12-2023

Navigating Triple Jeopardy: Pathways Of Career Ascension For Queer Black Women Executive Leaders In Higher Education

Terésa Dowell -Vest

NAVIGATING TRIPLE JEOPARDY:

PATHWAYS OF CAREER ASCENSION FOR QUEER BLACK WOMEN EXECUTIVE LEADERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

A Dissertation

by

TERÉSA DOWELL-VEST

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies
of Prairie View A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

December 2023

Major Subject: Educational Leadership

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Approved as to style and content by

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ABSTRACT

Navigating Triple Jeopardy:

Pathways of Career Ascension for

Queer Black Women Executive Leaders in Higher Education

(December 2023)

Terésa Dowell-Vest

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MFA, Theater, California State University, Long Beach

Chair of Dissertation Committee: Dr. Lisa K. Thompson

Research reveals a longstanding tradition of leadership in higher education predominantly held by heterosexual White men despite the increased representation of women, people of color, and LGBTQ+ individuals (Gagliardi et al., 2017; Jackson & Harris, 2005; Melidona et al., 2023; Moody, 2018; Titcomb, 2014; Waring, 2003). While the number of students and faculty members have grown over the last century and a half, the number of Black, women, or queer executive leaders in higher education has not shown a similar growth rate (Commodore et al., 2016; Gardner, 2019; Jackson & Harris, 2005; Melidona et al., 2023; Moody, 2018). Through the shared experiences of the four senior-level executive leaders who identify as queer Black women, this qualitative study examined intersectional experiences, career and workplace stressors, and opportunities for promotion to executive leadership for queer Black women in higher education. Using the conceptual framework Triple Jeopardy (Greene, 1998), this research was guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the personal barriers for queer Black women leaders who hold or aspire to hold executive leadership positions in higher education?

RQ2: What are the career and workplace stressors experienced among queer Black women leaders who hold or aspire to hold executive leadership positions in higher education?

RQ3: What are the career development and mentorship resources that serve as pathways for queer Black women higher education leaders for promotion to Vice President, Provost, President, or Chancellor?

Each participant completed a questionnaire to determine eligibility, followed by semi-structured interviews to share their lived experiences as executive leaders in higher education. Transcription of the interviews and analysis of the data revealed the following themes: (1) Leading with Personal Authenticity: Identity, Social Identity, and Leadership, (2) Lead in Your Full Self: Intersectionality in the Workplace, (3) Equity Leadership: Belonging in the Workplace, (4) Diversity Requires Diverse Leadership, and (5) Find Your Tribe: Forge Support Relationships.

Equity in leadership is crucial to ensuring equitable access to education. Diverse leadership fosters confidence that all voices will be valued on campus. This study highlights the benefits of leading authentically and forging a community to navigate the stressors of executive leadership while existing in marginalized communities.

Keywords: Black, women, LGBTQ, executive leadership, education leadership, president, provost, chancellor, queer

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the Black people, the queer people, and the women who shaped my path. Thank you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I want to express my gratitude and appreciation to the following individuals and organizations who have played a crucial role in the successful completion of my dissertation:

First and foremost, I am deeply grateful to my parents, Linda Vest and William Dowell, and my family for their unwavering love and encouragement. Your constant support has been a source of motivation throughout my entire life.

I sincerely thank my dissertation committee chair, Dr. Lisa K. Thompson, and my esteemed dissertation committee members, Dr. Anthony Harris, Dr. Fred A. Bonner, II, and Dr. Elizabeth Whittington. Your mentorship, valuable insights, feedback, and scholarly contributions have greatly enriched the quality of my dissertation and my experience in the doctoral program at Prairie View.

I want to thank the four amazing queer Black women who participated in my study. Your willingness to share your expertise, experiences, and insights as higher education executive leaders has significantly enriched the depth and quality of my research. Your voices illuminated the challenges and triumphs you encountered on your journeys, and these narratives are instrumental in shedding light on the intersectionality of your identities and the unique perspectives you bring to your leadership roles. Your courage and resilience inspire all who seek to create more inclusive and equitable spaces within academia.

To my fellow Cohort 13 members, thank you for your camaraderie, encouragement, and shared experiences. Your friendship and collaboration have made this academic pursuit more fulfilling and memorable.

Last, I want to express my profound gratitude to my loving wife, Michelle. Your steadfast support, patience, and sacrifices have been the cornerstone of my success. You cared for my every need as a doctoral student, then as a doctoral candidate, and now as a doctor. Your love and belief in me have been my driving force, and I could not have achieved this milestone without you by my side. In the words of the Vice President, Kamala Harris, “We Did It Joe!”

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"When I dare to be powerful, to use my strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid" (Lorde, 1996, p. 15).

Overview/Background

Traditions of oppression and discrimination hinder the career ascension of queer Black women on college campuses globally (Pryor, 2020). Queer Black women carefully navigate the workplace, revealing pieces of themselves as the environment sees fit and not necessarily on their terms (Bowleg, 2008; Greene, 1996; King, 1988). College and university campuses are no different. Being a woman, being Black, and being queer are then shackles, unlocked in combinations, allowing this person to take a tenuous step forward but not too far. In the perseverance of racism, sexism, and homophobia, queer Black women must dissect, prioritize, and hide aspects of themselves for acceptance in higher education executive leadership (Bowleg, 2008; Greene, 1996; King, 1988). The binding chains are growing weaker with each pull through generations, allowing the queer Black woman to step further ahead and be empowered to be herself entirely (Bowleg et al., 2003).

This study examined queer Black women executive leaders' shared workplace

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This dissertation follows the style of the *American Psychological Association*, 7th Ed.

and career stressors experienced during their rise to become chancellors, presidents, provosts, or vice presidents of institutions of higher learning. By interviewing four higher education executive leaders who identify as queer Black women, I aimed to extract proven pathways to career opportunities in higher education executive leadership for queer Black women resulting in a lasting resource document for upcoming leaders following in the participants' footsteps. In this chapter, I provide the context for the research study examining workplace and career stressors experienced among queer Black women who either are or aspire to be chancellors, presidents, provosts, or vice presidents of institutions of higher learning.

This chapter identifies the primary problem this research examined regarding queer Black women in senior executive leadership positions in higher education, the purpose of the study, and the research questions. The chapter continues with definitions of critical terms used in the study, the limitations and delimitations of the research, critical assumptions I made while conducting the study, and the significance of the study.

Statement of the Problem

Since the opening of Harvard College in 1636, leadership for higher education institutions has been traditionally reserved for heterosexual White men (Bok, 2015; Rentz, 2016). Research and data reveal a longstanding tradition of heterosexual White men holding positions of leadership in higher education despite the increased representation of women, people of color, and LGBTQ+ individuals (Gagliardi et al., 2017; Jackson & Harris, 2005; Melidona et al., 2023; Moody, 2018; Titcomb, 2014; Waring, 2003). Conservative promotion and hiring practices have resulted in systemic barriers preventing equitable ascension to executive leadership roles (American Council

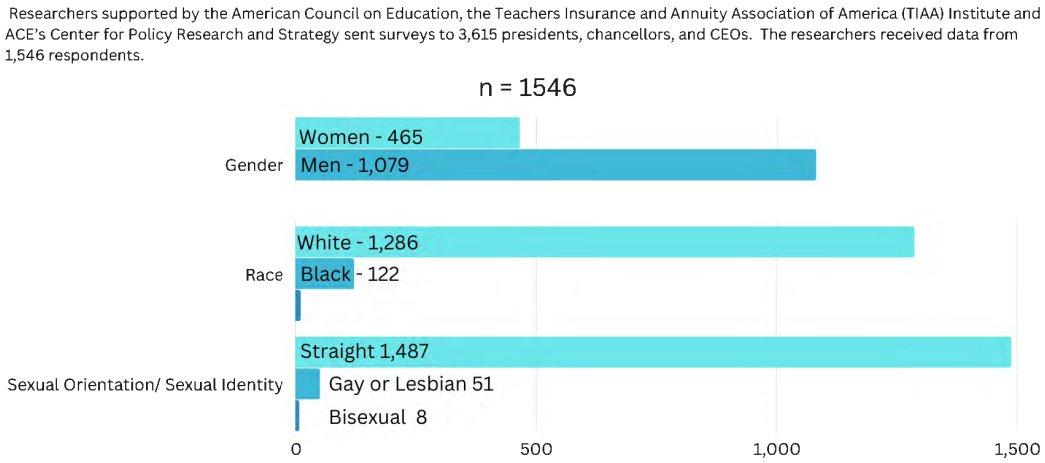
on Education's Center for Policy Research and Strategy, 2017). Achieving racial, gender, and sexual orientation parity in higher education leadership necessitates extensive research and the implementation of equity-building practices to dismantle privilege-based obstacles in the hiring and promotion process (Jackson & Harris, 2005; Waring, 2003).

Diversity Gaps in Higher Education Leadership

While the number of students and faculty members has grown over the last century and a half, the number of Black, women, or queer executive leaders in higher education has not shown a similar growth rate (Commodore et al., 2016; Gardner, 2019; Jackson & Harris, 2005; Melidona et al., 2023; Moody, 2018). Every five years, the American Council on Education (ACE) conducts the American College President Study (ACPS), a comprehensive quantitative survey designed to capture data on presidential demographics, search and selection process, career trajectories, and duties and responsibilities—with a focus on the intersectional lenses of race and gender (American Council on Education, 2017). Researchers supported by the ACE, the Teachers Insurance and Annuity Association of America (TIAA) Institute, and ACE's Center for Policy Research and Strategy sent surveys to 3,615 presidents, chancellors, and CEOs. Among the 1,546 respondents illustrated in Figure1, 30.1% (465 people) identified as women, compared to 69.8% (1,079 people) who identified as men (Gagliardi et al., 2017; Moody, 2018). In the category of "gender identity," transgender and non-binary participants were left with "other" for selection or opted to select male or female in the 2016 survey. The "other" option was not available in the 2011 survey. Consistent with the imbalance of gender-based leadership, women earned 11% less in salary than their male counterparts (Time, 2019; Zippia, 2021).

Figure 1

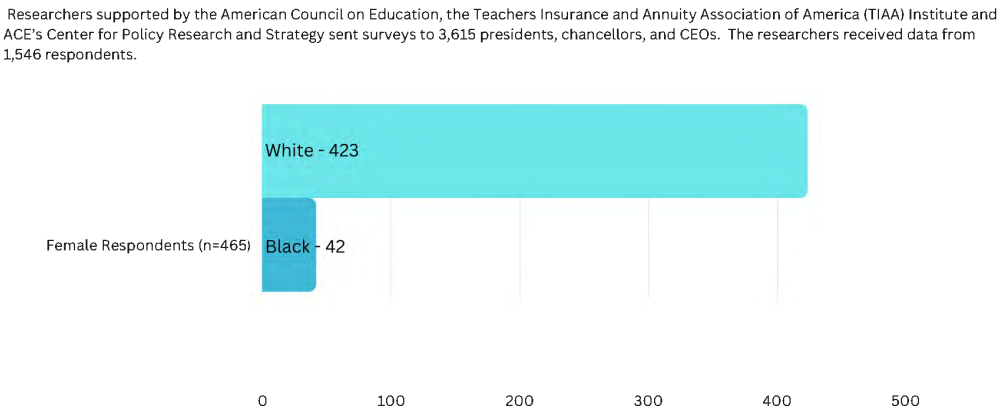
American College President Study – All Respondents (Gagliardi et al., 2017)



Among that same pool of 1,546 college presidents, 83.2% (1,286 people) of the institutional leaders identified as White, while only 7.9% (122 people) identified as Black or African American (Gagliardi et al., 2017). Of the 465 people who identified as women on the survey, 42, or 9%, identified as Black or African American. When asked about their sexual orientation, 3.3% of all participants (51 people) identified as "gay or lesbian," .5% (8 people) identified as "bisexual," and .7% (11 people) identified as "other" (Gagliardi et al., 2017).

Figure 1

American College President Study – Female Respondents (Gagliardi et al., 2017)



The data among the participants of Black or African American women showed that 100% identified as heterosexual or straight. According to the results of the ACE study, there are no viable participants for this study exploring the experiences of queer, Black women executive leaders. The apparent absence of queer Black women in the ACE research is the inspiration to amplify the narratives of the Black cisgender lesbians and Black transgender women who serve as executive leaders not depicted in typical research on higher education leadership.

Purpose of the Study

This qualitative study examined intersectional experiences, career and workplace stressors, and opportunities for promotion to executive leadership for queer Black women in higher education. Through the lived experiences of the four senior-level executive leaders who identify as queer Black women, this research provides guidance, inspiration,

and pathways for queer Black women leaders who aspire to attain executive leadership roles at colleges and universities. This study aspired to contribute to the research, so scholars and practitioners can grasp a personal, professional, and scholarly understanding of queer Black women executive leaders' lived experiences and resilient pathways to success. As a benefit of this research, I amplify networking and career development opportunities for queer Black women climbing the ranks of higher education leadership.

The long-term goal of this study is to contribute to solutions against discriminatory practices queer Black women experience in the workplace in general, particularly in higher education leadership. Addressing the ongoing nature of the problem is tantamount to identifying the problem itself. This study aspired to address the persistence of discriminatory practices in promoting queer Black women executive leaders in higher education.

Scope of the Study

The parameters of this study focused exclusively on the lived experiences of queer Black women who have held or are currently holding senior-level executive leadership positions at institutions of higher education. Such positions included, and were limited to, chancellor, president, provost, and vice president. This study examined the direct correlation between the participants' identity of race, gender, and sexual orientation and how these identity markers impacted their ascension into executive leadership. I welcomed insight into how the participants endured workplace stressors designed to hinder their career progress overtly and covertly. I inquired about their resiliency practices when overcoming personal micro and macro aggressors from colleagues and superiors on their campus. Ultimately, I solicited the wisdom of the

participants as they shared the organizations and associations charged with networking and mentoring queer Black women who aspire to serve as executive leaders at institutions of higher learning.

Significance of the Study

Today, institutional missions, including diversity, equity, and inclusion, are challenged by hostile political opposition (Bhopal, 2017; Tinsley, 2022). The significance of this study rests in the reality that Black people in higher education leadership are under-supported (Lederman, 2022; N. Lewis, 2016; Palmer & Freeman, 2019; Perry, 2020), women in higher education are undervalued (Bonner, 2001; Jackson & Harris, 2005; Jean-Marie, 2006; Moody, 2018; Waring, 2003), and LGBTQ leaders are forcibly undercover (Benozzo et al., 2015; Guittar & Rayburn, 2015; Perry, 2017) in higher education. To be a queer Black woman in higher education means to experience being under-supported, undervalued, and forcibly undercover all at once (Bailey & Miller, 2016; Bowleg, 2008; Carey, 2017; McInnis, 2017). This study acknowledges the gap in examination, as well as in literature analyzing the plausibility and pathways of executive success among queer Black women leaders in higher education.

The long Implications of this study rest In the pathways of equity and changes In traditionally conservative approaches to leadership recruitment. This study holds significant relevance for a range of stakeholders, including:

- Governing Boards: understanding the barriers faced by queer Black women in higher education leadership can inform governance and decision-making processes to promote greater diversity, equity, and inclusion.

- Policy Makers: policymakers can use the insights from this study to shape legislation and policies that address the underrepresentation and challenges endured by marginalized individuals in leadership positions.
- Search Committees: those responsible for hiring and promotion decisions can benefit from a deeper understanding of the issues faced by queer Black women in executive leadership, aiding in more equitable and informed selection processes.
- Administrators: educational administrators can use the study's findings to implement practices supporting underrepresented groups' success in leadership roles, aligning with institutional diversity and inclusion goals.
- HR Departments: human resources departments can use this research to develop more inclusive and supportive recruitment, retention, and career development strategies.
- Legislators: the study's findings can inform legislative efforts to address systemic inequalities and advance diversity and equity in higher education leadership.
- Social Justice Advocates: social justice and equity advocates can leverage the study to raise awareness, advocate for change, and push for more inclusive and equitable practices within the higher education sector.

In summary, this study is significant for a wide range of stakeholders who seek to address the underrepresentation and challenges faced by queer Black women in executive leadership roles within higher education, ultimately advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion in the sector. The presentation of lived experiences among queer Black women previously or currently in executive leadership roles may advance the current research on education leadership prospects among a deeply marginalized demographic.

Under supported. Undervalued. Undercover.

The behaviors of racism, sexism, and homophobia are both long-standing and newly cultivated all at once (Kim, 2020; Library of Congress, 2022a; Library of Congress, 2022b). America, and the world over, has a long-standing problem with allowing differences in race and ethnicity to drive decisions in economics, education, politics, and more (Hannah-Jones et al., 2019). The gender divide has always influenced gender norms, determining what occupations and societal roles belong to men and which belong to women (Harris, 2003; Jones, 2020). Navigating discriminatory practices is deeply woven into the fabric of the American narrative.

The significance of this study rests In the reality that racism and sexism have always plagued this country and will likely continue to do so if marginalizing acts such as red-lining, voter suppression, disproportionate criminalization, and imprisonment continue to occur against Black people (De Benoist, 1999; DeGruy, 2005; Harris, 2014; Law, 1999). The same can be said of women if legislation preventing women from fully commanding their bodies and the insistence on heterosexual-centered values persists in America (The Blackburn Center, 2019; Supreme Court of The United States, 2022). In the 20th century, the LGBTQ community initiated a new civil rights movement, giving queer men and women a voice and amplifying their desired freedom to live as equals in this country and this world (Alimahomed, 2010; Lane, 2015).

This study acknowledged the ongoing struggles endured by members of these often-marginalized groups, most importantly, the people who belong to all three communities: queer people, Black people, and women. To navigate the aggressions experienced by any of these groups could be enough to stifle interest in competing for

executive leadership positions when, for centuries, heterosexual White men have supported other heterosexual White men in those positions (Bok, 2015; Jackson & Harris, 2005; Rentz, 2016; Titcomb, 2014; Waring, 2003). This study addressed the legacy of discrimination endured by the under-supported, illuminates the contributions to higher education by the undervalued, and amplifies mentoring and networking associations and organizations connecting those living undercover with the safety and reassurance that they are not alone and are deeply supported.

Barriers to Inclusion in Educational Spaces

Barriers to inclusion on college campuses begin at the top. Diverse identities demand empathy and equity-building on college campuses. Discrimination, which can manifest based on factors such as race, gender identity, and sexual orientation, serves as a significant barrier. Cultural aspects like religion, geographical origin, age, and physical abilities also play a crucial role in shaping a person's sense of inclusion in an educational environment. Inclusive leadership, representing a broader cross-section of the campus community, increases the likelihood of the institution embodying empathy and fairness. When an institution's leadership ignores the concerns of marginalized groups on college campuses, the message conveyed is of a preferred hierarchy of priority and favor. Heyne (2003) identified four barriers most prevalent in institutions of higher learning: attitudinal, administrative, architectural, and programmatic.

Attitudinal barriers begin as personal beliefs that evolve into stereotyping and labeling, preventing leading from a place of fairness and general kindness. While it is understandable that higher education executive leaders are humans who develop biases throughout their lives, these preferences have no place in their active execution of

leadership (Bell et al., 2011; Bhopal, 2017; Bonner, 2001; Fyfe, 1983). Demonstrating empathy and fairness to the entire campus community inspires reciprocation and, hopefully, alleviates encounters of discrimination and unjust behavior.

In higher education, administrative barriers such as lack of funding, training, and staffing impact infrastructural and institutional equity. The lack of appropriate resources leaves many institutions with deficient academic programs, under-supported faculty, and near dilapidated buildings on outdated campuses (Broady et al., 2021; Holland, 2014). Such neglect impacts enrollment, research grants, competitive faculty recruitment, and institutional accreditation (KLT, 2019; Ortigo, 2019; Weissman, 2019). Leaders and supporters of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) have long expressed the inequitable dissemination of federal funds and resources compared to Predominantly White Institutions (PWI) (JBHE Foundation, Inc., 1997; Lee & Keys, 2013 Martin, 2019). Without parity of federal and state resources, executive leaders of HBCUs who understand the power of collaboration and partnership turn to alums and local and corporate support, all of which pales to the deeply endowed PWIs (Clay-Murray, 2022; Herder, 2022; Weissman, 2022).

Architectural barriers such as adequate ramps, elevators, telecommunication devices, and services prevent high-quality learning and experiences. Such barriers impact people of varying physical abilities and identities in various ways, creating an inequitable educational environment. Recent legislation regarding gender identity and public restroom use in states throughout the American South provides examples of how architectural barriers can create malcontent on college campuses (Bendici, 2016; Dura et al., 2023). In such cases, executive leaders, despite their personal views and attitudes,

may find themselves at odds with the rulings issued by local, state, and federal courts (Peters et al., 2017).

Programmatic barriers arise when university offerings such as courses, program curriculums, student engagement activities, advising, and career development underserve the campus community. Students graduating with underdeveloped skills for the workforce are ill-equipped to compete with recent graduates from institutions offering more robust programs (Burt, 2021; Morgan, 2021). Inclusion-focused and equity-building executive leaders may focus on student success, developing innovative solutions through the Provost and the Offices of Student Affairs and Academic Affairs (York et al., 2019). Hosting career fairs and conferences for networking and mentoring opportunities gives students additional resources for their success (Mishra, 2020).

Equitable access to education begins with equity in leadership. Diverse leadership often reflects the population of the campus community (Carey, 2017). When students, faculty, and staff see a reflection of themselves in leadership, it instills confidence that all voices will be valued on that campus (Boswell, 2019). More diverse organizations benefit from higher levels of creativity, engagement, collaboration, relationships, clarity, and productivity (Gardner, 2019; Jackson & Harris, 2005). The values of diversity in educational leadership are best realized when intersectionality and inclusion are considered in understanding and responding to the needs of a diverse student body and campus community (Lewis, 2016; Martin, 2020). Beyond the optics of diversity for students, faculty, staff, alums, and community supporters, inclusive leadership conveys that leadership is available to all people, not solely one group or demographic (Birnbaum,

1988; Perry, 2020). An impactful leader or leadership team should navigate these barriers to develop solutions to alleviate them.

Research Questions

This study examined intersectional experiences and pathways of ascension to executive leadership positions for queer Black women in higher education leadership. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are the personal barriers for queer Black women leaders who hold or aspire to hold executive leadership positions in higher education?
2. What are the career and workplace stressors experienced among queer Black women leaders who hold or aspire to hold executive leadership positions in higher education?
3. What are the career development and mentorship resources that serve as pathways for queer Black women higher education leaders for promotion to Vice President, Provost, President, or Chancellor?

These questions are significant, considering institutions of higher learning are charged with the mission to foster equitable and inclusive learning and work environments for the entirety of their diverse populations. The existing data reflects a disconnect between that mission and the reality of higher education leadership (Commodore et al., 2016; Gagliardi et al., 2017; Gardner, 2019; Jackson & Harris, 2005; Moody, 2018). Research that fully illuminates the relationship between career advancement and the marginalized identity of queer Black women is lacking (Bhopal, 2017; Corneille et al., 2019; Davis et al., 2018; Lederman, 2022). The next section of this

chapter amplifies the significance of this study and why the exploration of queer Black women executive leaders in higher education is necessary.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

To assess the experiences of executive leaders who identify as queer Black women, the first assumption I needed to consider was that queer Black women who self-identify as "*out"* or *"out of the closet"* and are leaders in higher education will be willing to share their stories regarding their leadership development openly. The participants needed to speak freely and without fear of retribution. Secondly, queer Black women face unique challenges while advancing in academic settings but will continue to enter executive leadership at colleges and universities. Third, due to the shortage of research describing the experiences of queer Black women executive leaders in higher education exclusively, it is assumed that the participants are willing contributors to closing the gap in the literature. Finally, though I am an out queer Black woman who aspires to ascend to higher education executive leadership, I will avoid personal biases to form conclusions and make distinctions among individuals based on race, gender, and sexual orientation.

Limitations

Due to the topic's sensitive nature, I was concerned that the participants might be uncomfortable providing transparent answers and, consequently, measuring their responses conservatively. Fortunately, this study did not experience limitations regarding the participants' willingness to be candid about perceived barriers such as stereotypes and discrimination. Because participation in the study was voluntary and not mandatory, the

experiences presented in the research were from queer Black women who chose to participate.

Delimitations

This research focused on the lived experiences of self-identifying "*out"* or *"out of the closet"* queer Black women executive leaders at higher education institutions. The participants selected for the research serve their institution in full disclosure of identifying as lesbian, transgender, or non-binary. The study did not include faculty, classified staff, or student experiences at these institutions, as the focus rested on the experiences of executive leaders and the pathways of their ascension. Also, the study did not address the experiences of other racial groups or males at these institutions. Higher education institutions identified for this study include two-year or four-year public and private higher education institutions. This study did not include for-profit institutions or vocational schools.

Researcher's Positionality

I am a queer Black woman who aspires to serve as a college or university president. As a researcher with proximity to the problem, I am interested in circumventing some of the barriers our current leaders are enduring. This study allowed me to examine pathways that will contribute to solutions that inspire change.

As a professor, I endured the attitudinal barriers of superiors and colleagues due to my sexual orientation as a queer person while teaching at an HBCU. Between February 3, 2018, to October 26, 2019, I received 26 anonymous complaints from a colleague or several colleagues enraged about me being an out queer Black scholar and faculty member at my university. My department participated in a retreat with an ombudsman to

mediate some of the conflicts within our program. In the end, the unsubstantiated complaints of sexual misconduct were interpreted as a desire to have me removed from the university based on my sexual orientation.

In a recurring fashion, I was accused of recruiting faculty members and students to be lesbians. The apex of the weaponization of the complaints and grievances system against me occurred when I was accused of inviting my daughter to dinner with my wife and me. In the spring semester of 2018, my 30-year-old daughter was a nursing major at the university. Every Tuesday and Thursday morning, she would join me in my office for coffee before going to her next class. One morning, a colleague saw a female student walk out of my office and overheard me invite her to my house for dinner. On February 3, 2018, two complaints were submitted, one by an anonymous student and the other by an anonymous faculty member. Both complaints described me inviting a female student to dinner at my house. Both complaints were submitted within minutes of each other.

On February 18, I was called by the Title IX office and was interrogated about inappropriately inviting a student to my house for dinner. When I explained my daughter's weekly visits for morning coffee and how I had invited her to have dinner with her two mothers, the case was marked as unsubstantiated and dismissed. The matter, however, was far from resolved as this would be the beginning of a long campaign to use my identity as a queer Black woman to undermine my work at the university.

From February 2018 to September 2019, I endured the vilest onslaught of complaints depicting me as a sexual predator, accusing me of giving sexual favors to male and female colleagues for promotion to a tenure-track position. The claims asserted that I used my race, gender, and sexuality to benefit financially in ways my White

colleagues were not permitted. One complaint found me inviting my wife to a campus function disrespectful to the university and that I should not be allowed to bring “that woman” on campus. I asked the Office of Compliance for copies of all complaints against me. The office forwarded 26 complaints, redacting any identifying information of the complainant or others named in the narratives. Though I had done none of the things narrated in the complaints, I carried shame and embarrassment for being an out queer woman at my university. Without the support of my wife, Michelle, and many colleagues who value a free and equitable environment for all campus citizens, I would not have found the courage to do this study, much less stay at the university.

Unsubstantiated and investigated as harassment, experiences such as these are not unique to professors or education leaders identifying as gay or lesbian. Attacks on my identity created doubt about my worth as an individual and my value to my institution. It created a sense that I did not belong at my institution, which, in turn, hindered my interest in ascending to higher positions in education leadership. Shining a light on the harassment revealed a more significant issue of duplicitous bigotry beyond my personal experience.

Over the years, I turned the question of “who I am” into the action of “what I do.” I create safe spaces for expression and art for my students. I challenge “normal” and reject “common” in my teaching, service, and research. This study depicts the firm ground upon which I stand as a queer Black woman insisting on a safer, more equitable work environment for all campus citizens in higher education.

Definition of Terms

Required is a shared understanding of the following important terminology for this study. Below is a list of key terms and definitions used in the literature and essential for the complete comprehension of this study.

Affirmative Action*:* the practice or policy of favoring individuals belonging to groups known to have been discriminated against previously (Lumen, 2016).

African Americans*:* identifies the descendants of enslaved people brought from their African homelands by force to work in the New World. An African American refers to a person of American nationality with ancestry from Africa (Lynch, 2018).

Bisexual*:* a person emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to more than one sex, gender, or gender identity, though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way, or to the same degree (HRC, 2020).

Black People: refers to dark-skinned people of African descent, no matter their nationality (Chavez, 2020).

BIPOC: acronym used to shorten "Black, Indigenous, and people of color" (Garcia, 2020).

Chancellor: the Chief Executive Officer of a college, university, or school system. Some states have university systems where multiple campuses share administrative oversight and considerable campus-specific control. Some of these systems are led by a chancellor, with each separate campus led by a president (Better College Student, 2021; Kretovics & Eckert, 2020, pp. 19–31; University of Colorado, Denver, 2022).

Cisgender / Cis: describes people whose gender identity or expression aligns with traits typically associated with their sex at birth (HRC, 2015).

Diversity: having respect for and appreciation of differences identity worldview, experiences, lifestyles and cultures (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2022).

Equality: the state of being equal, as it relates to status, rights, and opportunities (United Way, 2021; Vivacqua & Diab, 2020).

Equity: the quality of being fair and impartial (United Way, 2021).

Executive Leader: a non-academic role and title in institutes of higher education that include Presidents, Chancellors, Vice Presidents, Vice-Chancellors, and Provosts who oversee college or university operations and budgets (Kretovics & Eckert, 2020, pp. 19–31; University of Colorado, Denver, 2022).

Gay: a person emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to members of the same gender. Men, women, and non-binary people may use this term to describe themselves (HRC, 2020).

Glass Cliff*:* a real-world phenomenon in which women are more likely to be appointed to precarious leadership positions in poorly performing organizations, while men are more likely to be assigned to stable leadership positions in successful organizations (Ryan & Haslam, 2007).

Historically Black Colleges and Universities / HBCU: institutions established before 1964 with the principal mission of educating Black Americans. These institutions were founded and developed in an environment of legal segregation. By providing access to higher education, they contributed substantially to Black Americans' progress in improving their status (Hill, 1982).

Homophobia: negative attitudes towards homosexual people and homosexuality may manifest in discrimination, hostile behavior, or hate crimes (Fyfe, 1983; Gray et al., 1991; O'Donohue & Caselles, 1993).

Identity: the qualities, beliefs that make a particular person or group different from others (Stryker, 1968). A set of meanings attached to roles individuals occupy in a social structure (role identity), groups they identify with and belong to (group identity), and the unique way in which they see themselves (personal identity) (Burke & Stets, 2009; Stryker, 1968).

Inclusion: the act or practice of being valued, respected, and supported, including and accommodating people who have historically been excluded due to race, gender, sexuality, or ability (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2022).

Intersectionality*:* the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, gender, and sexual orientation (Crenshaw, 1989).

Ivory Tower: with references dating back to Greek mythology and the Old Testament, "the Ivory Tower" is a figure of speech commonly referring to a place of seclusion, privilege, and reverence (Shapin, 2012).

Lesbian: a woman emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to other women. Women and non-binary people may use this term to describe themselves (HRC, 2020).

LGBTQ: stands for "lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer." Many people and organizations use "LGBTQ" as a catch-all term for the non-cisgender and non-straight community, but the acronym varies depending on culture and style (HRC, 2020).

Microaggressions*:* microaggressions are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that

communicate hostile, derogatory, or harmful slights and insults toward people of marginalized communities (Sue et al., 2007; Williams, 2019).

Misogyny: an extreme form of sexism that is often defined as the hatred of women (The Blackburn Center, 2019).

Multiple Jeopardy Theory: the interdependence of classism, sexism, racism, and other systems that contribute to the simultaneous and multiplicative effects of oppression on Black women in their life (King, 1988).

Non-Binary People*:* people who may identify as both a man and a woman, somewhere in between, or as falling completely outside these categories. While many also identify as transgender, not all non-binary people do. Non-binary can also encompass identities such as agender, bigender, genderqueer, or gender fluid (HRC, 2015).

O*ut / "Out-of-the-Closet"*: a term or phrase used to describe a person no longer hiding their sexual orientation or sexual identity (Kushnick, 2010).

People of Color / Women of Color: groups or individuals not of White or European ancestry (Kim, 2020).

Predominantly White Institutions / PWI: an institution of higher education where White Americans represent 50% or more of the student population (Lomotey, 2010).

President: the leader of the entire institution. The president of a college is the equivalent of the CEO of a company. Their role is to lead the overall strategic planning for and sustained performance of an institution (Kretovics & Eckert, 2020; Seraphin, 2012; University of Colorado, Denver, 2022).

Provost: the vice president of a university, the provost is considered the senior academic administrator in charge of curricular and research tasks (Kretovics & Eckert, 2020; Seraphin, 2012; University of Colorado, Denver, 2022).

Queer: a term people often use to express a spectrum of identities and orientations that are counter to the mainstream. Queer is often used as a catch-all to include many people, including those who do not identify as exclusively straight and/or folks who have non-binary or gender-expansive identities. This term, previously used as a slur, has been reclaimed by many parts of the LGBTQ movement (HRC, 2020).

Racism: a system that affirms the superiority of one racial group over the others (DeBenoist, 1999).

Sexism: individuals' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors, and organizational, institutional, and cultural practices that either reflect negative evaluations of individuals based on their gender or support unequal status of women and men. (Swim & Hyers, 2009).

Tolerance: the ability or willingness to endure something, particularly the existence of opinions or behaviors with which one does not necessarily agree (Oxford University Press, 2021).

Transgender / Trans: an umbrella term for people whose gender identity is different from the sex assigned to them at birth (HRC, 2015; Transgender FAQ, 2018).

Triple Jeopardy**:** the conceptual framework expanding King's Multiple Jeopardy Theory to the specific additive oppressions of race, gender, and sexual orientation on the lives of queer, Black women (Greene, 1996).

Vice President: members of the college president's cabinet. Whereas the president focuses on an institution's overall vision and mission, vice presidents concentrate on daily operations (Kretovics & Eckert, 2020; Time, 2019; University of Colorado, Denver, 2022).

White Privilege: the social and economic advantages White people have under their race in a culture characterized by racial inequality (Law, 1999).

Womanism / Black Feminism: social activism of "Black feminist or feminist of color" who loves other women and/or men sexually and/or non-sexually, appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility, and women's strength, and is committed to "survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female," (Walker, 1983, p. xi).

Summary of the Chapter

This chapter introduced the research study of the commonly lived experiences of queer Black women executive leaders in higher education. The following chapter provides a more in-depth review of the relevant literature and the study's conceptual framework, Triple Jeopardy (Greene, 1996), a culmination of the theoretical concepts of Identity Theory (Stryker, 1968), Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Tajfel & Turner, 2004), Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989), and Multiple Jeopardy Theory (King, 1988).

"When we speak, we are afraid our words will not be heard nor welcomed, but when we are silent, we are still afraid, so it is better to speak" (Lorde, 1978, p. 32).

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

"There's always someone asking you to underline one part of yourself – whether it's Black, woman, mother, dyke, teacher, etc. – because that's the piece that they need to key in to. They want to dismiss everything else" (Lorde, 2004, p. 31).

This chapter presents a literature review foundational for a study exploring the experiences of queer Black women executive leaders in higher education, amplifying the significance of the study. This literature review begins with a historical overview of the status of the conservative legacy of higher education leadership and queer Black women executive leaders' roles within that history. This assessment of the literature follows with an overview of the conceptual framework, Triple Jeopardy (Greene, 1996), for this qualitative, phenomenological study based on the theoretical concepts of the Identity Theory (Stryker, 1968), Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Tajfel & Turner, 2004), Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989), and Multiple Jeopardy Theory (King, 1988).

The Irresistible Force Paradox In Higher Education

Within the third century BC philosophical book, *Han Feizi*, Han Fei (1600) presented the story of a man attempting to sell a shield and a spear. The man claimed the spear could pierce any shield it encountered. The man also claimed the shield could stop any opponent's spear launched in its direction. A puzzled buyer asked if his mighty spear could pierce his impenetrable shield (Han, 1600). The quiet confusion of the seller grew into a paradox that continues today.

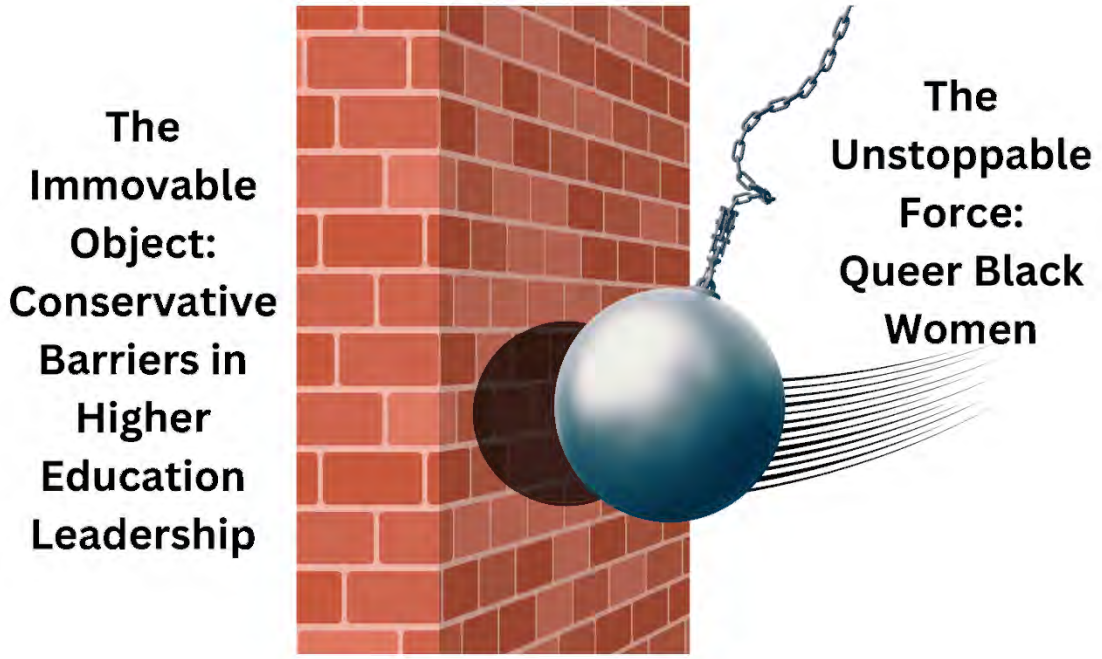
Today, the paradox is more commonly referenced with the question, “What happens when an unstoppable force meets an immovable object?” A brain twister of physics, the paradox reflects on a force projected in motion, unstoppable by any variable that gets in its way. The modern version of the paradox simultaneously contemplates an object so grounded in its place that nothing can break its barriers, displacing it from its position (Lunawat, 2022; Northwestern University, 2020; The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2007). However, Albert Einstein’s Laws of Relativity refutes the notion that ANY object is so fortified it cannot be moved as the immovable object would possess infinite mass (Waldrop, 2017). Relativity also concludes that if an object remains static and all other objects move relative to the objects in motion, the immovable object is no longer where It Initially was, thus changing the unchangeable (Britannica, 2022; MinutePhysics, 2013).

Just as the fundamentals of physics assert that every object is *movable*, the metaphor of an *immovable object* related to higher education leadership’s conservative nature is appropriate. Throughout the history of higher education, the client for whom the institution serves and who leads institutions of higher learning have evolved beyond solely engaging cisgender, heterosexual, White men of the Christian faith (Geiger, 1999). Since the latter days of the 19th century, Black women have been a growing faction of college students and faculty, giving them the characteristics of an unstoppable force (Gagliardi et al., 2017; Geiger, 1999; Zippia, 2020). This review examines the elements that make higher education leadership the immovable object and queer Black women executives the unstoppable force. The following literature review section examines the historical context of higher education executive leadership, in this context, the

immovable object. This section displays the queer, Black women, in this context, the unstoppable force, and each identifying variable as separate entities and their relationship to one another.

Figure 2

The Immovable Object vs. The Unstoppable Force



The Immovable Object: Conservative Barriers in Higher Education Leadership

The historical figure of higher education leadership is reserved for seemingly heterosexual, White men of elite society (Gallien, Jr., 2005; Rentz, 2016). This portrait of higher education leadership tethers directly to the primary and initial client of higher learning. At its inception, the college experience in America belonged to one demographic. With colleges serving primarily White men until the introduction of HBCUs and women's colleges, higher education leadership followed the characteristics of their institutions' clients (Rentz, 2016). Institutional data provides evidence aligning higher education leadership and governance with university finance, enrollment, and

endowments, the critical factors of institutional sustainability. For this reason, institutions continue to make conservative selections among leadership to ensure the trust of their longest-standing client (Birnbaum, 1988; Bok, 2005; Bok, 2015; Gallien, Jr., 2005; Hikes, 2005).

The Unstoppable Force: Queer Black Women

Queer Black women climbing professional ranks in higher education leadership concurrently endure acts of racism, daily microaggressions, episodes of joy, reminders of historical struggles, and celebrations of triumphs (Bowleg, 2008; Perry, 2017; Scharrón-Del Río, 2018; Sue et al., 2007; Williams, 2019). This research addresses the workplace stressors and inequities through the lived experiences of queer, Black women executive leaders in higher education. Indeed, there is a growing library of articles, journals, and research on Black leaders, women leaders, and queer leaders in higher education. Still, there is a paucity of literature on the experiences of the specific intersection of queer Black women in elevated leadership positions in higher education governance and finance. However, Black women have navigated their liberation in spaces that are not always welcoming to their whole selves (Bowleg et al., 2003).

Historical Context: Review of Higher Education History

Executive positions at any institution of higher learning are highly sought-after posts. Historically, cisgender, seemingly heterosexual, White men have held the roles of chancellor, president, provost, and vice president in overwhelming numbers (Titcomb, 2014; Flynn, 2021). The college president is the most visible leadership representative, often serves as the chief public relations officer, and is the most prolific fundraiser (Kretovics & Eckert, 2020. Since the founding of Harvard College, the conservative

practice of hiring White men ensured executive leadership was allusive for anyone in a marginalized demographic (Birnbaum, 1988; Bok, 2005; Bok, 2015; Gallien, Jr., 2005; Hikes, 2005; Rentz, 2016).

The Ivory Tower: The Privileged History of Higher Education Leadership

America's history charts its growth and legacy of three civil factors: governance, economics, and education (Altbach et al., 1999). Since the founding of the first colleges in the northeastern colonies, higher education belonged to wealthy White men of elite social stature (Rentz, 2016). Access to philosophical teachings and civic leadership opportunities were made available to the sons of a precious demographic protected from the mundane concerns of the middle or lower classes.

The term *The Ivory Tower* refers to the prestige of the university environment and stems from the elite, aristocratic history, and culture of the college or university ecosystem (Shapin, 2012). The apathetic attitude of wealthy White men in elite schools toward the world outside the academy prompted the adoption of the ivory tower as a symbol of fortitude and barrier from lower-class commoners, for whom higher education was unavailable (Altbach et al., 1999; Birnbaum, 1988; Bok, 2015; Gallien, Jr., 2005; Geiger, 1999; Hikes, 2005). The culture of exclusivity and systems of racism and sexism allowed college life to be as White men of means wanted (Rentz, 2016). There was no need to change a system that served its client perfectly.

For the historical context of the evolution of higher education in America, Geiger (1999) chronicled *The Ten Generations of American Higher Education*. He illuminated the exclusive nature of The Ivory Tower (Altbach et al., 1999). Originally, academia in the American colonies tied education to learning God's laws and man's laws in the new

world. Schools such as Harvard College, William and Mary, and Yale taught Greek classics and religion. As the colonies expanded throughout the northeastern region of North America, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania became the hub of modern education and the developing nation's industrial and urban centers. At the height of the American Revolution and the birth of a new nation, each state committed resources to charter new educational institutions and provide higher learning degrees. State colleges opened throughout the 13 original states to build a nation of innovative thinkers and policymakers while millions of Blacks toiled in bondage in the South and women remained silent and at home (Gallien, Jr., 2005; Geiger, 1999; Hikes, 2005).

The aristocratic privilege held firm to higher education until the mid-1800s (Geiger, 1999; Hikes, 2005). Whether rooted in religious dogma or preparatory institutions for the nation's civic, legal, or medical leaders, colleges and universities served the sons of the elite for the first 200 years of this country's existence. In the years since the Civil War, the identity and function of higher education evolved from an exclusive aristocratic club for young White men to a more inclusive sector of American growth (Altbach et al., 1999; Geiger, 1999). The inclusion of White women into established schools and the creation of institutions that were exclusively for women and historically Black colleges meant a college degree would be available to nearly anyone who aspired to have one. As America changed in civil wars and civil rights movements, women and people of color altered the idea of higher education and to whom it belonged (Geiger, 1999).

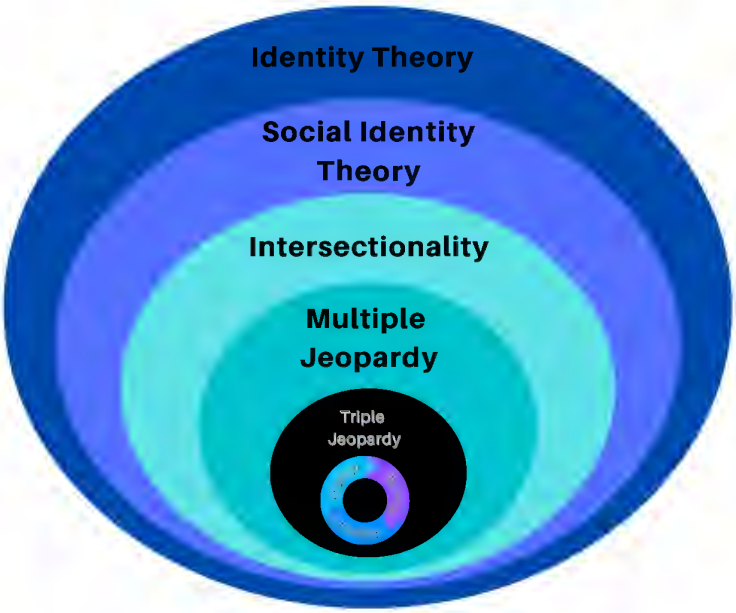
Conceptual Framework: Triple Jeopardy

The core of this study rested on the identity of queer Black women higher education executives, how their identity empowers them, and the barriers created when other people interpret their identity. The progression toward this study's conceptual framework, Triple Jeopardy (Greene, 1996), began with Stryker's Identity Theory (1968), establishing the baseline of the independent descriptors that create an individual. Next, examining Taijfel and Turner's Social Identity Theory (1979), the study addressed the phenomenon where individuals, using the elements of their identity, find others of like identity to form groups and categories in society. The research explored why forging groups and relationships based on identity groups were crucial to career development, mentorship, and enduring workplace stressors (Glover, 2017; Scharrón-Del Río, 2018).

Crenshaw's Intersectionality (1989) followed the previous two theories, examining how the general relationship between combinations of one's identifying variables influences societal perceptions of them and may impact the outcome of their efforts. Finally, the Multiple Jeopardy Theory considers what happens when the combination of identifying variables creates oppressive episodes for the individual, compounded by the number of marginalized identities that the individual possesses (King, 1988). Collectively, these four theories best explain the restrictive experience queer Black women endure as individuals and as a collective in higher education leadership: Triple Jeopardy (Greene, 1996). Combining these theories was uniquely appropriate for researching the lived experiences of queer Black women leaders as Triple Jeopardy addressed the multiplied variables for discrimination based on race, gender, and sexual orientation (Greene, 1996).

Figure 3

Triple Jeopardy Conceptual Framework



Identity Theory

This research examined the experiences of queer Black women via the lens of their identities. This research began with both personal identity and social identity. (Stryker, 1968; Styrker & Burke, 2000). Personal identity consists of the distinguishing characteristics that describe that individual (Fearon, 1999; Gleason, 1983). Variables of personal identity may include but are not limited to physical appearance, gender, sexual orientation, physical abilities, or age.

Personal identity is unique to every individual and defines the self (Stets & Burke, 2000; Stryker, 1968). The *self* consists of a collection of identities, each definitively related to a particular role (Stets & Burke, 2000).

Identities culminate to answer the question, “Who am I?” (Fearon, 1999; Gleason, 1983). Identity theorists posit that identity is initially grouped into *person identity* and *role identity* (Gleason, 1983; Markovsky et al., 1990; Stryker & Burke, 2000). A person’s identity connotes labels realized at birth and in familial relationships. These identities include race, gender, religion, age, and relationships such as son, daughter, father, and mother (Stets & Burke, 2000). Role identities are tethered to occupations and activities such as doctor, lawyer, teacher, student, professional athlete, or priest (Stets & Burke, 2000). The infinite permutations and combinations of identities account for the individuality of all the 8 billion people on the planet.

The Identity Theory also acknowledges societal hierarchies through Ih Identities filter, creating systemic advantages for people with identities of privilege (Stets & Serpe, 2013). In American society, White people, male people, and heterosexual people are idealized as possessing power, prestige, status, and thus more value (Stets & Serpe, 2013). The research examined the experiences of higher education executive leaders identifying as Black people, female people, and homosexual women, the antithesis of this country’s most prized demographic. The study considered the personal identity and role identity overlap these women experience in society as Blacks or African Americans, women, members of the LGBTQ community, and serve as executive leaders in higher education.

Identity: Amplifying Blackness. The inequities of educational access, practices, and resources for Black Americans compared to White Americans stem from the genesis of the nation. From August 1619, Africans in America have abided by the laws of whip-yielding masters, water hose-blasting Jim Crowers, and swinging batons of police

officers (Rogers & Bowman, 2017; Smedley, 1998), all designed to deter Black people from excelling White people in American society. Realizing an enslaved human who could teach themselves and others how to read and write could lead to rebellion, enslavers, and White politicians crafted legislation that developed the Slave Codes (Smithsonian American Art Museum, n.d.; USHistory.org, 2019), making it illegal for Black people to have an education of any sort (Smithsonian American Art Museum, n.d.; USHistory.org, 2019). These regulations on identity and education persisted through the ages of American history to the present day (Nellis, 2021).

Since the era of Reconstruction, the notion of *separate but equal* has haunted the American South as a social construct designed to prevent racial integration (National Archives, 2021a). Following the *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) case, this concept transformed into the legal framework known as Jim Crow, ultimately creating a society devoid of equality for Black individuals (Groves, 1951; Harris, 2013; Riegel, 1984). Regrettably, Black citizens endured the harsh reality of separation without experiencing any of the promised equality. The emergence of the Civil Rights Movement marked the beginning of a new era focused on achieving integration.

The signs hanging over drinking fountains were one example of the South's rules: “Whites Only” and “Coloreds Only.” Despite what the signs regulated, White people could go anywhere and do anything they wished. Black people were not permitted the same freedoms. So began the fight to balance the scale and change the “Whites only” spaces into places available to all citizens. The insistence on freedom by Black American citizens fell short of its call as Black people were denied freedoms, rejected as

Americans, and deprived of the rights of all citizens residing in the Jim Crow South (Black, 1959; Groves, 1951; Harris, 2013; Riegel, 1984).

White Southerners resisted mixed societies with Black people because they sought no need to mix. White schools, businesses, homes, and other facets of society were well supported financially and provided their community with substantially better-supported resources than Black schools, businesses, and homes. Why would White people integrate into Black spaces? There would be no balanced merging of Black communities and White communities. Inequity in societal resources meant integration could never happen (Horsford, 2018; Morris, 1986).

During the Civil Rights Movement, African Americans owned businesses and ran their schools. Black citizens, one hundred years removed from slavery, wanted the dignity of equitable financial resources and political might, as all Americans were due (Library of Congress, 2004; Virginia Writers Project of the WPA, 1994). Once the Civil Rights Act was passed in 1964, declaring all public spaces open to all people, Black Southerners sent their children to White schools, shopped in White stores, and ate at White lunch counters (Karenga, 2010; Library of Congress, 2004). The resources were exponentially better at these establishments. Throughout the American South, local, state, and the federal government resisted endowing Black schools and businesses with resources, making Black assimilation into White society inevitable (Karenga, 2010; Library of Congress, 2004).

When the Supreme Court ruling of the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* case called for the integration of public schools, White Southerners rebelled against the demands of the White House (National Archives, 2021c). In protest of the federal order,

Virginia Governor Lindsay Almond carried out *Massive Resistance*, the statewide mandate to close *all* Virginia schools, Black and White, to prevent integration (Legal Defense Fund, 2023; Library of Congress, 2004; Pratt, 1993; Smith, 1965; Virginia Writers Project of the WPA, 1994). Some Virginia counties closed their schools for years to avoid teaching Black children in the same schools as White children.

This period saw the birth of affluent private schools in church halls and private homes designed to keep Black children out of White schools (Legal Defense Fund, 2023; Library of Congress, 2004; Pratt, 1993; Smith, 1965; Virginia Writers Project of the WPA, 1994). White children were not sent to Black schools. White people were not patrons of Black businesses. Many Black institutions closed their doors. The dilemma of integration measured the calculated risk of better resources for schools and businesses against the price of abandonment, leaving Black communities across the South erased of their establishments (Karenga, 2010; Library of Congress, 2004).

The void of equitable rights, freedom, and access to economic resources was not a phenomenon relegated to the American South. Millions of Black people migrated north shortly after the Civil War in an exodus called “The Great Migration” (Karenga, 2010, p. 147). Refusing to work the same plantations as sharecroppers their parents and grandparents toiled on as enslaved humans, Black men, women, and children moved to northern cities such as New York, Chicago, Detroit, Philadelphia, and Boston to pursue better lives (Karenga, 2010). Expecting racial equity in the workplace, schools, and housing, Black people quickly learned that Northern Whites carried many of the same animosities and bigotry as Southern Whites (Clark-Pujara & Cox, 2020; Purnell et al., 2019). Racially and ethnically segregated communities in large metropolitan cities

warred against each other on issues such as school busing, unfair employment practices, and inhumane living conditions (Purnell et al., 2019).

Black lives became mixed into the social construct of White people, but White lives did not integrate into the lives of Black people (Cashin, 2005). In the real sense, integration should have been an equal shift in both ways of life. Proper integration would have been allocating resources and funds to build on the Black establishments so Whites could integrate into the Black culture and the reverse. Then, value would have been realized and preserved in the Black and White societal construct. Nevertheless, this has yet to happen. America did not integrate (Cashin, 2005). America de-segregated (Cashin, 2005; Karenga, 2010).

Addressing "The White Gaze" and Equity in the Workplace. In today's society, hard and fast rules of etiquette and respectability politics police these aesthetics and behaviors of African American women in the workplace and educational settings (Harris, 2014; Harris, 2003; Jefferson, 2019). The expectation of adhering to rules comforting to White people or *The White Gaze* contributes to an oppressive environment often rebelled against by Black activists (Asare, 2021). *The White Gaze*, coined by Nobel prize and Pulitzer Prize-winning writer Toni Morrison, depicts the unwanted inclusion of White expectations and White understanding of Black phenomena (Asare, 2021; Greco, 2021; Lewis-Giggetts, 2020). The centralization of the White American experience is the essence of the American experience. Historically, defining *Blackness* connotes Black achievement despite White oppression as depicted during slavery, Reconstruction, or the Civil Rights movement (De Benoist, 1999; Law, 1999; Smedley, 1998). Existing without *The White Gaze* means decentralizing the White American narrative and amplifying

Black American experiences autonomously. However, the legacy of higher education leadership rests on the promise of educating the sons of the White American elite. Black women, in general, and queer Black women, in particular, depict the actual opposite of the traditional profile of higher education leadership (Altbach et al., 1999; Geiger, 1999; Rentz, 2016).

The 1970s and 1980s saw Increased Black attendance at Predominately White Institutions (PWIs). Simultaneously, enrollment at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) dropped as some considered them relics of a segregated American past (Anderson, 2017; Wooster, 2016). *The White Gaze* watched over the shoulders of young Black men and women who entered PWIs for their college education. There was no wave of White students attending Howard or Hampton in the same way Black students leaped to attend Harvard and Yale.

Like the businesses forced to close their doors due to de-segregation, many HBCUs fell victim to low attendance and apathy following the Civil Rights Movement (Anderson, 2017; Wooster, 2016). Going to school with White students in their institutions gave an entire generation of young Black adults the idea that racial parity existed in the workforce and politics (Anderson, 2017; Wooster, 2016). Despite the emergence of college-educated African Americans, White Americans benefitted disproportionately over their Black counterparts, and *The White Gaze* relentlessly persisted in America. Affirmative Action, legislation designed to disrupt the centering of White people in education and the workplace, was first introduced by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1964 by Executive Order 11246 (Law, 1999; Lumen, 2016; Menand, 2020; U.S. Department of Labor, 2023).

Affirmative Action is the practice of improving the educational and job opportunities of members of groups that have not been treated fairly in the past because of their race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, and other identifying factors (Menand, 2020; Law, 1999; Lumen, 2016). It is an active effort to improve the employment or educational opportunities of members of minority groups and women, promoting the rights or progress of other disadvantaged persons. Today, the tenants of Affirmative Action struggle to hold up against the cries of positive discrimination or discrimination against White people (Australian Human Rights Commission, n.d.; Caccavale, 2020). In 2023, the United States Supreme Court agreed with conservative White Americans by prohibiting Affirmative Action from the college admissions process, deeming racial preference unconstitutional when making decisions on college admissions (Supreme Court of The United States, 2023). The ruling placed the power to admit as many or as few students of varying races with the institutions, with many doubting students of color being admitted to highly competitive PWI without the protection of Affirmative Action. The White Gaze persists.

Racial Diversity in Higher Education

Racial disparities responsible for the narrow access to higher education leadership evolve as the generational barriers shift within American culture (Jackson & Harris, 2005; Waring, 2003). Until the 1860s, the United States did not mandate service or enforcement of equity among colleges (Altbach et al., 1999; Birnbaum, 1988; Bok, 2015; Gallien, Jr., 2005; Geiger, 1999; Hikes, 2005; Rentz, 2016). American colleges, primarily located in the northeast region of the United States, were private institutions funded by

religious organizations or private funders (Ed et al., 2015). White society reserved higher education for civic policymakers and sons of the American aristocracy (Rentz, 2016).

African Americans who sought higher education before the 1860s encountered societal challenges such as slavery, access to educational experiences reserved for the elite, and the coming war destined to tear the country in two (Hikes, 2005). Race determined the roles of young Black men, and obtaining a college education was not among them. However, America was changing.

After the war, the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1890 ensured institutions of higher learning for Black citizens (Ed et al., 2015; Lawrence, 2022; Lee & Keys, 2013). Tethered to the White land grant state schools of 1862, HBCUs were initially led by White principals, White presidents, White religious leaders, or White trustees, all while receiving far fewer resources than their White educational counterparts (Hernandez, 2013; Lee & Keys, 2013). The *separate and unequal* practices continued in the 19th century, even during Reconstruction. They continued into the 20th century with the Civil Rights Movement when the fight for equality overshadowed the battle for equity. (National Archives, 2021a).

Diversity was born of the mandate of equal opportunity for all, regardless of race, gender, and other protected class attributes (Academic Leadership Institute – University of Michigan, 2021; Carnegie Mellon University, 2023). However, diversity more accurately defines the minimal inclusion of marginalized populations so the dominant population can say they practice diversity without losing power and privilege (Lawal & Nuhu, 2021). While the average percentage of Black student enrollment at PWIs remains 10-12% of the total student population, these schools can say they have a diverse student

population (Eakins & Eakins, 2017; Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2022). However, with a population of 20,000 students, having a 10% Black student population results in 2000 Black students out of 20,000. The numbers reflecting diversity in higher education executive leadership could not be more sparse.

Identity: Amplifying Womanness

Intertwined in the history of America is White male supremacy. The nation's charter document, The U.S. Constitution, only recognized White men as the country's only citizens with fully realized rights. White women later campaigned for their right to vote in local, state, and federal elections, resulting in the 19th Amendment to the Constitution (National Archives, 2021b; United States Senate, 2020).

Feminists, women who continued to amplify the value of full and equal rights for women as they were available to men, focused their fight on issues less prioritized by Black women. Throughout the 20th century, the pressing issues on the feminist agenda included reproductive rights and equal pay for equal work. While important issues, Black women had to navigate these issues plus the added weight of racism as it related to voter suppression (Laroche, 2022), unjust legal oppression (Chin, 2019; Crenshaw, 1989), inequities in housing (National Low Income Housing Coalition, 2022), under-supported schools for their children (Pitts, 2021) and the brutal violence imparted on African Americans (Jones, 2020). Black women had entirely different, pressing needs from their White counterparts.

What was equally apparent was the lack of active support among White feminists to aid Black women with their issues despite Black women aligning themselves with White women for equal rights (Bailey, 2019). Black women had to chart their path in this

country, separate from Black men and White women. The slow but steady climb into corporate, political, legal, medical, and educational leadership has been far more arduous than that experienced by White women and less profitable than Black men (Crenshaw, 1989; Lloyd-Jones et al., 2014).

Leadership roles for women, in general, is a late 20th-century concept, still met with scrutiny and doubt. Women managers tend to receive greater scrutiny and criticism than men, and they tend to be evaluated less favorably, even when performing the same leadership duties as men (Eagly et al., 1992; Lloyd-Jones et al., 2014). Attempting to break through the glass ceiling, the often invisible barrier to success experienced by women in their careers, female leaders often hit a career apex much lower than successful men (Crenshaw, 1989; Loden, 1978). Loden (1978) coined the phrase to describe a woman's ability to climb the career ladder into management but ascend higher than the lowest rung of middle management. Loden further asserted that the barriers to advancement were cultural, not personal, and contributed to the most consequential damage to women's career aspirations.

By the early 21st century, more significant opportunities in leadership were claimed by women in the United States. When she took the helm at Hewlett-Packard, Cara Carleton Fiorina, the first woman to be named CEO of a Fortune 500 company, stated that women face "no limits whatsoever. There is not a glass ceiling" (Meyer, 1999, para. 2). However, Black women did not share Fiorina's enthusiastic and optimistic assessment of corporate America. According to Catalyst, an independent research group, Black women perceived a concrete ceiling (Catalyst, 2001), conveying a gap in opportunities available to White women, not all women. However, by the mid-2000s, an

uptick in women hired as chief leadership officers revealed a new phenomenon taking shape in the workforce landscape in America: *The Glass Cliff*.

Ryan and Haslam (2005) defined *The Glass Cliff* as the likeliness of women and people of color taking on chief executive leadership roles associated with a greater risk of failure. If the failure occurs, women, not men, must face the consequences and be singled out for criticism and blame (Ryan & Haslam, 2007). Black women, in particular, have endured the *glass cliff* effect as a new wave of chief executive officers are hired to lead companies with broken cultures and failing systems (Ellis, 2022; Thompson Payton, 2022). Leading the company falls down the line of priority when battling racism and sexism while boosting company morale and managing exhaustion and eventual burn-out, which plagues this new class of executive leaders (Thompson Payton, 2022). Kyra Kyles, CEO of YR Media, a national youth-led media nonprofit based in Oakland, California, stated,

> You're not just tackling a business need. You're also being asked to tackle and transform culture. You're already coming in at somewhat of a deficit because you're coming in at a tumultuous time for all organizations and media in particular, and on top of that, the expectations are often highly unrealistic. (Kyles, 2022, para.11)

Kyles further spoke of the double standard and high expectations facing Black women,

> Why can't Stacey Abrams just run for public office? She's got to run for public office, change perceptions and stereotypes, and fix a broken voter suppression system all at the same time. That's not something that would be asked of her counterpart. (Kyles, 2022, para. 13)

The glass cliff effect continues to plague the success of Black women climbing the corporate ladder but are nonetheless, charged to correct company failings and conduct damage control upon arrival.

Womanism: Living in the Gap of Black Identity and White Feminism

This research draws a distinct line of difference between womanism and feminism. Traditionally, the emphasis of feminism places the needs of cisgender, straight White women above the issues of all other women (Black Feminism, 2021; Harris, 2003; Jackson, 2016). In the late 19th century, White women initially argued against Black men obtaining the right to vote ahead of them (Bailey, 2020; Jones, 2020; Walker, 1973). Feminists such as Susan B. Anthony and Lucretia Mott, who simultaneously identified as abolitionists, sought the rights of White women ahead of the civil rights of free Black men like their contemporary, Frederick Douglass (Bailey, 2019). This warring of power left Black women further conflicted in identifying with whom they should hold allegiance. The expectation of being quiet and supporting White women and Black men persisted until Shirley Chisolm insisted Black women stand out front (Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, 2016; The Edward M. Kennedy Institute for the United States Senate, 2023).

The void of priority for Black women's liberation was carried through the eras of Reconstruction and the Civil Rights Movement. The dismissal of Black women in the Feminist movement inspired Alice Walker to coin the phrase *womanist* in her book, *In Search of Our Mothers' Garden: Womanist Prose* (1983). Womanist identifies Black women who also identify as feminists and recognize the multiple jeopardy (King, 1988)

endured by Black women not commonly experienced by White women (Duke University Women's' Center, n.d.; Walker, 1983).

The Black Arts Movement of the 1970s marked a significant turning point, as it introduced fearless Black artists and activists who championed the idea that Black women should not merely be regarded as equals to white women but as individuals uniquely beautiful in their Blackness. This transformative era saw the emergence of influential figures like Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, bell hooks, Ntozake Shange, and Nikki Giovanni, all of whom profoundly contributed to literature and culture. Simultaneously, activists like Angela Davis and Shirley Chisholm tirelessly pursued personal and collective civil rights agendas, emphasizing centering Black women's experiences and struggles. Their collective efforts impacted society, challenging, and reshaping prevailing norms and perceptions (Ogbar, 2019; Poetry Foundation, 2020).

Women Leaders in Higher Education

While the number of women enrolling at institutions of higher learning increased since the mid-20th century, the number of women leaders has yet to meet the same growth (Jackson & Harris, 2005; Waring, 2003). Those numbers are even more disproportionately unbalanced among Black women and further unrepresented among queer Black women (Gagliardi et al., 2017; Melidona et al., 2023; Moody, 2018). Researchers supported by the American Council on Education (ACE), the Teachers Insurance and Annuity Association of America (TIAA) Institute, and ACE's Center for Policy Research and Strategy sent surveys to 3,615 presidents, chancellors, and CEOs. Among the 1,546 respondents, 30.1% (465 people) identified as women, compared to 69.8% (1,079 people) who identified as men (Gagliardi et al., 2017; Moody, 2018). In

contrast, female students comprise nearly 60% or 8.9 million undergraduates, whereas male students represent 40% or 6.5 million undergraduate students in the United States (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). Women make up two-thirds of all enrolled students but less than one-third of all executive leaders in higher education (Carey, 2017; Martin, 2020; Moody, 2018; National Center for Education Statistics, 2020).

The legacy of leadership at HBCUs mirrors PWIs, as boards of trustees and institution leadership have been predominately men. Before the 1950s, many HBCU boards comprised White men (Anderson, 1988; Gasman, 2013; Wooster, 2016). Since more HBCUs are in the American South, the conservative acts stifling women's leadership and perpetuating homophobia on campus have plagued the interest in diversifying leadership at HBCUs (Palmer & Freeman, 2019).

Over the years, some pioneering Black women have broken the barriers to higher education executive leadership, becoming the mentors of generations of higher education leaders. Fanny Jackson Coppin became the first Black woman principal to lead The Institute for Colored Youth, now known as Cheyney University, in 1869 (Perkins, 1982). Although founded as a college for men and women in 1873 and later chartered as a single-sex college for women in 1926, Bennett College would appoint a female president once Willa Beatrice Player was appointed in 1956. The inauguration of President Player marked the appointment of the first African American woman to be president of a four-year, fully accredited liberal arts college or university in the United States (Brown, 1998; Gasman, 2007, 2011, 2016, 2018; Guy-Sheftall, 1982). Mary McLeod Bethune, founder and first president of what is now Bethune-Cookman University, was the first African

American woman to both found (1904) and preside over (1923-42; 1946-7) a higher education institution (Bethune et al., 2001; Evans, 2008). It would be 106 years after the founding of Spelman College, a higher educational institution for Black women, that a Black woman, Johnetta B. Cole, would be selected to serve as president in 1987 (Cole, 1993).

Today, HBCUs are led by pioneers of education, law, medicine, and commerce. Currently, 26 of the nation's 103 HBCUs are led by Black women (Dillon, 2019; Herder, 2021). The efforts to elevate Black women into executive leadership roles at HBCUs continue thanks to the mentorship of current and former leaders and through organizations such as the HBCU Executive Leadership Institute at Clark Atlanta University (Clark Atlanta University, School of Education, 2023). The pathway to executive leadership opportunities at HBCU may still be more attainable than opportunities at any institution of higher learning in the country. However, with more Black women as mentors and organizations charged with grooming the next generation of leaders, the opportunities for Black women are growing more evident daily.

Identity: Amplifying Queerness

Early 20th-century Black lesbian-identifying women sought freedom to live and love as they wished in major metropolitan cities like New York, Chicago, and Washington, D.C. (Bronski et al., 2023). Harlem, New York, was a safe and vibrant haven for the Black queer creative community. Writers, musicians, dancers, and actors made their way to Harlem in the 1920s, an era better known as the Harlem Renaissance (Bronski et al., 2023). This transformative era saw women such as Gladys Bentley,

Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, and A'Lelia Walker dress in men's clothing or in *drag* and host lavish parties for New York City's queer Black creative and elite (Bronski et al., 2023).

Writers such as Audre Lorde, Leslie Feinberg, and Jewel Gomez celebrated queer life in poetry, prose, and non-fiction narratives while synthesizing the varying experiences of women who identified as lesbian, transgender, bisexual, or non-binary. While women were involved in the amplification of queer rights throughout the world, gay task forces, organizations, and associations tended to be male-centric, leaving out many lesbian and women's issues (Bronski et al., 2023). Same-gender loving women sought to incorporate their agenda with women's rights groups such as the National Organization for Women (NOW). However, too much resistance and omission prevented the merging of white women's feminist ideals and Black women's urgent pathway to equality (Black Feminism, 2021; Harris, 2003; Jackson, 2016).

Racial divides plagued the LGBTQ+ movement for equality as well. The Black lesbians of Boston's Combahee River Collective (CRC) drafted their 1977 Collective Statement, establishing their mission to combat racism, sexism, heterosexism, class oppression, and imperialism (Bronski et al., 2023). Named for the Combahee River Raid of the American Civil War, which was planned and led by Harriet Tubman, the CRC understood that Black lesbians had to fight oppression on multiple fronts simultaneously (Bronski et al., 2023). A decade before Kimberle Crenshaw (1988) coined the word *intersectionality* for the social theory depicting the way different social inequalities "intersect" to create unique conditions of hardship for an individual or group, the CRC's mission and manifesto addressed the reality that Black lesbians were the victim of

interlocking oppressions institutionalized by capitalism, imperialism, and patriarchy (Bronski et al., 2023).

Rather than bemoan the multiplying oppressions endured by queer Black women, the CRC forged lasting art and personal policy around it. Black feminist and lesbian culture were amplified in the music of *Sweet Honey in the Rock* and the literary works of Gloria Naylor and Alice Walker. The preeminent voice of the queer Black woman experience was self-identified Black, lesbian, mother, warrior, poet Audre Lorde. Lorde celebrated her various identities of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation and inspired others, stating, the identities of race, gender, and sexual orientation are often used by by society as tools of isolation, but should instead be reasons for growth and liberation (Lorde, 1984b).

While gay and lesbian baby boomers considered the word *queer* a homophobic slur, the current generation of millennials and Generation Z embrace the word queer and concepts of non-binary existence with a freedom unknown by older gay men and lesbians (Perlman, 2019; Rocheleau, 2019). In response to the increased homophobia exhibited during the late 1980s as a result of the growing AIDS crisis, LGBTQ+ agencies and activists used queer to defuse attacks on the community (Bronski et al., 2023). By the early 1990s, queer identity groups formed in cities throughout the United States, and *queer theory* and *queer studies* became topics of research in higher education (Bronski et al., 2023). Queer identity freedom and bravery derived from the gay civil rights era born of the Stonewall riots of 1969, the AIDS epidemic of the 1980s and 1990s, and into mainstream pop culture in the new millennium.

Self-Identity and Disclosure in the Workplace

Despite these unquantifiable strides in equality and visibility, LGBTQ citizens are still forcibly invisible in the workplace. Factors related to employment and personal security often compel LGBTQ citizens to remain quiet or private about their sexual orientation or sexual identity. Unlike race or gender, determining one's sexual orientation or sexual identity may require disclosure by the person identifying as LGBTQ+. Because sexual orientation and sexual identity require disclosure, colleagues may not know whether a person identifies as gay or straight, whereas race and gender can be determined by sight (HRC Foundation, 2023; International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Intersex Association, 2016). With the option of silence about one's sexual orientation or identity, one's queerness serving as a deterrent for career ascension is assumed less frequently than the other two more obvious identities (HRC, 2020; Huffman et al., 2008).

A primary workplace silencing of LGBTQ Americans was the 1993 Department of Defense's new policy for non-heterosexual members of the United States Armed Forces. Directive 1304.26, commonly known as "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" or DADT, allowed members of the LGBTQ community to serve under the condition that they kept their sexual orientation hidden. Personnel in positions were not permitted to inquire about or harass a person based on their sexuality. Openly gay or lesbian soldiers were still barred from serving and displays or declarations disclosing one's identity as queer was grounds for dismissal from the military (Bronski et al., 2023). DADT created a precedent for corporations and other businesses to adopt similar practices, making the workplace hazardous for individuals to be their full, authentic selves. While the original concept of the policy was designed to be inclusive, the practice of silencing people based on their

identity proved to be stifling and dangerous. With the legalization of gay marriage with the Right to Marry Act and other protective policies, the DADT policy was finally repealed in 2010 (Bronski et al., 2023).

As the number of women who outwardly identify as queer through verbal disclosure or in the depiction of domestic life with a partner or spouse increases, so does the frequency upon which sexual orientation and sexual identity are used to stifle career advancement through discrimination. As a result, queer Black women often refrain from revealing details about their personal life that may identify them as queer. Many individuals fear the repercussions of coming out, so they avoid revealing their sexual orientation/sexual identity in the workplace (Ragins et al., 2007; Ragins & Cornwell, 2001).

LGBTQ+ Leaders in Higher Education

Of the 96,000 respondents participating in *The Personal and the Political: Attitudes to LGBTI People Around the World* study by the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Intersex Association (2016), 65% of the U.S. study participants responded that they knew someone who identified as LGBTQ+. However, that number dropped to 35% of the respondents who knew whether they worked with someone who identified as LGBTQ+. The fear of disclosure, the risk of discrimination, the lack of federal protections, and the perverse stigmatization of queer life are reasons co-workers remain private about their sexual identity and sexual orientation (Bell et al., 2011; Benozzo et al., 2015; Guittar & Rayburn, 2015).

Social Identity Theory

Psychologists Henri Tajfel and John Turner (1979) proposed that the groups people belong to are essential sources of pride and self-esteem. Social identity refers to the characteristics, traits, actions, and rules to which a group of people may claim to belong to a group or membership (Fearon, 1999). Social identity may be informed by occupation, education, or nationality. Once an individual is associated with others within the same social group, change for empowerment can take place. While belonging to a group can give an individual the security and reinforcement of a community, an inevitable *othering* takes form as anyone outside the group is identified as separate (Davis et al., 2018). Tajfel identified that for every in-group (us), there forms an out-group (them) and the birth of Social Identity Theory. Social Identity Theory states that members of an in-group will seek negative aspects of an out-group to enhance their self-image (McLeod, 2019; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This ordered stereotyping and prejudice views birth, racism, sexism, and homophobia, elements implicitly or explicitly impacting hiring practices in higher education leadership.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality examines the interdependence between multiple identity variables and social inequities and exclusions (Bowleg, 2008; Crenshaw, 1989; Garcia, 2019). Intersectionality is an “analysis claiming that systems of race, social class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, and age form mutually constructed features of social organization, which shape Black women's experiences and, in turn, are shaped by Black women” (Collins, 2000, p. 320). Crenshaw argued that "Black women are sometimes excluded from feminist theory and antiracist policy discourse because both are predicated

on a discrete set of experiences that often does not accurately reflect the intersection of race and gender" (p. 140). Typical in examining social inequities is isolating one particular problem, be it racism, sexism, or homophobia. Rarely do social and civil rights movements compound societal issues for resolution (Hesse-Biber, 1986). In matters of race, Black women stand behind Black men's privilege (Jean-Marie, 2006; Ward, 2004). In cases of gender equality, Black women stand behind the privilege of White women (King, 1988; Ward, 2004). On civil rights issues for the LGBTQ movement, Black women fall behind White men and women and Black men (Alimahomed, 2010; Lane, 2015). The compound inequities experienced by queer Black women require understanding how these identity variables intersect and impact their lived experiences. Understanding the impact of these compounded inequities birthed the Multiple Jeopardy Theory (Bowleg, 2008; Bowleg et al., 2003; King, 1988).

Multiple Jeopardy Theory

The invisibility of Black women in social inequities prompted scholars such as Beverly Greene, Lisa Bowleg, Kimberle Crenshaw, and Gloria Ladson-Billings to develop research, literature, and theories to amplify their complicated experiences (Coles & Pasek, 2020). The first to introduce the notion that Black women had to navigate racism and sexism simultaneously as double jeopardy was the writer and feminist Frances Beal (1971). To further describe the dual discrimination of racism and sexism experienced by Black women, Beal (2008) wrote about the lack of reprieve Black women experience regarding marginalized treatment as Black women suffer the full burden of anyone with dark skin, but the additional suffering endured at the hands of all men. Beal continued to expound on how the double jeopardy experience by Black women impacted

their earning power but did not incorporate classism or economic inequities in her double jeopardy framework, which focused on race and gender.

Expanding double jeopardy to inequities such as class, religion, and sexual orientation is realized in the work of Dr. Deborah K. King. King, a sociologist and scholar at Dartmouth College, developed *Multiple Jeopardy*, a theoretical framework that extends jeopardies and disrupts the idea that multiple inequities are experienced as additive discriminations. King (1988) explained that multiple jeopardy impacts are significant. King emphasized the multiple jeopardy or compounding of overt acts of discrimination as well as daily microaggressions experienced by Black women, unlike the single jeopardy experienced by Black men or White women. The subjects for this study were invited to express their whole experience with multiple jeopardy related to their daily lives and professional aspirations.

Triple Jeopardy

Dr. Beverly Greene focused her research on Black lesbians in the development of her conceptual framework, Triple Jeopardy (Greene, 1996). Triple Jeopardy focuses on the compounded oppressions experienced by queer women of color and their impact on their mental health and general wellness. Greene's analysis of the psychological and cultural ramifications of self-identifying lesbians in communities of color provides context for the stresses queer Black women must endure at home, at work, and in greater society.

The framework for this study, Triple Jeopardy (Greene, 1996), develops first from identity, the variables that serve as the ingredients of a person: a cisgender or transgender woman, Black, and a member of the LGBTQ community. The focus then shifts to Social

Identity Theory, the social collectives towards which queer Black women gravitate for comfort and allegiance. The interconnectedness of identity variables is then assessed through Crenshaw's Intersectionality (1989) lens to explore the Multiple Jeopardy (King, 1988) endured by queer Black women.

Identity establishes the baseline describing the independent variables that create an individual (Stryker, 1968). Social Identity Theory addresses the phenomenon where individuals, using the variables of their identity, find others of like identity to form groups and categories in society (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Intersectionality addresses the general relationship between combinations of identifying variables (Crenshaw, 1989). Finally, the Multiple Jeopardy Theory considers what happens when the combination of identifying variables creates oppressive episodes for the individual, compounded by the number of marginalized identities that the individual possesses (King, 1988). Collectively, these four theories best explain the restrictive experience queer Black women endure as both individuals and as a collective in higher education leadership: Triple Jeopardy (Greene, 1996).

Summary of the Chapter

In this chapter, the researcher presented a review of previous literature related to this study exploring the experiences of queer Black women executives in higher education. The literature review included a historical overview of the *unstoppable force* of queer Black women versus the *immovable object* of conservative higher education leadership. The literature review covered an overview of the conceptual framework, Triple Jeopardy, for this qualitative phenomenological study based on the theoretical

concepts of the Identity Theory, Social Identity Theory, Intersectionality, and Multiple Jeopardy Theory.

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

"I have a duty to speak the truth as I see it and share not just my triumphs, not just the things that felt good, but the pain. The intense, often unmitigated pain. It is important to share how I know survival is survival and not just a walk through the rain" (Lorde, 1990, p. 104).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

> *It is learning how to stand alone, unpopular, and sometimes reviled, and how to make common cause with those others identified as outside the structures in order to define and seek a world in which we can all flourish. It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths. For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. And this fact is only threatening to those women who still define the master's house as their only source of support.* (Lorde, 1979, p. 19)

This study examined the lived experiences of queer Black women executive leaders in higher education employed a qualitative research design and methodology. This qualitative study, through a phenomenological approach, centered on capturing the participants' lived experiences with the intersection of their race, gender, sexual orientation, and their occupation as senior-level executives in higher education. This chapter details the data-gathering methods, a profile of the participants, interview procedures, and the analysis methods used in the study.

As mentioned in Chapter I, queer Black women must dissect, prioritize, and hide aspects of themselves for acceptance in the academy (Bowleg, 2008; Greene, 1996; King, 1988). Despite the tradition of Black women being at the forefront of social change, such as women's suffrage (Lane, 2015; Walker, 1973), the civil rights movement for racial

equality (Chatelain & Asoka, 2015), the trend of visibility among the LGBTQ community in mainstream society (Flood, 2019; Lewis, 2016; Wilson, 2009), and data reflecting of the woefully low number of queer Black women who serve as university executives, there is a paucity of literature and research charting the accession of queer Black women leaders in higher education. This study was an exploratory and descriptive examination of queer Black women leaders in executive positions, namely, Vice President, Provost, President, Chancellor, at institutions of higher learning. This study examined intersectional experiences and pathways of ascension to executive positions for queer Black women in higher education leadership. The following questions framed the study:

1. What are the personal barriers for queer Black women leaders who hold or aspire to hold executive leadership positions in higher education?
2. What are the career and workplace stressors experienced among queer Black women leaders who hold or aspire to hold executive leadership positions in higher education?
3. What are the career development and mentorship resources that serve as pathways for queer Black women higher education leaders for promotion to Vice President, Provost, President, or Chancellor?

Research Design

Using the foundational principles of qualitative research, this research project was an exploratory study designed to yield descriptive data to depict the lived experiences of queer Black women leaders at the executive level in higher education. Qualitative research is an interpretive approach that enabled me to study the participants' experiences

through interviews, recordings, and conversations (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The primary method of data collection was semi-structured interviews conducted via Zoom. The decision to study queer Black women higher education executives resulted from a narrow research history and literature review as well as the aspirational objective of uncovering pathways to leadership opportunities.

This qualitative study applied a phenomenological approach to address the research questions. Phenomenology methods of research capture participants' lived experiences (Guido et al., 2010; Perl & Noldon, 2000). The conceptual framework for the study, Triple Jeopardy (Greene, 1996), is based on the progression of the following theories: Identity Theory (Stryker, 1968), the Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Tajfel & Turner, 2004), Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989), and Multiple Jeopardy Theory (King, 1988). Combining these theories is uniquely appropriate for researching the lived experiences of queer Black women leaders as Triple Jeopardy addresses the multiplied variables of identity how queer Black women navigate relationships based on their identity and their response to acts of discrimination based on race, gender, and sexual orientation (Bowleg, 2008; Greene, 1996).

Identity Theory establishes the baseline describing the independent descriptors that create an individual (Stryker, 1968). Social Identity Theory addresses the phenomenon where individuals, using the variables of their identity, find others of like identity to form groups and categories in society (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Intersectionality addresses the general relationship between combinations of identifying variables (Crenshaw, 1989). Finally, the Multiple Jeopardy Theory considers what happens when the combination of identifying variables creates oppressive episodes for

the individual, compounded by the number of marginalized identities that the individual possesses (King, 1988). These four theories explain the restrictive experience queer Black women endure as individuals and as a collective in higher education leadership: Triple Jeopardy (Greene, 1996).

Analytical Paradigm

With a focus on challenging power constructs, inequality, and social change through the participants' narratives and everyday lived experiences, the analytical paradigm for this research is the interpretivism paradigm (Dudovskiy, 2019). The interpretivist paradigm aims to understand the subjective world of human experience (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). In the interpretivism paradigm, emphasis is placed on understanding the individual and her interpretation of the world around her. The fundamental premise of this paradigm is that reality is socially constructed (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). In the case of this study, the history and practices of higher education leadership relating to queer Black women were examined via the commonalities of the lived experiences of queer Black women higher education executives. While participants' experiences are unique to each individual, the collective experience possessed common themes built from the social constructs of privilege, homophobia, misogyny, and systemic racism (Bowleg, 2008; King, 1988).

The participants conveyed their understanding of privilege systems, the cultural norms of higher education, and the various episodes of negotiations when progressing up into their leadership positions. Indeed, their stories revealed situations and individuals who impacted their ascension as executives because of their professional or social roles (Jackson & Harris, 2005; Manning, 2018; Scharrón-Del Río, 2018; Waring, 2003;).

This study highlighted pathways to success and avenues of representation for queer Black women executives in higher education. Through the testimonies of the participants and a review of current practices in the academy, this research examined long-standing practices that hinder marginalized populations, particularly queer Black women, from ascending to executive positions at the same rate as their cisgender, seemingly heterosexual White male counterparts. When pathways are illuminated, objectives for promoting human rights, equitable distribution of power, and personal agency over career development will be realized.

Phenomenological Approach

Phenomenological epistemology validates perceptions and studies how things seem rather than how they are, focusing not only on people's subjective experiences but also on their interpretations of the world, reflecting the heart of knowing (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2007). Phenomenology also allows a community of stories and lived experiences to provide context for a phenomenon. This study examined the personal experiences and workplace stressors within higher education leadership as endured by queer Black women. This research also asserted that more research is needed for more equitable ascension opportunities for a historically marginalized demographic.

Phenomenology is a process and a method (Lester, 1999; Neubauer et al., 2019; Qutoshi, 2018). The procedure involves studying a few subjects through extensive and prolonged engagement to develop patterns and relationships of meaning. These engagements can include observations, case studies, and interviews designed to examine every day lived experiences shared among the research participants (Creswell, 2007; Lester, 1999; Qutoshi, 2018; Neubauer et al., 2019).

Through semi-structured interviews, this study explored the individual lived experiences among queer Black women who serve or aspire to serve in executive leadership roles at institutions of higher learning. The participants were selected based on their unique status, related experience, and knowledge of the conservative culture of higher education executive leadership. By focusing on the lived experiences of four participants, this study explored the phenomena of conservative hiring or promotion practices that serve as barriers to queer Black women executive leaders.

The study focused on uncovering lived experiences from the perspectives of four queer Black women executive leaders holding executive positions in higher education. Conducting a study with this demographic allowed a contextualization of the conditions the women negotiated in their professional environments. This study conveyed more about how they understood their leadership experiences in public, private, and religiously affiliated institutions of higher learning. The primary data collection method was semi-structured interviews via Zoom. Each participant's audio and video recording allowed the study to capture their verbal and nonverbal expressions.

Description of the Population and Sample

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Prairie View A&M University approved the design, data collection plan, and analysis procedure before recruiting participants (see Appendix A). The recruitment of participants included correspondence with leading organizations and associations known to support career development and offer mentorship to queer Black women in higher education leadership. Specifically, the LGBTQ Presidents of Higher Education Association, the Association of Black Women in Higher Education, the American Association of Blacks in Higher Education, the

American Council on Education Women's Network, and the HERS Institute were contacted for participant recruitment. I posted recruitment flyers on social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to solicit volunteer participants (see Appendix B). These groups included Black Educators, Black Educators Association, Qualitative Researchers in Education, LGBTQ Women of Color in Higher Education, Association of Black Women in Higher Education, Black Women in Higher Education, Minority Doctoral Network Inc., and Binders Full of Women and Nonbinary People of Color in Higher Education.

Study Participants

Purposeful sampling is a research technique where the researcher selects the possible participants based on particular characteristics (Patton, 2002). Purposeful sampling allows a researcher to deliberately select participants, settings, and activities relevant to the research questions and the study's goal (Maxwell, 2013). The participant criteria for this study included:

1. Women, either cisgender or transgender;
2. Women who identify as Black and/or African-American;
3. Women who identify within the LGBTQ community;
4. Are currently or previously employed as full-time cabinet-level administrators (i.e., chancellor, president, provost, vice-president);
5. Held their position (or previous position) for a minimum of three years;
6. Employed in a full-time capacity in a public or private degree-granting institution;
7. Possess budgetary, strategic, operational, personnel, or departmental responsibilities; and

8. Regarded as a member (or the leader) of the institution's executive leadership team or cabinet.

The gap in the literature on the lived experiences of the study's population and their pathways to higher education executive leadership inspired this study.

Instruments / Measures

Once the participants were determined, the second phase of data collection took place in the form of a recorded interview. The participants answered 30 interview questions (see Appendix F) in four sections for this study. The four sections included the welcome and questions directly addressing the three research questions. Participants' identities were coded and hidden in the study. All interviews were video recorded via Zoom, transcribed, and thematically coded based on the conceptual framework of Triple Jeopardy (Greene, 1996). I conducted one-on-one interviews, following an interview protocol. The Zoom video conferencing platform included a transcription feature that offered an initial transcription of the recorded interviews. I performed a more thorough transcription of the interviews to confirm that each individual interview was transcribed verbatim. Ultimately, all data gathering and deciphering efforts amplified the experiences, challenges, and strategies for queer Black women executive leaders in higher education.

Data Collection

Data collection took place in two phases: a demographic questionnaire to determine participation eligibility and a semi-structured, one-on-one interview via Zoom. First, a demographic questionnaire collected data to determine whether the participant met the interview profile qualifications (see Appendix E). The questionnaire included

questions about the participant's self-identities regarding race, gender, sexual orientation, occupation, the institution of employment, longevity in position, general duties performed in that position, and willingness to participate in an interview. Individuals eligible to participate in the study self-identified as females, either cisgender or transgender. The participants identified as African American, Black American, or Black. The participants were either currently or formally employed in a provost, vice president, or president position in administrative affairs, academic affairs, or student affairs at an institution of higher learning in the United States. While the target sample size for this study was 10 to 12 participants (Baker & Edwards, 2012; Dworkin, 2012), the final sample size was four. Participants were contacted via email with a recruitment communication to ensure they met the criteria to participate in the study. Once the qualifying participants were identified, I invited each of them to a one-on-one interview via Zoom.

Data was collected from a demographic questionnaire and a filmed interview of the qualified participants. The questionnaire collected demographic data to determine whether the participant met the interview profile qualifications. The questionnaire included demographic questions about the participant's self-identities regarding race, gender, sexual orientation, occupation, the institution of employment, longevity in position, general duties performed, and willingness to participate in the filmed interview. During the interviews, I asked the participants to share their experiences in higher education leadership from the vantage point of their various social identities as educators, executives, and Americans.

Data Analysis

Following the conclusion of the interviews and the compilation of all collected data, the information underwent a systematic process of separation and analysis to uncover recurring themes. Each recording and corresponding transcriptions were meticulously examined to identify shared statements and insights. This rigorous analysis resulted in the creation of a comprehensive list of common themes, offering valuable insights into the collected data.

Each interview was transcribed verbatim as verbatim transcription of recorded interviews provided the best database for analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The transcripts were then analyzed and coded for themes in a two-step process, including open coding and coding based on the conceptual framework. Ultimately, all data gathering and deciphering efforts served the mission of amplifying the experiences, challenges, and strategies for queer Black women executives in higher education.

The process for data analysis included coding procedures, quality measures, and the use of technology to analyze data obtained in the study. Following each interview, I transcribed each interview verbatim and wrote research memos to capture the nuances of participants' verbal cues, such as pauses and shifts in vocal quality. I then aggregated the data through themes that emerged from the shared and unique experiences of the participants. I reviewed the data repeatedly through the lens of the conceptual framework, Triple Jeopardy (Greene, 1996).

Coding Procedures

Once the interviews were completed and all other data collected, the information was organized in a color-coded spreadsheet matrix and analyzed for common themes.

Each interview was transcribed verbatim. "Verbatim transcription of recorded interviews provides the best database for analysis" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 131). Zoom's built-in transcription services aided in the preliminary transcription of each interview. I conducted multiple assessments of the transcriptions to ensure fidelity with the actual interviews. The transcripts were analyzed and coded for themes in a two-step process, including open coding and coding based on the conceptual framework. Ultimately, all data gathering and deciphering efforts served the mission of amplifying the experiences, challenges, and strategies for queer Black women executives in higher education.

Ethical Considerations

The research assured trustworthiness by adhering to Guba and Lincoln's (1982) four tenets for judging the soundness of qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. I employed the following procedures to ensure the quality of the study. To ensure credibility, I used triangulation with all interview data with other research data, including the documents and online research, to ensure that all data was correctly recorded and that the data was credible and verifiable (Carter et al., 2014). I demonstrated transferability by illustrating that the research study's findings applied to other contexts, such as similar situations, populations, and phenomena. Regarding confirmability, I asserted that the findings are based on participants' responses and not any potential bias or personal motivations of the researcher (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). Finally, dependability was assured as I described any changes in the setting and how these changes affected how I approached the study. I maintained that other researchers could repeat the study and that the findings would be consistent (Guba & Lincoln, 1982).

Summary of the Chapter

This exploratory study examined the lived experiences of queer Black women leaders at the executive level in higher education. Participants were asked to complete a questionnaire to determine if they met the participant profile qualifications for the study. The participant criteria for this study included:

1. Women, either cisgender or transgender;
2. Women who identify as Black and/or African-American;
3. Women who identify within the LGBTQ community;
4. Are currently or previously employed as full-time cabinet-level administrators (i.e., chancellor, president, provost, vice-president);
5. Held their position (or previous position) for a minimum of three years;
6. Employed in a full-time capacity in a public or private degree-granting institution;
7. Possess budgetary, strategic, operational, personnel, or departmental responsibilities; and
8. Regarded as a member (or the leader) of the institution's executive leadership team or cabinet.

The primary method of data collection was filmed semi-structured interviews via Zoom. The decision to study queer Black women in higher education executives resulted from a literature review and the aspirational objective of uncovering pathways to leadership opportunities. The data was analyzed by noting patterns and themes.

"The love expressed between women is particular and powerful because we have had to love in order to live; love has been our survival" (Lorde, 1984a, p. 142).

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

"It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept, and celebrate those differences" (Lorde, 1984a, p. 136).

This study examined the shared experiences of out, queer Black women who serve in executive leadership positions in higher education. Specifically, it explored personal identity related to workplace stressors and professional ascension barriers. In addition, this qualitative phenomenological study aimed to amplify the experiences of queer Black women executive leaders and illuminate pathways for career ascension and professional development. This study included four participants, all self-identifying as queer Black women who served in executive leadership positions in higher education. After the IRB approval in early May 2023, the women participated in semi-structured interviews the following month. The interview was structured to address three research questions related to personal identity, work stressors, and pathways in career ascension at institutes of higher learning.

Restatement of the Purpose

This chapter discusses the concepts that emerged from the qualitative data collected and an analysis of the data obtained from the participants in the study. This chapter presents findings from data collected and analyzed using the Triple Jeopardy conceptual framework (Greene, 1996). Triple Jeopardy is based on the theoretical concepts of the Identity Theory (Stryker, 1968), the Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Tajfel & Turner, 2004), Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989), and Multiple

Jeopardy Theory (King, 1988). Combining these theories is uniquely appropriate for researching the lived experiences of queer Black women leaders as Triple Jeopardy addresses the multiplied variables of identity, how queer Black women navigate relationships based on their identity and their response to acts of discrimination based on race, gender, and sexual orientation (Bowleg, 2008; Greene, 1996).

Identity Theory establishes the baseline describing the independent variables that create an individual (Stryker, 1968). Social Identity Theory addresses the phenomenon where individuals, using the variables of their identity, find others of like identity to form groups and categories in society (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Intersectionality addresses the general relationship between combinations of identifying variables (Crenshaw, 1989). Finally, the Multiple Jeopardy Theory considers what happens when the combination of identifying variables creates oppressive episodes for the individual, compounded by the number of marginalized identities that the individual possesses (King, 1988). These four theories explain the restrictive experience queer Black women endure as individuals and as a collective in higher education leadership: Triple Jeopardy (Greene, 1996).

Research Question

This study was an exploratory and descriptive examination of queer Black women leaders in executive positions of Vice President, Provost, President, Chancellor, at institutions of higher learning. This study examined intersectional experiences and pathways of ascension to executive positions for queer Black women in higher education leadership. The following questions framed the study:

1. What are the personal barriers for queer Black women leaders who hold or aspire to hold executive leadership positions in higher education?

2. What are the career and workplace stressors experienced among queer Black women leaders who hold or aspire to hold executive leadership positions in higher education?
3. What are the career development and mentorship resources that serve as pathways for queer Black women higher education leaders for promotion to Vice President, Provost, President, or Chancellor?

Description of the Sample

The participant criteria for this study included (a) women, either cisgender or transgender; (b) women who identified as Black and/or African-American; (c) women who identified within the LGBTQ community; (d) were currently or previously employed as full-time senior-level administrators, that is, chancellor, president, provost, vice-president; (e) held their position, or previous position, for a minimum of three years; (f) employed in a full-time capacity in a public or private degree-granting institution; (g) possessed budgetary, strategic, operational, personnel or departmental responsibilities; and (h) regarded as a member or the leader of the institution's executive leadership team or cabinet.

Participants Demographics

Given that the names of the participants and their institutions are confidential within this study, I gave the participants pseudonyms: QBW1 through QBW4. Any identifiable information that could reveal the participants or their institutions was omitted. Table 1 describes the participants' personal identification demographics, such as age, marital status, and racial identity. Additionally, Table 1 reveals that all participants identify as African American, in their 60s, holding doctoral or professional degrees.

Table 1

Participant Demographics: Age, Race, and Education

Participant's Pseudonym	Age	Race	Education
QBW1	64	Black / African American	Doctoral / Professional Degree
QBW2	63	Black / African American	Doctoral / Professional Degree
QBW3	66	Black / African American	Doctoral / Professional Degree
QBW4	62	Black / African American	Doctoral / Professional Degree

Table 2 displays the gender identity, sexual orientation, and marital status of each participant. All four participants identify as "Cisgender Female." Table 2 shows that three of the four participants identify as "Lesbian," while QBW3 identifies as "Bisexual." Finally, Table 2 reveals three participants are married or in domestic partnerships, whereas QBW2 is a widow.

Table 2

Participant Demographics: Gender Identity, Sexual Orientation, Marital Status

Participant's Pseudonym	Gender Identity	Sexual Orientation	Marital Status
QBW1	Cisgender Female	Lesbian	Married / Domestic Partnership
QBW2	Cisgender Female	Lesbian	Widowed
QBW3	Cisgender Female	Bisexual	Married / Domestic Partnership
QBW4	Cisgender Female	Lesbian	Married / Domestic Partnership

Table 3 and Table 4 illustrate the professional experience of each participant by current position and previous position, respectively. The two tables establish a range of professional experience. Three of the four participants led or are leading an institute of higher learning as their president. Two participants worked exclusively at four-year private predominately White institutions (PWI), while two gained experiences exclusively at two-year public schools. None of the participants lead or led a Historically Black College or University (HBCU).

Table 3

Current Executive Leadership Experience

Participant's Pseudonym	Current Position	In Current Position for at least 3 years?	Institution Type	HBCU?
QBW1	CoS to President	Yes	4-year Private	No
QBW2	VP	Yes	2-year Public	No
QBW3	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
QBW4	President	No	4-year Private	No

Table 4

Previous Executive Leadership Experience

Participant's Pseudonym	Previous Position	In Previous Position for at least 3 years?	Institution Type	HBCU?
QBW1	President	Yes	4-year Private	No
QBW2	VP	Yes	2-year Public	No
QBW3	President, Chancellor, VP	Yes	2-year Public	No
QBW4	President, Provost, VP	Yes	4-year Private	No

QBW1 serves as Chief of Staff for the president of a four-year private PWI in the Pacific Northwest. She has served for at least three years in her position. Previously, QBW1 served as president of two other institutions, both four-year private PWIs. QBW1 holds a doctoral degree, is a member of a Divine Nine sorority, and served in the Marine Corps. In her career, QBW1 has served as a director of academic affairs, an associate vice president of academic affairs, an organizational diversity officer, and president of two universities. QBW1 is a 64-year-old self-identifying African American cisgender lesbian currently married.

QBW2, a widow, describes herself as a 63-year-old African American, cisgender lesbian. She serves as a vice president for a two-year public community college system in the South. QBW2 served in the military, as did her father and siblings.
In her career, QBW2 served as an associate vice president. QBW2 joined her institution in 2002 and has served in various executive leadership roles over the last 20 years.

QBW3, 66, retired from higher education leadership after serving as vice president, chancellor, and president on the West Coast over the last two decades. QBW3 self-identifies as a bisexual, cisgender woman who is currently married. While QBW3 is no longer serving an institution as an executive leader, her consulting firm serves as a mentoring and support organization for LGBTQ+ people who aspire to ascend into leadership positions in higher education.

QBW4, 62, is the president of a four-year private college in the Northeast region of the United States. While she is new to her current position having served for fewer than three years, QBW4 has led other institutions in the roles of vice president, provost, and president. QBW4 self-identifies as a cisgender lesbian who is married.

Presentation of Data and Results

Interviewing the four participants in this study yielded significant findings relating to the connection between personal identity as a queer, Black woman and experienced workplace stressors, professional barriers, and pathways for career ascension. Each participant shared their experiences navigating how their thrice marginalized identity may or may not have factored into their success as executive leaders in higher education. Interviews were conducted via the Zoom video conferencing platform. Each participant communicated their pride in identifying as Black people, women, and members of the LGBTQ+ community, collectively and separately. They each articulated episodes in their careers where their identity impacted their leadership styles and effectiveness in higher education. Below are the detailed findings from the participants relating to each research question that guided the study.

Trustworthiness

The study prioritized research rigor and scholarly value by adhering to the four essential tenets of trustworthiness, as Shenton (2004) outlined. These components, namely credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, are crucial in ensuring the study's integrity and reliability in the academic context. The research maintains a strong foundation and contributes significantly to the scholarly discourse by addressing these aspects.

For this study, credibility was maintained by ensuring that all participants self-identified as Black or African American, women of the LGBTQ+ community, and executive leaders in higher education, which confirmed that responses accurately depicted the lived experiences of queer Black women who serve as executive leaders in

higher education. A semi-structured interview was adopted to ensure that the participants could articulate their experiences in as much or as little detail as they wished. The study utilized data source triangulation, which is defined as “involving the collection of data from different types of people, including individuals, groups, families, and communities, to gain multiple perspectives and validation of data” (Carter et al., 2014, p. 545).

The study adhered faithfully to its predefined sampling criteria, ultimately selecting four queer Black women who hold executive leadership roles within the realm of higher education to maintain transferability. The participants engaged in semi-structured interviews lasting for 90 minutes, providing a comprehensive and in-depth exploration of their experiences and insights. This rigorous approach enhances the study's ability to apply its findings to broader contexts and situations within the field.

Dependability for trustworthiness ensures study replication. Data collection consisted of one-on-one interviews via Zoom, with each participant being queer Black women and executive leaders in higher education. Each participant completed a demographic survey to determine their study eligibility. If they agreed to join the study, the individuals participated in interviews, which lasted between 60 and 90 minutes for each person. The structured interview guide was followed for each participant, consisting of three main research questions and respective interview questions for each. Each participant was allowed to share their experiences freely, only to be interrupted if clarification was needed for their responses. Participant replies were recorded on the Zoom Video conferencing platform.

Finally, confirmability for trustworthiness addressed researcher bias. Objectivity was maintained by allowing participants to address the question they saw fit without

prompting or guidance. All four addressed the research and interview questions through personal narratives and professional experiences.

Interview Protocol

The interview protocol designed to navigate this study was presented in four parts: questions establishing the participants' identities and the three research questions of this study. Interview questions were developed based on these research questions:

1. What are the personal barriers for queer Black women leaders who hold or aspire to hold executive leadership positions in higher education?
2. What are the career and workplace stressors experienced among queer Black women leaders who hold or aspire to hold executive leadership positions in higher education?
3. What are the career development and mentorship resources that serve as pathways for queer Black women higher education leaders for promotion to Vice President, Provost, President, or Chancellor?

The four parts of the interview protocol followed the progression of theories that collectively culminated in the conceptual framework Triple Jeopardy: Identity Theory (Stryker, 1968); Social Identity Theory (Taijfel & Turner, 1979); Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989); Multiple Jeopardy Theory (King, 1988); Triple Jeopardy (Greene, 1996).

Findings

Part I: Identity

The first interview questions related to each participant's identity, gauging their relationship and history to their race, gender, and sexual orientation. Aligned with the

Identity Theory (Stryker, 1968; Stryker & Burke, 2000) and the Social Identity Theory (Taijfel & Turner, 1979), the first group of questions asks the participants about the variables of their identity and how they forged relationships and navigated personal experiences based on their identity. Stryker's Identity Theory (1968) establishes the baseline of the independent variables that create an individual. I asked each participant how they felt, personally and internally, about being Black, being women, and being queer. I then followed with questions about times in their lives when they felt empowered and less powerful through the lens of their identity and how they navigated relationships with other people who may or may not have shared those same identities. Taijfel and Turner's Social Identity Theory (1979) considers how humans find others of like identity to form social groups and categories. This section of the interview explored why forging groups and relationships based on identity variables is crucial to career development, mentorship, and enduring workplace stressors (Glover, 2017; Scharrón-Del Río, 2018). Table 5 summarizes the theory and themes from the literature review and the participants' responses.

Table 5

Identity

Theory	Interview Questions	Theme	Research Question
Identity	IQ1: What does your identity as a BLACK person mean to you?	Amplifying Blackness	RS1: What are the personal barriers for queer Black women leaders who hold or aspire to hold executive leadership positions in higher education?
Social Identity	IQ1a: Tell me about a time in your life when being a BLACK person felt like a superpower.		RS1: What are the personal barriers for queer Black women leaders who hold or aspire to hold executive

			leadership positions in higher education?
Social Identity	IQ1b: Tell me about a time in your life when being a BLACK person did not feel as empowering.		RS1: What are the personal barriers for queer Black women leaders who hold or aspire to hold executive leadership positions in higher education?
Identity	IQ2: What does your identity as a WOMAN mean to you?	Amplifying Womanness	RS1: What are the personal barriers for queer Black women leaders who hold or aspire to hold executive leadership positions in higher education?
Social Identity	IQ2a: Tell me about a time in your life when being a WOMAN felt like a superpower.		RS1: What are the personal barriers for queer Black women leaders who hold or aspire to hold executive leadership positions in higher education?
Social Identity	IQ2b: Tell me about a time in your life when being a WOMAN did not feel as empowering.		RS1: What are the personal barriers for queer Black women leaders who hold or aspire to hold executive leadership positions in higher education?
Identity	IQ3: What does your identity as a QUEER person mean to you?	Amplifying Queerness	RS1: What are the personal barriers for queer Black women leaders who hold or aspire to hold executive leadership positions in higher education?
Social Identity	IQ3a: Tell me about a time in your life when being QUEER felt like a superpower.		RS1: What are the personal barriers for queer Black women leaders who hold or aspire to hold executive leadership positions in higher education?
Social Identity	IQ3b: Tell me about a time in your life when being QUEER did not feel as empowering.		RS1: What are the personal barriers for queer Black women leaders who hold or aspire to hold executive leadership positions in higher education?

Results

The resulting themes from the analysis of Part 1, the Personal Identity section of the interviews, were Amplifying Blackness, Amplifying Womanness, and Amplifying Queerness.

Theme 1.1: Amplifying Blackness

Participants in this study remarked proudly that their identity as Black people was foundational to their being. Each participant was proud to identify as "Black." QBW3's son referred to her as "uncomfortable Black," asserting that she "dilutes" her identity as a Black person to make other people comfortable. Another participant identified herself as "unapologetically Black," refusing to make excuses for the discomfort others may have in the presence of her Blackness. QBW3 said,

> It is the essence of my soul. It's the thing that makes me breathe. And everything else comes after that. And I know that, you know, particularly as women, we struggle because of the way we're socialized. We're so, you know, if we are mothers or sisters, or, you know, we identify as mothers and sisters and aunts…and you know all those types of things you know, we identify as women. I identify first as someone who is Black, not just Black, but Blackety, Black, Black, unapologetically Black. What my son sometimes calls that "uncomfortable Black." And not uncomfortable for me. But you know, uncomfortable for this world that really tries to dilute it in a way so that it makes…so that everybody else can have their comfort, you know. So, in terms of my identity being Black is first and foremost, and you know, and as a queer identified feminist…yeah, I just have to admit it loud that I'm Black first.

QBW4 said,

> Wow! It's who I am. It's not something I can avoid this. I was born this way. Okay, not only am I a Black person, but I'm a Black, queer Christian. And so, I claimed myself late in life. Okay, because I was afraid of who was going to say what, when, where, how. I was married to a man. And so my Blackness is… I'm unapologetically Black…how 'bout that?

All four participants had Southern roots. Two of the women spoke of their parents migrating north as a part of the Great Migration (Karenga, 2010; Hannah-Jones et al., 2019), the post-slavery exodus north by millions of Black people leaving the South for the North in search of better life and economic opportunities. The institution of Jim Crow was feared to stifle the success of Black people, and so families relocated to northern states in search of more equitable opportunities. QBW1 shared,

> Well, my identity as a Black person in this country is really rooted in many… I think of many different things. So, beginning with my parents, both born in the South…both born during the time of the 1930s. The great migration, they call it, from the South to the North. Matter of fact, my mother was only three years old when she, her mother, her grandmother, and her great-grandmother, all moved at the same time from Tupolo, Mississippi, near Gun Town, Mississippi, to Chicago, Illinois. And then my father from New Madrick, Missouri, to Chicago, Illinois. And so I identified with that because, notable, at least current day in the history books. Hopefully, they won't erase that or attempt to erase that part of it…is that great migration that came from the south…Blacks from the South to the north for a greater opportunity for their lives. In terms of, you know, work in their earning

potential and being able to raise a family, so on and so forth. So, I identify that way and have always been no matter where I have lived, and, you know, grew up. Born in Chicago, grew up in Southwest Michigan. That identity piece became very, very important. to me and being able to live in many different I say, what many different types of communities. So, communities, whether they were all Black, communities that happen to be all White, communities that happen to be mixed. So, I have a great appreciation for who I am, and that being recognized as important in a sense that others recognize that as important when I grow up.

QBW2 shared,

My identity means a lot to me. I came from a big family. There are seven kids in our family. My father. My parents are from South They were born in the thirties. and a lot has changed in my 62 years. You know, you figure when I was born in 1960. That thought of a Black President, or the thought of me being. you know, a having a doctorate degree, or I was in ROTC. I'm an officer and thought of me being an officer in the military. Was so foreign back then. so, as I navigate your life, I keep in mind that I am, you know, a Black woman, and that I need to identify with that. it does people Still, to this day you still feel the difference. When you walk into. I walk into cabinet. I still feel the difference. But when I send an email out, don't get responses. I still feel that that people try to say, Oh, yeah, it's all cool, everything's cool. But their actions aren’t necessarily in line with their words or their lack of action. I will say, I tell people it's easier to be gay in Austin than it is to be Black in Austin.

I asked QBW2 if she could expand on her statement regarding acceptance in her college's city. QBW2 stated,

> Well, because you know Austin supposed to be all hip right? Right, it's all hip and groovy and all these things. but you've got a real you know. You got a lot of we got a lot of white privilege in Austin. But at the same time, they want to come off as being cool. You know they say to keep Austin weird. And I say if you're a dog, they love you. They love animals. They love all that weird stuff. They love their tacos. Black people that they're not sure. they're still clutching their purses. They're still. You're still, you know. I yesterday met a friend of mine out. She was white…we met…a gay woman…we met out at a restaurant, and everything was fine. but 9 times out of 10, when I go to a decent restaurant, I'm usually the only Black person in. you know, except for maybe the help. you know. So you still have that you still have those barriers. But the gay [her first name] gets invited to the parties, right? The gay [her first name]. It's cool. Yeah, it's Black [her first name] that people still struggle with a little bit. when we moved here, that was the biggest thing. My partner and I was. Just wow! You know, it's so gay here it's, you know. It was kind of different, and we joined the church, and we will one of the few Black people there. But it's a big, gay community, and they welcomed us and loved on us. I think it was being gay than anything.

When asked when their identity as Black people felt like a superpower in their lives, they conveyed recent experiences from the administrative positions they recently or currently hold. QBW1 and QBW2 asserted they feel most powerful as Black people in

their field when other Black people, in particular, Black women, see them in roles of leadership: QBW1 said,

> I would say…maybe not a superpower as much as I felt very…a time where I was very influential. So, to be a Black woman, queer president of two universities, it's pretty influential. I mean, I don't like to talk about it in the sense that, you know, "look at me…look at me…I was the president of two universities…matter of fact, if you would have asked me that, I don't know…if you would have asked me that even a year before I completed my PhD, that I would be, you know, you figure next that you you're going to end up being a president of a college or a university. I would have told you no. But I found it was empowering to others because of my race which we could talk about later, how it was empowering to others. The color of my skin, how I identify both as a Black woman, but also identify as a lesbian as well, I believe, has made a different difference in terms of the students that I've encountered in the institutions in which I've led.

QBW2 said,

> Before I lived here, I lived in Georgia, and I worked at a community college in South Carolina. And I was…I don't know…I was an assistant dean or something…and I was over ESL…well, I was over literacy programs and programs with the state and things like that…with the local county and everything…literacy programs. And I remember once, my boss saying to me…I'd walked into a room and talking to some of the students, and then I walked out. And one of my instructors said, "When you walked out of that room," because it

was mostly Black women, she said, “You should have heard what they said. They were just in awe. You walked in, and you were very articulate. You were very professional, and they were just in awe of you.” And then I remember my boss telling me that she said…now this is the same boss you told me, “Don’t be too giddy about your girlfriend because people will notice it.” But she did tell me you should go in those classrooms more because they see you and it excites them that they see a Black woman in a position that you're in.” And I would say I didn't think of it as a position of power or anything, but that's when I learned that the effect that I can have, you know, just by your presence sometimes. So fast forward. I come here to Austin, and my first job is the executive director of adult education. So again, I have ESL and GED and all those programs. And I could see the impact I had by my presence and the position that I was in…not dealing with my peers, but more of the students. and especially the Black female students, where, you know, they're motivated, and they go, “What?! We could do this? We can be in these kind of positions. I need to get my GED,” you know, and I remember they would always want to be in classes with their friends, and we're trying to slate them in classes. And I would go. Do you want to get your GED, or do you want to hang with your friend? Let me know what you want to do. Because, you know, you get your GED, then you get a degree, then you get a nice job, then you can hang with your friends. Yeah, stuff like that. And so that's I felt my power more than I do in cabinet, or in a boardroom, or something like that. It's kind of your presence among your people.

Contrary to feeling empowered, when asked when their identity of being Black felt less empowering, three of the four participants had an anecdote conveying racial discrimination either in their childhood or in the workplace. Here is what QBW2 said,

> Before I started with [her college], I worked for a…I was a consultant for a couple of companies. One of the companies I was with, I could really tell the difference from other jobs that I had. We would all get together for these meetings out west…I can't remember, and I would be almost ignored. I would go out to meet with clients, and it was just different, you know, but somebody white walk into the room, and they would take over. Right? I felt at them, but I was only in that job for a year. But I will tell you here…and I love [her college], but I feel it here. I feel in here more over the last couple of years than I did when I first started here. So, as I moved up, I started to feel it. And I don't know what that is. And there was a time when I started at [her college]…I remember walking into a room, there were all these Black deans and everything. I was like. "Oh, my God, this is awesome." Now you walk in, and you, again, you're one of few people of color or women of color in the room, and there is a difference in the way you say something, and you're kind of ignored, or there's somebody else repeats it, and then it's gold when somebody else says it. So I feel like I'm going backward. and so, yeah, I feel it, to be honest with you, I feel it now in my current position.

QBW3 said,

> I can say the time when it didn't feel like a superpower when I was a child. When my mother was teaching us how to navigate…we were raised in the segregated South, and we were having to navigate…you know…kids go out for Halloween,

> we couldn't go because the Ku Klux Klan would chase Black children. I mean, we did go. The parents went...they drove you from house to house. You know how you 'drive, get in, get out, you drive, get in, get out"…you know, that kind of stuff, or you went right there in your neighborhood because Miss Olivia was waiting on the porch for you, you know? So, you know, I'm not trying to imply that I didn't have that kind of a childhood, and I didn't have those things, but we were raised, as children, to know that we had to survive the severity and the brutality, and the, quite frankly, just, the meanness and the inhumanity of racism. Right? So it didn't feel like a superpower then, though my mother, who was not formally educated, but was one of the most brilliant women I knew, you know, had us so proud of ourselves, of our Blackness, that you know, you wouldn't hear us articulate in a way that it was a burden. You know, it was just a way of life that you had to be smart about in order to, you know, to survive.

QBW4 said,

> I call myself the accidental President. I was happy at my Alma Mater. being the Associate Provost for undergraduate studies. The President and the Provost had a philosophical disagreement, and I think you know where I'm going with this, and so the Provost lost her job. And so the President went to the faculty and said, Can you recommend three people to be the interim Provost? I was one of three: Black woman; two white men? The President chose the white male with the least experience, to be the interim provost and, Teresa, I got mad. And that was the first time I had ever got mad in my career. I had planned to stay there because I was happy where I was. It was my alma mater, doing great work, love the students,

> but that thing did something to me. And that was the impetus for me applying for provost positions. So I applied for two, was a finalist for both, and chose to come to Ithaca. Lo and behold, I'm here serving as provost for three years, when my predecessor, who happened to be the first Dominican-American to be the president of the U.S. college or university, she decided to move on and take another job. The board came to me and said, "will you be the interim President?" And I said, "Yes, but may I apply to be the permanent President?" And they said, Yes. And so the last 5 years have been something that I did not imagine.

QBW1, however, responded with a more optimistic and self-preserving answer:

> I would say probably few times, and not anything that I've ever really focused on because when you focus on that, then that becomes the issue for yourself. Right? So you almost look up paranoid about that. Black woman happen to be lesbian, you know, and say in this very white world, if you will, which is ever-changing, not quite the that's the fear, right? It's not quite the white world that it was, but I would say that you know this thinking generalities and times where I would be the only Black woman, let's say in conversation with whether dinner meeting, whatever have you with all white males and especially white males that may have made determined in the themselves that they were on, you know…that they were kind of in charge of the conversation…authoritarian kind of feel. So that's kind of a generality about that. But it's happened a time or two, certainly in my lifetime.

While QBW1 admitted to experiencing occasions of racial discrimination in her life, she opted not to focus on discriminatory acts in the workplace. Time to lead and

create a lasting impact on campus, among the students, faculty, and staff, leaves little time to worry about the aims of discrimination and bigotry.

Theme 1.2: Amplifying Womanness

When asked about their connection to their identity as women, three of the four participants expressed great pride and sentimental connections to the women in their family, the relatability to other young Black women students on their campuses, or the simple "unapologetic" joy they possess when walking the Earth as women. QBW1 said,

> It means a great deal primarily in the sense that women, in my opinion and whether I think about my sisters, if I think about my nieces, if I think about my mother, who has since gone and then go on and on…very wonderful smart funny in a different way. Women are just different, right, especially in personality, in thought, in character than men. And I think that we, or that myself, bring very unique aspect to being a woman as opposed to being a male, or however I would identify. You know, we go beyond female and male, obviously, especially in current day. When I think about the contributions of women in the world, the contributions of women in this country, especially women of color, it makes me very proud to be a woman and very proud in terms of our unique ways of just getting things done.

QBW2 said,

> It's so much I wouldn't trade it for the world right? I love being a woman. I love women. It just means so much to me. And it means that it's also another power thing, you know, it goes back to when I would walk into classrooms with students, and they'd see a woman. or, you know, raising my daughter and being

> able to, you know, let her see what we need to do. I don't look at it as a detriment, even though I get frustrated. The fact that people treat me differently. But sometimes, you know, women do it to women. White women do it to Black women, all the time. You know, sit in the room and they talk at you instead of to you. And you're like, "why are you talking at me and not to me?" And you see a lot of that: fast-talking, fast-moving, white women. So I don't shy away from the fact that I am a woman…a proud woman…and that I wouldn't trade it for the world.

QBW4 said, "I'm unapologetically female. I'm unapologetically a woman and so it's how I move through the world. And so I'm happy to be a woman. That's how I identify."

Participants QBW1 and QBW2 referred to their history as veterans in the United States Armed Services and how being identified as women was less consequential to their success than their rank in service. QBW1, a veteran of the United States Marine Corps, stated,

> I'm a veteran of the United States Marine Corps, and I served as an enlistee when I graduated from college with an undergraduate degree, and I remember that oftentimes in the time I spent in the Corps, that any of the senior officers or senior NCOs if they wanted a job done, if there was a particular initiative, they turned to women…all the time. It's so interesting…not to the male marines…but if they wanted to get it done, they turn to the female Marines, and I think for good reason: because they wanted to get the job done.

Similarly, QBW2 was a veteran of the United States Army and had been in ROTC,

> I was a veteran, and I was in ROTC and I was Cadet Corp Command, and all these things, and that's the thing I say about the military is, you know, they respect the rank. So I wasn't used to these roadblocks being put up. because when I was an officer, just walk into the room, by virtue of your rank, you have the power. It was hard for me to get used to that…you don't have the power when you walk into the room anymore.

For QBW3, gender identity was labeled as incidental compared to her identity as a Black person or as a member of the LGBTQ community,

> Well, you know, that's actually a really interesting question, because there weren't terms like this at the time, but my gender for me is incidental. I love being a woman. I identify as a strong Black woman. It's not for me. It's not a defining entity. As long as I can be, whatever I am…as long as I can be the mother to my son, whether I show up as a woman or not. And now people are gender fluid and there's lots of different terms that people use where they don't necessarily identify in a binary way. They're not binary, etc., and I never articulated it that way. The closest thing that I would be able to say in my time was that we had the association of sexual orientation to be bisexual versus lesbian or heterosexual. So, you know, that that would probably be the closest I would…so I didn't have those terms. I didn't have a pronoun that said I identify as "they" though I probably would have been one of those young kids that did that. But that's in one moment, but in another moment, when I think about all these beautiful young Black girls, I think about my granddaughter, Camille, then all that I am, as a Black woman, and all that is a gift, I want to give to them. Young girls are walking down the street

> that I don't even know…I want to be able to say "baby…", you know, and support them in getting them on the right path, or "you know, now, baby, I know your mother raised you different in that." I want to be able to support them in all of their Black girl magic. So on the one hand, I say, well, you know, it's not that important to me, but it's everything if I look at it from the standpoint of how I influence and contribute to and give to someone else.

When asked when their identity as women felt like a superpower, they conveyed experiences in their personal lives and from the administrative positions they recently or currently hold. QBW1 said,

> I would say, being a woman and also being Black as a superpower…when I was especially when I was President of the University of [her school]…, my first presidency, primarily because it was a graduate school…so not just undergrad but graduate…doctoral and masters degree programs, social behavioral sciences. And so to be able to stand in front of a group of, you know, more than a few thousand family members and friends, and so on, and so forth, and more than a few hundred graduates that are receiving a doctoral degree in a master's degree. And I'm delivering a speech, you know, prior to the awarding of these degrees. That's a superpower because how often do you see it? At the time I was President of University of [her school] ... I may be getting statistics slightly off…there were only, out of the 2,000 or so colleges and universities in the United States there were only, I want to say, only 30…about 36 of us that identified as a woman of color, of colleges and universities…so like 36, I want to say, at that time. So pretty unique, right? Superpower in and of itself.

QBW2 said,

> This is more when I was over adult-ed (adult education) or actually when I worked over grants… I would go into meetings, and something about grant writing or being over grants…it's kind of a woman's thing. I don't know what it is. I see more women in that field. I always felt like when I walked in the room, I was the expert in the room, and I was treated like the expert in the room, and it could be because most of the people in the room were looking for money to do something. That always helps me get the advantage. I never felt like anybody was trying to overpower me because I was a woman. When we were talking money, I thought "this was my thing. Restricted accounts? This is my thing." And people knew, "this is her thing." I just think, day to day, as a mother, me being a woman is a superpower. I'm a widow. I became a widow four years ago…four years ago Monday, it will be 4 years. And I think that really triggered the woman in me in going, "you need to pull it all together because you got this kid who's in middle school, and you're getting ready to do this on your own." And that was not a part of the deal. And I just embrace being a woman and being a mother, and motherhood and being a working mother. It all kind of came together.

QBW3 said,

> Felt like a superpower right now. I love myself right now. I'm just telling you that right now, you know. I like the way I show up. I like who I am. I like who I've become. And it's not that I think that I'm great, it's that I'm just appreciative for all that has come to bear. You know my culture, my family, my experience, my lived experience to create this Black woman.

Contrary to feeling empowered, when asked when their identity of being women felt less empowering, two participants shared experiences conveying discrimination they had endured based on their gender. QBW1 said,

> I would say anytime I would witness the harassment of a woman, whether it was in the workplace or outside of the workplace, in some whatever setting where I would witness women being demoralized. Anytime I would hear of any type of incident or case that involved especially the physical abuse of women...very, very demoralizing.

QBW2 said,

> Meetings. We have this guy…this Vice Associate, Vice Chancellor, and he is so bad about the 'man-plaining' and it used to bother me. It used to drive me crazy to the point where we would be in a meeting and I would go, "I know, I just said that." Then I realized and that's just him. That's what he does to everybody. And I used to tell my staff, "It's not you. It's just how he is." Yes, it is a detriment that when you walk into a room and they see you're a woman, and they automatically think you don't know what you're talking about or you know they've got to explain, or somebody's got to repeat it. And then you go, "Okay. Is this because I'm Black or is it because I'm a women? Which one is?" And you don't know. We really don't know and I think it's maybe both of them. A long, long time ago I was in Georgia. We were doing training. and we were doing diversity training, you know. It wasn't called DEI then. We were doing it for the city of Aiken, South Carolina. And I remember at the end of the training because it was me…it was a lot of white people walk in and they see me. At the end, this guy

> went on about how good the training is and he said, “When I walked in the room I looked at you, and I said, there's nothing she can teach me.” I'll never know this to this day. I think it was because I was Black, but who knows? But then he came around towards the end and he thanked me for the training. So, I tell myself, “you walk in these rooms and you just gotta be on. You know you gotta be twice is good and it'll be okay.”

Theme 1.3: Amplifying Queerness

When asked about their connection to their identity as queer people, the participants all responded that this was part of themselves that they were still learning. They shared stories of how the world has evolved in accepting members of the LGBTQ. Three of the four participants conveyed they “came out” later in life at ages 40 or older. QBW1 said,

> I feel the importance of me being out in that way for others. So the stories are told of old, where you know the water cooler talk at an office where folks can talk about their weekends, and who they spent time with, and so on and so forth, right and mainly straight folks. And then those individuals who identified as queer in whatever way, who never felt comfortable about talking about it. So being more visible to the public because of my roles, I talk about who I am. And I always talk about it in a matter of fact way. So I don't assume that everyone is going to have some type of prejudice against me, because I identify as queer or Lesbian. So I just assume, maybe everyone is. And so if I just happen to be talking with someone, whoever there was, regardless of the color, regardless of their gender, it's more of a matter of fact. So I identify as queer, but queer doesn't identify

me… who I am as a human being. I just happen to be homosexual. It doesn't identify my personality. It doesn't it identify my wit. So I just make an assumption that individuals just know. And so I speak in that way. I don't hide it or anything. I just speak in that way.

QBW3 said,

Okay, so now you see, now you're getting into stuff I'm gonna have to like, sit down in front of the therapist. So that's really interesting because just like I said my gender was incidental…the reality is my experience and identifying as a queer person…I was married to a marine, a man, for 20 years. I've lived my life as a heterosexual woman…cisgender heterosexual with all of the privileges of heterosexuality. I got married. I had the baby. All of that stuff my mother worked very hard to make sure I did. I mean, along with going to college. And then I met who is now my wife. And I love her. And her gender was incidental. It didn't, you know…you love who you love. Their gender is incidental. And as a matter of fact, for me, her gender and her race was incidental. So the way I identify as a queer person, you know, quite frankly…I love being queer because I love being me. However, I do…I'm cautious because I don't know that I've paid my dues. You know what I mean? So let me let me explain. I was well into my forties, or late thirties, when I came out…when I when I realized that…you know I love a woman and I'm gonna tell you this right now, It wasn't until recently…we've been together 25 years…it wasn't until recently that I even identified as a lesbian. Neither one of us identified as a lesbian. None of us have been in a same-sex relationship. We just loved who we loved and I didn't know that was lesbian. As a

matter of fact, you could be talking about gay people and I didn't necessarily connect that you were talking about me. But I was always concerned that…look, there are people who died so that I could have the luxury of not even thinking about it. There are people who lose their jobs because they came out so that I can have leisure to talk all my stuff about being gay, right? And so, I'm conscious of that, that I didn't pay those dues. I came out as a time when I was what they call a 'grown-ass woman.' So what you thought about me was not my business. I wasn't navigating teenage things where your parents might put you out. I wasn't bullied in school because somebody said something. I didn't go through name calling people calling me a "dike." I didn't do any of that. I was a professional woman with resources and privilege. And so I could just I could step up on my soapbox and be queer. And as the president of the college, you know, be a queer, identified open out college president. So, I don't take it for granted that other people can't do that, and even right now, or in some other states where they can't do it right now. So I don't take that for granted, and I don't think that all of a sudden, when it's vogue to be queer, I'm going to appropriate that identity. "Where were you when Stonewall was happening? If you weren't out there doing that kind of stuff, then stop talking about you…" you know? So, you can see it's a psychological struggle for me…not a struggle to be queer. It's like a psychological struggle to reap the benefits or the privileges of being queer. Especially, I'm queer in the Bay Area in California, you know? I lived in a neighborhood that was called the Lavender Neighborhood, and that was because, predominantly, it was made up of same-sex households, and it also was one of the more affluent neighborhoods, you know

> because you know gay white me and got money in there, you know, in San Francisco, because it costs a lot of money to, you know, you know. So, it's different than when we think about, you know our gay identity or our queer identity…and for me, it's queer…you know, that you might navigate as a young person in your development. So, I love being queer, but I don't want to take liberties with the privilege of being queer without acknowledging and paying…quite frankly…I don't have another way to say it…without acknowledging and paying and contributing to the struggle of being queer.

QBW4 said,

> Well, I'm still learning that, okay? When something has been hidden for most of your life, that has not been the first thing associated with me. Okay? And so Black woman…queer is a new identity…that's a public-facing identity for me. It wasn't always that way. And so I remember when I was introduced to the college community, I claimed my partner, who is now my wife, at the time, I'm like, "if we're going to do this thing, I've got to say you are my partner…and so no secrets!"

When asked when in their lives their identity as queer people felt like a superpower, they conveyed experiences in their personal lives as well as from the administrative positions they recently or currently hold. QBW1 said,

> I was a visiting scholar few years back…at the University of Bradford in Bradford, England, and then also at Ankara University, which is the anchor of Turkey Acres, the capital of Turkey. And it was a wonderful colleague of mine…I was President of University of [her school] the time, and a wonderful colleague of

mine was a professor at the University of Bradford, but also was their Vice President of diversity, equity, inclusion and she sat on my board. So, producing a journal and she was instrumental in how we found her, and because she became a writer, but that also was able to identify other talent out there that could write for our journal, peer-reviewed articles. Anyway, that long story to say she asked if I would be a visiting scholar. And so I actually spoke before…it must have been at least a hundred or 100 to 150 individuals, all at this conference…it was a diversity, equity, inclusion, conference, or "Diversity Conference" they call it in the in the UK, because it's different there. They didn't go through Affirmative Action like we did in the United States, to identify that we need diversity offices all over the place. Looks very different in these European countries. So many countries were there, you know, represented Germany, Austria, and I was the keynote. And so it was about an hour-long talk on intersectionality. And being able to in that group of people that I'd never met, from all different countries. I'm not in my country. I'm now in Bradford, England, talking about my intersectionality that involves my queerness…who I am as queer. That's kind of like a superpower to be able to do just that and to be comfortable with, you know that. And it was just a great experience, because how they embraced my talk. My wife was there as well, which made it really cool for her to be in the audience, but just to be able to just talk about me and my intersectionality. And to this day, I have a similar basically a similar talk that I've delivered in a few…I was just at Felding Graduate University…we were able to present on intersectionality at Fielding to the doctoral students, but then also to alum. So I've kind of carried that

road show on. It's given and given. So that was that super powers. That was a lot. It was really neat to be able to just. you know, have this conversation in an entire different country.

QBW2 said,

Personally, I feel it with my with my daughter and her friends. And one of their parents said to me, “My kid came home and said, her friend has two mommies. That’s really cool.” And you know, I thought that is cool. you know, and we, you know, and just being able to show her to be confident and be confident in having two mommy, and being confident, when you get older, that you’re exploring who you are. But so there's that personal side…and her friends feel comfortable around me. Professionally, where it feels like a superpower… I gave a…they asked me give a talk for Veteran’s Day here years ago. The guy that was supposed to do it was like Texas’ oldest veteran. I can't remember his name. He passed away a few years ago. He had gotten real sick, so they asked me to do it at the last minute. So, I did it, and my daughter was out of school that day. She was in the fourth grade, and they called and asked if she would do the Pledge of Allegiance. We said sure. And my wife…trying to decide if we were married at the time or not. I don't think we're married yet. I don't think we could get married yet, but she came. But “Don't ask, Don't Tell” had been repealed and everything. So she came. So I'm standing up there, and I'm talking, and there's state legislators, you know. I thanked them, and I introduced my…I think we are married then. No, I'm sorry, I introduced her as my partner, you know, and everybody just kind of looked for me. And then they were taking pictures! And then afterwards, I had students come

> up to me and started talking to me. And then I got an email from one who was over the LGBTQ student group and thanked me and thanked for my openness and wanted me to come speak. And so then I felt this superpower, because I would just throw it out there because it was just…I wouldn't do it for shock value. I was like, this is who these people are and I never realized that they're still young people who are still grappling with them. And the fact to see this woman at the time in my 50s, you know, with a family standing there going, "Oh, by the way, this is my family," and that not batting an eye about it. It just kind of gave them some hope. So you know it was pretty cool. That was my, that was in superpower moment.

Contrary to the certainty the participants all possessed about their identities as Black people or as women, QBW1, QBW3, and QBW4 discussed the phenomenon of having to reintroduce themselves to family and friends as same gender loving women. Two of the four women discussed being married to men, so the transition for many family members was difficult to understand. The participants articulated the adjustments required to not only step into their new lives but also the process of bringing others into their reality. QBW1 said,

> It wasn't empowering for me when I initially came out because I came out in my forties. I was in my early forties, and coming out to a family coming out to dear friends who has known me for 40 something years, identifying as a heterosexual had been at the time married to a man, twice, and coming out to my family and then coming out to do to your friends, and mainly, it was very uncomfortable because you're older in life, and you're coming out to people that

> knew you in a different way. So not that I thought I, the most folks embrace me was an issue, but that it's really hard to explain the individuals how someone comes out at 47 years, especially if the individual did not, doesn't, had not live a life of hiding their sexuality behind being straight and married. That wasn't me. It just happened. I believe it manifested itself in different ways, which is probably another study that could be that could be taken on by someone. But it was not. There was not anything that creeped up. I mean, it just happened, and I distinctly know when it happened and what occurred. So that was really hard to for that shift for me, probably personally, to a great degree, but certainly to those people my family members and those friends that were close to me also.

For QBW2, living out as a queer person in her younger years was complicated by her service in the United States military during the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" (Bronski et al., 2023) era of the 1990s. She conveyed the reality of living in silence and having to sneak out to bars to date and be around other queer-identifying people:

> I go back to being in the military, and I was in before, "Don't ask, don't tell". So you served in silence. You didn't tell people. You snuck around and snuck out to the bars but careful when you parked your car so they couldn't see the military sticker on your car, but it would put people out. We didn't identify really. It just floated through life and you know, maybe had a girlfriend on the side. As time has gone on and we you know, we can now get married. I remember that because the thought of being able to get married like "that's never going to happen." And I remember when I met my partner, and I would joke, "I'm gonna marry you one day," and that was before the conversation about marriage, you know, I said it

> because I knew it was never gonna happen, right? And then she held me to it. So I say all that to say that over the years I identify with…I know you guys say queer, I still have to get used to that. I identify as being gay. I embrace it and I love it, and I'm not ashamed of it anymore. I make no bones about it, and everybody knows here at the college. They've known from day one that I was gay. I would walk up and I would start talking about my partner. For a little bit I would say "my friend" and I start talking about my partner, and we me together for twenty something years. Everybody knew her. Everybody loved her…embraced her and she would come to stuff and the chancellor would come to her and that was all a part of them embracing me because, you know, a queer woman. So it means a lot to me.

Collectively, all four participants asserted the value of living as opening queer women, the most impactful being the representation they offer to younger people and students who look to them as role models. QBW4 said,

> And a student came up to me, and the student had tears in her eyes, and I said, "Well, sweetie. What's going on?" And she said, "I never thought I'd see the day when they'd be a woman of color who's queer in a position of power at a predominantly white institution." And she went all the way there. And so I received it. I held it. And then I teared up, too, because I'm like, "Wow," again, but I never thought about it that way.

Part 2: Intersectionality

The second set of questions examined the intersections of their identity variables and how the various permutations of being a combination of queer, Black, and women

impact their experiences as executive leaders in higher education. Crenshaw's Intersectionality (1989) explored the general relationship between combinations of one's identifying variables that affect the outcome of one's efforts. Intersectionality also addresses the implications of adverse responses to one's identities or a combination of identities. I asked each participant about experiences where one of their jeopardies, or identity variables more susceptible to discrimination, was more accepted than others and how those prejudices and preferences impacted their professional experiences. Table 6 summarizes the theory and themes from the literature review and the participants' responses.

Table 6

Intersectionality

Theory	Interview Question	Theme	Research Question
Intersectionality	IQ6: Share an experience or story where your identity as a BLACK person was welcomed in higher education leadership spaces, but your identity as a WOMAN or a QUEER person was not as welcomed.	Prioritizing Blackness	RS1: What are the personal barriers for queer Black women leaders who hold or aspire to hold executive leadership positions in higher education? RS2: What are the career and workplace stressors experienced among queer Black women leaders who hold or aspire to hold executive leadership positions in higher education?
Intersectionality	IQ7: Share an experience or story where your identity as a WOMAN was welcomed in higher education leadership spaces, but your identity as a BLACK person or a QUEER person was not as welcomed.	Prioritizing Womanness	RS1: What are the personal barriers for queer Black women leaders who hold or aspire to hold executive leadership positions in higher education? RS2: What are the career and workplace stressors experienced among queer Black women leaders who hold or aspire to hold executive

			leadership positions in higher education?
Intersectionality	IQ8: Share an experience or story where your identity as a QUEER person was welcomed in higher education leadership spaces, but your identity as a WOMAN or a BLACK person was not as welcomed.	Prioritizing Queerness	RS1: What are the personal barriers for queer Black women leaders who hold or aspire to hold executive leadership positions in higher education? RS2: What are the career and workplace stressors experienced among queer Black women leaders who hold or aspire to hold executive leadership positions in higher education?
Identity	IQ9: Tell me about your educational background and your career journey that brought you to the role you currently serve in today.	Identity	RS1: What are the personal barriers for queer Black women leaders who hold or aspire to hold executive leadership positions in higher education? RS2: What are the career and workplace stressors experienced among queer Black women leaders who hold or aspire to hold executive leadership positions in higher education? RS3: What are the career development and mentorship resources that serve as pathways for queer Black women higher education leaders for promotion to Vice President, Provost, President, or Chancellor?
Identity	IQ10: Had you always aspired to be an executive leader in higher education?	Identity	RS1: What are the personal barriers for queer Black women leaders who hold or aspire to hold executive leadership positions in higher education? RS2: What are the career and workplace stressors experienced among queer Black women leaders who hold or aspire to hold executive

			leadership positions in higher education? RS3: What are the career development and mentorship resources that serve as pathways for queer Black women higher education leaders for promotion to Vice President, Provost, President, or Chancellor?

Results

Living in an age where the rights of Black people, the rights of women, and the rights of the LGBTQ community are better protected in America compared to previous generations, the participants of this study conveyed a lack of horror stories about overt or overwhelming racism, sexism, or homophobia in the workplace as a result of their identity. This is not to say they did not experience covert prejudice or microaggressions, but the participants expressed relief that they benefitted from civil rights struggles endured by earlier generations. The four participants articulated the privilege of living and working in this current day and age.

Exploring the overall acceptance of queer, Black women as fully realized human beings versus the code-switching (Santiago et al., 2021) that often takes place when queer, Black women must navigate what is accepted in any given room was central to this study. Defined as the process of shifting from one linguistic code to another, depending on the social or professional context (Dunn, 2019; Morrison, 2017), code-switching is a practice that allows people who exist in marginalized groups to navigate environments occupied by or defined by the dominant group present. Code-switching can be applied to behavior and body language. Queer people in the workplace may take on different

mannerisms and behavioral choices than if they are in spaces more welcoming to their queer identity. The examination of the four participants' interviews culminated in the resulting themes from the analysis of Part 2 or the Intersectionality section of the interviews: Prioritizing Blackness, Prioritizing Womanness, and Prioritizing Queerness.

Theme 2.1: Prioritizing Blackness

Of the three identities featured in this study, race is the identity most immediately recognizable when a person enters a room. Race, often deemed the most polarizing and even antagonizing of identities, is the identity most see first when encountering another person. Navigating race is among the most urgent factors in their leadership experience. Further, at the senior executive leadership level, being effective or impactful leaders takes priority over preoccupation with racism. When asked to share an experience where their identity as a Black person was welcomed in higher education leadership spaces, but their identity as a woman or a queer person was not as welcomed, the women shared their experiences. QBW2 said,

> When I was over adult education and we have a lot of partners, I would have to go into churches a lot. There, I was like, "Okay…with that Black pastor, you're gonna be Black and that's all you gonna be." And so I would say that's where I felt that the most…was when I had to go out into the community and depending on where I was, I had to be fine just being Dr., and they see this Black women, you know, and they say, "she's here to help the people." Everything else just put away. Getting locations, getting access to people in the community so we can teach them how to read and get their GED and make their lives better. So, I put all that aside. It didn't. It didn't affect me as much. I will say, over the years as I

> became a Cabinet member, and there was all this discussion about, you know, one day you're talking about DEI and our students, encouraging them and being allies and all these things. And then the next Cabinet meeting, you're talking about, "how do we reach students? How do we have relationships with the Black churches?" And I here, sometimes saying, "it's those but churches that are the worst when it comes to the queer community, so I don't know if we ought to be having relationships with them. I became more vocal about it then, but nobody ever listens to me. I think that's when now I think, as a cabinet member, I'm more vocal about that.

QBW3 said,

> I have to think about that, because when you're in the positions, like for me as a president, things could not be welcomed, but they don't have the audacity to say it to you because you are in a position of influence and power. So, I am sure there were many times when my position as a queer woman was not welcomed, particularly when I think about the people that we had to work with, predominantly the male faculty…particularly the white faculty. You know, when I think about those, I'm sure it was there. I don't know that they were in the position, you know, to do anything about it. Now, they can make your life miserable, you know. So, if I think about it in that regard, at the time it's happening, I may not have attributed it to being queer, because, you know, you remember I'm unpracticed in this queer thing. It didn't dawn on me necessarily that it was about me being queer. Usually I don't care if somebody made a mistake, and, you know, stepped on my toe at the grocery store. For me, it might

> have been related to my Blackness. Right? I don't have a horror story that says, "this happened because I was queer." If it did, they didn't have the courage to say that to me. And part of that is my existence as a queer woman, a queer, identified woman, you know, was, in my forties, fifties, and now I'm in my sixties. So, you're navigating that space with more influence. I was in executive level positions. I was in a different social economic status than my mother, or that I had ever been in. I was in different arenas. I was at the pinnacle of my career. So let's say I'm being a Chancellor, even if somebody was struggling with me being a queer Black woman. They couldn't keep me from becoming a chancellor. I was in those positions. At the end of my career, I became a chancellor at…, and I'm not shy about this, because, you know, I don't believe that you let abuse, you know, let them control the environment. It was one of the most anti-Black environments that I've ever been in. I mean, just the anti-Blackness was just phenomenal for this district. The administration was Black, but the faculty were White, and they had undue influence with the board, you know. So the anti-Blackness was phenomenal. And I do know that there was one board member that also struggled with me being in a same-sex marriage, however, I'm in the Bay area, so I'm a little bit of a bubble where that was not a thing for them to articulate.

While in the role of provost at her university, QBW4 described focusing on crafting and implementing the university's five-year strategic plan, only to have to pivot the plan in Year Two because the COVID-19 global pandemic struck. QBW4 articulated her dedication to the work of an executive leader who always takes the lead focus and executes with grace in the face of prejudice:

I haven't had an instance where my identity as a queer person has not been welcome, because again, I'm new to this space of claiming that identity. I really think that, you know, being the provost at [her school], during a time when I was charged with aligning the size of the faculty and staff with the size of the student body was challenging. And so, I had to right-size this institution within my first three years of being here. Okay? And so, being a Black woman, I think there were faculty who questioned how I got the job…how I had the knowledge to be able to make the decisions that I was making with regards to right-sizing the faculty. This is very interesting. Those first couple of years…year one was writing the strategic plan. Year two was beginning to implement the strategic plan, and then COVID happened, which meant that I had to accelerate a plan. Where I thought originally would have five years to right-size…we didn't have five. We had to do it with much more immediacy. And so there were folks here who were disrespectful to me at every turn. But I have a sign in my window in my office, and it says "grace overcomes all." And so, I demonstrate grace each and every day in the face of ugliness. And what I loved about Covid was that you know we were often in Zoom Meetings, so I would have a faculty meeting each month to answer questions and let them know what we're doing while we're doing it. And I would get asked the same question over and over and over again sometimes. And I would say, "Okay, we're going to put this to bed. My answer is not going to change." And I could look around the Zoom room and see people saying, "I don't know how she continues to answer these questions over and over and over again and not lose her temper." That's what you want me to do. No, no.

Additionally, QBW1 conveyed that cultural competence may not come easily for everyone, including people of color. An effective leader acknowledges their own bias and prejudices, realizing equity forward leadership requires an education and action plan for dismantling racism:

> Especially as colleges and universities were really leaning towards DEI, it was a period of time, it seemed that Black folks were chosen to lead DEI efforts. And I think that's…hilarious is probably not a good word. Here's a deal, just because someone is of color does not mean they're culturally fluent. We have our own biases and prejudices about ourselves, and that takes deep education: educating yourself in differences, in really understanding all of the "ISMS." So, whether it's white privilege or white fragility or microaggression, and we can go on and on, it's really being educated about what systemic racism is.

Theme 2.2: Prioritizing Womanness

The identity of gender afforded the participants the ability to navigate higher education spaces in a less antagonizing manner compared to their identities relating to race and sexual orientation. Whether taking on a more maternal, nurturing approach to leading or not presenting with the preserved aggressiveness of masculine energy, the participants articulated how leading with their identity as women may sometimes contribute to their success for equitable opportunities in higher education. When asked to share an experience where their identity as a woman was welcomed in higher education leadership spaces, but their identity as a Black person or a queer person was not as welcomed, the women shared their experiences. QBW4 said,

> I’m gonna attach a stereotype to this…but because I’m female-identifying and because I'm a mother, I have a way of interacting with people that is welcoming and caring and genuine. And they see it. Okay? And sometimes it's a magnet. It draws people to me because people know that I care about them. And it is the female-identifying part of me that I think attracts people, because, you know, I tell folks all the time, I want to make sure you feel seen, heard, and valued. And so that's how I interact with you, because I want to feel seen, heard, and valued. And so that that female part of me, that maternal part of me, that caring part of me, I think, always shines through.

QBW3 said,

> Absolutely. Part of it is that there's a fluidity to it that when I show up in space, and I am advocating for certain things, or why I'm looking to disrupt inequity, particularly inequity that is related to, you know, the way in which women are being treated or served or not served. So what are the assumptions that are being made, or the decisions around who gets forwarded in the hiring committees and those types of things, then absolutely there is space where I've been able, where I've tapped into that and didn't have to work hard to see it. You know, there is a certain type of skill and ability, and being able to recognize this inequity, and then you have to be able to have the courage to call it out. As some people might say, “you see race and everything.” You have to be willing for people to be tired of you talking about being discriminatory toward women, or you’re being discriminatory against people of color.

Theme 2.3: Prioritizing Queerness

All four participants spoke to the value of outwardly identifying as queer as an act of empowerment for the students of their respective institutions. Identifying as queer was less about broadcasting their relationships as much as it was a service of representation to students who may feel "othered." All four women acknowledged leadership from a place where empathy inspires empathy. When asked to share an experience where their identity as a queer person was welcomed in higher education leadership spaces, but their identity as a Black person or a woman was not as welcomed, the women shared their experiences. QBW2 said,

> I think it as a queer woman. It's been welcomed. It was actually in cabinet a couple of times when we were having discussions, there was some kind of survey that One of the LGBTQ groups, that really just kind of fizzled over the years here, put out and had a general consensus the school wasn't as welcoming students and staff. In fact, I think it was more staff thank faculty. I kind of spoke up about that. And then every time we had a meeting about it, I felt like they were actually listening to what I had to say. And what are we going to do about this? And I did say, I don't feel that but evidently there's feeling by other people. We need to do something about it. And we're supposed to be getting LGBTQ Center and the director of that, and they seem to be dragging their feet on that. And the last meeting I was like, "well, how hard is that to do it? Why is this, so hard to do?" I feel like when we're having those conversations, me being a queer woman helps in that conversation. We had this straight woman who ran it. I was like, "Why we got a straight woman running this? Why is it being advised by another straight

> woman?" I haven't got to the point where I've vocalized that because I go, "can they really relate to what's going on?" That's where I feel a real power in the room… trying to advocate our students and staff members who aren't comfortable. And I said, "I don't understand why staff members aren't comfortable." But I think it's one thing to say you're an ally and have the little thing on your door, as a college as a whole, but then when you narrow it down to the supervisor level or the fellow employee level, that's where it gets a little sticky.

QBW3 said,

> And that actually was because of a lesson learned. I'm so busy saying, you know, I don't really think about being queer. You know I'm grown now. I don't care what people think about me, you know. But I had a staff member coming to my office one time and she Iranian. And you know, I'm running as fast as I can to this. I might miss things sometimes…so she comes into my office, and she sits down, and I'm wondering what she wants to see me. But you know we got open doors, and I say, "come, visit me." She actually came. And you know she's a staff member who's in the lower part of the organizational chart. She's like a research tech or something, right? And as she's talking to me, tears well up in her eye because she's saying to me how much she appreciated that in one of my addresses or something, I said something about being queer-identified. And what I didn't realize. First of all, I didn't know she was family. I don't know because I'm busy being president, being me. I'm not paying attention and I got people around me that are not in those positions of influence and she's Middle Eastern. And so the

> significance of me standing up and coming out in in her mind, coming out, you know, in my mind, I never came out. I was just out. I was just me. That's significant…I stopped in my tracks. And I realized how important it was for me to show up…and show out. Then I got very involved. I looked at whether we have safe space on campus, and you know I was kind of late to the party. Students are, you know, like in tears because I come to their meeting, and you know it just was it…that then my identity as a queer woman, as a queer Black woman, a queer person of color….it was very important because it was very important to others. And it's not that it did anything…that I was getting any kind of benefit, but that it was supporting and giving to others. We have no idea how our words or our presence impacts people's lives.

QBW4 said,

> I want to say, maybe with queer students. When they see me they like "Hey prez, you know, you're my prez," and I'm like, "yes, I am. We are family." So always welcomed in that space. I would have to say that my sisters of color have been so supportive to me and of me in this PWI, in which I reside, because they see the intersectionality. They see all of the things that I represent. All of the boxes that I check. And so they always remind me that they have my back.

Part 3: Multiple Jeopardy

The third set of questions addressed the professional stressors in their careers and how their identities as queer Black women aided them in problem-solving, management, and policy development for their institutions through the lens of Multiple Jeopardy Theory. Multiple Jeopardy Theory (King, 1988) considers what happens when the

combination of identifying variables, or jeopardies, creates oppressive episodes for the individual, compounded by the number of marginalized identities possessed by that individual. Participants were asked how their identity as queer Black women impacted their hiring experience, workplace stressors, and promotions. Table 7 summarizes the theory and themes from the literature review and the participants' responses.

Table 7

Multiple Jeopardy

Theory	Interview Question	Theme	Research Question
Multiple Jeopardy	IQ11: What are some of the PERSONAL barriers you have experienced being a queer, Black woman who serves as an executive leader in higher education?		RS2: What are the career and workplace stressors experienced among queer Black women leaders who hold or aspire to hold executive leadership positions in higher education?
Identity	IQ12: Why did you choose to work at your current institution?	Belonging in The Workplace	RS2: What are the career and workplace stressors experienced among queer Black women leaders who hold or aspire to hold executive leadership positions in higher education?
Identity / Social Identity / Multiple Jeopardy	IQ13: For your current position of [state position], please share with me your experience during the hiring process.	Belonging in The Workplace	RS1: What are the personal barriers for queer Black women leaders who hold or aspire to hold executive leadership positions in higher education? RS2: What are the career and workplace stressors experienced among queer Black women leaders who hold or aspire to hold executive leadership positions in higher education? RS3: What are the career development and mentorship resources that serve as pathways for queer Black

			women higher education leaders for promotion to Vice President, Provost, President, or Chancellor?
Multiple Jeopardy	IQ14a: Can you provide an example or a story where your identity as a BLACK person was perceived to have an impact on your career development or promotion efforts?	Belonging in The Workplace	RS1: What are the personal barriers for queer Black women leaders who hold or aspire to hold executive leadership positions in higher education? RS2: What are the career and workplace stressors experienced among queer Black women leaders who hold or aspire to hold executive leadership positions in higher education? RS3: What are the career development and mentorship resources that serve as pathways for queer Black women higher education leaders for promotion to Vice President, Provost, President, or Chancellor?
Multiple Jeopardy	IQ14b: Can you describe some strategies used to counteract discriminatory behavior witnessed by you and/or exhibited to you based on your identity as a BLACK person?	Belonging in The Workplace	RS2: What are the career and workplace stressors experienced among queer Black women leaders who hold or aspire to hold executive leadership positions in higher education?
Multiple Jeopardy	IQ14c: Can you describe resources from which you benefited in developing your career based on your identity as a BLACK person?	Belonging in The Workplace	RS2: What are the career and workplace stressors experienced among queer Black women leaders who hold or aspire to hold executive leadership positions in higher education?
Multiple Jeopardy	IQ15a: Can you provide an example or a story where your identity as a WOMAN was perceived to have an impact on your career development or promotion efforts?	Belonging in The Workplace	RS2: What are the career and workplace stressors experienced among queer Black women leaders who hold or aspire to hold executive leadership positions in higher education?

Multiple Jeopardy	IQ15b: Can you describe some strategies used to counteract discriminatory behavior witnessed by you and/or exhibited to you, based on your identity as a WOMAN?	Personal Resiliency	RS2: What are the career and workplace stressors experienced among queer Black women leaders who hold or aspire to hold executive leadership positions in higher education?
Multiple Jeopardy	IQ15c: Can you describe resources from which you benefited in the development of your career based on your identity as a WOMAN?	Belonging in The Workplace	RS2: What are the career and workplace stressors experienced among queer Black women leaders who hold or aspire to hold executive leadership positions in higher education?
Multiple Jeopardy	IQ16a: Can you provide an example or a story where your identity as a QUEER person was perceived to have an impact on your career development or promotion efforts?	Personal Resiliency	RS2: What are the career and workplace stressors experienced among queer Black women leaders who hold or aspire to hold executive leadership positions in higher education?
Multiple Jeopardy	IQ16b: What factors affect your decision on if, how, when, and to whom you come out at work?	Personal Resiliency	RS2: What are the career and workplace stressors experienced among queer Black women leaders who hold or aspire to hold executive leadership positions in higher education?
Multiple Jeopardy	IQ16c: What has been your previous experience with coming out at work?	Personal Resiliency	RS2: What are the career and workplace stressors experienced among queer Black women leaders who hold or aspire to hold executive leadership positions in higher education?
Multiple Jeopardy	IQ16d: Has previous experiences shaped your decision-making process to come out now and in the future?	Personal Resiliency	RS2: What are the career and workplace stressors experienced among queer Black women leaders who hold or aspire to hold executive leadership positions in higher education?
Multiple Jeopardy	IQ16e: What reactions did you receive from your colleagues, subordinates, and supervisors when they learned of your sexual orientation?	Personal Resiliency	RS2: What are the career and workplace stressors experienced among queer Black women leaders who hold or aspire to hold executive leadership positions in higher education?

Multiple Jeopardy	IQ16f: How did the disclosure of your sexual orientation impact your interactions with your peers at work?	Personal Resiliency	RS2: What are the career and workplace stressors experienced among queer Black women leaders who hold or aspire to hold executive leadership positions in higher education?
Multiple Jeopardy	IQ16g: How would you describe the impact your organization's policies, climate, and culture have in your decision to come out?	Equity-Minded Leadership	RS2: What are the career and workplace stressors experienced among queer Black women leaders who hold or aspire to hold executive leadership positions in higher education?
Multiple Jeopardy	IQ16h: Can you describe some strategies used to counteract discriminatory behavior witnessed by you and/or exhibited to you, based on your identity as a QUEER person?	Equity-Minded Leadership	RS2: What are the career and workplace stressors experienced among queer Black women leaders who hold or aspire to hold executive leadership positions in higher education?
Multiple Jeopardy	IQ16i: Can you describe resources from which you benefited in the development of your career based on your identity as a QUEER person?	Equity-Minded Leadership	RS2: What are the career and workplace stressors experienced among queer Black women leaders who hold or aspire to hold executive leadership positions in higher education? RS3: What are the career development and mentorship resources that serve as pathways for queer Black women higher education leaders for promotion to Vice President, Provost, President, or Chancellor?

Results

The resulting themes from the analysis of Part 3 or the Multiple Jeopardy section of the interviews were Belonging in The Workplace, Personal Resiliency, and Equity-Minded Leadership. Focusing on workplace stressors and personal resilience, the next section of questions addressed the second research question: What are the career and

workplace stressors experienced among queer Black women leaders who hold or aspire to hold executive leadership positions in higher education?

Theme 3.1: Belonging in The Workplace

Themes connected to belonging in the workplace revealed themselves when discussing the hiring process. All four participants reflected on their educational and career experiences. Still, only one had a traditional hiring experience where the process included responding to a search and having an interview process with a panel of board of trustees or regents. The participants were assessed by mentors or supervisors who had the power to promote them or recommend them for ascension. In those occasions, their identity as queer, Black women was less consequential. QBW2 said,

> It kind of was serendipitous, and I was the executive director for grants development and I worked under this provost, this interim provost. I'd look back on it now, and I remember things he would give me and say, “Hey, read this over and give me your thoughts,” and it might have to do with reaffirmation and I think he was testing me out. Or he would always come to my office almost every morning and his assistant would call and go, “he's on his way,” and he would just come and sit and chat with me, and so I think he was checking me out. And I didn't realize it was time. And I was just being [her first name]. I wasn’t even being Dr. [her last name]. I was just being [first name]. And so it was just more him going to H.R. and going to the President…and the one thing that President said was, “I don't care what you do as long as you don't create another administrator position.” So that was the other nice thing: I was already an admin.

> We are too top-heavy, and we still are still too heavy. And so, they were able to do that. And so, everybody kind of won.

Only QBW4 experienced a traditional job search in her ascension into her current position as president. Still, in her experience, her identity as a queer, Black woman did not impede her progress:

> No, because I want to say the first time that I was publicly…that I publicly applied for a job as a queer Black woman was when I came to [her school]. So that didn't play a role for anything or anybody. No. I am me and again it's the way I lead. It's the way I engage. It's my experience. This is my 40th year in education.

I inquired about the personal barriers they each experienced being queer, Black women who serve as executive leaders in higher education. While they conveyed the benefits of having allied mentors and supervisors when obtaining their positions, there were many occasions of blatant and covert racism, sexism, and homophobia demonstrated in their presence while in the jobs. QBW1 said,

> I would say nothing significant. I would say that being Black is what in the 4 dimensions of diversity, that's obvious…the color of my skin is. I could be a Hispanic as well or others, but let's say Black and maybe more obvious. Woman, more obvious…than being queer, not so obvious. Maybe there's a space where individuals in that space are more uncomfortable with how out I am, because I call things like I see things. And so, if we're having a good conversation as a leadership development activity, all of the presidents, direct reports…so I'm part of the strategic leadership group, the cabinet and we're doing development work, I

very freely talk about who I am. Very, very freely. Everyone knows, and again, I talk about it as a matter of fact, like you know you should know, because it is what it is. And so I don't…I never dance around it. I mean, I'm not going after them like I'm the angry Black lesbian like, "listen to me! I'm talking now!" Although I did have to do that…I did have to say that once…had to pull a 'Kamala Harris' on a white woman in a leadership meeting…oh!...might be a good example for the study. So the conversation in our executive leadership team meeting. There's about 15 leaders around the table, myself and the President. and it was brought up that [the university] had, during our tournament, you know, we're known for basketball, where there was a commercial about finding God. But it was the way it was…this was a very quick commercial…not probably for a 30 seconds…with a cross, and something about finding the Lord. And what we found out is interesting story Teresa, because what we found out later was that for the individuals who had in these major tournaments, so this was like during March Madness, we did not know who the investors were of the commercial. But we ran the commercial during a game. And those who invested millions of dollars did not want to be identified. Then later. we find out, because they open their mouths, that Hobby Lobby was an investor. So, it came up in a leadership meeting. And someone said, leader at the time leading our mission and integration, had conversation with our athletic director about, "wouldn't it be something, you know, it'd be nice…because this is a faith base, plus we're a catholic university… we didn't know it was Hobby Lobby…we found out later that it was Hobby Lobby…" and I was slightly incensed, because they were

> slightly making excuse for them. And I said, “listen, there's no excuse for this. They are a homophobic group…have known to be homophobic…and not a place for us to be promoting anything that…they had anything to do with relative to advertising and commercials…” And she interrupted me as I was talking. And I said, “I'm talking now. I'm talking.” So the group was like freaked out. They're all freaked out. The president didn’t need to say a word. And this is a person that is a good colleague of mine, and she kind of gets a really emotional and kind of defending her, you know. She didn't know, and she's part of, you know, mission and ministry here and everything. And I said that loud, she said, “[Her first name], I am sorry,” in front of a group, “I am sorry. I interrupted you, and I am sorry.” But sometimes you just have to do that. So yeah, I was defending those individuals who identify as queer, how the institution does not support organizations of such…and I'm talking!

I asked the participants to describe strategies they used to counteract discriminatory behavior witnessed by them or exhibited to them as it related to their identity as queer, Black women. QBW2 vocalized advocacy for her identity beyond being a queer, Black woman:

> You know, I think one of the biggest strategies is…this is what I find about…especially Black women, is when we open our mouths, they expect one thing and when I open my mouth they get something different. I think, you know, I was raised on the east coast and people are always surprised at how articulate you are. Why are you surprised that I'm articulate? My mother use to say, “why are they saying your brother so articulate? He's a lawyer! He's supposed to be

articulate!" So, I think that one of the strategies I have is to always make sure that when I'm communicating verbally, that I'm clear. That if I write down what I need to say so that I'm not kind of stumbling over my words, like they would expect you to or struggling with subject-verb agreement…those kind of things, because, unfortunately, people kind of judge you about that. You could be as smart as a whip, you could just be off the game a little bit that day, and they will think you don't know what you're talking about. We hired it new Provost about a year and a half ago…a Black woman…and she would get up and go to the board and she would just stumble all over her words…just stumble all over her words. It was embarrassing…for her…for everybody. And I'm gonna be candid, she was not one of my best…one of my favorite people in the world. And I remember one day, having drinks with the board member who was...she's gay, so we have drinks. It's, you know, kind of the gay people having drinks. And she goes, "what is it with her?" And this board members is white, "what is it with her? She gets up there…this big Black woman, who's supposed to be confident, and she's stumbled all over her words! What's wrong with her?" You know…and the big Black woman and that's what I heard, you know. I don't want anybody to say that about me. So that strategy that I use, and like the last time I presented to the board…and I was never one to write out what I was going to say. But I now write out I'm going to say, because you gonna be able to say that about me. You're not going to like start looking down and ignoring me when I'm talking. So that's kind of one of the strategies that I use. Another one, like I said before, was try not to come out too strong, even though I so want to sometimes, right? Sometimes you

> really want to, kind of, “come on, folks! Why do we have to go through this again?” And being film and being confident, but also not coming off as being aggressive. And that's so hard sometimes. I remember once, we…it was all about the colleges celebrating Veterans Day. We didn't celebrate Veteran’s Day but they immediately want to start celebrating Juneteenth and I don't have anything against Juneteenth. I'm not from Texas, so I didn't understand it when I moved here. Should that take precedence over Veteran’s Day? And why can't we do them both? And I remember sitting in the meeting, and I had to kind of control myself, but I look at the Chancellor, and I said, “I am insulted.” And at that point, they were thinking about giving us more time off for Thanksgiving. And that’s when clearly I just wanted to go off on them and I went, “I am insulted. I am insulted that you were thinking about giving 3 days off, 3 more days after Thanksgiving, and you are not considering Veteran’s day.” I was absolutely calm when I said it, but I was firm enough that by the time we walked out of that room, we got Veteran’s Day off. And I had to, you know, versus what I wanted to do which was just go off on all of them. You have to just kind of balance your…I think that's the biggest thing: balancing your communication.

Belonging in the workplace hinges significantly on the response and reaction of the colleagues in that environment. I asked the participants about their colleagues' responses, both those who served in subordinate positions and those who operated as supervisors in their current or previous positions in higher education executive leadership. The participants all communicated an emotional maturity around navigating the opinions of others as they related to their identity. Each participant, now in their 60s,

was apathetic to the judgment of others and more invested in the interest of best serving their institution. They acknowledged that people will undoubtedly have opinions about their identity but frequently kept out of their presence. QBW1 said,

> For the most part, in terms of the workplace, very supportive. Incredibly supportive everyone was…I mean, barely a person that just might have been a little uncomfortable having known me as a straight person, for you know, over 40 years. When I was Associate Vice President of Campus Academic Affairs…at that time the Provost there, white male Mormon, by the way and when I came out to him, the first thing he asked, "You've come out to me, have you come out to others? Our colleagues?" I told him, "Yeah, have pretty much, I have." And he says, "And has anyone treated you any different as a result of that?" Like he got defensive for me, "Has anyone?" So, no…I was welcomed. But when I was President of [University name] in Atlanta, the Vice Chancellor, who ended up hiring me… I had gone through the process of going to the campus, and meeting all of the administrators: the Provost, the Vice President of Academic Affairs. the deans, so on and so forth. Going through that process, and the Vice Chancellor had a conversation with my Vice President of Academic Affairs… I learned this later on…and said, "do you think…?" Excuse the expression, he was a bit of an ass, anyway…If I may say that. He asked, my Vice President of Academic Affairs…so he kind of…they would have known I was out by my cv, but he says, "well, you know…you know [her name] does identify as a lesbian. Do you think the faculty… you think folks are going to have a problem with that?" First of all, I didn't ask him to out me. I'll out myself, thank you very much. And not that that's

> even a big deal, but that's not for him to have a conversation like that which meant, to a certain degree, he had a little bit of a concern, but he hired me for my skills and what that, and then found out, later on, that his daughter had come out as lesbian. Yeah. He had to walk some of that back.

QBW2 said,

> I didn't get any. I, you know, if I got negative reactions, I wasn't aware of it, I think, because I didn't make a big deal out of it. I will be honest with you, everybody liked [her wife]. Everybody just liked her. I think that ties into it, you know…take her places. Sometimes straight and gay people, or with people that you just like, "You're great…at the clubs! But I'm not taking you to my office, and we're not taking you home to meet my mom, either." She would let people take her everywhere and people did. They were like, "she's great." So I think that helps, you know, and how you come off also…how I projected myself as a gay women. you know, all that came into play, and I wasn't trying to force it down anybody throat, like "Oh, my God! How are they?" kind of thing. When we got married, it was one of those deals where we just kind of did it. We didn't make a big deal out of it. We already had a commitment ceremony, and then, when we got married, I went to work that day, and then that evening we kind of planned it, and we went and got married in a friend's backyard. The next day, I brought these treats, and I was giving them away at work. I said, "ask me why I'm giving these to you!" One girl who worked for me, who I thought was a racist…I could tell she was uncomfortable when I told her why. I told her we got married. I had another one start crying. She was real weird about it. There one who was so happy for me,

> she started crying…but then there was the other one, the racist one. It got real weird and didn't say much yeah. I didn't care. She don't pay my rent. She don't write my check. Sometimes, that's what you have to tell yourself. "You don't pray my rent! You don't pay my mortgage! You don't put gas in my car! I don't care!"

QBW4 said,

> Well, again, coming here, it was no secret. I walked in the door that way. So it was just…it was no big deal. [Her wife] and I…my wife is a principal of a school here, so we are a said power couple in [town], New York. We are an interracial couple in [town], New York. We are invited everywhere. We care about kids, you know. K through 16, that's who we are. It's what we do. And so, we make a difference. We walk the walk. We walk the talk. And so, we've been well received. I have not had an experience here where someone shunned me because I'm a queer Black woman. If anything, they welcomed me. It gives them some cool points, I think, for some folk.

I asked the participants to articulate the value of coming out in the workplace if their colleagues' judgment or opinion of them was inconsequential. QBW1 said,

> Well, I realized early on in "coming out" that that was an important aspect to my students, to my staff, and to faculty, and what I mean by that is, in particular, when I was President of the University of [her school]and being an "out" president, I received comments, later on, from graduates, from surveys and things of that nature, where the graduates said, "because Dr. [her last name] is out, I could be out, and I did not feel alone during my time at all at the University of [her school]" So it's empowering to know that others felt that, or even on the flip

> side of the coin, Black women who graduated with their doctorate or a master's degree, saying that their journey felt easier at the University of [her school] because there was a Black woman president. So both on the side of those identifies queer, and those who identify as women and Black…that because I was out, they felt like they could be out.

Theme 3.2: Personal Resiliency

Themes connected to personal resiliency revealed themselves when further discussing each participant's intimate relationship with their own identity as queer, Black women as well as their close relationships with other people. When asked about the factors that affected their decision on if, how, when, and to whom they come out at work, three of the four participants attributed being their whole authentic selves with their wives. QBW1 said,

> I remember that when I started dating now my wife, and she made a comment…I don't know what…where we were at the beginning of the relationship…but she said, "you understand that if we are going to be together, you have to be out everywhere. Period, You gotta be out." So, not that she made an assumption that I would not be, but she say, "you have to live your authentic self. And to do so, you have to be out, for all of these different reasons." So I tribute that type of conversation early on in our relationship. And I'm out because I'm not going to hide. I've got to be my authentic self. That's who I am. It's part of who I am. It's part of my DNA. It's part of my make up. And so that folks understand that, because there's been, you know, our forefathers and foremothers who felt like they could not be out because they'd be fired…you know…lose their jobs…been

beaten. Not that some of it doesn't happen in current day, but certainly there's a number of protections in terms of anti-discrimination against LGBT. Matter of fact, when we've lived in Dallas…get this…in Texas, in Dallas not every county has a anti-discrimination clause. Only Plato and Dallas Incorporated, but around the suburbs, they do not. So we needed to live in a place that has anti-discrimination clause.

QBW2 said,

It was…I'm gonna talk about just here at [her college]…lovely woman that I really like, but she was a straight white woman, Republican, but she was really neat, and I don't know if I ever really came out to her or just in conversation. But there was another woman who worked for her who was gay. And then our executive…we didn't have a provost, so our executive vice president, so number 2 to the president, he was gay. As I tell people, he was queerer than a $9 bill. Give you change back in 3s. He was so gay. For his retirement, they put flamingos all over the place, he so gay. I remember when I first started, I didn't even tell anybody. And this woman, who was gay, she invited me to lunch. And it was her and another woman, and the other one was straight. We were talking, and [her colleague] mentioned her girlfriend. And later on, years later, [her colleague] said, "you kept sitting there, talking about 'your friend,' and I knew it was a girlfriend, and I just want you to feel comfortable. Refer to her as your girlfriend." And then, the executive vice president…some months later, I had to meet him and somebody else for a luncheon meeting, and he and I got there first. And again I was hemming and hawing about 'my friend,' and he comes right out and says, "he

refers to her as my girlfriend." So my coming out was more hemming and hawing and then somebody would say something. And then I just got to the point where I would just say, "my girlfriend." So, I don't think there was ever a real big coming out. And then, my boss, one day [her wife], you know, she would come by the office, that I would just introduce her and over time, she would just figure it all out. Because her and this other woman, [co-worker's name], were really close, so she didn't have anything…she would have a problem with it. And it just…over time, it just kind of happened, so there was never really a big coming out. And then, like I said, when I did that veteran speech, and I was…boom!...introduced her and my kid and I could do it then. You know, at the time I was careful, because people knew I was in the reserves, and knew she was in the reserves. So, I was careful about who I could tell because, then, you could still get put out being gay. I had somebody to work for me, kind of my assistant, because I was over a unit in San Antonio, who was trying to go after me. And so, you know, I had to…we had to be careful, if you are in Austin, because you never know how it would get back into San Antonio and into my unit. So yeah, it just got it. Now, it's like, "Yep. Wife. Kid. I'm a widow. She."

QBW2 finished her answer with a shoulder shrug of normalcy.

I love my wife, and so she has been out much longer than I…decades, okay? There was no way I could move to a new community and not be out…and not be open. And so…I…hmm. What I love about this job, is that I get to bring my authentic self to work every day. And for a long time…my integrity means so much to me…and for a long time, I felt I was inauthentic because there was a

> piece of me that I was hiding…that I was afraid to share and ashamed to share. And so for the first time in my adult life, I bring my authentic self to work every day. And folks, for the most part, love me.

With tears welling up in our eyes, I followed with a question inquiring about her experience when QBW4 felt she could not publicly identify as a lesbian,

> I always felt like I was hiding something…that I had the secret, and then somebody was gonna say something, okay? And then I would have to explain something, and you know…it was hard to feel like, I'm living a lie, because I was okay. It was a lie I chose to live until I couldn't live it anymore. And then, once I decided I couldn't live in anymore, my God! It was so much easier than to keep it, you know, hidden. So I thought for all those years, I mean, I remember my closest girlfriend, saying to me, and we knew we were just waiting for to catch up with you, you know? It's not big deal! Live your life!

QBW3 made an interesting assessment of the perspective through which I asked the questions of being gay and how society should consider a complete paradigm shift of not centering heterosexuality as the societal norm.

> So, I never…I don't…the way, the questions are asked, in some ways, Teresa, are questions that are, you know, kind of a traditional paradigm of being queer or not, or being gay or not. And did you make a decision to come out? You know, when I was married to a man, at no point…I can't tell you when I came out as a heterosexual. I just can't tell you. I don't have judgment about it, just don't. I can't tell you that, and so I can't tell you when I came out as "queer." At no point that I make an announcement, you know. At one point, I did say to my mother, because

she loved my husband, you know…which…you know…I loved him too. I said, "Mon, Will and I are not together. I'm in a relationship with the woman." So that's probably the closest to coming out, I've done. And my mother is on the phone, because I talked to her regularly, she's on the phone and she said, "Hmm. Okay. Well, what you're cooking for dinner tonight." In other words, it was like, you know, water going from one glass to another. It was like that…that was the extent of it. So, that was my coming out experience, you know. You know, I will admit that I live in California now. I'm not in North Carolina, trying to navigate and keep my job. People have lost their mind, right? So I will admit that. But I can just tell you, I remember, you know, maybe about 6 years ago, I was out, my wife and I used to go, and we would just look at houses to get ideas for what we wanted to do with our house, because we were trying to do some remodel and stuff, right? And I ran into one of the faculty members from the college, and she was in a same sex relationship. And I thought that she was out-out, right? You know, I didn't even know that it was a thing-thing, you know. So I ran into them, and I introduced…I ran into her, and her then partner, and I said, "This is my wife," you know, and I introduced my wife. And later she came to my office and said, "My partner and I were just talking about how great it was that you just like spoke about your wife without even think about it." She's right. I didn't think about it. That was not a thing…any more than if I had introduced her to my husband.

Theme 3.3: Equity-Minded Leadership

Themes connected to equity-minded leadership revealed themselves when discussing organizational policy and culture. I asked each participant to describe the impact of their current or previous administrative policies, climate, and culture on leading a diverse campus community. I also wanted to know if their efforts of leading from a place of equity generated personal support for them. QBW1 said,

> I would say that current day is much different than even say 20 years ago. And what I mean by that is that most institutions, at least, that I'm familiar with, and I'm familiar with quite a few, is pretty much open and affirming relative to your you know, to how you identify…your sexual identity…pretty open. I would say that organizationally, and other groups, where little bit more hesitant, and I will tell you, Teresa, in a sense of same-sex benefits. So, 20 years ago, institutions deciding whether or not if you could prove a partnership, that your partner would receive benefits. Always nervous conversations about that, I've experienced it. Even at some progressive institutions I was affiliated with…and then to lead on them, which I did at one institution, I leaned on them, because that was before, of course, the Marriage Amendment act, but there were taxes that you had to pay on your partner that was receiving the benefits. There were taxes! Where if you were a hetero couple, married? No! So I'm like, "Nope, that's like wrong. Got to rethink all of this. This is not, is that righteous." And so no, I think that we've certainly come, you know, two steps forward, a step back sometimes, but certainly we've come a long way from those days, and having had that conversations about benefits. And it was such an important conversation because, you know, you're

with your partner, let's say 20 years, and there was no…you know…we didn't have…the marriage amendment act didn't exist then and not even the civil union…you know…first civil union came first. We were in Colorado, and actually, we were married by civil union. Of course, we had a progressive mayor, African American mayor in Denver. So, he was marrying people! He was at City Hall, he was marrying people! And then I think, some challenging times, little things that are big things like a gender-neutral bathroom. So we got to have that conversation, you know. ensuring that. We have gender-neutral bathrooms all over this campus, including this building I'm in…it was built in 1887, and a wonder it hasn't fallen down! We have a gender-neutral bathroom? I mean, how do you try to work that it into an old building…this used to be a men's college in the 1800s. Okay, everything was here. They had a swimming pool here. Their basketball court was in the building. I mean everything was so this place, over 100 years, has transformed and transformed. But decisions like that, that administrators had to make based on inclusive rights for their employees, for their community.

QBW2 said,

At the time, I don't think they did because they didn't think about. I've been here 20 years. So, 20 years ago, lots happen over the years. At the time. I don't think they had any policies that worked against us, but I don't think they had any policies… like you couldn't get benefits or anything like that for your partner. I had filed that all my paperwork and everything, so they knew but I knew that… I realized quickly that I was gonna be okay. Over the years, there's been a lot of

love wrapped around the and around the gay community. Here's when I really saw it…was when my partner…when she got sick at one point, years ago, and my boss, who hired me, she was just so good. She was so good to me. And she would tell me to take the time that I need it. And just like when we adopted our daughter, you know, there's people out there to say, you know, "people shouldn't be adopting." She was awesome about it. Fast forward to about 6 years ago and [for wife] was diagnosed with cancer, by then I was under Dr. [new provost] who is gay also…and I'll tell you, when Dr. [provost] accepted the job, he told the Chancellor he's gay. He said, "I just want you know I'm gay." "Yeah." "My partner we've been together for umpteen million years, and he was like, "that's fine with me." So, it's safe. And I want to tell you, this whole college just to wrap themselves around me and [her wife]. And I remember once the Chancellor's executive assistant said, "You know, [first name], we just want you to know, you've got people here who care about you and [her wife] and that we're here for you. You just tell us what you need." And I remember when she passed…when she decided to go into hospice care, I would come to meetings, and they could tell a difference to me, and nobody gave me a hard time. They were just there for me, and they gave me the space, and they gave me the time. And when she passed, the Chancellor called me. He called me at home. The provost came over to my house and brought me food. Some other people came over. All of them came. They all came to her service at the church. Sometimes it takes something bad to happen for, you now, these people truly love me. So I tell people that. When I've talked to somebody who thought [her school] wasn't very gay friendly, I told him my story.

> I said, “No, they are. They’re very gay friendly and way at the top. And I remember I was out for four or five weeks, afterward I came back and walked in the cabinet, everybody just jumped up and hugged me. You know it just kind of affirms that…they're okay. They look at me the same way, we've looked at a straight woman who lost her husband.

I interjected that I suspected their care was a result of their particular care for her, as an individual. She continued,

> I'm sure that does come into play. But you know, there are those people out there who go, “You know I love you. I’ll always love you . I’m still struggling with you being gay. Don’t really want to talk about that.” And I make a notice that woman who worked for me…whenever [her wife] would come around, this woman wouldn't talk to her. This was years ago. I hadn’t noticed it, and this woman was always in my office, and great employee, and I got along with her real well, but I think she struggled with that part. And people…you can tell them and they’ll be like, “okay,” but then, when they see it, that you’re with somebody, I think that makes it real for them, and it makes them more uncomfortable if they were a little bit of uncomfortable to begin with. There was this group I was involved with…I wasn't a chaplain, but they asked me to be in it because I was Black and I was female. It was a group of chaplains who were kind of advocating, mostly colonels and retired generals who were advocating for, you know, repeal of “Don't Ask. Don’t Tell.” And they was very involved and doing it from the Chaplain board, because there were some conservative chaplains were like “gays should not be in the military.” And a gay person would come to them and they would out them.

> And so I remember the guy saying, “the problem with people is all they think about is the ‘yuck factor’.” Right? They look at you as a gay person and all they think about is it's sexual. When you get pass the ‘yuck factor,’ the relationship is no different. When I look at a straight couple, I don't picture them having sex. I don’t look at the ‘yuck factor.’ And I think that's what gets in the way.

QBW4 said,

> It's a place where my students feel seeing her in value. You know, my kids came to us and said we would like to have transgender housing. So we would like to have dormitory space for students to identify as trans. And we made it happen. Okay? And so you know what I love about this place is that athletics is huge here. My football team won the [Conference] Championship. I mean, you know, I've got out the males on this campus living with. Folks feel they can be who they are here. And to me, that's the beauty of this place.

In addition to combating immediate and blatant acts of racism, sexism, homophobia, and additional acts of prejudice on college campuses, the participants spoke to the insistence on long-term policies and strategies designed to change the culture of the campus community to be more empathic and just.

QBW3 said,

> So, first of all, I call it out if it’s exhibited to me or if I see it. I take a position of the inquiry. So, I'm not attacking, but I take a position of the inquiry. So it could be, I say something, but, you know, they needed a man to say it for it to have a different meaning. Same words. Idea I put out there…but now, man said it so it must be a good idea, right? You know…I'm usually the one that starts up, “Wait a

> minute, Bob just repeated the point that I introduced. So why is it so much better received from Bob?" So, I come from a position of inquiry. I don't come from a position of accusing people and those types of things. Sometimes I, you know, I am a little rough, and you know, it's hard navigating Black space, isn't it? You know…

We shared a "knowing" laugh.

> …you know….So, I'm willing to. I'm willing to call it out. I strongly believe that the way in which people are able to assault and hurt and bully people and quite frankly manipulate, and you know, gaslight and racelight people is because they control the environment through what is considered to be etiquette and protocol for talking about things. And that if I say something about them, you know, doing something with regard to me being queer identified that I'm the one that's the problem, and there's more of a focus on my tone, and that that I'm violating protocol than it is on the oppression that I'm being subjected to. And so I'm willing to put those ideas out there and ask those questions about why is it important to prioritize peace over the disruption of oppression.

QBW4 said,

> Just call them things that what is wrong. You know, I've experienced more things around antisemitism here than any place I've ever been. Moreso than any LGBTQ hate. Now, my students of color…this has been an interesting journey from me…my students of color called us out this past spring, saying that there were microaggressions on this campus. They scheduled three walkouts about their lived experiences on this campus. So, you've got a Black president and you're talking

about microaggressions on this campus, and most of the things that they are complaining about are things that happen in the classroom. So, I met with them. Every time they walked out, I walked out to where they were. I scheduled three sessions at night to make myself available to talk to them, and what I learned is, you know, most of the things…most of the change they want involves curriculum…involves what my faculty are teaching in the classroom. What I loved about my faculty is that they called each other out. And they will like, "These students are talking about their lived experiences…about what you're teaching and how you're teaching and how you're presenting it." And so, all I could do was make myself available, but they would say, "You know, the president isn't listening," and I'm like, "How can you fix your lips to say I'm not listening when I show up…when I make myself available." So no, I don't buy that. This institution has a history…two presidents ago, students of color protested to the point where he resigned. Okay? And so he was afraid to meet the students where they are. Well, no, I'm not going, anyway. You know where my office is. I'm gonna come to the student union. I'm gonna be there and we're gonna talk this thing through. You will not be able to say that the administration didn't meet you where you were. This is not a crisis. I'm not going to make it a crisis. And I'm not going to allow you to make me make it a crisis. And so, part of it is how one responds but again, it's about the humanity, "I hear you. You've raised some real concerns that we need to address and we're going to address them one at a time." And so that's what I do. I listen. I acknowledged. "You're right. You are telling the truth." And now we have to do something about it.

Finally, I inquired about their sources of emotional, physical, and professional support, being queer Black women serving as executive leaders in higher education. All four women answered similarly, but QBW3 articulated the answer most succinctly. “I don't know if I got the support, because I was a queer Black woman, or because, you know, somebody loved me, you know. Period.”

Part 4: Navigating Triple Jeopardy

The fourth section of the interview inquired about mentoring and networking opportunities where scholars and educators who endure Triple Jeopardy and aspire to lead institutions of higher learning can develop their skills and relationships for leadership. Celebrating their Triple Jeopardy (Greene, 1996) identities as queer Black women, I asked participants about career development organizations and professional higher education associations charged with supporting queer Black women specifically. Table 8 summarizes the theory and themes from the literature review and the participants' responses.

Table 8

Triple Jeopardy

Theory	Interview Question	Theme	Research Question
Triple Jeopardy	IQ17: Do you have a mentor or sponsor at this college or from other accepts of your life that has been influential in your career pursuits?	Professional Resiliency	RS3: What are the career development and mentorship resources that serve as pathways for queer Black women higher education leaders for promotion to Vice President, Provost, President, or Chancellor?
Triple Jeopardy	IQ18: Do you think that it is important to have a diverse executive leadership team to represent a diverse student population, and why?	Diversity Requires Diverse Leadership	RS3: What are the career development and mentorship resources that serve as pathways for queer Black women higher education leaders for promotion to Vice

			President, Provost, President, or Chancellor?
Triple Jeopardy	IQ19: What organizations or associations impacted your career development path to higher education executive leadership? In what ways did these organizations serve your needs?	Diversity Requires Diverse Leadership	RS3: What are the career development and mentorship resources that serve as pathways for queer Black women higher education leaders for promotion to Vice President, Provost, President, or Chancellor?
Triple Jeopardy	IQ20: Are you a mentor or would like to serve as a mentor?	Diversity Requires Diverse Leadership	RS3: What are the career development and mentorship resources that serve as pathways for queer Black women higher education leaders for promotion to Vice President, Provost, President, or Chancellor?
Triple Jeopardy	IQ21: Does your institution provide support services for faculty and staff who endure acts of racism, sexism, misogyny, homophobia, transphobia or any other act of discrimination?	Guard Against Bigotry	RS3: What are the career development and mentorship resources that serve as pathways for queer Black women higher education leaders for promotion to Vice President, Provost, President, or Chancellor?
Triple Jeopardy	IQ22: What are your views on the current political attempts to eliminate Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion practices in the hiring process as well anti LGBTQ+ bills dismantling support offices and resources on college campuses?	Guard Against Bigotry	RS3: What are the career development and mentorship resources that serve as pathways for queer Black women higher education leaders for promotion to Vice President, Provost, President, or Chancellor?
Triple Jeopardy	IQ23: What were the driving factors that inspired you to pursue opportunities in higher ed executive leadership?	Professional Resiliency	RS3: What are the career development and mentorship resources that serve as pathways for queer Black women higher education leaders for promotion to Vice President, Provost, President, or Chancellor?
Triple Jeopardy	IQ24: In your opinion, what defines a leader and good leadership?	Professional Resiliency	RS3: What are the career development and mentorship resources that serve as pathways for queer Black women higher education

			leaders for promotion to Vice President, Provost, President, or Chancellor?
Triple Jeopardy	IQ25: How does your identity as a queer Black woman inform your approach to leadership or your leadership style?	Professional Resiliency	RS3: What are the career development and mentorship resources that serve as pathways for queer Black women higher education leaders for promotion to Vice President, Provost, President, or Chancellor?

Results

The resulting themes from the analysis of Part 4 or the Triple Jeopardy section of the interviews were Professional Resiliency, Guard Against Bigotry, and Diversity Requires Diverse Leadership.

Theme 4.1: Professional Resiliency

Themes connected to professional resiliency revealed themselves when discussing supporting organizations and mentors who aided in their rise to higher education executive leadership. I asked each participant to describe the organizations and personal mentors who supported their interest to lead while identifying as queer, Black women. QBW1 said,

> I may not formally call them a mentor, but they were mentors. I I've had mentors all through my career. I've had mentors that were men, and I've had mentors that were women. In the sense that they always provided me with their time. They always provided me with great perspectives and always provided me with their confidence in my ability to be a leader. And I would say many, many throughout the…I mean for my time in undergrad through the Marine Corps, and in another roles. And I and I think it, you know it sounds so formal, the whole mentorship

thing and all of that. I mean, I think you find someone that…individuals that are looking for that type of guidance and leadership. Let's frame it that way. Choose someone who, you believe is genuine…authentic. Who you admire in that way. Who you find that has navigated their own path in terms of their ability for upper mobility relevant to their career, who will be willing to just spend time and talk about their experiences. So that's more of a kind of an informal way, although I believe it's formal executive coaching. It says that I don't. I think the executive coaching is good. What I like about executive coaching is they are taught. I mean, there's full curriculums on executive coaching. Many universities offer it. I resonate with that because there is a science to that. and they. And it's learning, and it is certified. And then they gain levels of experience. It's almost like a mental health counselor, right? A therapist. So yeah, so I kind of look at it from that means.

QBW2 said,

Funny enough, I really don't, but I have this one, dear friend. Yes, and if I think of anybody…you know, there was a time when [wife] said, “I think you're mentoring her more than she’s mentoring you,” but now, I look at her as my mentor, and she is a straight Hispanic woman, who used to be a president. Now she does consulting on her own. And she's been a really good mentor to me, and that's the person that I kind of lean on. You know, I was in the Aspen presidential leadership program, and that's where I met Darion Pollan. She wasn't my mentor but, you know, I learned a lot from her just in observing her. And listen to her

> when she would speak…and her openness about being a queer woman. I was just taken by her…by how open she was.

QBW4 said,

> I feel like a unicorn. So, my PhD is from UMBC. Freeman Hrabowski was the president. So, I have Freeman's number on speed dial, so if I need to talk to him, he's available. My predecessor has made herself available if I need to talk with her. But when I think about programs that have been designed to help people walk these paths, I haven't done any of those things. I just haven't. I haven't been to this one's president's institute or that one's provost institute. I've worked okay. That's what I've done.

I asked each participant to detail the most impactful organizations and professional associations that aided them in climbing the ranks into higher education executive leadership. The goal was to compile an active list of organizations and associations for aspiring executive leaders who identify as queer, Black women.

QBW1 said,

> The Southeast Association of Schools and Colleges; Western Associations of Schools and Colleges; The H.L.C.: Hard Learning Commission. I was a member of sometime C.H.E.A. Council on Higher Education. Accreditation. but certainly A.G.B., the Association of Governing Boards. Obviously, you know, a founder of what was LGBTQ Presidents in Higher Education, now LGBTQ Leaders in Higher Education. All very, very, very good, important groups. The A.C.E…The American Council on Education. So, I always tell folks listen, get involved in some capacity, because that's great learning, educating yourself and networking,

because that's how you're going to meet people and maybe meet people that you might need. The next thing you know, you're looking for a role, or you're in search of a role. You utilize them as a reference. And so, any of the groups that I mentioned important it in networking cannot be overstated. Gotta network.

QBW2 said,

I will say, going to the Aspen Presidential Fellowship was very good for me. Don't know if I'll ever become a president. About halfway through that [wife] was diagnosed with cancer and then I had to drop out, and then I reconnected the next year. I think that has done so much for me. And let me see what's going on in higher ed and as I'm making decisions on what my next move will be, which will kind of be based on my daughter graduating, I go to a lot of the resources that they put online, and you know, and then I'll participate in some of the training they have that's virtual. That whole presidential fellowship, the purpose of it was, you know, they had presidents leaving, and there was kind of a lack of diversity amongst community college presidents. And so, I liked what their mission was from day one. When we walk into the room, it was very diverse. The LGBTQ Presidents, now LGBTQ Leaders group…I want to get more involved in that, because I do think that it's going to be a great resource to me as I move along, and also just me being a resource to younger queer folks who are moving up in higher ed to let them know it's gonna be okay…and also don't go places where you don't think you're gonna be welcomed. There's so many places where you will be welcomed. And stay the hell away from Florida.

QBW3 said,

> So, I would say, though it wasn't necessarily, you know, the organization itself, it was the people that made up these organizations, and that connected me and supported me. So, I was a part of the National Council on Black American Affairs, and so that was part of me being Black. I was a founding member of LGBT Leaders in Higher Education. So that gave me a network of people who, you know, made me smarter, quite frankly, about being, you know, queer-identified in a position of influence and how to use that in order to make progress on certain things: what I should be paying attention to; what I should be looking at. It is one of the few spaces in my life where I showed up in it, and I wasn't the star…that I wasn't the main one, you know, teaching everybody else. It was where I was truly, you know, the scholar, you know, as I call I was. I was grasshopping, you know, and I still am in that regard. That was the LGBT Leaders in a Higher Education, or at that time, it was called LGBT Presidents. And I got a chance to…that's how I know of some of those horror stories, and I'm careful because I don't…I can't even begin to know…to talk about those experiences. The other thing I had, though, that was a resource to my success, you know, and it could have been because of me being queer-identified. It could have been because I was a woman, because I'm Black, or it could have been in spite of those things. That there were people who wanted me to be successful. So, for an example, there was one woman who was very, very well respected in the community college. She's not out. I didn't know she was family until later, but I do know that from the moment that I came on the scene, she was calling me. She was telling me,

> “Regina, do this. Regina, don't do this.” I just considered her mentor and I call her and I say, “well, the board asked this question, and they're trying to decide whether I become the president. You think I should just step out instead of the, and not put the person in a position of having to say no to me,” and she said, “They can't help it, Regina. Just stay in there.” Or she was the one that would, you know, I'd be out there, loud and wrong, and she'd be out there saying louder, “be quiet when you're winning.” So, there were people, not organizations, but there were people that I now realize…hers was, I think, because I'm queer-identified, and she's queer-identified, and we’re sorors, and you know, all of them that. There are also people that needed me to be successful. Young brothers who were in, you know, mid-level management positions were supporting me because, you know, and I'm Mama bear in some ways, because now all of them are presidents and chancellors, and because I was in supporting them, you know, 15, 17 years ago, when they were first forming the organization. I don't know if you've ever heard of A2MEND. All of those brothers that you see there are now you know, just phenomenal Black brothers! I feel like I raised them all. They still call me and ask me what to do. The reality is that they all…they supported me. They really pushed me, even when they were not in those positions, but they fiercely defended me. Don't let those faculty get crazy and come after me. Yeah, they fiercely defended me.

QBW4 said,

> In an ideal world, I would love to be able to answer your question, but I can't. I will tell you this. There is a group of women called Sister Presidents. And so they

> have reached out to me. And so this organization was started by Johnetta Cole. And so, I had the pleasure of being on a Zoom call with these women. And I was like, “Wow.” I mean, I cried just being in the space with these women. I was like, look at this screen. There is no part of my day that looks like this. Okay? There's just no point in my day that looks like this. There's no meeting I have in the week in which there is another Black woman looking at me, like this, right now. But that's on me. I got to work on that. Yet and still, when I arrived, my predecessor, she created a diverse leadership team. She was Dominican. I'm Black. The Vice President for Student Affairs and Campus Life was Dominican. The General Counsel was from the Philippines. Everybody left. So, it's one thing to recruit. It’s another thing to retain.

Theme 4.2: Guard Against Bigotry

With the 2023 Supreme Court ruling against Affirmative Action practices and consideration in the college admissions process (Supreme Court of the United States, 2023), states such as Florida and Texas determining how much or how little educators can discuss race, gender, sexual orientation, or sexual identity topics in the classroom (Lopez, 2023; Najarro, 2023), and recent legislation hindering women personal agency over their bodies (Supreme Court of the United States, 2022), I asked the participants about their views on the current political attempts to eliminate Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion practices in the hiring process as well anti LGBTQ+ bills dismantling support offices and resources on college campuses. QBW1 said,

> Well, it's a struggle. I mean, it's a struggle. And so, we have to count on our leaders of these, the executives…the leadership teams, and these higher education

institutions to stand up…to stand up. And the pressures are coming left and right, but how do you best…you know…unions do a great job at organizing, much to the chagrin of administrators, or even within corporations, but they know how to organize. So how do you organize within your higher education institution to ensure that you will not be affected by governors, for instance, that want to change all of this and want to basically erase us? You have to be strong. There was a time where, you know, in this country…it's like we're reverting back in some type, in some way where, you know, folks were ridiculed for standing up for their rights and beaten because of standing up for the right and killed because of standing up for their rights. So, you know, folks got to get some huevos going on right now in this country and stand up. We gotta get some leaders here that will stand up for what is right and won't bend, you know, bow down to the pressures of this political landscape. I use this analogy, and I'm using it often. It came to me the other day, and it's like we go back to the 1960s and we talk about radicalism relative to African Americans at that time, because they wanted to force the change. So that's Malcolm X, Solidad Brothers, Angela we've been thinking of Angela Jones…thinking of the Blackstone Rangers, and The Black Panthers. And it was about violence. We're going to change this, and it's going to get ugly. Malcolm X kind of changed in this, but Martin Luther King was more for peace. But no, there was some anger. But it was anger because they were going to force that change. And, by the way, a lot of violence did kind of force change. Well, that's what's happening now. Now you get white folks, and what are they doing? White supremacist…the Patriot Front…I could go on and on with

these groups who are violent. They are supremacist. They're walking into Walmart. They're shooting people up. They're walking on the streets and just shooting people up. And don't care, because why? We are not going to allow them to take over this country. We are going to preserve our own rights, and they're not going to take this away. They're taking everything for what, you know. We're not taking anything. So now there's a radicalism, but on the other side, how about that? The parallel…becoming violent. The Ku Klux Klan, they were hoods…middle of the night stuff. No, not anymore more. Not anymore.

QBW2 said,

I think it's horrible. It is horrible! I've got a daughter who's looking at colleges. She mentioned a college in Florida and I said, "You're not going to Florida. Don't even look like you wanna go to Florida." And then she's also aware…these kids are aware of what's going on, and they don't want to go to places, you know, to states and countries, and they're trying to erase history. We've come…this in the LGBT community…so far. We've gone from hiding out in bars and not being able to tell anybody to being able to get married and walk down the street and hold hands in Austin and not worry about anybody wanting to beat you up or anything. To now, wanting to shove us back into the closet and make us disappear, because, supposedly, we're just bad people. And I, you know, I remember there was a time when we were very calculating on the adoption agency we worked with, because some would not work with gay parents. And we didn't tell them we were gay. They didn't ask them. We didn't tell…that whole thing…and I actually did a press conference on it. So, we've come so far…and what did we hurt? What are we

> hurting? To me, it's just anger. It's meanness. It's just trying to race history and change what we learn and how we learn. I'm hoping it will go away, you know, be strong amongst the cavalry. You know, DEI, and trying to change history and erase history that mean so much, and help us identify with who we are. How do we say that didn't exist? We can't.

QBW3 said,

> Now you know I think it's ridiculous. Of course, I think it's ridiculous, but you know what I'm understanding intellectually and academically, is that it is the cycle that nation goes through with white desperation and white fear. That it is about the preservation of white supremacy. And that what happens is that at certain points we get to where we are…it is no longer shameful to have certain ideological perspectives. So, when the nation put a white supremacist in the White House, and that white supremacist made white supremacy…it normalized white supremacy, and it bought what was normally an extremist view into the center of power. Then all of a sudden, these conversations act like they are normal conversations. We are at the beginning again. We are right back where we were when the nation was about reconstruction, and one of the things that I would commonly say is that it is not unfeasible to realize and think that we could actually be fighting slavery again. And just listen to some of the rhetoric and the power of the institutions to make certain things happen. Now, Michelle [Alexander] will tell you that Jim Crow is a new slavery or the prison industrial complex is the new slavery… so when you think about that, even though it's under the auspices…it is incredible to realize that still in the Constitution there is

a space where slavery is permitted. And now you hear mainstream politicians are talking about slavery. And you see around the world…Uganda's president just signed a bill that made being gay punishable under the penalty of death. So what's going on now today, you know, is just the normalization of white supremacy, you know, for a period of time, with the hierarchization of race and white supremacy, it at least, you know, the nation and people had at least the perspective to be ashamed, even if they didn't say it out loud…at least the source of shame. Now it is a source of pride. And so one of the things that, you know…that's why I would commonly say, everybody vote while you can, because it is not unfeasible… now look at all of the voter suppression. It is not unthinkable that at some point the majority of the Black population loses the ability to vote. So, it gets accomplished by a couple of things: it gets accomplished by making this much crack a felony when that much cocaine is not a felony, and then you lose the right to vote. You have the disproportionate relationship with the criminal justice system, and you lose the right to vote…for life, right? So you lose the right to vote. Then you have the voter suppression…you can't even give somebody a bottle of water in some states that it's not punishable by a criminal conviction. So just look at the use of regular systems of sanctions of authority, legitimate authority that really goes after the right to vote. So the needed ignorance around race ethnicity history is necessary for that to prevail.

QBW4 said,

I'm grateful that I'm in the State of New York. Okay? I think that this is intentional. This is conscious. It's deliberate and so I'm grateful to be in the state

> that I'm in. And I think that states like ours, universities…colleges like mine will benefit from some of the stuff that's happening in the State of Florida…I'll give you that as an example. People will leave. Okay? They're gonna want to come to work in places that are much more friendly. I'm waiting for what this Supreme Court decision is going to be around Affirmative Action. And so, we will continue to make DEI be a priority at [her college]. One of our goals is to become a national model of colleges committed to the values of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. And so, to that end did some reallocation, and this summer we are launching a Center for Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging at [college] for the first time in the college's history. And so, I have a dean working with the faculty piece. My LGBTQ Center Executive Director is handling the student piece, and then we are hiring somebody for the HR/ Staff version of this because I need people with expertise and working with faculty and working with students and working with staff. But we are launching that center this summer.

Theme 4.3: Diversity Requires Diverse Leadership

As I approached the closing of each of my interviews, I wanted to learn more about the driving factors that inspired their pursuit of opportunities in higher education executive leadership. I invited each participant to reach beyond the institutional speak and to candidly offer their motivation for leadership and the value of diverse leadership on college campuses. QBW2 said,

> The value of diverse leadership? To represent your diversity of body population. That's why. How do you get it if you don't have somebody in the room, it gets it, right? And there's a lot of that in [her city]. And I've been vocal about it. I see it

more and more in our cabinet. Our cabinet is getting a little too white. And students want to see people who look like them. And that was my experience…my first experiences when I was in South Carolina, when my instructor and my boss said, “you need to go into that classroom more so they could see you.” It ticked me off first, but then I got it. And not only do I need to go in that classroom, but I need to be on the board room. Me, as a Black woman…me, as a queer woman…me, as a veteran…me as all of those things, people need to see and we need to have not just me. We need to have a whole bunch of people like me in the room. So that we can get what students are going through. And we can have those conversations with them and they’re comfortable having those conversations with us, and you know, being supportive is more than just having a little thing on your door that you're an ally. So, I think it's crucial. I think that's one of the big…something that [her college] needs to work on a little bit over the years. We're in the process of a new provost search. I said to one of our board members, “please don't bring any of the white male.” It's not a provost…as a Chancellor, I said, “Please don’t bring another white male. Please don’t.” I don't it’ll be a Black male. I think it'll probably be a woman. We're overdue. Unfortunately, we’re in a city where it's predominately white, you know. The males have the power. White males have the power and they have the money, and somehow we've got to counter that. I was sitting in a ribbon cutting or something. And I whispered to somebody, “I want to come to one ribbon cutting where most of the people on the dais are not white at [college] and it's always the students of color speaking about their plight…you know, and everybody around

them is white. So I really work on that. Can we work on that? I just think it's natural. I don't think we should even have to work at it anymore. I remember saying to our marketing person, because our marketing staff…it's all white people in the marketing, when I said, "you know what? If you got to count the heads…if you've got to count the Black and brown heads, then you count the Black and brown heads in that picture until you no longer have to count the Black and Brown heads in the picture." But right now, we're still at the point where we're having to count to make sure we got enough representation in the pictures, and that makes no sense to me.

QBW4 said,

Wow, okay, so there you go. I was called on that recently. So, I'm hiring three new vice presidents, two of whom were white. When I look at the pool that's being presented of people in these positions, I'm like, "Can you bring me a diverse pool? Where are they?" This is a hard town because it's not very diverse. So, we talk about wanting diversity faculty, staff, executive leadership, but what have we done with the infrastructure? What have we put in place to make people who look like me feel comfortable being here. Now you take me back to my first year. I got one for you. I used to wear my hair naturally. Okay? When I came here, had natural hair. As you can see, I'm back to perming in my hair, but that's a different story for a different day. I wanted to get a haircut. I walked in town. There's a place called The Ithaca Commons. There's a barber shop on the commons, okay? I went into the barber shop, and I said to the barber, "Can you give me a shape up, please?" He looked at me and he said, "you need to go out of

the barber shop, make a right turn, go down to the end of the block, make a left turn, in the middle of the block, you'll find the Black barbershop and somebody there can do your hair." I was like "what just happened?" So that's what happened. I followed the directions. Got to the barbershop. I met Joe. Joe's a cool guy. Joe was my bar before quite some time. Long story short, had a hairdresser in Baltimore, who did my hair from the time that I was 19 years old until the time that I went natural. I called Lisa, and I said, "Lisa, I got a problem. There's nobody up here that can cut my hair the way I want it. Can you come up to do my hair, once a month?" So, my girl from Baltimore, who's been my friend since we were 19 and 20, comes up every 6 weeks to do my hair. But that's an example. So. you know, we as a town…so Cornell University is in this town. And so people who work at Cornell, you know, have the same issues with how do we build the infrastructure? How do we build the network, the social network to support people of color when we want them to work here? Getting back to your question, is very important for my leadership team to reflect the composition of the institution. And it's a challenge. And so until my leadership team can reflect the composition of my institution, the leaders on my team better be culturally competent. Okay? Better be able to speak to anti-Blackness. Better be able to speak to racism. Better be…trying to be better all the time. I said to my team, just in my senior leadership team meeting on Tuesday, we need a consultant to come in here and work with this team because we have some issues. We aren't D.E.I.B. Those are just letters and words…and they need to be more than that. And so we need to know in that sphere.

I closed each interview with the question, “What is good leadership and what makes a good leader?” QBW1 said,

> I would say…a leader is a person that can be humble, but takes the initiative...that have a has a level of confidence about their self and their ability…somehow make a change or make something happen. A leader is organized…proactive. A good leader has fantastic organizational skills…fantastic project management skills because all of those things bundled up… and a leader also listens. Has an understanding…they know all of their folks, they have an understanding of who they are as human beings. They've got to understand who they are as human beings. What makes them tick? What motivates them because they are the ones that are gonna get the job done. It can be learned. It can be learned through experiences. A leader is not self-serving. Tell you what it's not. It's not arrogant. It's not the person who believes they're the smartest person in the room. I hire people smarter than me, I'll tell you that. That's how you do it. Hire everybody smarter than you, so they can get the job done. But no, they it's selfless. A good leader believes in their people and don't always criticize them. That doesn't help. I mean, you get the folks, you know, case sometimes with things that get done, but it's demoralizing to do that just constantly criticize them…criticize those individuals who report to them. So, I think those elements of what is a good leader versus definitely, what's not a good leader.

QBW2 said,

> I think a good leader needs to be a visionary and have a vision and be able to articulate that vision. I also think a good leader needs to be open to differences in

people and differences, not only in the way people look and their culture, but then also the way people work. Some people work at a certain pace and other people work at another pace. And certain people need more hand holding and others people don't. And a good leader shouldn't want to just surround themselves with the perfect people, with the perfect teeth and the perfect hair, and the perfect way to work and challenge themselves to be around people who are different and may struggle a little bit, but, you know, you can put them with other people who compliment them and work together. And then you're more empathetic to what's going on around the world because we're not all perfect. And I also think a good the leader is honest. And a good leader doesn't show favoritism. That's another thing. I think that's hard as a leader not to show favoritism. I think that goes back to being open to everybody and not everybody being perfect. Then you don't show favoritism. And the last thing is a good leader doesn't mind conflict. Because we learn from conflict. We walk into the board room and then, you know, two people go at it over something, but then in the end, you work it out, and you continue on. Or those two people just might not get along but they're able to get the job done, and that's okay. It's okay to have a little bit of conflict, but you don't want to stir the pot all the time, but you want to be able to manage it. I've learned a lot over the years, you know. It's one thing, like I said before, you walk in a room, by virtue of my rank, I had the power. Now, there are other ways you have to have…or do you even need the power when you walk in that room sometimes or do you be just need to be equal with everybody else? I think that's what it is…just want to be equal with everybody else.

QBW3 said,

> I think good leadership is leadership that is grounded in equity, that understands…that has a racial and equity literacy and has the skills that are necessary to recognize it and interrupt it…to look at practices and policies to identify systemic and structural racism, and to understand that the impact of racism as well as racism itself, does not require racist. You know, as Eduardo Bonilla-Silva says, you know, these systems are doing precisely what they're designed to do. So for me, for the leadership perspective, is you have to have a fluency in that. You have to have an understanding of that. It does not require people to hate gay people. It does not require people to not like Black people. Matter of fact, if you don't like Black people, that's not my business. I don't…what you think about me is not my business. What I care about is if you are the judge and the chief of police, and if you are the politician, you are making decisions about my life and my well-being, in other words, it's not just that you have those racist views or those homophobic views, but you have the power to enact to them. Now that is what I care about. And so, therefore, leadership has to have an understand and has to have a literacy around that, and then has to be able to reflect on...first of all, understand and know what you stand for. Know what your position is, what your leadership framework is. So I lead to transgress. I lead, knowing that this nation was founded upon the pillars of white supremacy. So I understand that. And so that means that the decisions that I make as a leader start with the foundation of wanting to disrupt inequity, wanting to break down those systems of inequity…break down the practices and processes and procedures and

the policies that perpetuate those systems, to get exactly those results that we know you're going to get which is outcomes that I can predict by race. And then we turn around and we say, “Why aren't those students succeeding?” The question is, why are we so consistently unsuccessful and being able to teach Black and brown students? We know we can teach because we teach white students so well. So for me, leadership is about have being crystal clear about that understanding your priorities and being a person on a mission. It is about being bold and brilliant, and I'm not just trying to use a bunch of cliche words. It is about, for an example, you have to decide…it's kind of like when Obama said when they said, “if you do this health care thing, you're going to be a one-term. You're going to not going to get reelected,” he said, “and I'll just be a one term president, but people will have health care.” And so that's one of the things. Now I realized that I sit in positions of privilege to be able to say that, but for me, good leaders are leading for the practice of freedom for others. It is not about what you need, politically, to be able to survive. I'm not saying be stupid, but I'm it's not about what you need politically. You stay in that position to be able to have that influence, but you have to have consciences around it. So that's what I believe. I believe leadership is about being for something bigger than yourselves. It's not about what legacy I want to lead. It is not about what I need. It is not about what job I want to get. It's not about what name I'm trying to make. It is about being something bigger. It is about working for something bigger than yourselves. I happen to actually believe that there is a there is enough food for people to feed everybody. There are enough houses to house everybody, you know. I actually be

there enough resources for people to have a quality of life. I don't believe that there's political will and courage to make those things happen, and that takes leadership.

QBW4 said,

Leading means walking the talk. I don't ask my people to do anything that I'm not willing to do myself. I treat my team as my family, and they know that we are family. Families can disagree. Okay? But we can disagree without being disagreeable. Being a queer Black woman, there are a whole lot of people who never would expect me to be here. And so every day that I'm here, and every day that I'm successful, I'm shattering something that somebody didn't think that I, as a woman, could do…that I, as a Black person, could do…that I, as a queer person, could do I, as a queer Black person, couldn't do. I inherited an institution that was broken. When I assumed the presidency, I said to them, it's going to take us 3 to 5 years to restore and 3 to 5 to soar. We are in the Restoration Phase and they are believing in me because I show up every day. And I don't ask them to do anything that I'm not willing to do myself. I can show you better than I can tell you. I was with a group of young women recently, who want to go on to get their PhDs. And I'm like, you know, what nobody told me that being a professor was a beautiful thing. So, having gone from teaching the sixth grade for all of those years, and working five days a week, and having forty students in a class, and all of that, nobody told me about this life. The professoriate? Oh, my word, this thing! This is a good deal, okay? I can make my own schedule. I teach three days a week if I want to. Four days a week, if I want to. I can be done by noon. I could engage

> with students. I can teach the things that matter to me: adolescent development, educational psychology. Oh, my word, y'all, this thing? Think about it. Okay? I want you to think about it. And students just looked at me. And I'm like, “No, I'm serious,” because if nobody tells you, how do you know? I had no idea. And so, every time I get a chance to talk with students who are thinking about wanting to become a professor. Oh, how do I encourage you to walk this path because it's a really sweet one. Absolutely. And I'm telling you what this conversation has done for me, I get so lost in the work that I don't think about, “How can I show somebody else how to do this? How can I be for somebody else what I didn't have?” Okay? I need to think I need to put some more on that. I need to reflect on that a little bit more.

Summary of the Chapter

This exploratory study examined the lived experiences of queer Black women leaders at the executive level in higher education. Participants were asked to complete a questionnaire to determine their participation eligibility for this study. A qualitative phenomenological method was used to conduct this study via filmed semi-structured interviews to learn of the lived experiences of queer Black women who served as executive leaders in higher education. The interviews were conducted via Zoom and provided insight and invaluable knowledge regarding the underrepresentation of queer Black women in senior-level executive leadership, such as president, chancellor, provost, and vice president. The data was coded manually, revealing four major themes and twelve subthemes. The decision to study queer Black women in higher education executives resulted from a literature review and the aspirational objective of uncovering

pathways to leadership opportunities. The next chapter discusses the results related to each research question, limitations, implications, recommendations for future research, and a conclusion.

"In our work and in our living, we must recognize that difference is a reason for growth, rather than a reason for destruction" (Lorde, 1984a, p. 138).

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

"Life is very short. What we have to do must be done in the now" (Lorde, 1996 p. 20).

This qualitative study explored the lived experiences of out, queer Black women who served in senior-level executive leadership positions in higher education. Specifically, it explored personal identity related to workplace stressors and professional ascension barriers. In addition, this qualitative phenomenological study aimed to amplify the experiences of queer Black women executive leaders and illuminate pathways for career ascension and professional development. This study included four participants, all self-identifying as queer Black women who served in executive leadership positions in higher education.

This chapter amplifies the conclusions and assessments from the qualitative data collected and analyzed through the conceptual framework lens, Triple Jeopardy (Green, 1996). Triple Jeopardy is based on the theoretical concepts of the Identity Theory (Stryker, 1968), the Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Tajfel & Turner, 2004), Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989), and Multiple Jeopardy Theory (King, 1988). Combining these theories served as a uniquely appropriate tool for researching the lived experiences of queer Black women leaders as Triple Jeopardy addresses the multiplied variables of identity how queer Black women navigate relationships based on their

identity and their response to acts of discrimination based on race, gender, and sexual orientation (Bowleg, 2008; Greene, 1996).

Purpose of the Study

This qualitative study examined intersectional experiences, career and workplace stressors, and opportunities for promotion to executive leadership for queer Black women in higher education. Through the lived experiences of the four senior-level executive leaders who identified as queer Black women, this research provided guidance, inspiration, and pathways for queer Black women leaders who aspire to attain executive leadership roles at colleges and universities. This study aimed to contribute to the research, so scholars and practitioners can grasp a personal, professional, and scholarly understanding of queer Black women executive leaders' lived experiences and resilient pathways to success. As a benefit of this research, I amplified networking and career development opportunities for queer Black women climbing the ranks of higher education leadership.

The long-term goal of this study is to contribute to solutions against discriminatory practices queer Black women experience in the workplace in general, particularly in higher education leadership. Addressing the ongoing nature of the problem is tantamount to identifying the problem itself. This study aspired to address the persistence of discriminatory practices in promoting queer Black women executive leaders in higher education.

Identity Theory establishes the baseline describing the independent variables that create an individual (Stryker, 1968). Social Identity Theory addresses the phenomenon where individuals, using the variables of their identity, find others of like identity to form

groups and categories in society (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Intersectionality addresses the general relationship between combinations of identifying variables (Crenshaw, 1989). Finally, the Multiple Jeopardy Theory considers what happens when the combination of identifying variables creates oppressive episodes for the individual, compounded by the number of marginalized identities that the individual possesses (King, 1988). These four theories explain the restrictive experience queer Black women endure as individuals and as a collective in higher education leadership: Triple Jeopardy (Greene, 1996).

This study was an exploratory and descriptive examination of queer Black women leaders in executive positions, either Vice President, Provost, President, Chancellor, at institutions of higher learning. This study examined intersectional experiences and pathways of ascension to executive positions for queer Black women in higher education leadership. The participant criteria for this study included (a) women, either cisgender or transgender; (b) women who identified as Black and/or African-American; (c) women who identified within the LGBTQ community; (d) were currently or previously employed as full-time cabinet-level administrators, that is, chancellor, president, provost, vice-president); (e) held their position (or previous position) for a minimum of three years; (f) employed in a full-time capacity in a public or private degree-granting institution; (g) possessed budgetary, strategic, operational, personnel or departmental responsibilities; and (h) were regarded as a member or the leader of the institution's executive leadership team or cabinet.

The following research questions frame the study:

1. What are the personal barriers for queer Black women leaders who hold or aspire to hold executive leadership positions in higher education?

2. What are the career and workplace stressors experienced among queer Black women leaders who hold or aspire to hold executive leadership positions in higher education?
3. What are the career development and mentorship resources that serve as pathways for queer Black women higher education leaders for promotion to Vice President, Provost, President, or Chancellor?

Research findings revealed that the data presented aligns with the literature and themes reviewed in Chapter II. This study of queer Black women executive leaders lends itself to follow-up research to amplify the pathways for a growing demographic of higher education leaders and obtain a deeper understanding of queer Black women's experiences in the field. Chapter V highlights conclusions, including an overview of the study's results, a discussion of the results, final reflections, limitations and implications of the study, and recommendations for future examinations.

Summary of the Results

Major RQ1 Findings

Research Question One asked, *"What are the personal barriers for queer Black women leaders who hold or aspire to hold executive leadership positions in higher education?"* In this qualitative phenomenology study, the first section of the interview protocol addressed the participants' identity and their relationship with each identity as it related to their barriers and successes in their careers as executive leaders. Participants also shared examples of how their identity as queer Black women impacted and informed their leadership styles and career experiences. The significant findings were derived directly from participants' responses.

Identity, Social Identity, and Leadership

1. Leading from a positionality of authenticity is essential.
2. Representation matters to the campus community, particularly the students who share the leader's identity in any way.
3. The participants insist on being recognized as their full selves, normalizing the presence and experiences of working with queer Black women.
4. The participants had few "horror stories" of overt discrimination, based on their identity, in the workplace.

Major RQ2 Findings

Research Question Two asked, *"What are the career and workplace stressors experienced among queer Black women leaders who hold or aspire to hold executive leadership positions in higher education?"* In this qualitative phenomenology study, the second and third sections of the interview protocol addressed multiple identity jeopardy and intersectionality and their impact on career and workplace stressors. The significant findings were drawn directly from participants' responses.

Intersectionality in the Workplace

1. Depending on the context of the workplace environment, the participants articulated experiences where certain aspects of their identity were more welcomed than others.
2. The participants trusted their educational and career experiences to aptly prepare them for educational leadership.
3. Executing the work of executive leadership effectively leaves little to no time or energy to ponder multiple jeopardy.

Belonging in the Workplace

1. Being out, queer Black women executive leaders did not require "coming out," but it does require "being out."
2. The spouses/partners of the participants played a significant role in their decision to be "out" in the workplace.

Major RQ3 Findings

Research Question Three asked*, "What are the career development and mentorship resources that serve as pathways for queer Black women higher education leaders for promotion to Vice President, Provost, President, or Chancellor?"* In this qualitative phenomenology study, the fourth section of the interview protocol presented the organizations, associations, and resources available to the participants as they navigated Triple Jeopardy while performing the duties of senior-level executive leadership in higher education. The significant findings are drawn directly from participants' responses.

Diversity Requires Diverse Leadership

1. Diverse campus communities require diverse leadership at the executive cabinet level.

Find Your Tribe: Forge Support Relationships

1. The participants all acknowledged a lack of mentorship organizations or associations to support queer Black women.
2. The participants identified colleagues and individual executives who supported, mentored, or promoted them into executive leadership positions in higher education.

Discussion of the Results

RQ1: "What are the personal barriers for queer Black women leaders who hold or aspire to hold executive leadership positions in higher education?"

The four participants collectively talked about their pride and self-possession while leading as their most genuine and authentic selves. They were each aware of the different points of view they bring to their institutions. Throughout their careers, they experienced the setbacks of being overlooked or the aggravations of microaggressions, but they persevered, worked the jobs in stellar fashion, and proved their work ethic to be the driving force of their ascension. Their identity was a manageable help and a hindrance when climbing the ranks to the president, chancellor, provost, or vice president. They are problem-solvers, and whether the position needed to be filled and the task done, they each answered the call.

Representation is an act of service to the students, in particular. The values of diverse leadership in this political age where Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) offices are under attack, the four participants amplified their commitment to doing DEI work without requiring dedicated offices. These leaders operated with the mission of equity-building, equity-minded leadership at the forefront. The participants referenced the joy of the students who identify as Black, as women, and as members of the LGBTQ community or are collectively as queer Black women and the pride they felt in showing their students what is possible. Leadership that represents the greatest collective can best serve that community.

The participants spoke of being recognized as a total package, normalizing serving and working with queer Black women. Executive leadership is a community-

facing position. The number of queer Black women in academic positions such as faculty or deans far outnumber the number of queer Black women in executive leadership. The participants expressed a deep interest in fostering relationships with the next generation of queer Black women executive leaders in a way available to them through personal mentorship but not available to them by institutional or organizational means.

While each of the participants lived experiences of microaggressions, they each admitted to not having a major horror story of overt discrimination. Conflicts in attitudes were deemed manageable and, in some cases, even expected. Having navigated the "Don't Ask. Don't Tell" era in the military, two participants reflected on a time when it was impossible to disclose their sexual orientation and sexual identity or openly introduce the women with whom they forged personal, intimate relationships. Today, they feel the rights of queer people to live authentically in their whole selves are catching up with the rights of Black people and women.

RQ2: What are the career and workplace stressors experienced among queer Black women leaders who hold or aspire to hold executive leadership positions in higher education?

While colleagues and supervisors knew better than to comment to their faces, the participants commented on times when they felt the need to quiet or lessen the visibility of one aspect of their identity to work in particular communities. Two participants reflected on work they did in Black communities, particularly in local churches. From their experience, women were often relegated to secondary or supporting roles in the Black church if they were allowed to be church leaders at all. The tradition and customs

of homophobia in the Black church are still prevalent, inspiring the participants to mute talk of their relationships or engagement in the queer community.

When asked to reflect on their educational background and career journey in their ascension to executive leadership, the four participants had stories of answering the call for an open position. They, along with their supervisors and mentors, believed they could do the job. When the opportunity to climb the rank became available, the opportunity was framed as positions that needed to be filled by capable people. While the participants privately expressed doubt about their practical experience, they accepted the challenges of the new job, learning what they did and did not know on the job.

Leading in the most seemingly progressive time in American history, the participants talked about leading in a time where *coming out* was unnecessary. They attend events with their spouses, referring to them as their wives, contributing to the normalcy of queer relationships. In all four instances, the participants spoke of their wives refusing to be hidden away or referred to as a friend. In two cases, accepting executive leadership positions required acknowledging their spouse as such from the introduction. The advocacy in the LGBTQ community begins with the first family of the university.

RQ3: What are the career development and mentorship resources that serve as pathways for queer Black women higher education leaders for promotion to Vice President, Provost, President, or Chancellor?

Three of the four participants served or are serving as president of an institution of higher learning. They agreed that having diverse leadership is vital to serving a diverse

community. In theory, diverse leadership is normal, but the practice is less plausible given the smaller pool of candidates for executive leadership positions.

The grooming of university CEOs is still primarily reserved for straight White men. While conducting this study, the American Council on Education (ACE) released the data from its 2022 American College President Study (ACPS), a comprehensive quantitative survey designed to capture data on presidential demographics, search and selection process, career trajectories, and duties and responsibilities—with a focus on the intersectional lenses of race and gender (American Council on Education, 2017). The 2023 data report conveyed the same results as the 2016 survey illustrated in the first chapter of this study and the initial research problem addressed: the underrepresentation of queer Black women executive leaders in higher education (Melidona et al., 2023).

Researchers supported by the ACE, the Teachers Insurance and Annuity Association of America, and (the TIAA) Institute sent surveys to 3,901 presidents, chancellors, and CEOs; nearly 300 more people than in the previous study in 2016 when 3,615 presidents were contacted for the study. Of the 3,901 total presidential positions at institutions of higher learning in the United States, 66% (2,646 people) are men, 33% (1,297 people) are held by women, and the remaining 1% (12 people) were deemed undetermined by the study researchers (Melidona et al., 2023). Of the 1,075 presidents who participated in the survey, 32.8% (353) identified as women, compared to 60.9% (1,765 people) who identified as men. Of the 353 women who participated in the 2022 study, 14.7% (52 people) identified as Black or African American women, up from 7.9% in 2016—none of the participants identified as “non-binary” or “other” in the current survey. The survey combined the identity of gay and lesbian, making it impossible to

determine how many of the queer presidents identified as men or women. Still, queer-identifying presidents increased from 3.8% to 7.7% (Gagliardi et al., 2017; Melidona et al., 2023; Moody, 2018). Even fewer identified as queer Black women. Without queer Black women as viable candidates to take positions of executive leadership, the shortage of representation will persist.

Mentorship is essential at the executive leadership level. The challenges faced by presidents, provosts, chancellors, and vice presidents are shared among many educators. The four women named specific people who helped them traverse the path to executive leadership, but they each agreed there were no formal organizations or associations charged with supporting queer Black women with their specific jeopardies and career aspirations. Organizations such as the LGBTQ Presidents, now the LGBTQ Leaders in Higher Education, exist but serve an overwhelmingly White male demographic. The organization is a proven resource for networking with other queer people.

However, understanding the nuanced episode of racism, sexism, and misogyny on top of homophobia endured by queer, Black women are not experiences shared by most of the organization's members. A participant referenced an annual Zoom session conducted among all the Black women presidents in America. While she felt an overwhelming pride for participating in the session, she amplified her Blackness and her womanness, but made little mention of her queerness. Having organizations, associations, and mentoring groups that understand this participant's combination of jeopardies could prove valuable to queer Black women who aspire to assume roles in higher education executive leadership.

Discussion of Conclusion

The role of an executive leader in higher education is to represent the community on campus to the community off campus. Serving as an advocate on behalf of the students, faculty, staff, and administrators to the world beyond the borders of the campus grounds rests on the shoulders of presidents, provosts, chancellors, and vice presidents. Through the lens of the progressive conceptual framework, Triple Jeopardy (Greene, 1996), this study examined the lived experiences of queer Black women in higher education.

Triple Jeopardy is based on the theoretical concepts of the Identity Theory (Stryker, 1968), the Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Tajfel & Turner, 2004), Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989), and Multiple Jeopardy Theory (King, 1988). Combining these theories was uniquely appropriate for researching the lived experiences of queer Black women leaders as Triple Jeopardy addresses the multiplied variables of identity, how queer Black women navigate relationships based on their identity and their response to acts of discrimination based on race, gender, and sexual orientation (Bowleg, 2008; Greene, 1996).

Identity Theory established the baseline describing the independent variables that create an individual (Stryker, 1968). Social Identity Theory addresses the phenomenon where individuals, using the variables of their identity, find others of like identity to form groups and categories in society (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Intersectionality addresses the general relationship between combinations of identifying variables (Crenshaw, 1989). Finally, the Multiple Jeopardy Theory considers what happens when the combination of identifying variables creates oppressive episodes for the individual, compounded by the

number of marginalized identities that the individual possesses (King, 1988). These four theories explain the restrictive experience queer Black women endure as individuals and as a collective in higher education leadership: Triple Jeopardy (Greene, 1996).

The four participants of the study met all the criteria of eligibility for participation: (a) women, either cisgender or transgender; (b) women who identified as Black and/or African-American; (c) women who identified within the LGBTQ community; (d) were currently or previously employed as full-time cabinet-level administrators, such as, chancellor, president, provost, vice-president; (e) held their position or previous position for a minimum of 3 years; (f) employed in a full-time capacity in a public or private degree-granting institution; (g) possessed budgetary, strategic, operational, personnel or departmental responsibilities; and (h) were regarded as a member (or the leader) of the institution's executive leadership team or cabinet.

The ingredients of our identity are not more significant than the sum of who we were or the promise of excellence when we perform at our highest level as our authentic selves. Executive leaders in higher education are public-facing champions for the education of all students, the academic freedom of all faculty, and the curated high-quality education of esteemed institutions of higher learning. When considering all the people currently engaged at a college or university, including alums, board members, sponsors, donors, and corporate benefactors, the question remains: Who supports the person busy supporting the entire universe of that college or university? Who supports the queer Black woman who has to navigate microaggressions, doubts of excellence, racism, sexism, and homophobia while maintaining a record of excellence every year for the entire small-town community, such as a college campus. The four participants in this

study depict the strong will and mind to overcome the insecurities of accepting new challenges and lean into the call to deliver a successful educational experience every year.

There will always be a collective of naysayers attempting to make a meal of a dynamic leader's efforts to innovate, inspire, and educate. The four participants in this study depict the best of leaders who command from a place of compassion and empathy while leading in authenticity as queer Black women. The next generation of educational leaders has much to learn from the study precipitants and the scholars and practitioners who amplify their under-amplified and vibrant experiences in higher education leadership.

Limitations

One significant limitation of this study is closely aligned with the central issue it aimed to explore: the limited presence of senior-level executive leaders who are queer Black women in higher education. The study's focus on a small demographic of participants further narrows its scope. All four participants were in their 60s, and three had spent the majority of their personal and professional lives identifying as heterosexual women, married to men, with their LGBTQ+ identities emerging later in life. While their experiences provided valuable insights, there is a lack of representation of stories related to personal and professional resilience during the LGBTQ civil rights movement of the past three decades, as the participants primarily worked in a time when the challenges faced by the LGBTQ+ community had less impact on their career trajectories. Today, queer individuals can openly acknowledge their spouses without fear of discrimination or the need for coded language.

Conclusions

Equitable access to education begins with equity in leadership. Diverse leadership often reflects the population of the campus community (Carey, 2017). When students, faculty, and staff see a reflection of themselves in leadership, it instills confidence that all voices will be valued on that campus (Boswell, 2019). More diverse organizations benefit from higher levels of creativity, engagement, collaboration, relationships, clarity, and productivity (Gardner, 2019; Jackson & Harris, 2005;). The values of diversity in educational leadership are best realized when intersectionality and inclusion are considered in understanding and responding to the needs of a diverse student body and campus community (Lewis, 2016; Martin, 2020).

Beyond the optics of diversity for students, faculty, staff, alums, and community supporters, inclusive leadership conveys that leadership is available to all people, not solely one group or demographic (Birnbaum, 1988; Perry, 2020). An impactful leader or leadership team should navigate these barriers to develop solutions to alleviate them. This study and its participants of queer Black women amplified the benefits of leading from our most authentic selves, forging community to assist with navigating the stressors of executive leadership while existing in thrice marginalized communities and illuminating the pathway for the next generation of presidents, provost, chancellors, and vice presidents.

Recommendations for Future Studies

The following recommendations are made for further research based on the findings and conclusion of the study:

- This study must be replicated with queer Black Women executive leaders who did not participate in this initial study.
- This study must be replicated at the Dean and the Department Chair/Head level to assess the experience of queer Black women leaders as they ascend into higher education leadership.
- This study should engage with LGBTQ Centers and DEI Offices on college campuses to broaden their missions' scope and encourage collaborative engagement between colleagues and institutions.
- This study should examine practices of equity-building programming without the need to create DEI offices that local/state governments may target politically conservative states.
- The study should research the necessary implementation plan for an accreditation process designed to assess the cultural competence of college campuses.

The IDEA Academy

The IDEA Academy is a quality assurance certification designed to measure the effectiveness of an institution of Inclusion, Distinction, Equity, and Alliance. I conceptualized The IDEA Academy to honor the valued richness of each individual and empower that student with the respect of belonging, regardless of their identity. The IDEA Academy's mission rests in its title:

- **Inclusion** replaces integration and is a practice of welcoming all campus citizens as their complete selves. Each person's presence and positionality are welcome in every space or organization on campus.

- **Distinction** replaces diversity, allowing every campus citizen to exist by their merit. Individuals will be seen as such, not as a lump group such as “a minority” or a “person of color,” minimizing their unique presence.
- **Equity** replaces equality as every campus citizen has comparable value, a voice entitled to amplification, and a vote worthy of being counted. The campus, resources, and opportunities will be equally available to all students.
- **Alliance** informs the commitment every campus citizen vows to one another. Every member of the campus community uplifts, protects, and empowers others.

Institutions are rated in an accreditation process to achieve IDEA Academy certification. Assessment measurements will grade the school’s performance in all areas of life and education on campus. A school failing IDEA certification lacks programming, curriculum, and practices promoting empathy and humanity.

College or university leaders must remember that we are the stewards of a small village of young people, shaping their identities and knowledge as the next generation of decision-makers. By assessing three education reform policies and amplifying their benefits and unintentional adverse reactions, a leader can craft equity-building programming, curriculum, and environments for the next generation of leaders to thrive. Implementing the IDEA Academy certification will transform the historical facilities of integration and diversity into a visionary promise of inclusion, distinction, equity, and alliance.

A similar model is currently in operation at the University of Colorado. The University of Colorado invests $25 million into its IDEA Plan and Programming (Langford, 2021). According to the University website, the University of Colorado,

Boulder's Inclusion, Diversity, and Excellence in Academics (IDEA) Plan is the campus's blueprint for diversity, equity, and inclusive excellence (University of Colorado, 2021). The IDEA Plan has three key goals for the Inclusion, Diversity, and Excellence in Academics (IDEA) Plan: Climate, Infrastructure, and Leadership (Boswell, 2019).

- **Climate:** Create a richly diverse, inclusive, and equitable learning and working environment. Build a campus climate characterized by a deep sense of belonging based on a strong commitment to respect and care for all members of the CU Boulder community. Hire and retain diverse faculty, staff, and students who reflect the global society students will lead. Ensure a curriculum that fosters intercultural competence and prepares critical thinkers who innovate through embracing multiple perspectives.
- **Infrastructure**: Empower individuals and university entities to enact transformational diversity, equity, and inclusive excellence work. Improve elements of the infrastructure that enable work and professional and personal growth—policies, systems, professional development, organizational learning, data, and accountability. Commit to both transformational and continuous improvement.
- **Leadership**: Create a permanent focus on diversity, equity, and inclusive excellence as a deeply understood shared priority among campus leaders at all levels. Create and implement strategies. To ensure progress and continuity of diversity, equity, and inclusive excellence efforts among CU Boulder's central and distributed executive leadership, emphasizing proper hand-offs of initiatives

to new leaders when they arrive and the development of a layered understanding of how to evaluate progress, success, and ongoing challenges.

In addition to the three key goals, the IDEA Plan includes five areas of focus, using the acronym CLIMB:

- Cultivate success for a diverse undergraduate and graduate student body with new financial resources and programming.
- Learn and lead effective efforts to attract and retain a diverse faculty and staff.
- Increase financial resources and incentives to undertake diversity and inclusion work.
- Move accountability for diversity and inclusion from the periphery to core institutional functioning.
- Build institutional infrastructures and human capacity to implement the plan (Boswell, 2019, pp. 8-9).

The IDEA Academy of Inclusion, Distinction, Equity, and Alliance and The IDEA Plan of the University of Colorado (Boswell, 2019; University of Colorado, 2021) have a unifying mission: to encourage equity-building institutions of higher learning. Executive leaders who foster equity-building environments on their campuses recognize the benefits of leading with empathy. This study of queer Black women executive leaders empowers their respective institutions to promote inclusion, diversity, equity, and alliance in quantifiable practice and qualifiable research.

"I am deliberate and afraid of nothing" (Lorde, 1993, p. 84)

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Institutional Review Board Approval

DocuSign Envelope ID: 4275D6F3-FB84-4787-BDA3-2ABC83BDE95C

PRAIRIE VIEW A&M UNIVERSITY
A Member of the Texas A&M University System

To: **Lisa Thompson, Ph.D., Principal Investigator**
Teresa Dowell-Vest, Ph.D., Co-Investigator

From: Marco L. Robinson, M.A.Ed.
Director, Research Compliance
Office of Research Compliance

Date: May 4, 2023

Re: IRB Protocol #2022-123
NAVIGATING TRIPLE JEOPARDY: Pathways of Career Ascension for Queer Black Women Executive Leaders in Higher Education

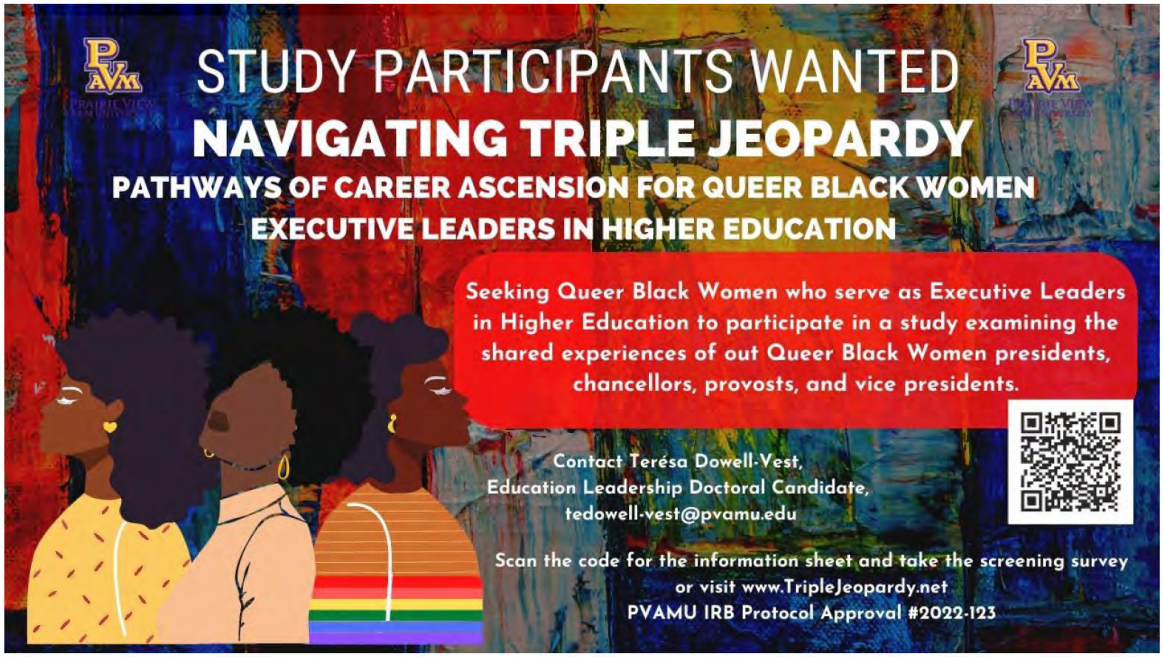
This serves as an official notice that your IRB protocol application submitted falls under the Exempt Review, category 2, according to the Code of Federal Regulations.

Please note, any changes to the exempt protocol must be re-reviewed by the IRB.

DocuSigned by:
Marco Robinson
ABCC397634014EC...

Marco L. Robinson, M.A.Ed.
Director, Research Compliance
Office of Research Compliance
Email: mlrobinson@pvamu.edu

Appendix B: Recruitment Flyers



Appendix C: Information Form

INFORMATION FORM

TITLE OF STUDY: **NAVIGATING TRIPLE JEOPARDY: Pathways of Career Ascension for Queer Black Women Executive Leaders in Higher Education**

PROTOCOL NUMBER:

DEAR STUDY PARTICIPANT:

You are invited to participate in a research study of proven pathways of career ascension for queer Black women executive leaders in higher education. You were selected as a possible participant because you identify as a queer Black woman in higher education executive leadership (president, chancellor, provost, vice president) or aspire to be an executive leadership in higher education.

We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Terésa Dowell-Vest, Educational Leadership Doctoral Candidate (Prairie View A&M University)

Background Information

The purpose of this study is to examine workplace and career stressors experienced among queer Black women who either are or aspire to be chancellors, presidents,

provosts, or vice presidents of institutions of higher learning. Researcher and doctoral candidate, Terésa Dowell-Vest will also extract proven pathways to career opportunities in higher education executive leadership for queer Black women.

Procedures:

If you agree to participate in this study, we will ask you to do the following things:

1. Take an online survey, completed via Qualtric, to determine your eligibility to participate in the study. Eligible participants will meet the following criteria:

    women, either cis-gender or transgender.

    women who identify as Black and/or African American.

    women who identify within the LGBTQ community.

    are currently or previously employed as full-time cabinet-level administrators (i.e., chancellor, president, provost, vice-president).

    held their position (or previous position) for a minimum of 3 years.

    employed in a full-time capacity in a public or private degree-granting institution.

    possess budgetary, strategic, operational, personnel, or departmental responsibilities; and.

    will be regarded as a member (or the leader) of the institution's executive leadership team or cabinet.

2. If you meet the criteria to participate in the study, you will be interviewed in a one-hour, video recorded session by the researcher, Terésa Dowell-Vest, via Zoom.

Risks and Benefits of Participating in the Study

Risks:

The risks associated with participating in this study are no greater than those encountered in everyday life.

Benefits:

The benefits of participating include, but not limited to, an enhanced knowledge of workplace and career stressors experienced among queer Black women who either are or aspire to be chancellors, presidents, provosts, or vice presidents of institutions of higher learning. The data may contribute to illuminating proven career pathways in higher education executive leadership.

Compensation:

Participants will not receive payment for their participation in this study.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In all reports resulting from this study, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you as a participant. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers will have access to the records. Researcher and doctoral candidate, Teresa Dowell-Vest, under the mentorship of dissertation chair, Dr. Lisa K. Thompson, will retain, in perpetuity, encrypted external hard drives with the surveys and interviews.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Prairie View A&M University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships. **Contacts and Questions:**

The researchers conducting this study is Terésa Dowell-Vest. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact the Principal Investigator, Terésa Dowell-Vest Prairie View A&M University, tedowell-vest@pvamu.edu; 713.291.7726. Advisor: Dr. Lisa K. Thompson, lkthompson@pvamu.edu, 936.261.3653.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), **you are encouraged** to contact the Office of Research Compliance at researchcompliance@pvamu.edu or 936-261-1553 (Fax 936-261-3528).

Statement of Consent:

____I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

____I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I do not consent to participate in this study.

Appendix D: Invitation Letter or Email Template

Invitation Letter or Email Template

My name is Terésa Dowell-Vest and I invite you to participate in a research study designed to explore proven pathways of career ascension for queer Black women executive leaders in higher education. This research project fulfills one of my degree requirements at Prairie View A&M University, where I am a doctoral candidate in educational leadership.

I am inviting you to participate in this study because I believe you experiences are valuable, and I would like to learn more about how queer, Black women navigate "triple jeopardy" in their ascension to positions in higher education executive leadership. This research project is focused on women who identify as Black, self-identifies as a member of the LGBTQ community, and serves in positions of higher education executive leadership, such as president, provost, chancellor, and vice president. The purpose of this study is to examine workplace and career stressors experienced among queer Black women who either are or aspire to be executive leaders of institutions of higher learning. I also aspire to extract proven pathways to career opportunities in higher education executive leadership for queer Black women.

If you choose to participate in this project, you will take an online survey, via Qualtric. This survey will determine if you meet the full credentials to participate in this study. If you are deemed eligible, you and I will schedule a time to conduct an interview, via

Zoom. The interview will last no longer that 90 minutes. The tapes will be transcribed, coded and analyzed in my dissertation.

During the study, you will be given a pseudonym. You may choose to stop participating in this project at any time without penalty or prejudice. Keep in mind there are no right or wrong answers in the interview. And above all things, your participants will be greatly appreciated.

If you have questions or would like more information, please feel free to contact me tedowell-vest@pvamu.edu or 713.291.7726.

Attached to this email, you will find the “Informed Consent” form. This is the form that explains the project and what will be asked of you as a participant. Please feel free to pass this email and form to anyone you know who may be interested in participating in this project.

Thank you in advance pf your participation in this project.

Terésa Dowell-Vest

Appendix E: Survey Questionnaire

Survey Questionnaire

Welcome

You are invited to participate in a research study, "Navigating Triple Jeopardy: Pathways of Career Ascension for Queer Black women Executive Leaders in Higher Education" which seeks to examine proven pathways of career ascension for queer Black women executive leaders in higher education. Through the lens of the conceptual framework, Triple Jeopardy (Greene, 1996), the researcher will examine workplace and career stressors experienced among queer Black women who either are or aspire to be chancellors, presidents, provosts, or vice presidents of institutions of higher learning. The researcher will also extract proven pathways to career opportunities in higher education executive leadership for queer Black women.

Completing this initial survey communicates your interest in the participating in this study. If you meet the required criteria this research and are selected to participate, you will be contacted by the researcher.

If you decide to participate, please understand your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw and discontinue participation at any time. If you do not wish to participate in this study, do not complete this survey.

If you wish to be considered as a potential participant, please complete the following questionnaire. The questionnaire is designed to gather basic information what will help

the researcher select research participants. It will take approximately five (5) minutes to complete the questionnaire.

The risks associated with participating in this study are no greater than those encountered in everyday life. The benefits of participating are an enhanced knowledge of workplace and career stressors experienced among queer Black women who either are or aspire to be chancellors, presidents, provosts, or vice presidents of institutions of higher learning. An additional benefit of participating in this study will be to extract proven pathways to career opportunities in higher education executive leadership for queer Black women.

Data will be collected using the Qualtrics. Confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by Qualtrics. If you are not selected as a research participant, your information will be deleted as soon as participants are identified.

Thank you for your valuable time and support of this significant research.

Q1. Age:

Q2. Marital Status

- Single (never married)
- Married; or in a domestic relationship.
- Widowed
- Divorced.
- Separated

Q3. Education

- Less than a high school diploma
- High School degree or equivalent (e.g GED)
- Some college, no degree
- Associate degree (e.g., AA, AS)
- Bachelor's degree (e.g., BA, BS)
- Master's degree (e.g., MA, MS, MEd, MFA)
- Doctorate or professional degree (e.g., MD, DDS, JD, PhD)

Q4. Racial Identity

- White
- Black or African American
- American Indian or Alaska Native

- Asian
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- Other

Q4a. If your identity as Black but not American, please share your country of origin.

Q5. Gender Identity

- Cisgender Female
- Transgender Female
- Cisgender Male
- Transgender Male
- Gender Non-Conforming
- My gender identity is not list but it should be. I identity as:

Q6. Sexual Orientation

- Heterosexual (straight)
- Lesbian
- Gay
- Bisexual
- My gender identity is not list but it should be. I identity as:

Q7. Are you currently serving as an executive leader (president, chancellor, provost, vice president) at an institution of higher learning?

- Yes

- No

Q8. Please select the position you currently hold.

- President
- Chancellor
- Provost
- Vice President

Q9. Have you held your current position for at least three (3) years?

- Yes
- No

Q10. Identity the type(s) of institution of higher learning where currently serve as an executive leader (president, chancellor, provost or vice president)?

- 2-year Public
- 2 years Private
- 4-year Public
- 4 years Private

Q11. Is your institution an Historically Black College or University?

- Yes
- No

Q12. If you do not currently hold a position of executive leadership, have you ever worked as an executive leader (president, chancellor, provost, vice president) at an institution of higher learning?

- Yes
- No

Q13. Please select the position(s) you have held in the past. Check all that apply.

- President
- Chancellor
- Provost
- Vice President

Q14. Did you hold any of your former positions for three (3) years or more?

- Yes
- No

Q15. Identity the type(s) of institution of higher learning where previously served as an executive leader (president, chancellor, provost, or vice president)?

- 2-year Public
- 2 years Private
- 4-year Public
- 4 years Private

Q16. Were any of your previous institutions Historically Black Colleges or Universities?

- Yes
- No

Q17. Title

- Dr.
- Mr.
- Mrs.
- Ms.
- Other

Q18. First Name:

Q19. Last Name:

Q20. Email:

Q21. Phone Number:

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.

Appendix F: Interview Protocol

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Navigating Triple Jeopardy: Pathways of Career Ascension for Queer Black Women Executive Leaders in Higher Education.

Date:
Interviewer:
Interviewee:

Position of Interviewee:

Pseudonym of Interviewee:

My name is Terésa Dowell-Vest, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Education Leadership program in the Whitlowe R. Green College of Education at Prairie View A&M University. I would like to thank you for participating in the Navigating Triple Jeopardy survey and volunteering to be interviewed in this study.

I will be conducting interviews with a number of queer Black women who hold positions in higher education executive leadership, such as yourself, to examine intersectional experiences, career and workplace stressors, and opportunities for promotion to executive leadership for queer Black women in higher education. This research will provide guidance and pathways for queer Black women leaders who aspire to attain executive leadership roles at colleges and universities. This study aims to contribute to the research, so scholars and practitioners can grasp a personal, professional, and scholarly understanding of queer Black women executive leaders' lived experiences and resilient pathways to success. As a benefit of this research, I anticipate amplifying networking and career development opportunities for queer Black women

climbing the ranks of higher education leadership. The long-term goal of this study is to contribute to solutions against discriminatory practices a thrice marginalized demographic of people experiences in the workplace in general, particularly in higher education leadership. Addressing the ongoing nature of the problem is tantamount to identifying the problem itself. This study aspires to address the persistence of discriminatory practices in the promotion of queer Black women executive leaders in higher education and promote the resources available for queer Black women who aspire to be presidents, provosts, and chancellors.

Before we begin, I will collect data for this study via the video and audio recordings of this Zoom call. When I activate the record feature on this Zoom call, you will receive a prompt asking permission to record this call. The video and audio recordings will remain private and archived on an encrypted external hard drive, stored with my dissertation committee chair, Dr. Lisa K. Thompson, for a period of three (3) years.

[Click “Record” on the Zoom Call].

Thank you for your valuable time and willingness to participate in this study.

QUESTIONS:

I. General Opening: We are going to open with open-ended questions to introduce yourself and tell me about your background.

A. What does your identity as a BLACK person mean to you?

a. Tell me about a time in your life when being a BLACK person felt like a superpower.
b. Tell me about a time in your life when being a BLACK person did not feel as empowering.

B. What does your identity as a WOMAN mean to you?
    a. Tell me about a time in your life when being a WOMAN felt like a superpower.
    b. Tell me about a time in your life when being a WOMAN did not feel as empowering.

C. What does your identity as a QUEER person mean to you?
    a. Tell me about a time in your life when being QUEER felt like a superpower.
    b. Tell me about a time in your life when being QUEER did not feel as empowering.

D. Tell me about your educational background and your career journey that brought you to the role you currently serve in today.

E. Had you always aspired to be an executive leader in higher education?

II. Research Question #1: What are the personal barriers for queer Black women leaders who hold or aspire to hold executive positions in higher education? (Identity)

A. Share an experience or story where your identity as a BLACK person was welcomed in higher education leadership spaces, but your identity as a WOMAN or a QUEER person was not as welcomed.
B. Share an experience or story where your identity as a WOMAN was welcomed in higher education leadership spaces, but your identity as a BLACK person or a QUEER person was not as welcomed.
C. Share an experience or story where your identity as a QUEER person was welcomed in higher education leadership spaces, but your identity as a WOMAN or a BLACK person was not as welcomed.
D. What are some of the PERSONAL barriers you have experienced being a queer, Black woman who serves as an executive leader in higher education?

III. Research Question #2: What are the career and workplace stressors experienced among queer Black women leaders who hold or aspire to hold executive leadership positions in higher education? (Stressors)

A. Why did you choose to work at your current institution?
B. For your current position of [state position], please share with me your experience during the hiring process.
C. As you think back on your career, please reflect on your experience related to your identity as a BLACK person.
    1. Can you provide an example or a story where your identity as a BLACK person was perceived to have an impact on your career development or promotion efforts?

2. Can you describe some strategies used to counteract discriminatory behavior witnessed by you and/or exhibited to you, based on your identity as a BLACK person?
3. Can you describe resources from which you benefited in the development of your career based on your identity as a BLACK person?

D. As you think back on your career, please reflect on your experience related to your identity as a WOMAN.
    1. Can you provide an example or a story where your identity as a WOMAN was perceived to have an impact on your career development or promotion efforts?
    2. Can you describe some strategies used to counteract discriminatory behavior witnessed by you and/or exhibited to you, based on your identity as a WOMAN?
    3. Can you describe resources from which you benefited in the development of your career based on your identity as a WOMAN?
E. As you think back on your career, please reflect on your experience related to your identity as a QUEER person.
    1. Can you provide an example or a story where your identity as a QUEER person was perceived to have an impact on your career development or promotion efforts?
    2. What factors affect your decision on if, how, when, and to whom you come out at work?
    3. What has been your previous experience with coming out at work?

4. Have previous experiences shaped your decision-making process to come out now and in the future?
5. What reactions did you receive from your colleagues, subordinates, and supervisors when they learned of your sexual orientation?
6. How did the disclosure of your sexual orientation impact your interactions with your peers at work?
7. How would you describe the impact your organization's policies, climate, and culture have in your decision to come out?
8. Can you describe some strategies used to counteract discriminatory behavior witnessed by you and/or exhibited to you, based on your identity as a QUEER person?
9. Can you describe resources from which you benefited in the development of your career based on your identity as a QUEER person?

IV. Research Question #3: What are the career development and mentorship resources that serve as pathways for QBW higher education leaders for promotion to Vice President, Provost, President, or Chancellor? (Pathways)

A. Do you have a mentor or sponsor at this college or from other accepts of your life that has been influential in your career pursuits?
B. Do you think that it is important to have a diverse executive leadership team to represent a diverse student population, and why?

C. What organizations or associations impacted your career development path to higher education executive leadership? In what ways did these organizations serve your needs?
D. Are you a mentor or would like to serve as a mentor?
E. Does your institution provide support services for faculty and staff who endure acts of racism, sexism, misogyny, homophobia, transphobia or any other act of discrimination?
F. What are your views on the current political attempts to eliminate Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion practices in the hiring process as well anti LGBTQ+ bills dismantling support offices and resources on college campuses?
G. What were the driving factors that inspired you to pursue opportunities in higher ed executive leadership?
H. In your opinion, what defines a leader and good leadership?
I. How does your identity as a queer Black woman inform your approach to leadership or your leadership style?

Wrap Up

A. Tell me about your coming out experience.
B. Is there any additional information you would like to share?

Thank the individual for participating in this interview.

Assure them of the confidentiality of their responses. (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019, p. 225.)

Appendix G: The IDEA Academy

TERÉSA DOWELL-VEST

dowellvest@gmail.com / 713.291.7726

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE (PARTIAL LIST)

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR | PRAIRIE VIEW A&M UNIVERSITY; JAN '17 - PRESENT

Interim Department Head, Dept of Languages & Communication (Sept 1, 2023 - Present)
Associate Professor, Communication, Media Production (Sept 1, 2023 - Present)
Assistant Professor, Communication, Media Production (Sept 1, 2019 - Aug 31, 2023)
Director of Film and Television Production
Director - PVAMU-TV
Lecturer, Communication, Media Production (Jan 17, 2017 - Aug 31, 2019)

ADJUNCT FACULTY | PRINCE GEORGE'S COMM COLLEGE; JAN '14 - AUG '16

Instructor of Speech Communication
Instructor of Film Studies / Film Production
Co-Director of the Library of Congress Film Series "The Veterans History Project"

VISITING PROFESSOR | CARTER G. WOODSON INSTITUTE FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN & AFRICAN STUDIES; UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA; JAN '15 - MAY '15

Created original course: From The Drinking Gourd to #BlackTwitter: Social Communication for Social Change
Created new blog site for the course, allowing students to engage college students at other campuses on social change

PROFESSOR | AMERICAN MUSICAL & DRAMATIC ACADEMY; SEPT '05 - JAN '12

Professor of Acting for Camera
Created original course: Entrepreneurship: Business for the Creative Producer
Director of stage plays and film productions

RESEARCH FACULTY | UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA; JAN '00 - OCT '02

Program Director: African American Heritage Program (AFAM Program)
The AFAM Program is a joint initiative between the VFH and the Virginia Tourism Corporation (VTC) to develop an educational and economic resource for the Commonwealth on the history of African Americans in Virginia.

EDUCATION

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY, EDUCATION LEADERSHIP (HIGHER EDUCATION)
Prairie View A&M University; Prairie View, TX; Aug 2019 - Dec 2023
Dissertation: Navigating Triple Jeopardy: Pathways of Career Ascension for Queer Black Women Executive Leaders in Higher Education

MASTERS OF FINE ARTS, THEATER MANAGEMENT
California State University, Long Beach; Aug 1994- May 1997
Thesis: The African American Producer is the American Griot

BACHELOR OF ARTS, THEATER
James Madison University, Harrisonburg, VA; Aug 1990 - May 1994

PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

University Film and Video Association
President: Sept 1, 2024 - Aug 31, 2026
President Elect: 2023 - 2024
Board Member: July 2021 - Present
Film Festival Jury Member: 2022 University Film and Video Association National Conference and Film Festival - Fredonia, NY, July 2022
Chair - Ad Hoc Committee on Diversity and Inclusion: July 2022 - Present

LGBTQ Presidents and Leaders in Higher Education Association
Member: July 2020 - Present

The Ruth J. Simmons Leadership Symposium
Selected Participant: November 2019

Houston Entertainment Industry Task Force
Member: June 2017 - June 2022

HONORS & AWARDS

The Marvin D. and June Samuel Brailsford College of Arts and Sciences Dean's Award - Outstanding Contributions, Spring 2022

2021 Outstanding Faculty Service Award; Prairie View A&M University

Best Non-Fiction Series: "The Death of Cliff Huxtable"
University Film and Video Association National Conference and Film Festival, July 2021

Mellon Foundation Outstanding Faculty - Prairie View A&M Univ., Spring 2021

Best Short Play - Drama (Director); DC Black Theater Festival, Summer 2014

Santa Monica Theatre Guild - Geoffrey Award Winner, Best Director ("Conversations With My Father"), 2008

HONORS & AWARDS (cont.)

NAACP Theatre Award Nominee, Best Director ("Flyin West"), 2007

Santa Monica Theatre Guild - Geoffrey Award Winner, Best Director ("Flyin West"), 2007

Santa Monica Theatre Guild - Geoffrey Award Winner, Best Sound Designer ("Flyin West"), 2007

American Forensics Association; #5 Ranked Public Speaker in the United States, 1994

Member: Delta Sigma Rho / Tau Kappa Alpha, National Honor Society for Speech & Debate, 1994

GRANTS
(Total: $2,005,000.00)

Propel Center / Apple HBCU Arts and Entertainment Impact Grant; To produce "HBCU Today" TV Series, $300,000 (2022)

Mellon Foundation Faculty Grant (Humanities); "The Death of Cliff Huxtable" 15-episode Live Reading and Virtual Panel Series, $5,000 (2022)

Department of Education, Title III Grant; Enhancement of Mass Communication Program & TV Studio Renovation, $1,700,000 (2017-2022)

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

"Leaning Into Media: The Higher Ed Shift to Audio/Video Technology During A Global Pandemic" University Film and Video Association National Conference and Film Festival - Fredonia, NY, July 2022

"Leaning Into Media: The Higher Ed Shift to Audio/Video Technology During A Global Pandemic" National Title III HBCU Administrators, Inc. 2022 Technical Assistance Workshop, Philadelphia, PA, June 19-24, 2022

"Leaning Into Media: The Higher Ed Shift to Audio/Video Technology During A Global Pandemic" The Texas A&M University System Chancellor's Conference on Academic Technology: Now & Next: Transformative Educational Technology (Texas A&M University, College Station, June 27-28, 2022

"Collaborating Solutions: Building Safety and Course Protocols With Other Institutions During COVID-19" The 27th Annual HBCU Faculty Development National Conference (Virtual Conference), October 29, 2020

"Mic Your Marketing: Storytelling and Podcasting as Brand Marketing" University Research Magazine Association Annual Conference (University of Houston, Texas), July 2019

"From the Drinking Gourd to #BlackTwitter: Social Communication for Social Change" HBCU Faculty Development Network Conference Annual Conference (Houston, Texas), November 2019

"Chronicles of a Colored Queer SuperSHEro: Intersectionality, Media and Technology" Lesbians Who Tech Summit; New York City, NY, Oct. 2015

"Chronicles of a Colored Queer SuperSHEro" BlogHer15, New York, NY, July 2015

"From the Drinking Gourd to #BlackTwitter: Social Communication for Social Change", Blogger Week, Washington, DC, May 2015

"Frederick Douglass Was A Blogger", Lesbians Who Tech Summit, San Francisco, CA, March 2015

"The Death of Cliff Huxtable: So We Can Survive Bill Cosby," The Virginia Festival of the Book (Charlottesville, VA) March 2015

"Social Media for Social Change", The White House LGBT Innovation Summit, Washington DC, July 2014

"Images of Queer Blacks in Film & TV", Morehouse College, Atlanta, GA, April 2013

"Black Filmmakers and Science Fiction," Georgia Tech, Atlanta GA, April 2013

SYMPOSIUMS

"Nightmares From MonkeyPaw Production: A Virtual Symposium on the Works of Jordan Peele" University Film and Video Association HBCUxUFVA Diversity Initiative; Chair; Nov 2022

"Race And Reconciliation in Charlottesville, Virginia: The Vinegar Hill Symposium" A Four Night Symposium featuring the play "Vinegar Hill" by Terésa Dowell-Vest at The Jefferson School African American Heritage Center (Charlottesville, Virginia), January 15-18, 2021

"Passage Home: The Three Day Symposium" A multi-day examination of the novella "Passage Home" by Terésa Dowell-Vest, Cascadia College (Seattle, WA) May 2014

Sessions:

"Microeconomics and Passage Home: Alternative Economy in America"

Host: Prof. Lisa Citron;

"Immigration, Race, Power, and Privilege: Passage Home and Identity in America"
Host: Prof. Danielle Powell & Prof. Jesus Perez;
"Film & Lit: Bridging Literature and Motion Pictures"
Host: Prof. Jared Leising;
"Human Sexuality"
Host: Prof. Catherine Crain

KEYNOTES / PANELS / WORKSHOPS

Keynote Speaker, Prairie View A&M University's LGBTQ+ "Lavender Graduation" Dec 3, 2022

Keynote Speaker, Prairie View A&M University's First LGBTQ+ "Lavender Graduation" May 3, 2022

"Women In Theater: A Conversation with Terésa Dowell-Vest, Yetunde Felix-Ukwu, and Tawnya Pettiford-Wates, PhD" The Evelyn Barbour Lecture Series, The Jefferson School African American Heritage Center (Charlottesville, Virginia), September 2020

"Building a Film & TV Production Protocol for Higher Ed during COVID-19" Virtual Workshop for 126 professors of film, television, and theater from 100 different schools, July 24, 2020

10th Annual HIGHER Ground Women's Leadership Conference (Richmond, VA) Panelist, Oct 2014

Black Bloggers Connect Annual Conference (Washington, DC) Panelist, 2014

Human Rights Campaign - DC Women's Conference (Washington, DC) Session Facilitator, 2014

The University of Virginia - Black Women's Leadership Conference (Charlottesville, VA) Keynote Speaker & Facilitator, 2003

Bath County High School - Black History Month Program (Warm Springs, VA) Keynote Speaker, 2003

Motherread/Fatherread - Teacher Training Seminar (Charlottesville / Alexandria / Hampton, VA), Trainer, 2002

The Afro-American Historical Assoc. of Fauquier Co.- Black History Month (The Plains, VA) Keynote Speaker, 2001

KEY VIRTUAL SERIES

"PVAMU-TV's YouTube Subscribe-A-Thon" 24-Hour Live Stream for PVAMU-TV April 30-May 1, 2022

"PVAMU Panthers National Signing Day 2022" 7-Hour Live Stream for Prairie View A&M University Athletics Feb 2, 2021

"PVAMU Panthers National Signing Day 2021" 4-Hour Live Stream for Prairie View A&M University Athletics Feb 3, 2021

"Festival On the Hill: Prairie View A&M University's Virtual Film Festival," Nov 12 - 14, 2020
"PVAMU Virtual Homecoming" 6 Day Virtual Homecoming for Prairie View A&M University, Oct 26 - Oct 31, 2020

KEY VIRTUAL SERIES (cont.)

"The Death of Cliff Huxtable" 15-Episode Virtual Live Reading and Panel Series with 51 Scholars, Educators, and Artists, May 28 - July 12, 2020

"Prof. TDV's Virtual Lecture Series: Conversations with 19 Entertainment Industry Leaders During COVID-19 Quarantine", March 31 - April 21, 2020

PROFESSIONAL ARTS EXPERIENCE: FILM
DIRECTOR

partial list

HBCU Today	(2020)	KPVU-TV
The Death of Cliff Huxtable	(2020)	Diva Blue Productions
"Testing Makes Us Stronger" Campaign	(2016)	CDC & FHI360
The Veteran's History Project	(2014)	The Library of Congress
Shirts vs. Skins (short)	(2013)	Diva Blue Productions & 3.21 Productions
Master Piece (short)	(2013)	Diva Blue Productions
Smoke & Mirrors (short)	(2012)	M.Power/Productions & Diva Blue Productions
Stuck (short)	(2010)	Alpha & Omega Productions

PROFESSIONAL ARTS EXPERIENCE: FILM
PRODUCTION DESIGNER

Showstoppers (Feature)	(2008)	B-Love Productions
Dead Tone (Feature)	(2007)	Hooks & Taylor Entertainment
Flip The Script (Feature)	(2005)	Pleasant View Productions
Wifey (Feature)	(2005)	B-Love Productions

PROFESSIONAL ARTS EXPERIENCE: FILM
PRODUCER

Coaches Corner	(2020)	KPVU-TV
D.O.P.E. Conversations (TV version)	(2020)	KPVU-TV
The Death of Cliff Huxtable	(2016)	Diva Blue Productions
The Tea	(2014)	KPVU-TV
Panther News Network	(2013)	KPVU-TV
Panther Sports Zone	(2013)	KPVU-TV
PV Round Table Talk	(2012)	KPVU-TV

Zone Four Music Show	(2010)	KPVU-TV
The BreakThrough	(2020)	KPVU-TV
Topicality	(2020)	KPVU-TV
It's About Time	(2016)	KPVU-TV
The Freshman Year	(2014)	J.O. Malone / Vincent Powell
Shirts vs. Skins (short)	(2013)	Diva Blue Productions & 3.21 Productions
Master Piece (short)	(2013)	Diva Blue Productions
Sex & The Green Card (short)	(2012)	Reel Stock Productions