level leadership positions (Eagly and Chin, 2010). According to Eagly and Carli (2008) “even those few women who rose steadily through the ranks eventually crashed into an invisible barrier; the executive suite seemed within their grasp, but they just couldn’t break through the glass ceiling” (p. 1). In fact, Eagly and Chin (2010) stated, “despite growing diversity among leaders, the still underrepresentation of women and of racial and ethnic minorities in leadership roles demands an explanation” (p. 216). While it has been established with the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that Employment

discrimination based on color, religion, sex, and national origin are illegal, discrimination remains commonplace (Eagly & Chin, 2010, p. 217).

Black women leaders continued to succumb to the social prejudices of historical negative prejudices in the forms of direct and blatant discrimination or subtle and mindless forms of prejudice (Eagly & Chin, 2010, p. 217). For Black women in particular, racial stereotypes from society created images of them as, “antagonistic and lacking competence” and hindered their career growth (p. 218).

Challenges for Black Women as Leaders

Black women faced barriers that hindered their success in career advancement. The first being subtle race discrimination. One of the barriers that kept Black women from attaining a higher status job is called *gatekeeping*. Gatekeeping is “an effective...technique... [where] qualified women and minorities are not available for hiring” (Jackson & Harris, 2007, p. 121). Mickelson and Oliver (1991) identified numerous Black and Latino candidates who had graduated from non-Ivy League universities and who experienced difficulties in getting job offers (Jackson & Harris, 2007).

Another barrier for success was what Jackson and Harris (2007) called the *glass ceiling*. “The majority of college presidents were white males with Black women and other ethnic minority representation negligible” (p. 121). Furthermore, the glass ceiling often referred to as the *concrete ceiling* by Black women were the artificial barriers unseen, which hindered Black women from upward mobility regardless of their qualifications and achievements (Cotter, Hermsen, Ovaldia, & Vannerman, 2001, p. 656).

According to Evelyn (1998), Tallerico and Burstyn (1996), Brodbelt (1991), and Jackson and Harris (2007), there was a lack of support from other women administrators, especially

minorities, which caused stress on the job and feelings of loss of connection. Although the United States of America has come a long way from the Brown vs. Board of Education decision of 1954, eyebrows were still raised when our country voted on a White woman and a biracial man for potential presidency in 2008 (Eagly & Chin, 2010, p. 216). Strides were made, but there was still much to be done to bridge the gap between black and white equality. In regard to careers, White men have historically been the dominant race and gender to hold higher educational leadership positions.

Research showed that diversity in leadership, in particular of racial and ethnic minority groups, benefitted the discussion in the room (Eagly & Chin, 2010, p. 220). More specifically, Eagly and Chin (2010) suggested, “individuals from racial and ethnic minority groups, in particular, generally have multicultural experience because they have learned to negotiate” (p. 220), which in turn brought forth a sense of flexibility in movement and understanding from the minority culture as well as the majority culture.

Women in Higher Education Leadership

While there have been barriers faced by women there is evidence of how those barriers have been overcome; specifically, by women who accounted for 6.6% of leadership in management roles and Black women accounted for 11.2% of leadership in management roles (NECS, 2015). Women and Black women continued to break barriers for equal representation for leadership roles by taking on what Eddy and VanDerLinden (2006) suggested: (a) Encourage the elimination of institutional gender stereotypes; (b) Redefine power and the power structure of the institution; (c) Enact gender-related policies and procedures; (d) Raise collegial consciousness and initiate collegial dialogue on gender and related issues; (e) Take a proactive stance on public policy and debate beyond the local campus (p. 10).

Single Mothers as Leaders

According to are single-parent families are increasing in number in the United States and made up nearly 13 million families. Additionally, Mather (2004), Dabney (2013), and Parents without Partners International (2009) suggested when compared to two-parent families, single-parent families were becoming more common. Single-parent families faced more dysfunction in comparison to dual-parent households (Dabney, 2013, p. 1). Although two-parent families experienced dysfunctions related to chaotic, violent, and unstable family environments, they were structured to account for better access to finance, health care, and supportive resources than single-parent families (Dabney, 2013, p. 1). The responsibility of the single-parent weighed heavier than that of a two-parent household. Instead of sharing the responsibility, single mothers were solely responsible for the management and functions of their homes (Dabney, 2013, p. 2). Furthermore, single mothers had the responsibility of trying to balance their family life, work life, and emotional needs. According to Dabney (2013), single parents were solely responsible for the management of their own personal and emotional needs all while maintaining the cares of the home. Their emotional needs varied daily and even yearly. Whereas two-parent households could rely on their significant other to balance out their busy day, single mothers had to rely on other people and family members to help meet their needs (Dabney, 2013).

Additionally, mothers who had more work-family conflict felt less competent as parents and therefore suffered from the reduction of structure in the home, which resulted in irritability and impatient behavior (Malone, 2011, p. 6). Being single was difficult for the mother as well as the children. Mothers bore the sole responsibility of providing for their children's emotional and financial needs as well as their own (Dabney, 2013). Furthermore, mothers strived oftentimes in

an isolated effort knowing they had to work harder emotionally and financially than those from a two-parent household (Kiernan & Huerta, 2008).

Single Black Mothers in Leadership

Single-parent families were rapidly growing in the United States, in particular single Black mothers accounted for 56% of the single-parent population (Massey, 2015, p. 1). Not only was the number of single Black mothers growing rapidly so were the statistics about their children such as abuse of drugs and/or alcohol, poor self-esteem, poor academic achievement, pregnancy, and crime (Massey, 2015, p. 1). Additionally, Malone (2011) highlighted race as an important factor for Black mothers in comparison to White mothers due to differing societal assumptions in regard to appropriate ways to mother (p. 2).

While the struggle for single Black mothers exists today, the battles these women faced are historic (Elliot et al., 2015, p. 352). Black mothers have experienced difficulty being called a mother, and even with their most valiant efforts continued to experience scrutiny in society; in particular, being labeled *Black* and *poor*, two terms that were associated with bad mothering (Elliot et al., 2015, p. 352). The negative perception affects their self-efficacy in their feelings of inferiority as they navigate through higher education.

The difficulties Black mothers faced in spite of negative perceptions, single Black mothers use perseverance and strength as tools to strive toward good mothering. Furthermore, single Black mothers strived to overcome lack of self-esteem, financial burdens, and barriers to career goals all while trying to maintain the home (Elliot et al., 2015, p. 353). The prejudices and scrutiny from society towards single Black mothers persisted, creating more stress, more so for Black mothers who also have to endure the historical context of being Black and how they balance of home and career (Cohen, 2009; Kaplan, 1996; McGuffey, 2005).

For single Black mothers, the balance of career and family proved to be difficult. According to Rampell (2009) and Cheung and Halpern (2010), for the first time in U.S. history, women were close to surpassing men in their employment rate largely due to job loss in the recent recession in fields such as manufacturing, construction, and finance, jobs largely held by men. While the trends were growing for women in general, few Black women held higher-level education positions in spite of being qualified with Ivy League educations (Jackson & Harris, 2007, p. 119). Although Eagly and Carli (2008) detailed that women comprised more than 40% of all managerial positions in the United States (p. 1), for most Black women, the obstacles to overcome for higher education leadership positions were overwhelming and caused them to give up their pursuit instead of pushing through (Jackson & Harris, 2007, p. 119). In addition, Black women accounted for 11.2% and Black men account for 8.1% of leadership roles in higher education. With the percentage of Black women in leadership roles in higher education, understanding their lived experiences provides insight into what is needed in order to increase numbers for this population.

Challenges of Single Black Mothers

Single Black mothers are more likely to be faced with challenges of financial scarcity, going from a dual income to a singular income (Elliot et al., 2015, p. 353). Additionally, single Black mothers endure negative self-efficacy in regard to guilt felt in their limitation in providing for their children; whether that be time, financial resources, or balance of home and career. Furthermore, single Black mothers overcome other barriers particularly in the workplace (Elliot et al., 2015, p. 353). For example, Blacks were labeled lazy and careless, characterized as gorillas and chimpanzees, pathologically infected, and unstable, easily enslaved, and the lowest on the hierarchy of the human race (Lewis, 2007, p. 3).

Financial Scarcity

Single Black mothers who are pursuing careers are often labeled as *welfare leavers* and according to Berry (2006), structural inequalities such as minimal economic resources, family structure, and health account for most group differences and result in Black families having scarce resources for giving additional money to their children (p. 1584). This lack of financial support offers more strain for single Black mothers who look for outside financial support from family members. Parents work strenuously in their careers in order to provide a foundation in which their children can thrive (Berry, 2006). Assistance from parents, especially in the United States varies depending on ethnicity and race (Berry 2006; Eggebeen, 1992; Jayokody, 1998; Lee & Aytac, 1998). Within the Black family, parents report lower amounts of additional financial resources to provide their children (Berry, 2006; McGarry & Schoeni, 1995). Additionally, the lack of additional finances creates increased levels of stress for single Black mothers in their ability to care for themselves and their children (Elliot et al., 2015).

Self-Efficacy

Gender roles contribute historically to the self-efficacy of women, in particular Black women (Jackson & Scheines, 2003, p. 5). Not only gender roles, but also how one identifies with who they are in those roles is instrumental to their self-esteem (Buchanan & Selmon, 2008). According to Buchanan and Selmon (2008), how a person values their abilities and capabilities in how they achieve goals reflects their self-efficacy. Not only is self-efficacy the way people view themselves, but that perception differs among races. For example, according to Buchannan & Selmon (2008), how cultures value themselves is very different, especially in the Black culture for example, Black women viewed themselves as less likely to get married and become dependent on a male provider (Buchanan & Selmon, 2008, p. 824). Furthermore, because Black

mothers understand the struggle in finding the balance of being a mother striving for career success, they are more tolerant of working mothers than White mothers (Buchanan & Selmon, 2008).

Self-efficacy is a learned perception often depending on how a person is reared. A child's upbringing, their environment, and parents' affirmation play a huge role in how Black children view themselves academically and socially (Buchanan & Selmon, 2008). According to Buchanan and Selmon (2008), the balance of self-efficacy and achievement has bearings on how a person pursues their career, importance of encouraging words, and emotional supports as a contributor to positive self-choice and how they will achieve success within that career.

In order to foster positive self-efficacy, parental stress levels have to be at a minimum, so parents have enough positive emotions to give to their children (Ciabattari, 2007). According to Buchanan and Selmon (2008), the stress of work and economic pressures is a direct reflection of parenting styles, which in turn contributes to children's self-efficacy. However, Buchanan and Selmon (2008) accounted for the importance of parents to have success at both the workplace and home in order to transfer positive encouragement to children. Although single parents may not be emotionally filled after a long day, Wilson, Henriksen, Bustamante, & Irby (2015) suggested that children are observant and have a high percentage of a chance to model after their mother's work ethic.

Support System

According to Wilson (2013), the success of single Black mothers relied heavily on their support system of extended family and loved ones (p. 92). More specifically, Black families, recognize extended family as those who extend beyond bloodlines; neighbors, friends, distant relatives, and persons the family can trust (Wilson, 2013, p. 92). Support for Single Black

mothers helped them balance their emotions as well as other aspects of single motherhood (Wilson, 2013, p. 92).

Furthermore, Wilson (2013) stated, “single Black mothers who have little or no support from loved one’s experience greater depression and emotional difficulties” (p. 92). Having access to a support system, contributed to single Black mothers being able to achieve a higher education level as well as to eliminate stereotypical images related to poverty within the Black family (Wilson, 2013, p. 92).

Religion

Spirituality and church were the backbone for Black families and church communities were considered part of the extended family (Wilson, 2013, p. 93). Additionally, Wilson (2013) described spirituality as the foundation in which Black families exercise their personal and parenting values (93). More specifically, “religion provides a means for single mothers to cope with the everyday stressors of racial discrimination and also plays a pivotal role in the lives of single mothers who later become successful and resilient individuals” (Wilson, 2013, p. 93).

Furthermore, religion has played an important role in the lives of many single Black mothers; it has helped them to cope with stressful life situations and has served as the foundation for personal growth, happiness, and parenting values” (Wilson et al., 2015, p. 191).

Barriers for Single Black Mothers

Minority faculty and administrators often face significant barriers on predominantly White campuses (Lewis, 2007). These barriers include isolation, loneliness, and racially motivated victimization, and they inhibit their academic success and tenure (Lewis, 2007). After historical barriers of racism have been crossed, our college and university faculties and administrators, still do not come close to reflecting America’s racial and class diversity.

Recruiting minorities into the teaching profession at all levels of education is not sufficient in solving the problem (Lewis, 2007). Profound and lasting change is needed to enhance the participation of these minorities, without lowering standards (Lewis, 2007). The lack of sensitivity toward minorities on most university campuses has made African American female administrators particularly vulnerable in this system (Lewis, 2007).

Networking

There has been a lack of recognition and achievement amongst females due to the absence of formal and informal social networks (Jackson & Harris, 2007, p. 122). Due to the mindset of other women administrators who say, “we don’t hire the competition,” the isolation associated with minority status, sex-typed expectations, gender bias, the enormous amount of stress that is part of the job and the lonely at the top feelings are barriers” (Jackson & Harris, 2007, p. 122).

Additionally, there has been a scarcity of mentor relationships among Black women in higher education, which forces many to seek mentorship outside of their discipline for academic, emotional, and spiritual support (Davis & Harper, 2003, p. 69). Black women joined networks with others who related to their struggles professionally and personally. While there were networking opportunities in their discipline, they preferred to seek mentorship elsewhere (Davis & Harper, 2003, p. 69). Furthermore, Davis and Harper (2003) stated, “professional associations have long been important networking outlets for women of color because they can provide an arena in which their voices can be heard and their issues can take priority” (Davis & Harper, 2003, 69). More specifically Crawford and Smith (2005) stated, “Ultimately, mentoring not only would change their experiences but would also help to change the overall paradigm” (p. 54).

Job Positioning

For Black women, job positioning, and career choice were important factors. More specifically, once Black women took lower level positions such as student services it was difficult for them to transition to a higher education leadership role (Crawford & Smith, 2005, p. 53-54). Due to Blacks being at the bottom of the societal market, they are often disadvantaged in the job market. Further, Black women are limited in their contributions in society due to education limitations and inadequate recognition from the dominant society (Crawford & Smith, 2005). Furthermore, upward mobility has proved challenging for Black women who have been barred from obtaining positions that deal with policy-making because not all women are able to break through those barriers; this shows a way in which some women do break through those barriers (Crawford & Smith, 2005, 53-54).

It is important to point out that individuals have succeeded and will continue to succeed without the assistance or intervention of mentors or sponsors. Mentors will not guarantee career success, but they are invaluable in ensuring that the protégé will be socialized into the formal and informal norms and rules of the organization's culture. (Crawford & Smith, 2005, p. 53-54)

Support Systems

According to Ciabattari (2011), single Black mothers' benefit from support systems (p. 3). More specifically, Jones et al. (2006) stated, "there is a connection between the strength of the Black culture and the extended family" (p. 3). Furthermore, research suggests that in the single Black homes in particular, single mothers are more likely to reside in the home of a relative and support extends beyond blood lines to non-relatives and friends (Jones et al., 2006).

Negative Perceptions

Perception plays an integral part in how single Black mothers are viewed, especially in the role as a leader (Eagly & Chin, 2010, p. 218). According to Eagly and Chin (2010) “racial stereotypes also contain disadvantages of leadership; Black women are viewed as antagonistic and lacking competence...other expectations about how ethnic minority groups should behave may constrain their leadership” (p. 218). More directly, in ranking, Blacks are at the bottom of the social status; minorities have not yet reached equilibrium (Abdalla, 2018). Additionally, “while some minorities might land prestigious positions this does not mitigate the prominence of historical institutional racism in higher education” (Abdalla, 2018, p. 6).

Time Constraints

A key limitation of the work-family conflict from literature was that the mother’s number of hours at work was often not clearly defined; research investigated employment terms of career types such as executive, professional, manager, or lawyer (Malone, 2011, p. 4). Additionally, categorizing by career type did not allow an understanding of how much of the mother’s time was taken up by work. Studies categorized mother’s employment by number of hours worked or by full or part-time status included this only as a control rather than to explore employment differences (Malone, 2011, p. 4).

Conceptual Framework

SBW functions both as a cultural symbol and a cognitive framework that aids Black women in organizing and interpreting information and experiences (Abrams, et al., 2014). Utilizing the Strong Black Woman (SBW) framework allows single Black mothers to be viewed through the lens of three themes: “unyielding strength, assumption of multiple roles, and self-sacrifice” (Abrams et al., 2014, p. 4). The foundation of the Strong Black Woman schema was an

attempt to understand the complexities of the perceived roles, responsibilities, and experiences of oppression of the Black woman (Abrams et al., 2014, p. 2). With the emergence of the Strong Black Woman schema as the root of the Black woman, the branches of this schema were constructs such as *Superwomen Schema*, *Sojourner Truth Syndrome*, and *Sisterella Complex* (Abrams et al., 2014, p. 2). The foundation of the SBW was illustrated by Gillespie (as cited in Abrams et al., 2014):

She's the fearless foremother: Harriet stealing back into the pit of slavery boldly leading us to freedom; Sojourner the abolitionist refusing to be cowed...She's that Mama men love to brag about who sacrificed all for them...The do-it-all mother, always on call, raising children, sustaining households, working both outside and inside the home...the community mother...the determined sister...We've named her the "Strong Black Woman". (p. 3)

Furthermore, the Black woman who assumed multiple roles as "financial providers and caregivers and possess the ability to independently support their families, all while exuding strength in the midst of fear, pain, and extreme pressure, is the epitome of the strong Black woman culture" (Abrams et al., 2014, p. 3).

The SBW framework brought forth the participants' need for support, career experiences, and validity in leadership positions. Furthermore, the participants' strategies for balancing career and home, as well as strategies for overcoming barriers and career goals were evaluated.

Conclusion

The beginning of the literature review discussed women in leadership and how society's perception has changed from believing women should be solely responsible for the home to now occupying leadership positions. It discussed the perceptions of women in leadership and how

women battle between being charismatic and masculine in their leadership roles along with barriers placed on women in the workplace followed by leadership challenges for women in the workplace. Next, the literature discussed mothers as leaders in the work place and the challenges for women to balance work and home. Furthermore, the literature discussed Black women as leaders who dealt with challenges of equal representation in their leadership roles. Additionally, single mothers as leaders were discussed as well as single Black mothers followed by the perceptions and pressures society places on single Black mothers. Although single Black mothers were viewed negatively, those who continued into the job market had better self-esteem, self-efficacy, and felt they were a better role model for their children (Ciabattari, p. 6). The literature discussed the perceptions of single Black mothers and how they had a hard time being recognized as mothers due to historical prejudices against Black culture. Furthermore, “taking history into consideration and the impact the past has on the present and the future, progress of the African-American population has been vast” (Lewis, 2007, p. 2-3).

Next, the literature discussed the barriers faced by single Black mothers in their leadership roles in higher education and how those barriers affected their self-efficacy. Lastly, the conceptual framework for the research was formulated under the Strong Black Woman Schema (SBW), which was derived from unyielding strength, assumption of multiple roles, and self-sacrifice (Abrams, et al. 2014, p. 4).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to provide a better understanding of how single Black mothers experienced higher educational leadership roles. Phenomenology is an approach to qualitative research that allowed the researcher to discover the inherent perceptions of the participants (Chan, Fung, & Chien, 2013). Additionally, phenomenology served as an education qualitative research design that focused on diverse conceptions of reality (Diaz, 2015, p. 101). The philosopher Immanuel Kant incorporated the word phenomenology in his classic work, *Critique of Pure Reason*, showing the difference between mental representations of objects, “understood as the thing in itself (a priori knowledge independent from experience), and objects understood on the basis of experience: posteriori of empirical knowledge” (Diaz, 2015, p. 102).

This chapter includes a review of the research questions, the setting, and the process for selecting participants for the research study. Additionally, the methodology describes the strategies for the collection of data and how participants’ rights were protected throughout the research. Finally, the chapter highlights potential limitations with the research. As with all qualitative data, phenomenological data analysis involved such processes, which makes sense of essential meanings of the phenomenon (Kleiman, 2004).

To have the ability to hear the stories of single Black mothers who hold leadership positions in higher education were on the forefront of the research. In order to bring forth the lived experiences, a phenomenological study was more suited for this research. More specifically, the utilization of phenomenological design served to better understand the shared patterns of the African American community (Creswell, 2012).

A qualitative study approach served as the best way to interact with a smaller number of participants in order to glean the perspective of a specific population (Creswell, 2012); therefore, interviews of single Black mothers in leadership positions allowed for a deeper understanding of the experiences faced in order to achieve career success. The focused research question for the study was: What is the lived experience of single Black mothers who hold leadership roles in higher education?

Setting

This study sought out to fill the gap in the research on the lived experiences of single Black mothers in higher educational leadership roles. For the purposes of the study, the setting was all single Black mothers in higher educational leadership roles resulting in five participants from the South, three from the Midwest and one from the West.

Participants

This study focused on single Black mothers in higher educational leadership positions. Therefore, potential participants needed to meet the following criteria:

- Participants were single Black working mothers with the sole responsibilities of taking care of children.
- Participants held leadership roles in higher education such as School President or senior management positions one, two, or three levels removed from the President (Vice President, Dean of Students, etc.).

The researcher expected to acquire 8 to 10 participants who represent single Black mothers in postsecondary leadership roles. Nine agreed to be interviewed.

Participants' Rights. Before interviews began, a description of the study was provided to all potential participants. Initial contact was made via e-mail and participants were provided a

written consent form (Appendix C). In order to protect the privacy of the members in this research, each member was assigned a pseudonym. Informed consent was obtained from each potential participant prior to their participation in the research.

Before the interview began, each participant was informed of how the interview process was to be conducted as well as the nature of the questions being asked. Participants were also informed that their participation was voluntary, and they had the right to stop at any point during the process if at any point they felt uncomfortable. Additionally, interviews occurred over the telephone in a private room where no one else could interfere with the questions and responses from participants. Additionally, specific names of colleges and universities were not used to protect the participants and their academic institutions.

Sampling Method

The researcher contacted candidates she knew directly via telephone, text message, and/or Facebook Messenger (Appendix A) who already qualified as being single Black mothers in higher educational leadership positions. In addition to using personal contacts, the researcher utilized social media as a means to broaden the pool of participants. A message (Appendix B) was displayed on the researcher's personal Facebook page in regard to the scope of the research as well as the specific criteria needed for potential participants. In addition to Facebook, the researcher used but not limited recruitment efforts to (a) Facebook messenger, (b) Instagram, and (c) LinkedIn. Through the social media avenues, the researcher contacted potential participants via private message to ensure their privacy. Upon initial contact, the researcher also asked if they could provide contact information for any other single Black mothers who fit the criteria of the research. After names and contact information were given, the researcher contacted potential participants via Facebook messenger, Instagram, and LinkedIn asking if they would be willing to

participate in the research. Participants were asked to provide informed consent to ensure their participation and acknowledgement of the interviews. Additionally, participants were asked to provide their personal email address where they would be provided an electronic copy of the interview.

Snowball sampling in conjunction with recruiting from social media forms were used to increase the pool of potential candidates. The utilization of snowball sampling is a method in which referrals were made amongst persons who share interest in the research. More specifically, snowball sampling is particularly applicable in qualitative research focused on a sensitive and private matter (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981, p. 141). Snowball sampling was applicable for this research because it allowed the researcher to reach more participants through referrals, so it provided potential participants to be approached by acquaintances to see if they were even interested in participating in the study instead of the researcher contacting them personally.

Upon the participants' consent, an additional e-mail was sent explaining the parameters of the study as well as a scheduled interview date and time. The letter described the scope of the study and asked participants to respond via e-mail if they were interested in participating.

Follow-up phone calls were made with permission from the participants within one week after distribution of the letter. An informed consent form (Appendix C) was provided electronically.

According to Morse (1994), Boyd (2001), and Creswell (2007), sample sizes in phenomenological studies generally range from 8 to 10. This small range of participants allowed for the rich authentic perspective of the lived experiences of the participants during the limited timeframe for the study's completion. The manageable number allowed the researcher to go in-depth with each participant to provide deep, rich descriptions of their individual experiences.

Data Collection

Data was collected through one semi-structured interview with each participant lasting approximately 60 to 90 minutes that took place via telephone. For the purposes of the study, semi-structured interviews worked best in allowing for flexibility in how questions were asked (Teijlingen, 2014). Furthermore, contacting participants via telephone according to Mann and Stewart 2000 (as cited in Opdenakker, 2006) was advantageous in five ways: (a) wide geographical access, (b) hard to reach populations, (c) closed site access, (d) sensitive accounts, (e) access to dangerous or politically sensitive sites.

Upon determination of date and time of interview, participants were asked to return the signed consent form when they confirmed the interview time and date. Additionally, an interview guide (Appendix D) was sent to participants via e-mail and consisted of questions that best addressed the participants' beliefs about their experiences of being a single Black mother and their experience pursuing higher educational leadership roles. At the conclusion of the interviews, recordings were transcribed by a professional transcription service and participants were sent transcripts by email and asked to respond with corrections and/or comments or to call the researcher if they wished.

All information pertaining to the research was handled by the researcher and in conjunction with a professional transcription service for transcribing the interview recordings; both handled with confidentiality. Furthermore, audio files were stored in a secure location where they will be held for a three-year period then transferred to a hard drive and erased.

Annotations. Listening to the audio while reading the transcript provided insight on the participants' stories. Notes were annotated to the transcripts. These annotations included the breakdown of the verbal conversations as well as pauses and emotions from each participant's

interview. The research questions served as the navigation for the framework for the data analysis. Additionally, the researcher read and reread the interview transcripts and listened to the audio recordings several times for understanding and emergence of themes (Hycner, 1985).

Interviews

In this study, the goal of the interviews was to uncover the experiences of single Black mothers in higher education leadership positions. Phenomenological interviews were used to gain insight on the experiences of single Black mothers who held higher education leadership positions in higher education. According to Creswell (2007), phenomenological interviews uncover the underlying meaning of participants' experiences (p. 218).

A conversational interview guide (Appendix D) was used to focus the interview and to ensure consistency across interviews. While qualitative interviews are flexible (Creswell, 2007) phenomenological interviews allow for flexibility and allow participants' perspectives to emerge (p. 218). Participants were reminded their participation in the interview process was voluntary, and they had the right to discontinue at any point if they felt uncomfortable.

The Interview Questions. The interview guide (Appendix D) consisted of questions that allowed participants to share their experiences in higher educational leadership roles. The semi-structured questions consisted of questions of work-life balance, participants' experience of being a single Black mother in higher education leadership, and how success is viewed. Further, participants were asked to share their experiences in pursuing higher educational leadership roles while being a single Black mother based on the Strong Black Woman (SBW) framework (Abrams et al., 2014). The questions asked in the interview were shaped by the SBW framework based on the unyielding strength of the Black culture.

Reflexive Journaling

Qualitative interviews served as authentic ways to capture the lived experiences of single Black mothers who served in leadership roles within higher education. However, when the subject matter was closer to the researcher, there was potential for preconceptions, which may have influenced the manner in which data was gathered (Tufford & Newman, 2010, p. 2). In order to eliminate bias, the researcher used reflexive journaling, specifically bracketing.

Bracketing

Prior to starting interviews, the researcher utilized a journal to set aside any biases with the research topic answering these questions:

- What is the reason for undertaking the research?
- What are the assumptions regarding gender?
- What are the assumptions for race/ethnicity?
- What are the assumptions for socioeconomic status? (Tufford & Newman, 2010)

The utilization of bracketing was ongoing throughout the research process to help the researcher glean from each participant the authentic lived experiences from each single Black mother's perspective. Additionally, it was the use of bracketing in which helped the researcher set aside any bias toward the participants' stories. The importance of bracketing was profound in allowing the researchers preconceived assumptions of the participants to be flushed out and the emergence of their own stories and experiences to unfold; without this method, the separation from the subject matter would have been difficult. The importance of bracketing can be illustrated with a shift in perspective on behalf of the researcher from her first interview entry on June 6th, 2018 and the last excerpt on July 18th, 2018

- June 6, 2018: *“I’m looking forward to hearing the challenges all the participants faced while being a single Black mother in Educational Leadership. This subject is so personal to me and I cannot wait to see how closely related their stories are to my own.”*
- July 18: 2018: *“Wow! These interviews have blown me away. I initially went into each interview with the idea that every participant had a horror story and had to overcome incredible barriers or obstacles, but that could not be further from the truth. Some women expressed how they had an overall good experience with support systems, flexibility, and mentorship.”*

Analysis

Data was coded and analyzed for emerging themes and subthemes using a cost-effective qualitative research software program for coding data called Qualitative Data Analysis Software (QDA Miner Lite) (Cuva, 2014, p. 1). This allowed the researcher to identify themes amongst the participants not originally apparent that served as a bridge to document the shared lived experiences of single Black mothers in higher education leadership.

The steps encompassed within the phenomenological method included bracketing to set aside the researcher’s views, identifying significant statements, clustering themes, synthesizing themes into textual and structural description, and developing a composite description of the meanings and essence of experiences (Creswell, 2007). Data analysis served as a method in which information was better understood through emerging themes. Qualitative data analysis consisted of identifying, coding, and categorizing patterns found in the data (Bryne, 2011; Creswell, 2007). The focus of the analysis was to understand the meanings of the descriptions provided by participants.

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

Data was interpreted in eight different steps utilizing Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Larkin & Thompson, 2012).

- With each individual coded transcript, the researcher went line by line in order to identify objects of concern, relationships, values, etc.
- For identification of emerging themes within the coded transcript, the researcher organized these codes in categories in order to keep track.
- The researcher developed a dialogue between participants of how the coded data could be interpreted.
- The researcher developed a structure in how relationships between themes emerged.
- All the material was organized in a way in which coded data could be traced.
- The researcher developed a narrative of the commentary, which takes the reader through the interpretation of the data.
- The researcher reflected on her own perceptions.

Relevancy. The next phase of analysis served as the reviewing of the relevancy of each participants' response to the research question. The review of each participant response provided the researcher with emergent themes. When sifting through participants' responses, data proven irrelevant to research was set aside and does not appear in research findings. Electronic qualitative research software, QDA Miner Lite, was used to further code and analyze the data in order to organize reoccurring themes. From the information from each participant, the researcher input the word document into the software and developed codes that could be merged, ordered, and recoded for clarity.

The next step in the data analysis was to merge results into textual, structural, and composite descriptions for each participant. Textural descriptions were written using the validated themes (Moustakas, 1994). Structural descriptions were developed based on the textural description and imaginative variation (Moustakas, 1994). Finally, a composite description of the essence of each of the participants' experiences was developed (Moustakas, 1994).

Trustworthiness

This study utilized one validation strategy frequently used by qualitative researchers, member checking (Creswell, 2012, p. 259). Transferability was addressed by collecting data and asking probing questions and following unanticipated trains of thought, and reporting a rich, deep set of descriptive data both of the context of the study and the responses from participants.

Member Checking

Member checking is a validity method whereby the researcher shared the interpretations of the findings with participants (Creswell, 2012, p. 259). Participants were provided individual transcripts to check for accuracy and provide additional responses and/or clarification.

Additionally, a second member checking process was used in which the interpretation of the preliminary findings was shared with participants. This checking enhanced the credibility of the data and its interpretation.

Potential Limitations

This study was limited in that it focused on single Black mothers in leadership positions in the field of higher education. The limitations to this research were due to a purposeful sampling method in which the selection criteria were single Black mothers who had the sole responsibility of raising their children. Additionally, only women who were known to the

researcher or other participants and/or who used social media had an opportunity to accept the invitation to participate in the study.

An additional limitation for the research was time constraints. For single mothers, setting aside time in their already busy day imposed additional stress in their balance of career and home. Furthermore, the allotted time to share their experiences may have been difficult; single Black mothers may not have had 60 to 90 minutes to set aside for the research, which limited the number of available participants.

Limitations also included the researcher's ability to create an unguarded environment for participants to share their stories in an authentic manner. Although participants were selected through purposeful sampling, there could have been a lack of trust to share their experience with a researcher they do not know. The participants' perceptions of their experience as single Black mothers in higher educational leadership and their accurate remembrance of key events in their experience may also be limited.

Conclusion

The information provided in this chapter includes a deeper understanding of the purpose of the study as well as the methodological approach that was used to guide this study from the initial stages through completion. An explanation of the selection of qualitative research methods was explained, as well as the components of the research design, participants, data gathering, and data analysis. In the next chapter, information will be shared amongst the participants in how they expressed their lived experiences as single Black mothers in higher education leadership.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The goal of this study was to identify the lived experiences of single Black mothers in higher educational leadership. Through an in-depth study of lived experiences of nine single Black mothers in higher educational leadership positions, three themes emerged that were directly related to the Strong Black Woman schema: unyielding strength, assumption of multiple roles, and self-sacrifice, and six additional themes emerged not specific to the schema: flexibility, support systems, motivations, barriers, emotional stability, and mentorship. This chapter presents the themes and the voices of single Black mothers in higher educational leadership.

Trustworthiness of Data

Data collection took place in May of 2018. Data was collected through in-depth interviews with participants by phone. Semi-structured and open-ended questions were used with each participant (Appendix D). Participant interviews were coded following each interview. The researcher used reflexive journaling—more specifically, bracketing—before, during, and after each interview to mitigate any biases with the subject matter. For each interview, the researcher used Rev.com, a recording service that allowed the interviewer to focus solely on the participant being interviewed. The interview questions allowed for an exploration of individual responses to all interview questions. Additionally, the interview questions served as a guide to locating themes and identify recurrent patterns across participant responses. Once entered into QDA Miner Lite, all data was coded, and codes were assigned to themes. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was then used to confirm thematic elements and inform the interpretation of the texts.

The trustworthiness of this qualitative research relied on the researcher utilizing member checking and confirmability to deduce the meanings these participants gave to judgement and stereotyping of the experience of single Black mothers in higher education leadership. The trustworthiness of the data collected was protected by selecting an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis with semi-structured interview questions to allow for exploration of the data into information that confirms the lived experiences of single Black mothers. Semi-structured interview questions allowed for the collection of the data using the story-telling aspect of the single Black mother's responses with their experiences in higher education leadership. Additionally, semi-structured interview questions allowed the interviewer the opportunity to ask additional questions to better understand each participant's story.

Comparing the multiple perspectives helped to establish the trustworthiness of the data. Allowing single Black mothers to tell their stories provided an opportunity for the researcher to uncover patterns in their stories. These similarities held true even though the participants were dissimilar in their personal backgrounds.

Participant Information

There were nine single Black mothers identified and interviewed for this study. Each of the nine participants was given a pseudonym and the institutions where they are employed are described in general terms using the Carnegie basic, size and settings, and enrollment classifications (Carnegie, 2018) and, where applicable, their NCAA division classifications (NCAA, 2018). Of the 9 participants, 4 hold a BS degree, 4 hold a MS degree and only one holds a terminal degree (PhD). Average year of employment in higher education leadership for the group was 18.7 years. Seven of the women have held 2 or more leadership positions in higher education, 1 has held 4 position and 1 had held only one. The average age of study

participants was 38.6 years, with the youngest being 27 and the oldest being 72. Five of the women were single mothers with one child, two were single mothers with 2 children, one was a single mother with 3 children, and one was a single mother with 5 children.

Responses to General and Demographic Questions

Participants were asked a series of general and demographic questions that provided background information including:

1. What is your current position at your institution?
2. How long have you been at your institution?
3. Can you provide a brief description of your role?
4. How many children do you have?
5. How long have you held your current position at your institution?

An introduction to the individuals was created based on these responses and is provided by grouping them together by their organizational functions. Four participants had athletic leadership positions (Brenda, Anna, Sharon, and Sandra); four had administrative leadership roles (Trena, Stacey, Alyssa, and Caren); and one participant (Bobbie) held the title of Provost and was the only participant with a PhD.

Athletic Leadership

Brenda. Brenda is a 36-year-old mother with a one-year-old son. She is the Senior Women's Administrator at a large, four-year, primarily residential research Division I University in the South (Carnegie, 2018). After college, Brenda relocated west and was on her way to a management role at a major department store. Although her job did not specifically deal with college athletics, she knew her ultimate goal was to hold a position in college athletics, so she made sure that every single job opportunity would translate back into college athletics, which

helped prepare her for her current role of Senior Women's Administrator. Prior to her current role, Brenda served in athletic administration at a collegiate conference in the South for 13 months. For the next nine months, Brenda served in an administrative role at a Division 1 University. Following the nine-month stint, Brenda received a phone call for her current position as the Senior Women's Administrator and has held this position for the past three years.

Anna. Anna is a 50-year-old mother with a 21-year-old-daughter. Anna is a Senior Women's Administrator and Executive Senior Associate Athletic Director at a large, four-year, primarily residential Agriculture and Applied Science university in the South (Carnegie, 2018). She recalled how she started as a Life Skills Director and then transitioned into athletics. She was content with her current position until a mentor suggested she expand herself by pursuing a 17-month-long internship through the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), a program specifically designed to help minority women learn how to become an Athletic Director. In 2006, Anna was approached with an opportunity to be the next Senior Woman's Administrator. After doing some research, she learned this position was the highest-ranking woman in the athletic department one level below the Athletic Director. Additionally, the NCAA (2018) states, "the SWA is not the senior 'women's' administrator, nor is the role intended to be restricted to the individual supervising women's sports. The SWA can fill any job duties in the athletic department—business manager, facilities, compliance, academics, sport supervision, etc., so she concluded that was a good opportunity for her" (p. 2).

Due to her mentorship and training, Anna has been at her current university for the past 25 years but has been in the role of Senior Woman's Administrator for the past 12 years. Anna described her rise to higher education leadership as "difficult".

Sharon. Sharon is a 38-year-old mother of a nine-year-old son. While still in athletic leadership, she is the only participant who serves as the Director of Athletics at a Division II university in the South (Carnegie, 2018). Once she realized after a short stint that college coaching was not her avenue to advanced leadership positions, she started to pursue opportunities in administration. Sharon attributed her rise to higher educational leadership to the ability to network. By utilizing an internship opportunity at her first university experience, Sharon networked and moved on to her first entry-level leadership position at a larger university. Coupled with her prior experience, Sharon now holds a leadership role at a medium-size, highly residential university (Carnegie, 2018). She has been in this role for the past 22 months. A 37-year-old mother of one, Sharon described her journey to higher education as “an uphill climb”.

Sandra. Sandra is a 50-year-old mother of a 34-year-old daughter. She serves as the Senior Woman’s Administrator. She recounted her professional experience as being fortunate to have had mentorship. Sandra started her career coaching track and field and transitioned into administration. The strategy she used for her professional journey was taking advantage of opportunities and not being fearful if they took her far. Sandra transitioned through multiple career paths, each taking her further away from her comfort zone showing her fearlessness in embracing new challenges. She claimed her friends often thought she was a *military brat* because she moved around so much. For example, when she transitioned out of coaching and pursued administration, she found herself in academics and compliance. Although compliance is known as a high burnout profession according to the professionals who work in college athletics, Sandra still pursued that position as her first administrative role. From there she pursued a job opportunity 15 hours away in the Midwest where she was the coordinator of multi-cultural programming for the athletic department. She left that position and pursued an opportunity even

further away that created not only a cultural barrier but also a language barrier in Germany where she worked as part of a German foundation. She would have stayed in Germany longer, but was diagnosed with breast cancer and moved back to the states. Once her health returned, she pursued a job at her current institution and has been there for the past 13 years. For the past 18 years, Sandra has worked for a large, public, four-year, primarily residential university in the South (Carnegie, 2018). She served as the Associate Athletic Director for six years and has served as the Senior Associate Athletic Director for the past 12 years. Sandra described her journey in higher education as “having to have thick skin”.

Administrative Leadership

Trena. Trena is a 56-year-old mother of two sons, a 31-year-old and a 26-year-old. She served in a leadership role outside of athletics as an Assistant Vice President for Strategic Success of Student Affairs. She started as an English professor where she described the importance of having thick skin. Not only because she was Black, but also because she was female. The students, she recounted, had an aura about them that made her feel unqualified to teach English. Trena recalled her insecurities magnified by her perception of her students. “It was prejudged that I couldn't do it because I was a Black person. So, when I went into the classroom, I know some, especially white middle-class kids, when they come in there and they're in like English 1A, College level writing, they're like, ‘Oh, okay. We got a Black woman. Is she really going be able to teach us how to stop a run-on sentence?’”

Trena now holds a leadership role at a large, private, research institution (Carnegie, 2018) out west where she has worked for the past 20 years. She has been only three years in this particular role. Trena described her rise in higher education leadership as “frustrating”.

Stacey. Stacey is a 42-year-old mother of a 10-year-old daughter and a 12-year-old son. She is a Senior Academic Advisor and detailed how she missed opportunities for growth due to her own loyalty. While she acknowledged loyalty was certainly a good thing, Stacey described how she maintained her position at a lower level longer due to her own loyalty; feeling stuck between feelings of growth and comfort. At the conclusion of those three years, she transitioned to working with college students. After she completed her master's degree and became a student development specialist for a federally funded education program for three years, she received a promotion to Assistant Director. For Stacey, in pursuing her higher-level leadership role, loyalty was her strategy. She stated, "I was big on loyalty and while that was a good thing, I feel it held me back from pursuing my higher-level leadership role sooner." Although she faced setbacks, Stacey now holds a leadership role at a large, public, primarily residential, co-education university (Carnegie, 2018) in the Southwest where she has worked for the past 15 years. She has served in her current role for the past four months. Stacey described her rise in higher education leadership as "promising".

Alyssa. Alyssa is a 37-year-old mother of a 13-month-old daughter. Alyssa is a civil rights attorney by training, worked for a firm for a year, clerked for a judge, worked for the legal defense team for three years, worked for a civil rights firm, worked in the federal administration, and then worked for a consulting firm. She has held a leadership role as the Assistant Vice President of Affairs in the Office of Federal Relations at a four year, private, highly residential, non-profit research university in the Midwest for the past four years (Carnegie, 2018). She described her professional experience as one in which she had to utilize her voice and let people know she was in the room. She specifically stated, "People seem to be much more impressed that

I got a degree from Stanford over my law degree.” Alyssa described her rise to higher education as “strategic”.

Caren. Caren is a 50-year-old mother of a daughter who has graduated from college and a son who is a senior in high school. She applied for an advising position and found she absolutely enjoyed her role, so she had a caseload of students, but also had a special group of students that she worked with outside of her caseload. She did that for a few years, and then there was an opportunity to move to her current institution and continue her advising role. She started as an academic advisor and then worked her way to Assistant Director, then to Associate Director. And then again, “more self-promotion, I would talk to someone and go, here’s the work I’ve been doing. Matter of fact. I know you see it, but whether or not you’re going to recognize it, that’s okay. I’m going to help you recognize my skills. Okay, so I think it’s time to be promoted.” Caren spoke candidly about her passion to help empower students of color and provide them with a voice. While she is the Assistant Dean for Academic Services, she works more specifically with undergraduate students in a specific field of study. She recalled how she developed quite a reputation for helping students from all disciplines. Caren also spoke candidly about how her upward mobility came from her own ability to advocate for herself. She has not been afraid to be her own cheerleader recalling, “If you don’t speak up, you will get passed up.” Caren has now been at a public, four- year, primarily non-residential university in the Midwest for the past 15 years (Carnegie, 2018). Caren described her rise to higher education leadership as “authentic”.

Bobbie. Bobbie is a 76-year-old-mother of three sons and two daughters. Bobbie was the only participant who holds a doctoral degree. She is the Provost and Academic Dean at a very small, four-year, primarily residential university in the Midwest (Carnegie, 2018). Bobbie

described her professional experience as “challenging”. During the Civil Rights movement, she received her bachelor’s degree but realized there was almost nothing she could do with a science degree without continuing her education. Looking to pursue the medical field, she went to her advisors for help, but was discouraged by their advice. They told her, “You will never get in.” She was fortunate enough to get a position at the hospital during a time when medicine was becoming more sophisticated and they needed someone to help run the laboratories. It was there she became a Medical Technician. While it was not her dream job, she pursued it because it provided her an opportunity to stay close to medicine. Then there was an opportunity through the Peace Corps to earn her master’s degree, which allowed her to become a middle school science teacher. As a single mother, she thought the teaching field would be great because she would have her summers off. While she enjoyed teaching middle school science, she knew she wanted more. There was an opportunity to get into medical school at an East North Central State University. She recounted, in particular, a decision she was faced with while a middle school Science teacher. She went to her Principal and asked if she could move from the middle school to the high school to teach. When she was told no, she resigned and went full-time into medical school. She spoke about the guilt of being a single mother because she left a steady paying job with benefits to pursue a career in the medical field. She quit her teaching job and entered medical school. She described that each step of the way was one opportunity after another she was willing to take to help her career. Once she started practicing medicine and teaching, Bobbie said, “That was when I realized that, boy, the things I enjoyed most, the practice of medicine and teaching had come together.”

Bobbie recounted her professional experience as one of assurance and boldness in breaking barriers and reported feeling fortunate that medicine was at a place where both women

and women of color had career opportunities. Bobbie described her rise to higher education as “breaking barriers”.

Responses to Experiential Interview Questions

The collection of single Black mothers included leaders of various ages in different leadership roles, representing multiple types of institutions and conferences in the NCAA. The participants had many similarities and differences providing a plethora of extremely rich data. Specific interview questions were designed to solicit the participants’ experiences as single Black mothers in higher education leadership roles to answer the single research question for this study: What is the experience of single Black mothers who hold leadership roles in higher education? Participants were asked specific questions that would highlight those experiences in more detail. This chapter presents the key findings obtained from nine in-depth interviews.

Question 1: What strategies did you use as a single Black woman in your pursuit of leadership role in higher education?

The primary and overriding finding of this question was all the participants used a strategy. For the purposes of this study, a strategy was defined as particular effort or consideration employed toward achieving a desired outcome, such as seeking a particular type of position, specialized training, flexibility, professional networking, etc., even if that strategy was not specific. This finding was highly significant in terms of the overwhelming number of participants (eight out of nine) who found having a strategy to be important for career preparation. Based on the participant descriptions, there appeared to be a connection between having a strategy and their upward mobility into higher education leadership. All eight participants described their connection to a strategy. Among the comments cited were those from Brenda, who said, “I always made sure that whatever career move I made, it would always

translate back to athletics; keeping all the elements of the things that I enjoyed doing and it was at a higher elevation at a reputable institution.” Most of the participants also spoke favorably about the importance of maintaining a strategy.

Strategy 1: Maintaining flexibility. Alyssa recalled, “I wanted to prove my value as a woman before becoming a mother so there wouldn’t be much scrutiny when I had to take maternity leave; also, to move to a leadership position where I could have more money and more flexibility for motherhood.” Other participants who spoke specifically on the importance of flexibility said,

- Other people having children helped. At least they knew and understood what it was like to have a flexible schedule (Caren).
- With the workload and the expectation of the job and family there has to be more flexibility (Brenda).

Only one participant of the nine did not acknowledge having a particular strategy in her upward mobility, but she did find she had more flexibility as a result of her move stating, “I wouldn’t be in charge of a particular sport and as a result, I could devote more time to my daughter without feeling as if I was avoiding my job or doing less of my job.” (Anna)

Strategy 2: Taking advantage of opportunities. Of the nine participants, two spoke on the importance of taking advantage of opportunities as their strategy. Opportunities were taken by Sandra that took her and her daughter to three different states and a different country; Bobbie, who left a stable teaching position to enter into medical school then took a position to become a med-tech before she became the first Black dean of a university in the south; and Trena who also took an English teaching position against the advice of her colleagues. Among the reasons cited

Trena reflected the rationale stating, “You never know when they [opportunities] will come again.”

Strategy 3: Utilizing a network. Of the nine participants, Sharon was the only participant who spoke on the importance of utilizing a network in her quest for upward mobility. She described her use of a network as helpful, stating, “The small network has gotten me to where I am...I didn’t have to apply for an opportunity.”

Strategy 4: Expanding impact. Two of the nine participants began their trajectory into higher education after collegiate coaching experiences. Sharon commented, “After one year of coaching collegiately, I knew quickly that wasn’t for me, and I wanted to make an impact beyond one sport”. Sandra commented, “I knew I had to transition out when I felt I had to choose between my job and my daughter.”

Strategy 5: Serving as a role model for students of color. Two of the nine participants spoke on the importance of their upward mobility in having a bigger impact on students of color. Stacey recalled, “After some reflection, I realized my desire for upward mobility was in trying to get students of color access to institutions and keeping students enrolled.” Trena also focused on her interest in impacting students of color, stating,

My whole thing was how teachers treated Black students in the classroom. In addition, if they say they were culturally responsive, how do they show that? Teachers would say, ‘I’m culturally responsive’ but then they don’t even check themselves in how they answer or ask students of color a question...the Blacks didn’t want to answer the question. The teachers would go, ‘That’s not right. Let me hear from Johnny’. The white students would get kudos because the way they phrase it. They were linear in their answer where the black student would meander, but they had the right answer. It is the

way we set up our Black students in the classroom. All of those kinds of things are hands-on for me and are much more important than being president or vice president, but at the same time I want to make policy change.

Question 2: What has your experience been like as a single Black mother in higher education leadership?

The responses from the participants on how their experiences have been as single Black mothers were varied, but the majority of participants expressed their experiences as being negative. More specifically, five out of the seven described how they were viewed negatively. Examples included comments from Bobbie who said, “I was viewed with all the preconceptions of being Black and being female. I was judged based on the preconceived perceptions of a Black female during a time when there were very few women in the field of medicine.” Additionally, she commented: “I never realized I was a woman until I entered medical school. Prior to that, I had always been Black; carrying the double whammy, both being Black and female; I learned an important lesson while in medical school when I found I could not trust the environment around me to give me appropriate feedback, because they expected so little of me.” Another participant, Trena, commented: “They have more empathy for people with families, and they assumed I had it worked out. I’m not looked at as having value.”

Another negative experience expressed by one participant was the perceived stereotypical behavior of Black women. Bobbie commented, “I was accused of missing several classes and showing up late to work. They assumed it to be so. I have to be my own worst critic because everyone around me expected so much less.”

One of the nine participants expressed how she felt excluded from events after becoming a single Black mother. Brenda expressed: “I don’t feel like I get invited to as much as I did before... I feel I miss out on opportunities that I didn’t miss out before becoming a mother.”

Although two participants expressed how they were viewed as a role model, one of those participants felt that view was negative. Anna stated, “for Blacks, if you mess up, oftentimes the only jobs available are at HBCU’s; there is nothing wrong with Historically Black Colleges, but if you are there you know what time it is.”

Two of the nine participants expressed how they either did not know or did not care how they were viewed. Sandra said, “To be quite honest, I don’t think about it,” and Sharon’s response was, “I don’t know, and I don’t care about how people view me. I don’t think it’s anything to be ashamed of, and I don’t think it’s anything worth letting anyone else place their perception and opinions on your journey.”

Although most participants had a negative view of how they were perceived, two incidents surfaced in which participants found favor in being a single Black mother. Caren expressed how she was perceived as a role model, adding, “I have a lot more opportunity to speak to more students on how to balance school and motherhood.”

One out of the nine participants expressed how they received more support as a single Black mother. For Stacey, “when plans were changed midday at work, my colleagues did not bother to ask questions as to why I had to leave early or what time I would be back, they were available for support.”

In responding to how they were viewed, seven participants recounted the importance of overall flexibility, three of the nine expressed an equal importance of that flexibility coming from their boss. Sharon commented, “Before I took the job as Director of Athletics, I had to

make sure my boss was okay with me integrating my son into this environment. Those are my non-negotiables to get my son every day, to drop him off, anytime I'm here, to pick him up every day. That helps me a little bit, to integrate him into the work environment and be unapologetic."

Brenda recalled, "My boss has four kids, so when I had to take maternity leave there was understanding and flexibility, and if there were meetings that needed to be changed around due to unexpected issues that came up with my child, my boss was open to rescheduling in those circumstances." Another participant described her situation as unique when she commented, "I think that's because I have an amazing boss who is a woman and had a daughter and is just a friend, and has been, like I said, a friend, a mentor, a leader in the office." She further reflected,

I do not know if I will ever be able to get the perfect situation that includes being able to have the flexibility to spend time with my daughter but also earning the amount of money that it would take to send her to school and all those other things. So, I'm right in the process of thinking that myself. So, again, it's primarily the work-life balance that I have here. (Alyssa)

Four of the nine participants expressed the importance of having more flexibility so they could be more available for their children as single Black mothers. Among the notable comments were those by Bobbie who said, "Although I loved what I did, there came another opportunity for me to be a chairperson for a mid-western University and that is when I also saw another opportunity for more flexibility as a single parent." Three other participants commented in the following ways,

- For me, when people would ask if I would leave my job, I would say "no". I wouldn't have left it because they were the most flexible people for me raising a child by myself. It was a godsend job for me to do the things I loved to do in order for my daughter to have

the support she needed to be successful. So, I would tell anybody, if you have a job, it's not about the job if you are a single parent, it's about flexibility. (Anna)

- My transition afforded me more freedom in attending my daughter's events surrounding an incident I experienced that ultimately caused my exit from coaching. I was criticized for showing up late to track practice because I was going to watch my daughter's recital. Once I arrived the assistant coach approached me saying, "Well, you need to get your priorities straight and determine if you want to be a coach or not." While I liked coaching at the collegiate level, it was in this moment I realized that I needed to put myself in position to have more flexibility for my daughter. (Sandra)
- I had to make sure that whatever jobs I pursued were going to be flexible enough to make sure that if I had to take a vacation or two extra days when my daughter was out of school, that she was able to come and stay with me...or if I had to leave early, that wasn't going to be a problem, because other people too have children, and they at least knew and understood what it was like to have a flexible schedule. (Caren)
- I think it will be hard to find another position that provides me with the same level of seniority with a culture that I appreciate better, perhaps, or an impact that I think is broader than what I'm having now, but also provides me with the flexibility. (Alyssa)

One out of nine participants spoke on the ability to have more flexibility in her authenticity. More specifically, Caren stated,

What I've learned along the way is that Black women they've had to, I don't want to say sell their souls, but they lose something, and so, they've lost something at that point, so that they can sustain at that level. I don't know if you've noticed, but I can only speak as being a black woman. Every morning you wake up, you have to be okay with who you

are; know who you are. I refuse to wake up every morning and have to think about, okay what am I going to wear today so that they see me in a certain light? Do I wear make-up today? Should I wear heels or flats today? How should I do my hair? Can I keep my crochet? Can I do something natural? Can I do this other thing, can I put in weave, without having a whole bunch of questions? Okay should I wear black today? Should I wear white today? Can I wear anything on my shirt? Should I not? How high should my skirt be, how low? Should I wear flats today, should I wear dress shoes?

Trena and Stacey described how they found their higher education leadership roles as having less flexibility. More specifically, Trena stated, “after three years, like I don’t have the power to say this or say that, but then I turn around and people will look at me like I’m crazy.” For example, Trena shared a time when she questioned some analysts on some procedures she did not agree with. According to Trena, the analysts’ response was “Oh no, that’s not the way it should be.” She continued, “I was like, wait, this is my role here, I should have the power to say that.”

One out of nine participants described having less flexibility as a single mother in higher education. Stacey commented, “Higher education job is very structured 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. job. My passion for helping students succeed, specifically students of color are my reason for pursuing higher education even though I find it more structured and less flexible.”

Question 3: What behaviors did you observe that positively affected your pursuit of higher education leadership?

The primary and overriding finding of this question was that when the participants were asked what behaviors they observed, seven out of the nine spoke on the importance of having access to mentorship in their climb to higher education. Among the comments that demonstrate

this response were those from Brenda, who said, “I was fortunate enough to have really good administrators at my university when I was a student-athlete that helped guide my career,” and Anna’s response, “Not only did my mentor provide me an opportunity to become the Senior Women’s Administrator, he also encouraged me to sign up for a program through the NCAA that would prepare me for a Director’s role.” Sharon expressed her appreciation for her mentor stating, “My mentor helped me step outside of my comfort zone,” and Stacey recounted the words of her mentor who said, “So, just stay the course in getting your PhD and you'll start moving up into those roles.”

One of the seven participants, Caren, expressed the importance of mentorship and detailed several people who contributed to her climb. The first mentor was her guidance counselor who helped her figure out her steps after becoming a single mother by stating, “okay, you had a baby ...it will be better for you in the long run if you finish your degree. She continued checking in on me during my tenure at the university and made sure I had the accommodations needed to be both single mother and college student.” Furthermore, Caren expressed the mentorship from her boss who took interest in her upward mobility and encouraged her to come to meetings. Caren summed it up, “It was during those meetings I learned the importance of being in a higher position to create policy change. In continuation, Caren utilized the advice of her grandmother who stated, “to go for what you want,” and her Board of Directors who commented,

Oftentimes we kind of wait around to get the skills first before we get the job. I don’t know if it’s just Black women, or just women of color, we want to get every single skill because we don’t want them to say anything, but also, we’ve been programmed, it’s a programming issue.

Two of the seven participants who expressed the value in having mentorship spoke specifically on race when they described their mentors. Among those who commented were Sandra, who described her mentor as “a white guy with a PhD who said, ‘young lady, it never hurts to listen. I think you'd be really interested in this new position that they're starting there’”, and Trena who described her mentor as “A Latino woman who talked to me about being at the table and encouraged me to let my voice be heard.” Additionally, Trena stated the importance of having mentorship from her boss. While she had access to mentorship, her desire was to experience it directly from her boss. Her frustration was expressed when she commented,

My biggest wish is that I want a boss that can give me expertise and direction and not feel like my boss is competing with me. My biggest desire is to have worked with someone that will say, ‘you’re doing this right. I think you should do this, or wow, you know what, you need some leadership training in this. Let’s do this. This is a great job.’ That is what I want. Somebody to mentor me. That is what I think every single Black mother need when they get into higher ed is mentoring. Finding those people, you trust to mentor you.

Two of the seven participants described how they did not have mentorship in their climb to higher education. Among those who commented were Alyssa who stated:

I can safely say; I haven’t had any mentors in higher education. The mentors I’ve had in life have gracefully helped get me to this point in my career (my mother and many former bosses—who were black, white, gay, and straight men) ...I think higher education is an area where people are always testing their mettle. And, unfortunately, that may lend to them not looking out for each other.

Another participant, Bobbie, reported: “If I did have mentorship, I would have a different mentor for career and for my personal life. It is impossible to have one for both.”

Question 4: What motivations did you pull from?

The overriding finding of this question was the participants were motivated to continue pursuing higher education by their children. Of the nine participants, six expressed their children as their driving force. Brenda said, “I don’t feel like I have a choice, no disrespect to other moms out there but I want to do this. I enjoy my work. I enjoy the access that my job gives me, and as long as I can be a decent mother where my son has all his teeth, his toes, and his eyes, then I feel I am doing a pretty good job.” Brenda added, “as long as I can continue to work and no one seems to be suffering, it’s important to me.” Additionally, Brenda described, “He is able to see so much as he is growing up, and it just becomes normalized to him. I don’t have to ask him about college, I don’t have to talk to him about the importance of education, because he sees it every day.” Other participants expressed their children as motivation in the following ways:

- I just had to get it done. Not being successful was not an option, I had to get it done. I did not know what success was going to be, but I could not let this little girl down. I go to work, I take care of my child, and I come home. I get up and I do it all over again (Anna).
- I wanted to have a career that provided security for myself and my kids (Bobbie).
- Failure can't be an option because if I fail then I'm failing her (Sandra).

One out of the nine participants expressed being motivated by a career that excited them and financial security as expressed by Bobbie who said, “I really, really enjoy the medicine and teaching my students, and I wanted to have a career that provided security for myself and my kids.”

One out of nine participants expressed how she was motivated through prayer and religion. Caren said, “I prayed a lot...there’s this thing inside of me that believes that I can do something. It was that inner strength, or courage. I started this. I’m going to finish it.”

One out of nine participants expressed how in order to face her journey in higher education she had to look within herself. Sharon said, “It came a point where I realized that in order to be the best for my daughter, I had to start with myself. I had to focus on the two of us.”

One out the nine participants expressed how she was motivated by the stereotypical lens in which single Black mothers were viewed. Trena said she was told, “‘People like you can’t do this. Oh no, you can be the Director if you want, but I am the Executive Director because I have my doctorate.’ I just get motivated by other people’s preconceived notions of me as a stereotype. I just want to prove them wrong.”

Two of the nine participants expressed how they were motivated by their own mothers. Among those who commented were Stacey who said, “I witnessed my mother make sacrifices, one being her own college education so she could raise her daughter. I felt guilty of all my mother sacrificed in order to provide for her children,” and Alyssa who commented, “First and foremost, I have a powerhouse of a mom who defied all rules and expectations. So, there is no ‘I can’t do it’ because she did it and broke a more substantial barrier as a single mom.”

Question 5: How were you able to balance your emotional stability?

The overriding finding from the research showed that six out of the nine participants expressed religion as a method of how they balanced their emotional stability. Among them were Brenda, who commented, “There were days when I put my son down, and thought, we got through the day I don’t know how, but the day is over; thank you, sweet Jesus,” and Caren who commented, “I survive only by the grace of God. God is a good God; He wants the best for me.” One participant, Trena, spoke to her experience being a single Black mother saying, “It’s just

really a hard, lonely journey, I think as a single mom you have to be prepared for that journey.”

Other participants also express the importance of religion in their balance. They said:

- I am a spiritual person, and I know when I need to go off by myself. I really am a person that is ok by myself and get some quiet time with the Lord.” (Anna)
- Prayer provides hope, optimism, and a positive outlook.” (Sharon)

One out of the nine participants expressed the importance of mentorship as a way she was able to balance her emotions. Caren stated, “I just don’t know what to do? She would listen to me and be supportive.”

One out of the nine participants expressed the importance of having a sense of humor. Anna commented, “In my leadership role you have to have a good sense of humor, I balance it all because I’m crazy. I can laugh at myself. I’ll laugh at you.”

For one participant, the importance of utilizing four different methods was how she balanced her emotions. Sharon commented on the importance of surrounding herself with people when she stated, “There are times when I have to have that person or two, I can call to have a moment of vulnerability with and have it be okay.” Additionally, Sharon used prayer and going to the movies commenting, “You have to have an outlet, you know, from it all. Something as simple as going to the movies, or watching a movie, it’s my escape.” She also utilized counseling, “I think it’s healthy to get counseling. I think a lot of times, as leaders, we shy away from that, but I think counseling is good.” Lastly, Sharon utilized Executive Coaching stating:

- It is an incredible resource if people have the time and money to do it. Executive coaching helps provide guidance, strategic guidance to help leaders manage and lead on a day-to-day basis. Additionally, it could serve as a sounding board for how to deal with

challenges and know how to best manage, communicate, and respond. It could be as big as working with how to build team cohesion within an organization.

Two out of the nine participants expressed how they never thought much of the balance. Among those who commented was Sandra, who said, “You know, I think it's something that I honestly never thought about. Because you know Black women are used to taking care of everybody else, we don't worry about ourselves.” Bobbie responded to the question with a different perspective on emotional balance. She described it by saying, “Those were the things that I love, so it didn't take much of a balance. I really love being a mom. I'm really committed to family, and I really, really enjoyed medical school. I had no problems with balance.”

One of the participants, Trena, described meditation as the way she balanced her emotions stating, “I would go away for 10 days and learn how to breathe and calm my mind; a method I used frequently during my master's and Doctorate program.”

One out of nine participants expressed her vulnerability in crying, stating, “There are days where I just have to cry. When I am trying to keep all of the bottles in the air. And it just seems like a lot. My son has ADHD, and it's like a perfect storm” (Stacey).

Alyssa commented on the ability to outsource as much as she could stating, “I had someone I called for handiwork, and I paid him back in pizza. I realized I cannot do everything and instead of spending all of my emotional energy on something that will frustrate me as a mother, I outsourced as much as I could.”

Question 6: Who did you rely on as your support system?

The overriding finding resulting from this question suggested that six out of the nine participants utilized family as their main support system. Among those women were Sharon who commented, “I flew my family in from time to time for additional support. If I needed to write a

paper, I could take my children to my mother's house on the weekend,” and Alyssa who commented, “My mom is my partner in the process, she traveled and stayed with my daughter when I had to travel for work once a month. She is my safety valve.”

Other participants responded:

- I could not have done any of this without my family. (Bobbie)
- My support came from my mother. She helped me get back on my feet after I had my daughter. (Caren)
- Although my family was supportive, they did not reside in the same town as me. I would drive three hours there, turn around and come back to catch the plane and go with the team. Afterwards, I would come back from the football game Saturday night, wake up early Sunday morning and travel three hours to pick up my daughter and turn around and drive three hours back and be back to work on Monday and I wouldn't miss a beat all because I didn't want anyone to say that I couldn't do my job. (Anna)

Only one participant described how her family was not a strong support for her stating, “My mother passed, so I did not really have the grandmother to take care of the kids. My extended family in Southern California as well as back east in Virginia helped, but it's hard to say there was a strong support system for me.” (Trena)

Two of the nine participants expressed how they utilized support from the day-care on campus. Among those who commented was, Brenda, who stated, “I used multiple avenues of support for my child and for myself; which included taking advantage of the child daycare on campus.” Trena's response was, “I was able to trust the care my children received.”

Of the nine participants, five utilized the support from co-workers for support. Among those who commented was Anna, who stated, “The people that I worked with were excellent,”

and Sharon who commented, “I utilized my colleagues although I tried to do a great job of scheduling work events so I was able to drop my son off in the mornings and pick him up in the afternoons.” Another participant, Brenda, stated, “My colleagues also happened to be new moms and how they bounced ideas off each other about how they do it and was able to get stuff done.”

Two of the nine participants expressed the importance of having an accommodating boss. Among those who commented was, Anna, who said, “Although I had four Athletic Directors, every one of them were excellent as far as helping me when I had to go out of town. I never had a problem being a single parent with the people that I worked with, when I needed to take off of work I did and the people at work would help when I needed it,” and Alyssa who stated, “My boss was very flexible, very accommodating. It’s not lost on me that sometimes she is a mom herself.”

One of the nine participants expressed how she used the athletic department stating, “I called on secretaries and academic counselors to help me out.”

Four of the nine participants described the importance of utilizing friends as a support system. Among those who commented were Brenda, who said, “You may have gotten your butt kicked today, it may not have gone your way, or step back for a minute because this isn’t even what you thought it is. I made sure to surround myself with supportive people. They do not have to be related by blood, but they have to love you unconditionally and be willing to support you and be honest with you.” Trena recalled, “When I failed my master’s thesis, I had somebody to help me get through it. When I was getting my doctorate, I had somebody close to talk to me in a positive way saying, ‘come on Trena, we got you, you gotta get this EdD’. They wanted to see me succeed.” The other two participants found support through their friends whose children went to school together, so the parents helped each other out.

Two of the participants expressed how they utilized a nanny as their support system. Sharon felt “fortunate enough to have a nanny. It’s been a great resource in terms of the family for my son and myself.” Alyssa stated, “Getting the promotion and raise was really important for me getting a nanny.”

Two of the participants utilized a sorority as a means of support. Among those who reported this were Anna, who stated, “My sorority served as a huge support system in helping me with my child,” and Sandra who stated, “I would always connect with my sorority sisters, and we would keep each other’s kids.”

One of the nine participants, Anna described her use of athletes as a support system commenting, “I had football players and volleyball player’s help babysit.”

Two of the nine participants expressed the importance of the church and the pastor for a support system. Anna recalled a time when her pastor “went in support of my daughter on grandparent’s day because my parents did not live nearby.” Sandra reported, “One of the things I always did was I would join a church wherever I moved to. Then you know, I met people in church that befriend me. I’d befriend them.”

Only one of the nine participants, Trena, described how she did not have support commenting, “I didn’t really have that as far as a babysitter. I pretty much took my kids everywhere I went.”

Question 7: Do you feel you experienced any obstacles and barriers you had to overcome?

The findings from the research showed five of the nine participants experienced negative perceptions as a barrier they had to overcome. Trena explained, “They had more empathy for people with families and they were like, ‘aw, the single mother is trying to get her degree.’ But I didn’t feel like they had that empathy for me as a single mother. They just assumed, ‘she’s got it

going on.” Alyssa, declared, “There is discrimination, prejudice, and judgment which requires me to credential myself over and over again.” Other participants commented with their experiences stating:

- In order to maintain, you gotta have a schedule. If your mind isn't in order, it only breeds chaos when you're trying to do something. I was carrying the double whammy, both being Black and female. I was viewed with all of the preconceptions of being Black and female. I learned to be my own worst critic, because I could not trust the environment around me to give me appropriate feedback, because they expected so little of me. (Bobbie)
- In order to get to the higher level, Black women have to lose something, some part of who they are; their authenticity and so, they've lost who they are at that point, so that they can sustain at that level. (Caren)
- Oh no, we can't have you teaching grammar, and she encouraged me to pursue another profession other than English. (Trena)

One of the nine participants, Brenda, described her barriers with time constraints and her youth stating, “Working from the moment I get up checking emails, making phone calls all through the night all while having events and having to take my son to those events makes it even more challenging. Sometimes being a mom is most important in the moment and sometimes being an administrator is most important that moment.” When describing barriers with her youth she stated, “I felt because I looked younger, people may not have thought I had the wherewithal to be able to build relationships and to make the decisions, and that is something I always had to overcome.”

Two of the nine participants expressed barriers they faced being in a male-dominated profession. Among those who reported this as negative, Brenda stated, “There were times when I had to remind my male counterparts, not only do I do what you do, but then I go home and do what your wife does.” Sandra commented, “If I don't go with my daughter there's nobody to go with her. So, you know what coach? I'm going to do the best that I can do.”

One of the nine participants expressed pressure being the only single Black mother in her position as a barrier. Anna recounted:

The downside to my position is the pressure of feeling like I can't mess up. I am representing all the other Black women who are coming after me. That is sometimes always in the back of my mind, and I want to mold the next up-and-coming Black person but know that it's true because when you make a mistake it puts you ten years back.

Two of the nine participants expressed feelings of pressure from the system. Sandra stated, “The feelings of pressure from the “good ol' boy system; normally there's a hierarchy of white males, Black males, white females, then Black females.” Sharon commented, “My barriers were political, and the stress level was way beyond normal, especially early on.”

Two of the nine participants discussed upper management as barriers to their upward mobility. Among those who commented was Trena who said, “It came in the area of the lack of transparency, honesty, and communication. The biggest barrier to me is not having honest communication with your hierarchy.” Stacey noted that when her manager said, “I need you to come in a few minutes early to prepare for something,” the logistics that are involved in doing that for me as single mother is difficult. Due to the fact I had kids and worked in an office where everybody else did not, I have to do as much as they do if not more so that you're not viewed as using your kids as a crutch to get out of stuff.”

Trena expressed barriers of loneliness and lack of financial resources stating, “I felt really isolated because I was single. At one point when I was getting my master’s degree I always tried to reach out for help, but I really didn’t have that, [and] the negative part is I didn’t have any money.”

Question 8: Is there anything specific about the Black culture that you pulled from in your pursuit of your current role?

When the women were asked about elements of Black culture, their responses could be closely tied to the three themes of the Strong Black Woman framework: “unyielding strength, assumption of multiple roles, and self-sacrifice” (Abrams et al., 2014, p. 4).

Strength. All of the participants expressed an element of strength needed as a single Black mother in higher education leadership; which is the first and most important element of the Strong Black Woman construct. Brenda described “Not having a choice. By no means disrespecting other moms, but I want to do this. I enjoy my work. I enjoy the access that my job gives me, and as long as I can be a decent mother where my son has all his teeth, his toes, and his eyes, then I feel I am doing a pretty good job. As long as I can continue to work and no one seems to be suffering, it’s probably selfish of me, but it’s important to me.” Anna responded, “I just think we’re tough! Not being successful was not an option; I had to get it done. I did not know what success was going to be, but I could not let my daughter down.” Additionally, Anna commented, “You go to work, you take care of that child, and you come home, you get up, and you do it all over again.” Other participants expressed strength in the following ways:

- Strong and resilient. I think strength is just a level of commitment and fortitude to continue on despite what obstacles and hurdles come your way. (Sharon)

- Single Black women are strong. The ability to face difficult circumstances and still maintain the strength and poise of a woman. In Black culture you always see strong Black women; my hands might hurt, but I still got to keep going. (Sandra)
- Surrounding myself with other positive influences, it takes a village. The Sankofa, which is an African bird that looks back and grabs from his past to move forward. This documentary was very vivid as I moved forward and thought about blackness and where I came from and why it was important to me to be a leader. I just think about all the women that I know, and they tell me about issues on their jobs or they had to fight for their education, and I just feel like I owe it to them to move forward on a daily basis. (Trena)
- We can do anything. The single Black mother is a virtue for strength and resilience that can endure through difficult circumstances. There are days for me that are tough while trying to, but I remember I'm a Black woman so I can do it. (Stacey)
- Having the courage to maintain authenticity in spite of societal pressures. Knowing I am a strong, single Black mother is the epitome of strength. When you grow up in the ghetto, there's just certain things you learn, there's certain way to be on the street. (Caren)
- Overcoming the biases of what society has to say about single Black women. Black people in this country have survived more than any people have been ever asked to survive, except maybe the American Indian. We can appreciate each other's plight, and the pride that it takes for those cultures to remain in the face of that kind of assault; yeah, it's to never forget the assault, so that the culture can blossom and be appreciated. (Bobbie)

- Alyssa's response, "Paying homage to those who have come before me", summed up her desire to use the progress from generations past and make it better for the Black community to achieve new levels of greatness.

Assumption of Multiple Roles. Of the nine participants, four women expressed the importance of the second element of the Strong Black Woman construct of assumption of multiple roles. Among those who commented was Brenda, who stated, "I am working from the moment I got up checking emails, making phone calls all through the night all while having events and having to take my son to those events made work even more challenging. While I was running around taking care of business at sporting events, the athletic directors' wife helped with watching my son. Even while multi-tasking, I tried to be a role model whether it be a mom, a working mom, an administrator, or former athlete. I believe you can't be what you can't see" so I think it's really important for young women to see that you can do it."

Other participants expressed the importance of assuming multiple roles in the following ways:

- I could be called at eight o'clock at night asking a question about a player. I may have to be at work on a Saturday, and I did study hall. During registration, I would be at work and my daughter would be behind the desk. When I had to travel with the basketball team over spring break, that turned into family trips, so my daughter was able to go to Florida every year. I was on every PTA while my daughter was in school. I was parent of the year. When the school needed something, I was the first parent they would call. I went on every field trip. I could be their best ally or their worst enemy depending on how things were going at the school. (Anna)

- I learned to integrate my son into this setting. Any opportunities that exist that he can be with me in this environment, I do it. I worked out a schedule of job duties that is non-negotiable. Outside of me traveling or having to go to functions, those are my non-negotiables: to drop my son off every day and to pick him up every day. (Sharon)
- I took my kids everywhere; to meetings and while I was getting my master's and teaching English as a second language. I was a director of a reading and writing institute for faculty from the university and from teachers in high school. I am running a peer-to-peer program and am on the diversity council (a program where students of color train other students about culture responsiveness and what that looks like). (Trena)

Self-Sacrifice. Five of the participants expressed the importance of the third element of the Strong Black Woman construct which is self-sacrifice. Brenda stated, "Sometimes being a mom is most important in the moment and sometimes being an administrator is most important in that moment. I not only do what you do, but then I go home and do what your wife does. So, if I can't make something due to taking care of my son or not having a babysitter, that is when I make my family a priority. You can have a career; you can have a family; and you can have fun doing it."

Other participants expressed self-sacrifice in the following ways:

- Sometimes it was very difficult for me because I worked as an academic advisor for a coach, then as a transporter for my daughter driving three hours to my parents' house and back. Additionally, I had to assume the role as a planner in order to make sure my daughter didn't miss school; and finally, as life-long learner taking advantage of a 17-month long opportunity through the NCAA in Indianapolis" (Anna).

- I tend to put myself last, and that is what people know about me. Once I became a single mother, I started putting myself first. I became solely responsible for my son and having no family nearby there were times when work had to take priority over me being at an event for him; that's tough, and there's no make-up for that (Sharon).
- Lack of financial resources was stressful. I did not have the money, so I took out student loans and had student loan debt when I was trying to raise my two boys. I did not have a full-time job and was on welfare, which allowed me to get some food stamps, which helped. Unfortunately, while on welfare I started a job doing lab work for college classes and started accepting money as a college graduate and welfare came after me to collect the back pay for monies I received while working. In addition, due to raising my kids alone I felt I had to combat the entire K-12 system by myself; that's the hard part. (Trena)
- I had to reprioritize everything. It was an immense responsibility, and it's hard to capture the intensity of that responsibility. I'm not willing to give so much of myself that there isn't enough for my daughter (Alyssa).

From the research findings there were other themes that emerged not originally part of the Strong Black woman construct which were: support systems, emotional balance, motivations, and barriers. Support systems, more specifically families, described six out of the nine participants who relied heavily on family members. Furthermore, six out of the nine participants utilized religion as a source of emotional balance for home and career. In continuation, five of the nine participants detailed how negative perceptions was a barrier in their rise in higher education. Lastly, six out of the nine participants expressed their children as the primary motivation for upward mobility in higher education leadership roles.

Themes

Nine themes emerged from this study. Themes 1, 2, and 3 were directly related to components of the Strong Black Women schema, while themes 4 through 9 did not directly relate to the schema. Figure 1 is below:

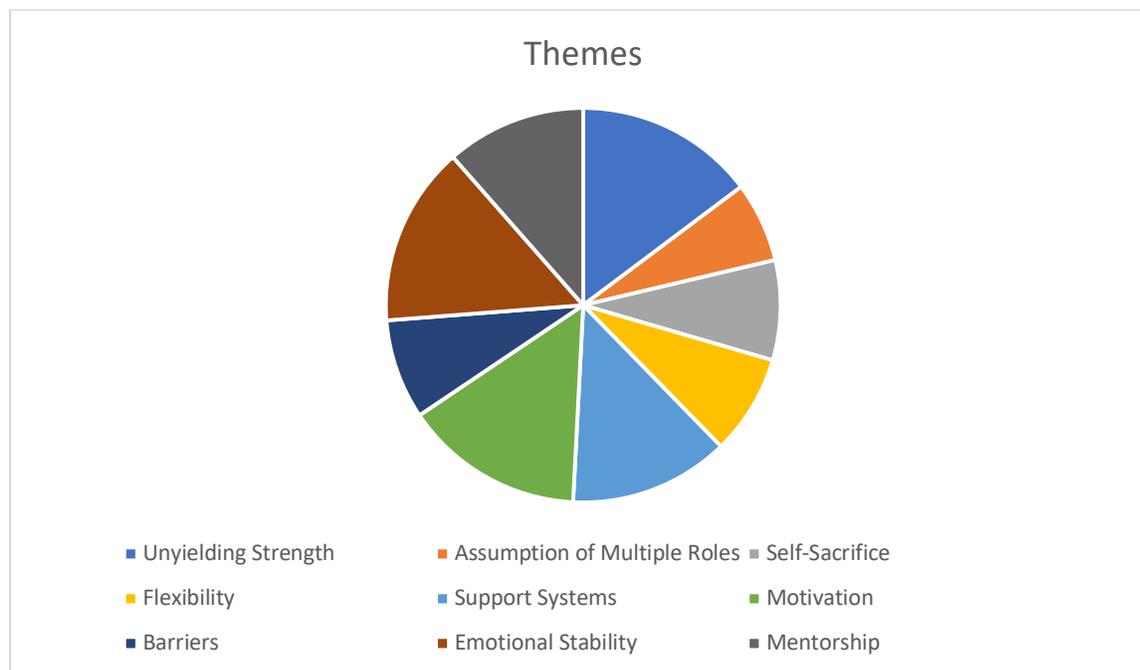


Figure 1. Themes

1. Theme 1: Unyielding Strength: During the analysis phrases like “Blacks have survived more than any other people”, “we can do anything”, “tough”, and “in Black culture you always see strong Black women” appeared universally and were grouped under the practice of utilizing a foundational strength embedded in the Black culture.
2. Theme 2: Self-Sacrifice: During the analysis phrases like, “I had to work seven days a week and 12 hour shifts”, “I’m not going to tell you it was easy because it wasn’t especially when my child was younger”, “sometimes being a mom is most important in the moment and sometimes being an administrator is most important at the moment”, “I had to travel to work which meant oftentimes leaving my child behind”, and “I didn’t

have the money so I had to take out student loans while raising two boys” appeared universally and were grouped under the common theme of self-sacrifice. Each woman’s narrative spoke to a pervasive practice of placing others first, often at her own expense.

3. Theme 3: Assumption of multiple roles: During the analysis phrases like, “I pretty much took my kids everywhere”, “working from the moment I get up checking e-mails and making phone calls all through the night”, “I figure out how to make sure my child was taken care of while balancing the duties of my job” Each woman’s narrative spoke to a pervasive practice of the assumption of multiple roles.
4. Theme 4: Flexibility: During the analysis phrases like, “I have so much flexibility in this job and that’s very unique”, “ I had to make sure that whatever job I chose was going to be flexible enough to bring my daughter along”, “my decision on the job was dependent on the flexibility of me bringing my son to work”, “with the work load and the expectation of the job and family there has to be some flexibility”, and “if you have a job, it’s not about the job if you are a single parent, it’s about the flexibility” appeared universally and were group with the theme flexibility.
5. Theme 5: Support Systems: During the analysis phrases like, “I did not have family close so I used the daycare on campus”, “the people I worked with were great; the town stepped up big”, “I rely on the people around me to help me”, “when you are single like me and you have a child you have to rely on the African Proverb; it takes a village”, “I didn’t have any family support in the town I was in so I had to build a village”, “my biggest support is my family”, “my family, I could not do it without my family”, “and “it’s not lost on me that I have an accommodating boss” appeared universally and were grouped with the theme support systems.

6. Theme 6: Motivation: During the analysis phrases like, “I have a powerhouse of a mom who defied all odds; I want my daughter to look at me as a role model”, “I started this and I want to finish because I want to be an example for my daughter”, “I wanted to have a career that provided security for myself and my kids and to do something I enjoyed”, “my mom, I saw how she sacrificed for me”, “putting myself first”, “my child, failure cannot be an option”, “I want to do this, I enjoy my work, I enjoy the access that my job gives me”, and “my daughter, I just had to get it done” appeared universally and were grouped with the theme motivation.
7. Theme 7: Barriers: During the analysis phrases like, “when I took over for male sports, the coach was initially concerned about me”, “I not only do what you do, but then I go home and do what your wife does”, “I know that not everybody is going to like me”, “I am naïve to it”, and “I was viewed with all the preconceptions of being Black and being female”, appeared universally and were grouped with the theme barriers.
8. Theme 8: Emotional Stability: During the analysis phrases like, “I ask for help”, “I prayed a lot”, “there were times I would call on my mentor”, “those were things I loved so it didn’t take much balance for me”, “there were days where I would just have to cry”, “I used many different outlets; prayer, counseling, and executive coaching”, “I never thought about it because Black women take care of everybody else and don’t take care of themselves”, “the grace of God”, and, “a good sense of humor” appeared universally and were grouped with the theme emotional stability.
9. Theme 9: Mentorship: During the analysis phrases like, “he provided me an opportunity to become the SWA, he also encouraged me to sign up for a program through the NCAA that would prepare me for a Director’s role”, “I was fortunate enough to have really good

administrators at a previous university when I was a student-athlete that helped guide my career”, “my upward mobility opportunities was largely due to her mentors”, "young lady, it don't hurt to listen, go ahead and attend the meeting”, “you need to be at the table your voice needs to be heard”, “so, just stay the course in getting that and you'll start moving up into those roles”, “go for what you want” appeared universally and were grouped with the theme mentorship.

Conclusion

Throughout the research there were nine themes in which the participants expressed during their journey and tenure in higher educational leadership which are: (a) unyielding strength, (b) assumption of multiple roles, (c) self-sacrifice, (d) flexibility (e) support systems, (f) motivations, (g) barriers, (h) emotional stability, and (i) mentorship. The participants utilized their experiences to help them attain career success while being a single mother. Utilizing the stories expressed from each participant exposed the importance of having their stories told in order to understand their lived experiences.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to provide a better understanding of the experience of single Black mothers in higher education leadership roles. One-on-one semi-structured interviews highlight the lived experiences of this target population. Given the lack of research on the experience of single Black mothers in higher education leadership roles, this study sought to capture the authentic stories of this population regarding their experience constructed around one primary question: What is the experience of single Black mothers who hold leadership roles in higher education?

Through the exploration of the lived experiences of these single Black mothers and the search for understanding how these experiences allowed for them to balance motherhood and career success, this study identified key components of their lived experiences in collegiate athletics, administration, and academia, specifically, the impact those experiences had on their upward mobility.

This study used a phenomenological approach to collect qualitative data utilizing semi-structured interviews. The data was coded and analyzed using themes grounded in the research question and conceptual framework of this study. Themes used for coding stemmed directly from each of this study's research questions. These themes were used to code the data and present the findings in Chapter 4. In the data analysis, the researcher initially looked for emerging patterns among the themes. In another level of the analysis, the research from the literature review of this study was used to challenge or confirm the themes found in the data.

Through the data analysis, three themes emerged that were representative of the Strong Black Woman schema: unyielding strength, assumption of multiple roles, and self-sacrifice, and

six additional themes emerged that were not part of the schema: flexibility, support systems, motivations, barriers, emotional stability, and mentorship. Chapter 4 presented the major findings of this study by organizing qualitative data from semi-structured interviews by the topics in the interview questions from this study. This chapter aims to provide an interpretation of these findings while also considering the literature of the lived experiences of single Black mothers in higher education leadership as illustrated in the literature (Jackson and Harris 2007; Jones et al. 2006; Wilson et al. 2014; Elliot et al. 2013). This chapter concludes with the possible implications of the results of this study as well as recommendations for action and further study.

Alignment with SBW Framework

The responses from the participants confirmed the research about the Strong Black Woman framework. Each participant expressed strength as being the foundation of being a single Black mother (Abrams et al., 2014). More specifically, a few participants defined the essence of what they believed strength was, and it ran parallel with the first component of the SBW framework, which is unyielding strength (Abrams, et al., 2014).

Secondly, the responses from the participants aligned with the literature about single Black mothers bearing the sole responsibility of assuming multiple roles taking care of home and children (Abrams, et al., 2014; Berry, 2006, Elliot et al., 2013). These women spoke candidly on the many tasks they were in charge of. One participant (Anna) recounted the bedrock of the second theme of the SBW of assuming multiple roles stating how she would drive three hours to drop her daughter off on a Friday and drive three hours back to her job to catch her plane and then drive back to pick her up and bring her back home (Abrams et al., 2014).

The last theme of the SBW is self-sacrifice and aligned with the research in how these mothers recounted the self-sacrifice of handling their affairs (Abrams et al., 2014; Cheung &

Halpern, 2010; Elliot et al., 2013 Jackson & Harris, 2007; Malone, 2011; Rampell, 2009).

Interestingly one participant spoke about how she put herself first as a part of being the best she could be. She noted that in order to be her best she had to put herself first. With these three pillars of the SBW, each of these women carried a part of the SBW in their upward mobility in higher education leadership (Abrams et al., 2014).

The implication of these findings is that these women personified many of the characteristics of the SBW framework as part of their lived experiences.

Themes beyond the SBW Framework

From the participant responses there were six additional themes not connected to the SBW framework that emerged as the women characterized their lived experiences. Among those themes the mothers expressed the importance of flexibility in their careers in order to balance motherhood. Another theme was the importance of support systems as well as their motivations behind their pursuit in higher educational leadership. In continuation, the participants expressed barriers in which all mothers expressed were apparent in their upward mobility. Lastly, the participants expressed how they balanced their emotions and the importance of mentorship.

Flexibility

Another theme that emerged from the research was the importance of flexibility in the leadership position. For most participants they expressed their desire to move up in order to have more flexibility, so they can be more available for their children. While the participants spoke expressively about their need for flexibility, the need for flexibility for single Black mothers did not show up in the research. On the other hand, not all participants expressed they experienced flexibility as they moved up in fact, for some, they detailed how they had less flexibility and found it more rigorous than when they had lower level leadership positions; which is found in the

literature from Ciabattari (2007) stating how occupational factors have been shown to increase conflict including lack of flexibility. Interestingly enough there was one participant who made a strategic move to position herself for a promotion before she became a mother, so she would have more flexibility as well as prove self-worth prior to motherhood. While the participants expressed different viewpoints on how they experienced flexibility they understood that flexibility in the workforce was essential in being able to maintain both home and career. In fact, Ann stated, “I would tell anybody, if you have a job, it’s not about the job if you are a single mother, it’s about the flexibility.”

Support Systems

The participants all experienced the benefits of support systems in how they balanced career and motherhood. This ran parallel with the literature that expressed the importance of support systems extending beyond bloodlines as well as contributing to single Black mothers rise in higher education (Ciabattari, 2011, 2006; Wilson, 2013). Repeatedly these women reported the significance of having a support system in place in order to achieve career success. In a difference of opinion, there was one reported incident in which she expressed having no support system which aligns with literature from Jones et al. (2006) which spoke on mothers not having extended family members. It is important to note the mothers expressed their willingness to take care of their children alone but valued the importance of having a support system in place. Additionally, while reaching out was important to each mother, being a good observer of others’ behavior was equally important; watching how others handled their own children as well as how their children responded to the adult. One of the key pieces of information that came from the data was the intention behind participants taking advantage of opportunities. Through a myriad of different support avenues, these single Black mothers had the ability to pursue career success.

For many women in this study, they noted the ability for their support system to provide a sense a validity to who they are and what they can become, and a sense of relief in how to handle motherhood and career. The findings of this research support the importance of a support system in the lived experiences of single Black mothers. According to Patton (2009) Black women administrators in the field of higher education express the importance of mentors and how those experiences shaped these women's career choices and development (p. 515). The participants took those findings one-step further stating their support system played, and frequently continues to play, a major role in the development of their personal and professional experience.

When looking at successful practices of these participants, several athletic departments and education departments in higher educational leadership have begun offering more of a support system for single Black mothers. These opportunities are geared to offering on-site daycare, reduced cost for daycare and flexible hours to accommodate single Black mothers. The implications of these findings are that the participants found it necessary to utilize a myriad of different support systems to help balance their desire for upward mobility and being a single mother.

Motivation

The matriarchs of higher educational leadership who participated in the study were clear about the importance of being motivated by their children. Their children were a calling for them, a personal responsibility that they felt they not only wanted to do more but also had to. A common phrase amongst the participants was their unwavering mindset to succeed not only for themselves but also for their children.

Motivation was not an emerging theme in the literature, but it was very present in the participants' responses. For one participant, the importance of her motivation coming from her own difficult childhood recalled periods of time where she was not able to participate in activities due to lack of finances. She did not want her child to go without those experiences, so she pushed herself to provide. Another motivation from participants was to be a voice for minority students. For one participant in particular, she spoke of how she witnessed the oppression in the classroom for Black students and she knew the only way to make policy change was to climb higher in her leadership role. In a similar situation, another participant witnessed the dropout rate amongst Black students and wanted to understand the fall out. Again, she was motivated to be an agent of change and although she found higher education less flexible, she was willing to make the transition to influence change. The participant responses for motivation did not show up in literature but was a common theme for single Black mothers in the data. The implications of these findings are that participants utilized different forms of motivation that propelled them forward in their goals for higher educational leadership.

Barriers

The participants all experienced tremendous growth in their careers in leadership regardless of barriers. Throughout their careers, the participants met with success because they were recognized by others as having the qualities and skills to lead in a variety of positions. These stories ran parallel with the literature that indicate that single Black mothers who aspire to or have obtained leadership roles face innumerable barriers reaching top-level leadership roles and maintaining a presence in those roles (Crawford & Smith, 2005; Davis & Harper, 2003; Eagly & Chin, 2010; Jackson & Harris, 2007; Lewis, 2007). The barriers faced were called by different names by women in the study such as lack of networking, time constraints, negative

perceptions, no support systems, and job positioning (Abdalla, 2018; Ciabattari, 2011; Crawford & Smith, 2005; Eagly & Chin, 2010; Malone, 2011). This theme also aligns with Paige (2018) who stated that minority women have fewer opportunities for professional networking than their white peers.

The participants placed significance on their experiences of barriers, there were some additional barriers faced in which participants expressed which were: youth, pressure, good ol' boy system, loneliness, and lack of finances. As previously mentioned, the participants enjoyed and continue to enjoy successful careers in leadership, yet the researcher's analysis revealed how these barriers did not hinder the participants from achieving roles in higher education. There was one reported incident of the effects of negative perception in the way people perceived a participant in her leadership role. The implication of the experience is that merit may have helped them succeed early in their career and now, at the pinnacle of their career, they are being held back and held to a different standard than that of the past. In another case, the perception of the community caused a participant to feel apprehension regarding her performance as a leader.

Emotional Stability

Another theme that emerged from the research was the balance of emotions for a single Black mother. Research illustrated how single Black mothers have to work harder than two-parent homes because they have sole responsibility of taking care of their children and their home (Cohen, 2009; Kaplan, 1996; McGuffey, 2005; Elliot et al., 2013). The responses from the participants ran parallel with the literature. The participants all expressed different avenues on how they balanced their emotions which included (a) having a sense of humor, (b) going to movies, (c) having a support system, and (d) meditation and prayer (Ciabattari, 2011; Jones et al., 2006; Wilson, 2013). While being a single Black mother these outlets may come rare, but

participants stated that they were necessary. Interestingly enough, two of the participants stated they did not find the need to balance much because motherhood and career were what they enjoyed most. More specifically, Bobbie stated, “it depends on what you characterize as having it all. If having it all means going out with friends, going on trips, and having a social life you may find it frustrating, but for me, I did not need all of that. As long as I had my career and my children that was all I needed.” For single Black mothers, the use of support systems and religion is to help single Black mothers cope and serves as a foundation for growth, happiness and parenting values (Patton & Harper 2003; Wilson et al., 2014). Two emotional outlets that did not show up in the literature but were expressed by participants were having a sense of humor and going to the movies. For two of the participants, their emotional stability methods contradicted the research from Patton and Harper (2003) and Wilson et al. (2014) suggesting that single Black mothers utilize a form of emotional support from religion and support systems. The first participant expressed how she defined having it “all” meaning all she wanted were her kids and career. She further stated, “if you tried to make ‘all’ encompass trips, nights out, vacations, etc. it may become overwhelming. The other participant stated she was so immersed in taking care of her children and going to school that she did not have much time to think about anything else. While having a balance was important, for a few of these participants not having an outlet did not prohibit them from achieving career success.

Mentorship

Another theme that emerged in the research was the importance of having mentorship. This theme also ran parallel with research in stating the significance of having mentorship and how most single Black mothers do not have access to individuals and networks (Patton & Harper, 2003). Most participants had access to mentorship, which proved to be instrumental in

helping the women navigate through careers in higher education. On the contrary, a few participants did not have access to mentorship but spoke on how they wished they had access to it. More specifically, Bobbie addressed the need to not only have mentorship but how important it is to have mentorship in personal and professional life; which also aligns with literature from Crawford and Smith (2005) which suggest, “mentorship for Black women administrators would provide greater responsibility and visibility and would encourage young Black women to choose higher education as a career” (p. 53). She stated, “It is impossible to have a mentor that can serve as both in your personal and professional life.”

Implications

The implications allow for the emergence of how the participant responses aligned with the research. From the responses, it was revealed how there needs to continue to be access for single Black mothers who want to pursue higher educational leadership positions.

Flexibility

Flexibility did not emerge in the literature, but many participants spoke heavily about the importance of having flexibility in the workforce in order to achieve success in their career and balance as a mother. This served as a positive relationship between access to flexibility from the participant’s boss and availability for cares of the home and child. Additionally, participants spoke expressively about how they inquired first about the level of flexibility before taking a position. The decision to pursue the opportunity did not deter participants from staying in higher education but did weigh heavily in their decision to take an opportunity at a particular institution. In contrast, there were participants who expressed they found less flexibility in higher education leadership. The less flexible environment deterred these participants from wanting to continue to stay in higher education. Further, the strictness of less flexibility was derived directly from their

bosses. As a result, flexibility did not hinder participants from wanting to pursue higher education leadership roles, but it did hinder some participant's willingness to stay in higher education.

Without a level of flexibility, participants feel stress in order to fulfill the duties of both career and motherhood. Flexibility, in this regard does not exempt participants from fulfilling the duties of their positions; rather, without the employer's flexibility in how they carry those duties out is what creates stress. Employers oftentimes see the duties of a position carried out in a rigid manner in which provides no room for flexibility its participants need to bring their children to work.

Support Systems

The participants were clear about the importance of having support systems to aide in the upward mobility of their career. Utilizing extended family, daycares, other mothers, and athletic and education departments served as a positive correlation in their upward mobility in higher education leadership. In contrast, some mothers who expressed they did not have a support system also experienced success in higher educational leadership roles but did express they had to utilize more strength, assumption of multiple roles, and self-sacrifice. Additionally, they also expressed the need for additional support for themselves in the form of therapy.

Based on the experiences of study participants there appears to be a lack of necessary support systems available for single Black mothers in which hinders their ability to balance a career and motherhood. More specifically, the lack of on-site day care makes it difficult for participants to stay in close proximity to their child as the sole provider. Further, the lack of a true family-oriented environment creates guilt for these mothers who may often time have to bring their child to work with them due to lack of additional help.

Motivation

There was a connection between the motivation factors including their own children, troubled childhood, and being a voice and agent of change for children of color. Although the participants expressed varying forms of motivation, they all were supported with the third component of the SBW framework-self-sacrifice. As a result, the underlying recognition expressed from the participants is the need to understand that upward mobility is about more than one; in order to navigate through the process, mothers have to undergo self-sacrifice. Further, while all participants expressed their understanding that the upward mobility goals for their career would result in self-sacrifice as a mother; they were willing to continue the process resulting from their motivating factors. While strength and assumption of multiple roles were also utilized in the process, the emerging component of motivation expressed from the participants is self-sacrifice.

The women perceived a lack of motivation from colleagues and employers in helping not only their ability to succeed, but also in helping them find the balance between home and motherhood. Additionally, the failure for others to motivate, creates a continued feeling of separation and understanding of the journey in which they took in order to reach career success. Further, motivation can lead to not only more connectedness, but also an encouragement for more input and involvement.

Barriers

Lack of networking opportunities, time constraints, and negative perceptions were among the main barriers that emerged as critical for all participants in their lived experiences for higher educational leadership roles. Additionally, lack of support systems, job positioning, youth, loneliness, and lack of finances also emerged as barriers. The relationship between the

participant's barriers was significantly related to their upward mobility in higher education leadership. Analysis of the specific barriers revealed that the barriers faced by each participant had a direct correlation with the foundation of the SBW framework, which is strength. As a result, the utilization of strength served as the driving force for overcoming the barriers and supports the first component of the SBW. Further, while the second and third component of self-sacrifice and assumption of multiple roles were mentioned, they were not the driving forces for participants in overcoming barriers.

Emotional Stability

Participants used varying forms of resources for emotional stability utilizing going to the movies, having a sense of humor, establishing a support system, and religion (more specifically meditation and prayer). As a result, there is a positive relationship between the access to resources as mentioned above for single Black mothers and their emotional stability. In contrast, there were participants who did not feel they needed resources to help them balance their emotions. Additionally, those who did not utilize additional resources leaned heavily on self-sacrifice and the assumption of multiple roles in order to balance both. As a result, all participants were able to achieve career success with or without access to resources for emotional stability.

The women perceived a lack of emotional stability in the workplace for single Black mothers; more specifically, in the form of a support system. Without the use of a support system, it makes it difficult for these participants to experience forms of stability which aides in providing stability. An environment of emotional stability is essential in helping to provide less stress for these participants as an employee as well as a mother.

Mentorship

All participants spoke of the importance of mentorship in higher education. There was a positive relationship between the access to mentorship and the upward mobility in their careers (Crawford & Smith, 2005; Davis & Harper, 2003; Jackson & Harris, 2007). In contrast, mothers who did not have access to mentorship were also able to achieve success in higher educational leadership roles. Although there was varying access to mentorship, all participants spoke of the importance of having access to mentorship as a single Black mother not only in their professional life, but also in their personal life.

The women perceived a lack of mentorship in higher education; more specifically mentors of color, which hinders their growth. More specifically, for these participants, not having a connection in gender and culture creates additional stress and disconnection in the workplace. Further, this lack of mentorship hinders other single Black mothers from seeing likeness in higher education; which creates hesitation for pursuing higher educational leadership.

Recommendations for Action

Based on the results of this study, academic institutions seeking to foster environments that promote success of single Black mothers would benefit from adopting structures that promote recognition of talent, provide opportunities for mentorship and networking, and considerable work-life flexibility.

Flexibility

Flexibility as a single Black mother is necessary to have success in the workplace. For employers, it is recommended they let go of the ‘there is only one way to get the job done’ mentality and in its place allow for differing avenues through which a particular job gets done. Additionally, it is important to allow for accommodations for children in the workplace when

plans fall through with their support system. This recommendation is consistent with the literature that expressed the importance of support systems extending beyond bloodlines as well as contributing to single Black mothers rise in higher education (Ciabattari, 2011, 2006; Wilson, 2013). Allowing for children to travel when mothers are required to be away for extended periods of time would be another helpful accommodation. Lastly, an additional recommendation for employers is to be cognizant of the time constraints and utilize varying avenues for conveying information to limit face-to-face time.

Motivation

Motivation for single Black mothers is critical in their emergence into higher education, but also in their tenure. In order to foster an environment of motivation for this population, it is recommended that employers understand that their children are their number one motivating factor. Providing opportunities to bring their children to work and offering monthly or bi-monthly events at the workplace that foster an environment where children are welcome in the workplace are essential for longevity and continued motivation for the single mother.

Barriers

Barriers for single Black mothers in the workplace must be eliminated in order to foster growth and an environment of connectedness. This recommendation is consistent with the literature that indicate that single Black mothers who aspire to or have obtained leadership roles face innumerable barriers reaching top-level leadership roles and maintaining a presence in those roles (Crawford & Smith, 2005; Davis & Harper, 2003; Eagly & Chin, 2010; Jackson & Harris, 2007; Lewis, 2007). More specifically, employers create a workplace of diverse networking opportunities as well as professional development opportunities. Additionally, in order to eliminate barriers due to the time constraints of being a single parent, employers can allow for

less face-to-facetime, especially after hours, and implement more opportunities for work to be done remotely.

Emotional Stability

Emotional stability in being a single parent is stressful to mind, body, and soul. It is a recommendation that the workplace allow for activities on-site if available or provide membership access to facilities such as yoga, gym, and massages. According to Patton & Harper (2003; Wilson et al., 2014) single Black mothers, the use of support systems and religion is to help single Black mothers cope and serves as a foundation for growth, happiness and parenting values. Additionally, while the workplace is a place of business, the employers can implement opportunities throughout the year that provide a more relaxed environment such as recognition of employee of the month, celebrations of monthly birthdays, or game nights, all of which would lower stress levels.

Mentorship

Mentorship has been an essential missing component for these participants. It is essential for employers to not only provide mentorship but also have an understanding that same race mentorship is essential in creating a meaningful network for the Black culture. According to Crawford and Smith (2005) which suggest, “mentorship for Black women administrators would provide greater responsibility and visibility and would encourage young Black women to choose higher education as a career” (p. 53). Additionally, providing additional professional development opportunities would help foster continued growth and development. It may be necessary for Black women faculty, staff, and administrators to initiate outreach to same-race women on staff. Reaching out requires time. Making room within a weekly schedule to meet one-on-one with other Black women particularly those who are in departments that have no

Black female leadership would facilitate mentoring opportunities.

Mentors need to be aware of the circumstances that could emerge because of race and gender, as well as how those characteristics alone set single Black mothers apart from their colleagues. Given the extreme shortage of Black leadership, it is important that culturally different administrators who remain the majority willingly reach out to assist single Black mothers whether in a mentoring capacity or simply to provide general guidance and encouragement.

Recommendations for Further Study

Further qualitative research should be conducted with work-life balance. The exposure of how the work-life balance is maintained when single Black mothers are the sole provider is necessary. More specifically, how these participants specifically use resources in order to help maintain the balance. Additionally, research highlighting the avenues in how these participants communicated with their employers in how to maintain work-life balance as a single Black mother. The work-life balance is a worthy topic for future research and may yield further findings for single Black mothers in leadership roles.

Similarly, research with single Black fathers as participants would provide an understanding of their experiences and could lead to a comparison between male and female gender role and how those roles are influenced by society's expectations. More specifically, research detailing the difference if any on single father's work expectations, time constraints, and work-life balance in comparison to single Black mothers. A deeper acknowledgement of how gender leads to different experiences may provide a better understanding of how to better provide for children in single parent homes. A comparative research study may also reveal not only similarities and differences in their self-perceptions as leaders, but also their successes as a

leader.

Additionally, a research study of the lived experiences of the children of single Black mothers in higher educational leadership roles. Further, research identifying the impact of the children of single Black mothers; both positive and negatives. More specifically, how those impacts helped propel them to aspire to become better or hindered them. Further, how their father's absence impacted their life growing up in a single-parent home. An understanding of this research would bring attention to the literature review discussion about the mother-child dyad.

Conclusion

Many mothers have similar values, philosophies, management styles, and available resources, yet very few have been able to achieve what these single Black mothers in this study have done. Their innate ability to cultivate a lifestyle surrounding their circumstances and have great amounts of success in their career is something that many have tried to emulate, but few have been able to do. The participants recalled various ways in which they achieved their own version of balance with career and motherhood, but the one unanimous response from them all was: "you just have to find a way", and from the lived experiences of these nine participants. Their unwavering belief that success could be attained while being a single Black mother was exhibited with their unyielding strength, assumption of multiple roles, and self-sacrifice.

From their individual stories, these nine women took us on a journey of their resiliency in overcoming barriers, their support systems that helped them assume multiple roles, and their children who were their motivation to pursue careers in higher educational leadership. Further, their lived experiences detail the hard decisions made for their career which resulted in their absence of quality time with their children and the courage to use their voice in negotiating more

flexibility in their careers that would allow more immersion of work-life balance for the sake of their children. The stories of these nine participants is to provide a sense of hope and encouragement to other single Black mothers who have a desire to pursue a career in higher educational leadership. Hope that will provide the courage for them to continue on in spite of foreseen or unforeseen obstacles. Additionally, their stories purpose to highlight their experiences in hopes to show there is more than one path to achieve work-life balance. Finally, their stories are to share that ‘you are not alone’ in your experiences, circumstances, and emotions; with unyielding strength and self-sacrifice a successful career in higher educational leadership while being a single Black mother is not only possible, but attainable.

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Appendices

Appendix A: A Description of the Study

Dear Leader:

I am a doctoral student at the University of New England. I am conducting a study to research single Black mothers who hold leadership position in higher education. The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of single Black mothers who are managing dual roles as mother and school leader. If you are rearing a child in addition to your role as a leader, I would love to speak with you about your experiences, as I feel that your perspectives would be invaluable. The data obtained from this study will provide useful information for women who are mothers and school leaders. Your participation will make a significant contribution to the success of the study and to the knowledge base surrounding single Black working mothers and higher education leadership. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to take part in a telephone interview that will last about an hour and will be scheduled at a time and location that is convenient to you. Your participation will be confidential. Please contact me at (936) 554-2804, or via email at iyhiamac@gmail.com if you would be willing to participate in this study, or if you have any questions. Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Iyhia McMichael

Appendix B: Text of Communiques

Dear Participant,

A research is being done to understand the lived experiences of single Black mothers between the ages of 22-44 who hold leadership positions in higher education. If you or anyone you may know someone would be interested in being a part of this research study, please have them contact me directly by email: iyhiamac@gmail.com or by text message (936) 554-2084, or by Direct Facebook Messaging under: Iyhia McMichael.

Appendix C

UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

Project Title: *Lived Experiences of Single Black Mothers in Leadership Positions within Higher Education*

Principal Investigator(s): *Iyhia McMichael, University of New England Doctoral Candidate, Email: IMcMichael@une.edu; Phone: 860-952-4266*

Faculty Advisor: *Marylin Newell, PhD, University of New England, E-mail: mnewell@une.edu*

Introduction

- Please read this form, you may also request that the form is read to you. The purpose of this form is to provide you with information about this research study, and if you choose to participate, document your decision.
- You are encouraged to ask any questions that you may have about this study, now, during or after the project is complete. You can take as much time as you need to decide whether or not you want to participate. Your participation is voluntary.

Why is the Study Being Done?

- The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of single Black mothers who are leaders in postsecondary education, in order to understand how they view these roles and the strategies they use to manage the demands of the roles of motherhood and school leadership.

Who will be in the study?

- Participants involved in the study will be Single Black mothers who hold a postsecondary leadership position. The approximate number of participants for this study will range from 5-8.
- You have been identified as a potential participant because you meet the criteria of being a single Black mother between the ages of 22-44 who is working in a leadership position in higher education and raising children under the age of 18.

What Will I Be Asked to Do?

- If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:
 - Participate in an interview of approximately 1 hour in length.
 - Allow the interview to be recorded
 - Participate in any additional communications needed for research including reviewing the transcript of your interview

What are the possible risks of taking part in the study?

- There is minimal risk to participating in the study. Possible risk includes the possibility of some of the questions exceeding your level of comfort. You may refuse to answer any question that you are uncomfortable with answering and may decline to participate in the study at any time. All information that could be used to identify you will be removed. A pseudonym will be assigned for the duration of the study. No reference to any identifying information will be made in the study.

What are the possible benefits of taking part in the study?

- There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this study; however, your participation in this study will help bring attention to lived experiences of single Black mothers in the workplace, specifically those women working in leadership positions in higher education.

What will it cost me?

- There is no anticipated cost to you for participating in the study. There will be no compensation for participation in the study.

How will my privacy be protected?

- Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in any reports of the study.
- Your interview will be held privately by phone. The recorded interview will be transcribed by a professional transcription company Rev.com
- The final study will be submitted to the Digital University of New England repository.

How will my data be kept confidential?

- Only the researcher will have access to recordings and these recordings will be used for the researcher to go back over the interview to ensure accuracy of each participant's story. Audio recording will be destroyed upon the completion of the

research.

- The University of New England Institutional Review Board may examine or audit the data
- A copy of your signed consent form will be maintained by the principal investigator for at least 3 years after the project is complete before it is destroyed. The consent forms will be stored in a secure location that only members of the research team will have access to and will not be affiliated with any data obtained during the project.
- Research findings will be provided to participants and participants can request findings via e-mail: imcmichael@une.edu, or via my home personal line at 936-554-2804.

What are my rights as a research participant?

- Your participation is voluntary. Your decision to participate will have no impact on your current or future relations with the University.
- You may skip or refuse to answer any question for any reason.
- If you choose not to participate there is no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits that you are otherwise entitled to receive. You are free to withdraw from this research study at any time, for any reason. If you choose to withdraw from the research, there will be no penalty to you, and you will not lose any benefits that you are otherwise entitled to receive.

What other options do I have?

- You may decide not to participate in the study. Your participation in this study is voluntary.

Whom may I contact with questions?

- The researcher conducting this study are Iyhia McMichael. For questions or more information concerning this research you may contact her at (936) 554-2804 and lyhiamac@gmail.com
- If you choose to participate in this research study and believe you may have suffered a research related injury, please contact Marylin Newell, PhD at 207-345-3100 or mnewell@une.edu
- If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you may call Olgun Guvench, M.D. Ph.D., Chair of the UNE Institutional Review Board at (207) 221-4171 or irb@une.edu

Will I receive a copy of this consent form?

- You may print/keep a copy of this consent form.

Participant's Statement

I understand the above description of the research and the risks and benefits associated with my participation as a research subject. I agree to take part in this research and do so voluntarily.

Participant's signature or
Legally authorized representative

Date

Printed name

Researcher's Statement

The participant named above had sufficient time to consider the information, had an opportunity to ask questions, and voluntarily agreed to be in this study.

Researcher's signature

Date

Printed name

Appendix D: Interview Guide

Interview Guide Semi-Structured Interview Questions:

1. What is your current position at your institution?
 - a. How long have you been at your institution?
 - b. Can you provide a brief description of your role?
 - c. Is this the ultimate position you desire?
 - d. Is there anything that could potentially hold you back from a different leadership role?
2. How many children do you have?
3. What support system do you have in place?
4. How long have you held your current position at your institution?
5. Could you describe your professional experience leading up to your current leadership position?
6. What has your experience been like as a single Black mother in higher education leadership?
7. Has being a single Black mother in your leadership role had some advantages? Disadvantages?
8. What intrinsic motivations did you pull from?
9. What behaviors did you observe that positively affected your pursuit of higher education leadership?
10. How do you feel you are viewed as a single Black mother in your current role?
 - a. Has the view changed over time?

11. Is there anything specific about the Black culture that you pulled from in your pursuit of your current role?

In the following questions, think about your role as a single Black mother in academic leadership

1. What strategies did you use as a single Black woman in your pursuit of leadership role in higher education?
 - a. Do you feel you experienced any obstacles and barriers you had to overcome?
 - b. Do you feel you had any advantages?
2. What resources did you use to balance home and career?
3. How were you able to balance your emotional stability?
4. Did you have any experiences in which you felt the demands were too burdensome in your current role?
 - a. Were they different from other co-workers?
5. What advice would you provide for other single Black mothers pursuing leadership roles in higher education?
6. Is there anything else you would like to add?